Playing politics: Power, memory, and agency in the making of the Indonesian student movement
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In this extended ethnography of the Indonesian student movement, Yatun Sastramidjaja offers an intimate look into the cultural and political dynamics of student activism in the context of shifting state regimes. Based on a re-interpretation of historical narratives, twenty-two months of participant observation, and life story interviews, Sastramidjaja traces how students' political identity and agency are formed in the interplay between political culture and personal experience. Introducing the concept of 'playing politics', she shows how students acquire activist dispositions and a ‘feel for the game’ of activism through playful socialisation, how activist performances involve a mimicry as well as mockery of institutionalised roles and repertoires, and how the student movement is tied to its own ‘play realm’ that gives it a special license to protest not granted to other actors. She further shows how the limits to this license are set through symbolic battles which the students engage in with the state, both over protest targets and over the representation of their identity and agency as legitimate political subjects. This ethnography thereby provides an alternative perspective on the interplay of student activism and state repression.
Playing Politics
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Power, Memory, and Agency in the Making of the Indonesian Student Movement

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aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam
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Indonesia’s first president Sukarno once stated, ‘Give me ten youths whose hearts are aflame and I shall move a mountain’. This research certainly felt like moving a mountain, but I have many more (young and older) people to thank for helping me carry the load and making me take the challenge to begin with. They are, first of all, those who inspired this research long before its inception; not ten, but tens of thousands of young people with hearts on fire who took it on themselves to act, whether or not it seemed feasible to move mountains in order to change a deeply corrupted political landscape. Different from Sukarno’s imaginary young heroes, who seemed to be gifted with superpowers, they are ordinary young people, with ordinary strengths and weaknesses. What makes them remarkable is an extraordinary choice of life.

I feel fortunate to have met so many activists from different parts of the movement in Jakarta and elsewhere in Indonesia. I wish to thank them for allowing me into their world and making me feel at home there. To immerse into their rhythm of collective action and life was an amazing experience, to hear about their personal stories was deeply inspiring, and to learn about politics from practice has enlightened me in ways no textbook can. Above all, I cherish all the good (and bad) times shared and the lasting friendships that have grown along the way. Too many have played a role in this research to mention individually, but I wish to acknowledge that activists from BEM-UI, FAMRED, FAM UI, FMN, FNPBI, FORKOT, FPPI, GMNI, HMI, JAKER, JKB, KAMMI, KB UI, LMND, PMII, PRD, WP, and other groups have contributed to my research in invaluable ways, probably without always realising it, or without me always realising it. Many had remarkable stories to tell, interesting ideas to discuss, and meaningful feelings to share, which makes for a rich collection of ‘deep data’ to which this study can impossibly do justice. In the end, the lessons I learned from them extend well beyond my research purposes; they are also about the passion, guts, and strength of mind to make worthy choices in life, which deserves much more credit than the so-called heroism often associated with activism.

This research would have been an impossible mission without my assistants in Jakarta. I am especially grateful to Ery for her devotion and friendship. Proving her worth as both a research assistant and a participant respondent – not an easily combined task, which she performed with splendid reflexivity – she committed to the research from the beginning all through the end; introducing me into the labyrinthine world of activists in a pleasantly informal manner, enlightening me on its
enigmas with rare honesty, accompanying me on countless trips, and helping me to keep the spirit. Crucially, Ery not only provided a soundboard for reflection but also shared with me the emotional burden of this research. For to move around in a political ‘minefield’ for a long period of time, and to constantly switch between rival groups, while trying to keep a balanced distance at all times – also among activists I came to regard as friends – required constant control of performance and emotion. For that reason, one of my other assistants once called me ‘queen of jaim’, slang for jaga image, to guard your image, which describes my research position spot on: to play theatre, to mask emotions. But with Ery I never felt the need for jaim, which was vital for keeping me sane. I also wish to thank my other research assistants who joined me for shorter periods for their valuable assistance. Realising that my initial plans for this team were not very realistic, I have all the more appreciation for the work we did accomplish together.

Due to misfortune my belated return from fieldwork was not easy, but I was able to swiftly re-immers into academic life owing to the stimulating atmosphere at the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR), in particular as created by the spirited angkatan (‘generation’) of which I was happily part. My very special thanks go to Anouk de Koning, who has been of great inspiration and support since our first year as AISSR roommates. In the same spirit, many thanks to Eileen Moyer, Francio Guadeloupe, Martijn Oosterbaan, Irfan Ahmad, Rachel Spronk, Courtney Lake Vegelin, Ines Trigo de Sousa, Miriyam Aouragh, Lizzy van Leeuwen, Sonja van Wichelen, Barak Kalir, and many other dear colleagues for the great discussions and fun times.

The AISSR made the research possible by providing generous funds for the extended fieldwork research, as well as helping to finance the thesis. Within the institution, I wish to thank José Komen, Teun Bijvoet, Miriam May, and Anneke Dammers for their personal care. I further wish to thank Patricia Spyer and Birgit Meyer for their highly perceptive and helpful feedback on my ‘X’-month papers; Jan-Willem Duyvendak for his constructive feedback on my seminar paper; Oscar Verkaaik for his inspiring, ‘fun’ input on the serious topic of political violence; and Rosanne Rutten for helping us explore social movement theory and for her genuine encouragement. I wish to thank Gerry van Klinken for his willingness to act as my co-promotor on short notice, as well as for providing a great example of engaged scholarship in Indonesia Studies. Of course, my deepest gratitude goes to my promotor Henk Schulte Nordholt, who has devoted much time and energy to supervising, first, my Master’s, and then my Ph.D. research projects, always able to disentangle the knots in my chaotic thinking and to encourage me with positive feedback. To say that I have not been an easy student to supervise is an understatement, so I need to thank him especially for his lasting patience and support.
Lastly, I wish to express my deepest love and appreciation for those who truly mattered in the past ten years, when too much went wrong for one person to cope with alone. Three people helped me to keep faith. My life and soul mate, Remco, has always stood by me to join the adventures, to help nurture my ideas and slam them when necessary, and to remind me of my ideals whenever I tend to lose grip on them. His company and encouragement throughout the research period and in the trying years thereafter have been vital to making this experience bearable and worthwhile. Thank you, kasih, for being my anchor and keeping me real.

With their unconditional trust and guidance my parents have contributed to all my achievements in life, for which I am eternally grateful. In 2006, at the time of finishing this study (so I thought then), my father fell ill and he passed away. This came as a terrible shock, but his passing was also a reminder of the values and causes that he so passionately stood for in life. Because he had experienced the corrupting influence of political influence at the time of the 1960s student movement in Indonesia – when he was a youth in his twenties, who joined the movement out of conviction but was left disillusioned with its outcome – he was not a big fan of politics. Thus I grew up learning to distrust all forms of power play and to be critically aware of any hypocrisy behind big claims and gestures. However, I also learned to care about humanity and justice, to appreciate commitment and integrity where it does occur, and to value critical and selfless minds, of which my father was a role model to us. Because his philosophical and spiritual legacy suffuses my mind and soul, all my work is partly his. It is with great pride that I therefore dedicate this work to my father, Benny Sastramidjaja, a unique spirit – hatur nuhun for the drive and inspiration.
On 11 March 1998, the People’s Consultative Assembly reappointed President Suharto for his seventh term, despite his failure to control the financial crisis that caused the Indonesian economy – previously touted by the World Bank as one of the ‘miracle growth economies’ – to collapse like a house of cards. Suharto’s New Order regime had been in power for thirty-two years, but mounting student protests and calls for reform from the wider society made clear that, this time, his reappointment was taken as an affront. A few days earlier, I had watched a broadcast of the assembly’s proceedings that reflected nothing of the crisis going on outside the Parliament building, while passing time at the Jakarta airport. I was waiting to fly back to Amsterdam after having spent six months in Bandung for my master’s degree research on youth lifestyles under Suharto’s regime. I recall feeling uneasy about the timing of my departure, for in the previous months I had felt the tensions rising as riots and rumours spread across the country like wildfire, creating a surreal atmosphere of looming danger. I could tell something ‘big’ was about to happen, just as I was leaving the country.

How could I not have had that feeling? For weeks I had passed by army troops and tanks that were posted on each strategic street corner. For months I had listened to people’s concerns that had become my own. And near the end of my stay, a joint exhibition by young artists that was to be held in Bandung’s municipal art gallery – in which my partner, a Dutch artist, would participate – was banned at the last minute, as officials deemed it a risk to allow this form of free expression in such critical times. The organising artist then begged my partner for forgiveness, down on his knees, his fists clenched before his chest, and speaking ‘in the name of the Indonesian people’ – a poignant yet utterly sarcastic performance in itself, which proved to be typical of the political style of Indonesian students, as I found out years later. In art galleries, in private homes, in the mass media, and on the streets, the sense of crisis was everywhere. Meanwhile, students were drawing attention with their rapidly growing protest movement. To me, their protests were especially meaningful in light of my research findings on the defiant sensibilities of youth, convincing me that young people were eager to resist the repressive climate in which they had grown up. I did not foresee what was about to happen as I boarded the plane to Amsterdam, but I could surely imagine that any response by Suharto, as cold as it would surely be, would only add fuel to the fire.

In the following weeks the protests intensified and turned more aggressive. So too did the regime’s response, resulting in a cat-and-mouse game between student
protesters and security forces that turned increasingly violent. Still, the regime kept up an air of normalcy, and Suharto’s position seemed secure as ever. But the façade collapsed on 12 May, when troops opened fire at student protesters at the elite Trisakti University, killing four, which was followed by riots in Jakarta and other cities that took more than a thousand lives. Allegedly orchestrated by army factions loyal to Suharto, who were seeking to deter further protests and create a pretext for martial law, the atrocities instead provoked a national and international outcry. This boosted support for the students, who then decided on an audacious act. On 19 and 20 May, tens of thousands of students began to occupy the Parliament compound, demanding Suharto’s resignation. On 21 May Suharto stepped down. As I followed these events from afar – holding my breath, sometimes in tears, and forever regretting to have missed the action – it was easy to share in the euphoria of the students seen celebrating on the Parliament building’s rooftop and the people rejoicing in the streets.

After the ‘May Revolution’, as it was called, I felt a strong urge to get back on the plane and join the struggle for democracy in Indonesia in any possible way. However, since I still had my studies to finish I felt I had to suspend this urge for at least a year. Still, my thoughts kept wandering to fellow students in Indonesia – whose movement proved to be far from over, becoming all the more dramatic with the ‘Semanggi Tragedy’ in November 1998, when more student protesters were killed by military gunfire – and I was haunted by the urge to ‘do something’. The least I could do at that time was to dedicate the final chapter of my Master’s thesis to the rise of the student movement, which seemed a fitting ending to my narrative on youth agency at the end of an era.

After I graduated in June 1999, when Indonesia held its first free elections, I was still haunted by the thought of having to ‘do something’, though I had no idea about what I could do. By then, the ‘student struggle’ had become more muddled, as student activists were no longer just fighting the regime but also each other. Amidst all political intrigues and violence it was difficult to distinguish ‘the good, the bad, and the ugly’ among the ‘forces of change’. And while students’ call for ‘reform’ was moving towards a more powerful bid for ‘revolution’, the student movement seemed to be losing power. Little was left of the heroic image that had made such an overwhelming impression the year before. What remained was confusion, between the activists, among the general public, and in me.

Amidst my confusion, my thesis was awarded the 1999 National Thesis Prize and it was published. Then, I found myself giving occasional talks in university classes and at ethnological and Indo-Dutch events on the subject of Indonesian youth, in which I was also confronted with queries about the student movement. On these occasions I was struck by the prevalence of myths and stereotypes about
the student movement, about which little was apparently known. People imagined them to be either pioneers or pawns, or to represent some generic type of youth rebellion. Those familiar with Indonesian history drew parallels to the nationalist youth of the struggle for independence, or the student movement of 1966 that had allegedly served as the army’s dupes to bring Suharto to power. Others brought up the 1960s protest generation in the West, or imagined student protest to be detached from any history and to be driven by an intrinsic youthful urge to rebel. The recurrence of these images unsettled me, and made me wonder where they came from. At that time, though, I felt unable to ‘set the image straight’, for I too knew little about the student movement except for what I had learned from secondary sources. And so it became clear to me that if there was anything sensible for me to do, it was to resume my research where I had left it in March 1998.

I was fortunate for the opportunity to conduct this research with a scholarship granted by the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AIISSR), where I started my doctoral studies in September 2000. My first year at the AIISSR then became much more than just that opportunity. It became an exciting journey into the world of social sciences, where I could experiment with all strands of theory. This made my research plans more complex than initially envisaged. I became intent to try out an unconventional approach, as I found that myths about student movements are often reproduced in the conventional models by which they are studied. Thus I set out to stray from the beaten path, intent to explore the student movement’s dynamics in its fullest dimensions in order to debunk the myths and recover the ‘real’ stories ‘behind’ the stories about it. Ambitious and naïve it was. But while my naivety was soon overcome as the realities in the field struck home, they only added to my resolve to approach things differently.

Designing my research as an extended ethnography, I decided not to focus on specific organisations, events, or periods, but to adopt a relational, genealogical, experiential and praxis oriented approach, seeing the student movement as part of a political culture in the ongoing process of reconstruction, and student activism as a collective as well as personal project of achievement. My aim was to identify the links between these two dimensions. By assuming an ‘expanded sensitivity’ to the webs of narrative, performance, and experience within and surrounding the student movement, I intended to recognise ‘protest as an act of becoming, rather than an already achieved state’ (Fox and Starn 1997: 6). My plan was to combine a set of qualitative methods, including participant observation across networks, discourse analysis, focus group discussions, and life story interviews. But how I would exactly go about in the research was a mystery to me. I knew it would be a challenge to put participant observation into practice in the political ‘minefield’ that was the post-New Order student movement, where activists were often suspicious of each other and outsiders.
I was confronted with the potential difficulties of conducting cross-network research during my pilot project in Jakarta, conducted in January and February 2001, which coincided with a political rift that was being vehemently fought out in Parliament, in the mass media, and on the streets. The student movement was divided into openly hostile factions for and against ‘GusDur’, as then president Abdurrahman Wahid was popularly known, which more or less mirrored left- and right-wing politics, respectively. As I arrived in Jakarta the conflict was reaching a boiling point. The situation was so tense that I felt hesitant to approach any of the parties without first getting a sense of the stakes involved, hence I discreetly attended the mass rallies of both camps, and found the threat of violence palpable. One such rally left me with my first experience with tear gas; at another I found myself stuck amongst masses of protesters as they were being besieged by masses from the opposing faction, and that night I witnessed a violent clash between the opposing student groups. In addition, there was much speculation of infiltration and provocation to and fro, on top of rumours of a pending military coup, making all groups involved all the more anxious and on their guard. In this antagonistic, volatile situation, I could not just jump into the field as an innocent outsider.

But when I started my field research six months later, in September 2001, the situation had already changed. In August, Wahid had been replaced by Megawati Soekarnoputri. A new status quo was forming, and activists were reconsidering their positions. International and domestic affairs provided new incentives to bury erstwhile enmities. In the wake of the ‘9/11’ attacks in the United States, activists collectively condemned the global ‘war on terror’ that granted the military and state intelligence increased powers in Indonesia too, while a corruption scandal involving the chair of the New Order ruling party, Golkar, provided another flashpoint for concerted student action. This new spate of protests would develop, a few months later, into the joint movement against the neoliberal and militaristic policies of Megawati’s government, which became a focus of my research. While activists of all stripes condemned this government as ‘neo-New Order’, divisions among them remained evident, if only in the different symbols used in action.

While trying to interpret these events, and with previous events fresh in mind, I knew much time and effort was needed to map and make sense of this volatile field, and even more to get to know its players and gain some level of trust. But once I had gained some entree into the movement I also found that familiarity and trust as such were not enough to gain a deeper understanding of the movement’s inner dynamics. Lived experience was needed to make sense of the elusive politics playing offstage, especially the political sensitivities that seemed to be constantly, silently present in the background – like a muffled rustle, imperceptible and unintelligible to outsiders such as myself. That such sensitivities related to
embodied political knowledge, that there are emotional aspects of political being and acting, and that politics is deeply emotional, became clear to me right at the start of my research.

My first team of research assistants – solicited through a ‘neutral’ ad put up on a bulletin board at the University of Indonesia (which has a rich tradition of activism): ‘Anthropologist is looking for research assistant’, no subject mentioned – happened to include former and current student activists from different factions. Learning of the six applicants’ affiliations I decided to hire them all, hoping they could provide insights into different factions and an entrance into different parts of the movement. For less pragmatic reasons, I also hoped to establish that differences can be overcome through teamwork. In my naivety I did not consider that, over and above differences, these factions shared a highly sensitive history of disputes that had left deep scars within the student movement. As a fresh researcher, I knew nothing about this history. Neither was I to find out soon, since it all remained unspoken. In the first weeks of working with this team they seemed to openly share their thoughts and experiences. But I found first impressions not to last.

Within the team I began to sense vague sensitivities. I felt some were keeping a discreet distance, and were biting their tongue when discussing certain topics. Then one of them decided to only meet me in private, as she ‘couldn’t bear being in the same room’ with one of the others for ‘political reasons’, no more explanation provided. Before even properly starting my research, then, there was serious political ‘fuss’ going on within my team, which for me was hard to fathom. It was only after this team had fallen apart that I learned, through partial disclosures, what nasty affairs the fuss was about. Once I did, this seemed to ‘involve’ me, too, and indirect threats came my way. Mildly alarmed, yet also strangely excited for so closely experiencing critical politics so early in my research, I realised I had to tread more carefully. If I wished to delve deeper I would have to develop a ‘feel for the game’ (Bourdieu 1977), especially in a game so fraught with risk yet with few explicit danger signs to go by. For that reason I decided to extend my fieldwork period, so as to learn, through experience, the inner dynamics of this field without getting trapped in any of its political fuss.

In what then became twenty months of fieldwork in Jakarta and other cities, I carefully moved across the movement’s intricate networks and myriad activities. I joined countless protest events of all kinds and colours, from massive marches to campus happenings. I attended all sorts of gatherings, from high-profile seminars in fancy hotels, to a secret training camp and an underground congress up in the mountains, closed strategy meetings, and casual reunions in shabby boarding rooms. And I hung out with activists on social occasions, including graduations, birthday parties, weddings, rock concerts, quiet afternoons spent playing football
outside or on the PlayStation, and nights spent playing guitar and playing cards. All the while I tried to maintain my research position in-between factions, trying to balance intimacy and detachment, trying not to get involved in intrigues, trying to link contradictory accounts, and ever trying to convince myself that I was onto something relevant, however elusive. I was certainly learning, about the complex interplay of myths, performances, rhetoric, and elusive ‘fuss’; the intricate fabric of ideologies, strategies, hierarchies, and histories behind factions; the collective thrills and tensions; and the personal beliefs, concerns, and passions that together make the student movement. The more I learned, the more daunting it seemed to identify patterns that could explain the paradox of the student movement’s apparent power, and lack of it. But gradually a clearer picture came into view, revealing the bitter ironies of politics, yet also strengthening my conviction that the student movement truly is an important phenomenon, even if for reasons other than what is typically stated about its role in ‘making history’, ‘pioneering revolutions’, and being an ‘agent of change’.

Amidst growing concerns about the movement’s decline, it became clear to me that the student movement is important because it is there. Its very existence is the one key role it fulfils, since this signals the presence of counterhegemonic voice, vision, and play, which no society can do without. But it also became clear to me that its existence cannot be taken for granted. It is an achievement, over which battles have to be fought. From the start, I was struck by the recurrent issue of eksistensi (‘existence’) in activist discourse. Initially I framed this in the same terms as they did: as the need felt by each group to attest to its political presence and right to that presence, which was felt to be a problem as it led to mutual competition and thus posed an obstacle to movement unity. Only later in my research, when the reconsolidating state began to eclipse the student movement, did I recognise the deeper meaning of eksistensi as a crux of activist being. And only after my return visit during the 2004 elections, when student protest had all but disappeared from the public stage, did I conceive of the student movement’s existence – or rather, the political identity and agency that authenticate its existence – as a key struggle in itself. This shed a whole new light on the banal phrase of ‘student struggle’. This struggle of being is at the heart of a dynamic that I call ‘playing politics’ and upon which this study is focused.

There can be no existence without stories, and my research left me with a huge amount and vast range of them, conveying as many different views, which posed difficult dilemmas of interpretation and representation. Stories are always a tricky kind of data to handle, but my dilemmas had less to do with their shaky degree of consistency and reliability than with the fact that stories can be harmful – especially stories related to the student movement, which have often been used
as weapons, by activists and against them, precisely in the struggle for existence. I was wary of reproducing potentially harmful stories, yet no less wary of allowing this to restrain how I presented my research findings. Careful selection could only be a partial solution, as the ethical grounds for what to exclude remained tenuous. Should I exclude stories that might bring someone harm? Where is the boundary of what is considered harmful? Stories that put the student movement, or certain groups or persons within it, in a bad light?

To complicate matters, the activists I worked with were no less aware of the power of stories. Thus, especially in the first months of my research, many only told me stories that championed their own positions. Yet, many also urged me to collect stories from ‘all sides’ in order to produce a ‘fair’ account, which implied that ‘unfair’ or biased accounts are common. By the end of my research, several activists also privately told me – and moreover urged me to ‘expose to the world’ – some of the more scandalous stories about the movement, the ‘skeletons in the closet’. When asked why they did not expose these stories themselves, their reply was either, ‘I’m not objective, like you are’, or, ‘Too risky’, or a hesitant mumble that to me suggested they were no less aware than I was of the tension between the analytical import and the political impact of potentially harmful stories.

With these stories in hand – from the self-championing to the self-critical, the secret and the scandalous – how was I to construct a critical but fair and harmless account? Then it occurred to me that the only constructive way to connect these stories and ‘disarm’ the potentially harmful ones was to make their power a key theme of my analysis. That is, to make this a story about the role of stories in the making (and potentially breaking) of the student movement, its political identity, and agency. Needless to say, the story presented in this study is not, and cannot be a conclusive version. Part of my argument is that the student movement is kept in existence precisely because its story continues to be contested, renegotiated, re-constructed, and reflected upon. If my study, for all its shortcomings, can contribute to this reflective process in any constructive way, then perhaps my initial urge to ‘do something’ will not have been completely in vain.

Many years have passed and much has happened since I started this research. For one decade the work on this thesis came to a standstill, as I had to devote my time to a different research project for a subsequent appointment and to teaching obligations. The interruption was frustrating, to say the least. Once I resumed writing, however, I found that it brought me the benefit of hindsight. Looking back further in time, with more emotional distance, I was able to identify patterns in processes that had seemed fuzzy in the turbulent moment of their happening, and to identify significant details in stories that had previously escaped my attention. Moreover, distance has allowed me to put my role as a researcher into perspective, including
accepting that I cannot, nor should aspire to, write the ultimate narrative about the student movement that can ‘set the image straight’. Myths will be myths, regardless of my efforts to debunk them.

Distance has allowed me to get to the end of this story. Yet, it has not made me less engaged with the subject. More than ever, I am convinced of the import of student activism, in Indonesia and everywhere. It is a subject that I frequently discuss in my teaching, and it is a source of pride when I see a student become ‘activated’ in any way by stories of activism. Recently, one of my students from Hong Kong told me she could ‘feel her heart beat’ when discussing the topic in my class. Three months later she was in the midst of the ‘Umbrella Movement’ in Hong Kong, a movement galvanised by the energies and creativity of students. Strikingly, this movement also mobilised myths of students’ ‘historical duty’ to ‘make history’, themes that the students in Hong Kong played up in similar ways to students in Indonesia. The Umbrella Movement made global headlines – just as the student movement in Indonesia once did – yet many observers still viewed the protest as futile, merely delaying the machineries of power. But any ethnographer of social movements will disagree. Anyone who has experienced what I call the ‘spirit of agency’, either as participant or participant observer, will have seen, sensed, and embodied the effect of mobilisation. Even if this spirit does not make history, it certainly has an impact on personal and collective lives. It makes our hearts beat, even long after the mobilisation ends.

Meanwhile, the situation in Indonesia has not stood still. In the decade since my field research, marked by apparent stability under the presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, new generations of student activists have experienced further ups and downs. I have resisted the temptation to include the developments after 2004 in this study, though I include the most recent events in an epilogue, as it rounds out the story so well – showing how, in July 2014, the activists I worked with between 2001 and 2004 once again mobilised in a momentous campaign to help the populist presidential candidate Joko Widodo defeat the military candidate Prabowo Subianto. To my regret, once again I had to witness this historic event from afar, yet again, it was easy to share in the euphoria of the activists I had come to know so well. As I followed their updates and watched photos and videos of their campaign and eventual victory through social media, I not only felt their hearts beat, but also mine. In addition, social media have allowed me to follow these activists’ further trajectories in life, and to me it has been comforting to see that they did not change much in the past ten years. They have grown older, but the spirit has not died out. Hence, the once-frustrating delay in finishing this study has turned into a blessing in disguise. It has become a fortunate opportunity to come full circle, allowing me to include in my account the personal transitions
of this generation of activists in a larger context of a protracted era of political transition. I can now conclude that the story of their political existence is to be continued.
Note on Orthography, Translation, and Pseudonyms

In spelling Indonesian words I generally follow the orthographic system officially adopted in 1972, although in some cases (especially personal names, or names of organisations, from the colonial era), I use the old orthographic system following common usage. Indonesian words frequently used are put in italics only with their first usage. Unless stated otherwise, all translated quotes from Indonesian sources (oral and written) are my translation. In translated quotes, English words in italics denote phrases expressed in English. Quotes from respondents are taken from interviews during the fieldwork, which were conducted in Indonesian. Following common anthropological usage, and for reasons of confidentiality, all respondents are named by pseudonyms. For reasons of clarity, only the main characters in this thesis are given names; other respondents are designated by their organisational affiliation, if and when relevant. I use the actual names of organisations, in order to make this history as useful as possible to other scholars and interested parties.
PART I

INTRODUCTION

Participant observation: the author with two participants during a demonstration against the invasion of Iraq, March 2003 (Yatun Sastamidjaja).
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In Search of Agency

The Spirit of a Movement

It was amazing, to look behind you when marching on the streets and see the whole road filled with one moving sea of people – you couldn’t see the end! Then all feelings of exhaustion disappear, there’s only the spirit to keep going. Like in a dream, your body just disappears. I mean, I hadn’t eaten but I wasn’t hungry, I hadn’t slept for days but I wasn’t tired, I had walked for who knows how long but my feet didn’t hurt a bit. Well, maybe a little, but it didn’t matter as long as I kept moving. Like I said, we moved on spirit.1

Memories of the heyday of protest are often emotionally evocative, like this former student activist’s recollection of the five-day ‘long march’ across Jakarta during the People’s Consultative Assembly, from 9–14 November 1998. It was the most dramatic student protest since Suharto’s resignation on 21 May of that year; students called on the government to fulfil the task of reform that they had so phenomenally set in motion. But things went awry. On Friday, 13 November, troops opened fire, killing eleven protesters, and the dreamlike atmosphere turned into the nightmare known as the Semanggi Tragedy, after the Semanggi Bridge where the bloodshed took place. Yet, the students were not deterred. The next day, thousands returned to the streets to condemn the excessive violence. One activist explained:

The Semanggi attack was tough on us. We had been on our feet for days, we had clashed with the police, we were intimidated by militia, and then this shit hit us! But it’s true what they say; it did give us new energy. The more we were shot at, the more it raised our spirit to fight back.2

Participants often invoked the word ‘semangat’, or ‘spirit’, in their recollections of the 1998 protests, to describe the invigorating energy of the movement. Students who took part in the protests shared this spirit in a desire to act as agents of history. As one student recalled the mood in the early phases of the protest:

I was never politically conscious. I used to laugh at students who bothered to demonstrate on campus. They looked weird, and what's the use? They’ll only get expelled.
But suddenly I felt from deep inside that I had no choice but to join the struggle. It may sound dramatic, but I was really ready to die. Senior students warned me it could be dangerous, but the situation was so critical, all my fears seemed irrelevant. I felt we could make a difference. I felt we were making history. 3

The sudden transformation of this student, and thousands of others like her, into an agent of history reflects the sweeping sensation of a historic turning point. The student movement was thrust into stardom, catching the public’s attention in Indonesia and abroad, and no self-respecting student wanted to stay behind. This is illustrated by the famous images of the occupation of Parliament on 19–21 May 1998, showing masses of students swarming the building’s rooftop and stairways, as if standing on top of the world – a young, dynamic body capable of changing the course of history. But this sense of possibility was not to last.

In the post-1998 ‘era of reform’, students continued to mobilise against the New Order regime’s legacy of corruption and injustice. Student protests contributed to the resignation of two succeeding presidents, B.J. Habibie (1998–1999) and Abdurrahman Wahid (1999–2001), and threatened the presidency of the third, Megawati Sukarnoputri (2001–2004). Through these six years of persistent mobilisation, student activists gained significant political expertise in matters of organisation, strategy, ideology, and public relations. Yet, by 2004, the student movement was no longer the agent of change it seemed destined to be in 1998. Despite some victories over unpopular government policies, a sense of decline had displaced the ‘spirit of agency’, and there was growing speculation that the student movement’s role was exhausted. As one activist wryly remarked in 2003, at a reunion of participants of the 1998 student movement: ‘Let’s face it, at the end of the day we didn’t become anything but heroes in vain’.

In this study I examine what happened to the student movement, on and off stage, to first become an ‘agent of history’ and then lapse into decline. But this is not a story about the rise and fall of the student movement. When I started my research, I was mainly concerned with the first part of the question, since the movement’s decline had yet to happen. During my first research trip to Jakarta, in January and February 2001, I witnessed massive student protests against then President Wahid, heralding his downfall six months later. My fieldwork period, from September 2001 till June 2003, again coincided with major protests, this time against then President Megawati, in which there was even talk of a ‘people’s revolution’. But, a revolution never materialised. Instead, the end of this period marked the ‘death of reform’, as activists said, and by the time of my return visit during the April 2004 legislative elections, the student movement’s very survival seemed to be at risk. I began to trace obvious causes of the movement’s decline – such as internal conflicts, mutual rivalries, and political pressure from opponents,
including the reconsolidating state – while observing the strategies used by activists to deal with the problems. But there was a deeper sense of losing the spirit – losing agency and power – that bred an anxiety of its own across the movement. This was, I began to think, related to subtle pressures created by the New Order’s political culture, which had re-emerged in new guises in the era of reform.

**Between Mimicry and Mockery: Playing Politics**

To understand why this would so deeply affect the student movement, we need to consider the student movement’s ambivalent relationship to power. At once high profile and shrouded in mystery, the student movement is the staunchest critic of the powers that be, yet it is imbued with myths that intricately tie it to the governing discourse of power. While I had expected to see this discourse in relation to state efforts to repress student protests, I was struck by its recurrence in the students’ performances. A similar rhetoric of ‘patriotism’, for example, could be heard on both sides. It seemed to me that symbolic battles were going on – ‘a war of representation’ (Guano 2002) – in which the student movement and the state used similar symbolic devices to compete with one another on the same discursive grounds. The symbolic battles reveal that more is at issue in student struggle than hitting the streets, making headlines, and ousting presidents, and that more is required for success and survival – for keeping the spirit – than clever strategy, sound ideology, or solid organisation. From staging spectacular action to dealing with decline, symbolic battles are at the heart of each stage of student struggle. For in them the student movement’s identity and agency as a legitimate political subject are at stake, including its power to act and its space to move.

This study, then, is about the tenuous grounds of the student movement’s political identity and agency, and the symbolic battles waged over its representation and control. The question of what happened to the student movement – how it evoked and then lost its grip on a powerful identity and sense of agency – may thus be examined by tracing how symbolic battles were played out before, during, and after the heyday of protest. How did wars of representation affect the student movement’s dynamics of mobilisation and styles of action? Which repertoires of political culture were brought into play in symbolic battles, and how were they reproduced or transformed through their uses by rival players? How were student political identity and agency reconstituted in this process of rival representation?

Taking the power of representation seriously, I also highlight its effects on collective subjectivities and personal lives. What, then, does it mean for students to become ‘agents of history’, even ‘heroes’, only to conclude they were ‘heroes in vain’? How does the experience of engaging in ‘historic battle’ affect their sense of self and personal trajectories within and beyond the story and lifespan of
the student movement? Lastly, I focus on the oft-cited ‘spirit’ of student struggle. What is this spirit of struggle in terms of experience and political signification? What role does it play in mobilisation and symbolic battle? How can something that elusive be ‘won’, ‘lost’, or regained? Is it transferrable from ‘historic battle’ to other times and settings, such as routine activist practice, the life after student activism, popular culture, or the political culture at large? And if so, is ‘spirit-out-of-context’ still the same?

In engaging these questions I introduce the concept of ‘playing politics’ as an analytical tool to interpret the student movement’s dynamics. From the premise that student movements are not isolated events, I contextualise these dynamics in historically extended, culturally embedded, as well as deeply personal processes of political formation. Two dimensions can be identified in this. The first is political socialisation, in which students are socialised into proper political roles and repertoires of political culture. The second is subjective becoming, or agency, in which students rediscover and redefine themselves as political subjects and actors based on shared experiences. The concept of playing politics is meant to analyse how these processes intersect in the student movement and affect its dynamics and style. On the one hand, playing politics involves a performative mimicry of political roles and repertoires, which entails reproducing political culture. But it also involves a mocking of those roles and repertoires, which entails reconstructing political culture. This tension between mimicry and mockery is at the heart of the symbolic battles.

One way to interpret the interplay of political culture and subjective agency is to frame it in terms of webs of narrative – from official to personal stories, or all the macro-, micro- and meta-narratives that give ‘student struggle’ its particular meanings, enabling different actors to make sense of political processes and politicised lives. Moreover, narratives indicate that symbolic battles do not occur in a historical void. Political stories have political histories, which need to be taken into account to understand the parameters of student political identity and agency. Indeed, to understand what happened to the student movement, to evoke and then lose grip on ‘historical agency’, it should be recognised that this was not the first time that this happened to student movements in Indonesian history. Student movements have been entangled in wars of representation throughout Indonesian history, and each episode has had lasting effects on subsequent battles. Hence, this study is not limited to the ethnographic present: to trace the genealogy of student political identity and agency today, I critically re-examine the story of student movements in Indonesian history.

In this chapter, I show how theories of Indonesian politics and student activism have contributed to circumscribing the definitions of student political identity
and agency. I argue that, ironically, agency is neglected in much of this literature, with critical ramifications for student activism in practice. In the following chapter, I demonstrate that agency has indeed played an important role in this history by highlighting two dimensions of protest: narrative and play. Lastly, I discuss the narrative and playful methodology of my research. But first, we need to return to the spectacle of 1998.

**Heroes of History, Icons of Events**

With its phenomenal rise, massive scale, and striking assertiveness, the student movement of 1998 took virtually everyone by surprise. Two decades after the suppression of the last major student movement in 1978, and two years after the crackdown on political opposition in 1996, few had expected so much power to come from the campuses, though the conditions seemed to be ripe for protest. Indonesia was hit hard by the Asian financial crisis, social unrest was brewing, Suharto’s health problems made the issue of succession pressing, and celebrity mystics skilfully played their part in the nation’s favourite pastime in times of crisis: predicting doom. Still, the chance of student action was widely dismissed. Even long-time student activists, who were involved in off-campus struggles at that time, told me that they, too, were unprepared for the sudden acceleration of student protest and had to hurry back to campus in an attempt to give it direction. Scholars were no less surprised. Many had difficulty making sense of the power of this flamboyant crowd of students, who had just been branded an alienated, apolitical, apathetic, decadent, MTV generation (Ibrahim 1997). As sociologist Ibrahim remarked a few years later, in 2003, ‘It sure is funny that the trendy youth of the MTV generation were the ones to achieve what no one else dared to imagine: toppling the regime’. Still, most observers framed their analysis of this unconventional generation in conventional paradigms.

The narrative of Indonesian national history offered the most convenient interpretive frame, one that incorporated this student movement within Indonesia’s ‘tradition’ of student struggle, so that, in hindsight, its occurrence was not that surprising after all. In this narrative, students are always at the vanguard of each milestone in national history: from the national awakening in the early twentieth century to the start of the national revolution in 1945; from the birth of the New Order in 1966 to, it was now added, its overthrow in 1998. Recognition of this vanguard role comes with the exclusive title of ‘Angkatan’, or (Great) Generation, which is granted to each young generation whose struggle had determined the course of history. The official line-up includes the Angkatan 1908, Angkatan 28, Angkatan 45, and Angkatan 66, and to this relay of national struggle was now added the Angkatan 98. This label offers observers a convenient way of compari-
son, allowing the latter Angkatan to be evaluated in terms of preceding ones. The most obvious comparison was with the Angkatan 66, the student movement that had earlier helped topple a long-seated president, Sukarno. In this comparison the Angkatan 98 usually comes out as the more courageous generation, who fought against the army instead of cooperating with it as students did in 1966. The very different worlds in which the two generations arose, and the different nature of their movements, are thereby easily ignored.

Thus entering history as but one in a long series of agents of history, the 1998 student movement became history, a thing of the past that no longer seemed to be of current interest. This was reflected in the decline of scholarly interest. While the early books on reformasi had chapters on the student movement (Aspinall 1999; Bhakti 1998), the subject is conspicuously absent in later publications on civil society and social movements in the era of reform (e.g., Priyono, Prasetyo, and Törnquist 2004). This neglect of the designated stars of reformasi – D&R (2000) magazine used the phrase ‘forgotten heroes’ on the cover of its special issue on the student movement6 – hardly fits with the student movement’s role in post-Suharto civil society. In the years after 1998, student action continued to attract much public attention, and the student movement was a key factor in many civil society campaigns. In fact, the student movement came to define and organise itself increasingly in terms of civil society, joined together with NGOs and other opposition groups in the ongoing struggle for democracy. However, it also retained its exclusive identity as ‘agent of history’, which puts it in an ambivalent position between the narratives of ‘civil society’ and ‘national struggle’. This categorical in-betweenness partly explains why the movement has been neglected in the scholarship on civil society and political opposition in Indonesia. But there is more to this neglect.

Different from ‘regular’ civil society, student movements seem to be tied to a spatially and temporally bounded framework of historic turning points, especially those accompanied by dramatic, mass-mediated events. Given the discourse that student movements are key actors in such historic moments – indeed, that they determine the course of history, as the narrative of national history in Indonesia has it, or that they have a ‘historical destiny’, as discussed below – these moments also define the student movements. After a historic event, the student movement thus becomes equated with the event; it becomes its icon. That is what happened in May 1998, when spectators in Indonesia and abroad were led to believe they could be close witnesses to the heroic student struggle for reform, as it could be followed in an up-to-the-minute fashion via CNN, BBC, Reuters, and the Internet. The intensity of media images and reports created an ‘illusion of proximity’ (Schulte Nordholt 2003) – the illusion of being on top of the event while knowing
little about its circumstances – and thus invoked a sense of intimacy and common cause, while adding a good dose of suspense, which made it easy to recognise in the event a modern saga of good against evil, and to identify the student movement as its proper hero. Little did it matter that few people had insight into the affairs playing behind the scenes, or even on stage. What mattered was that the students had come into view as a perfect icon for this historic moment. Hence, as any iconic image starting a life of its own, the image of students-in-action came to decorate the covers of many books on reformasi, even if the books contained little to no discussion of the heroes depicted.

Reduced to an empty signifier, the icon becomes available for random appropriation, as various parties may attempt to exploit its emotional power to promote their own story. Once historic events are iconised through ‘hyper-representation’, as Leavy (2007: 4) argues, they can be used for unrelated political purposes as ‘representational vehicles’ or ‘organising tools to talk about other events and other social issues’. Disconnected from historical context, an iconic event then comes to signify a sudden disruption of the normal state of affairs, an ‘anomaly’ that signals crisis. This ‘crisis quality’ makes iconic events useful: by invoking the event in relation to contentious issues, the public can be urged to avoid repeat of the ‘crisis’ by closing ranks against a so-called threat. This dynamic is closely tied to the politics of memory that is at the heart of wars of representation. It is why the memory of the Angkatan 98, and its iconic predecessors, is repeatedly re-invoked by state officials, political opponents, as well as student activists – not as a historical occurrence but as a political threat or promise.

Iconisation also circumscribes the definition of student movements as political actors. Because student movements are equated with the ‘anomalousness’ of key events, it is seen as an anomalous event itself. Hence, outside the drama of key events, a student movement’s role and identity become ambiguous. Without mass mobilisation and ample media coverage signalling crisis, student movements may not be recognised as ‘real’ movements. This is evident in the case of student movements that do not gain iconic status, such as the student movements of the 1980s, a period known as the ‘era of stability’ at the height of Suharto’s power, when political activity was curbed and protest was rare. These movements have only been studied by Aspinall (1993), though he later characterised them as part of a preliminary phase of ‘proto-opposition’ preceding the ‘mobilisational oppositions’ of 1996 and 1998 (Aspinall 2005). According to the dominant strand in social movement theory, real movements only occur as part of a national crisis, when windows of political opportunity open (see Chapter 2). By the same token, though for different reasons, the student movements of the 1980s could never qualify for the title of ‘Angkatan’, since they did not represent a historical milestone in the narrative of national struggle.
When I asked a former student activist from the 1980s about the neglect of the student movement of his time, compared to that of 1998, he said, ‘It’s upside down, the ‘98 kids were following a trend! We built a real movement, one that struggles in any circumstance!’ It did not occur to him that, in trying to rectify a misperception of ‘his’ movement, he was reproducing another about the movement of 1998. But when I asked him if he felt slighted by the denial of the Angkatan title, he laughed, ‘Why should I? That’s a myth! Who wants to be a myth?’ Indeed, the title can be more of a burden than a blessing. Through a paradoxical interplay of iconisation and trivialisation, it traps student movements as ‘heroes of history’ in the collective memory, while turning its actors into ‘heroes in vain’ in political reality.

Bias in the Study of the Game of Politics in Indonesia

Theories of Indonesian political culture also contribute to the neglect of student movements. From Feith’s (1962) study of the ‘decline of constitutional democracy’ under Sukarno, to Jackson’s (1978) study of Suharto’s ‘bureaucratic polity’, to McVey’s (1982) study of the New Order as efficient bureaucratic machine, or Beamtenstaat, and recent variations, the study of Indonesian politics has long been limited to the inner mechanisms of the state, especially the central powers in Jakarta. Although this state-centred bias has come under growing criticism (Van Klinken 2001; Schulte Nordholt 2003), it has produced persistent myths of elite control that still colour perceptions of Indonesia’s political landscape.

The bias is reinforced by the notion of aliran, introduced by Geertz (1960), which posits that sociopolitical forces in Indonesia are divided in traditional ideological streams, or aliran, organised around the major political parties. This notion implies that student movements are also divided in such ideological units, and that their main relevance is their substructure (onderbouw, as it is called in Dutch and Indonesian) function of supporting the aliran parties at the top. They are thus denied a political identity and agency of their own. A similar effect follows from Geertz’s (1980: 13) notion of the ‘theatre state’ – based on his study of classical Bali, yet influencing prevailing views about the ceremonial nature of Indonesian politics – ‘in which the kings and princes were the impresarios, the priests the directors, and the peasants the supporting cast, stage crew, and audience’; hence, ‘power is ritual, not politics’. For student movements, this implies that their role is limited to ‘supporting cast’ or ‘stage crew’ – never ‘impresario’ or ‘director’, yet never mere ‘audience’ either – who play their part in the theatre of power. While I recognise ideological affiliations and theatrical aspects in politics, I wish to point out the elite bias reproduced in these models, which reduces political practice to reflections of a static order, controlled by the top.
This is also evident in models stressing the patrimonial nature of Indonesian politics, often referred to as ‘bapakisim’, father-ism, a culture centred on patron–client (‘father–child’) ties. According to Jackson (1978: 34), this culture begets an atomised society, ‘composed of a multitude of groupings, each with its own elite and mass elements’, in which political action is limited to ‘selective mobilisation’ of masses by elites so that ‘mobilisation along ideological lines is nearly impossible’. This ignores the success of the Indonesian Communist Party, PKI, whose ideological promise attracted millions of Indonesians. But since Jackson wrote after PKI’s annihilation in 1965–’66, and at a time when Suharto consolidated his power, he could see the patrimonial society ‘naturally’ reproduce itself, arguing that the ‘presidential variety of the bureaucratic polity’ – that is, the New Order, headed by supreme father–patron Suharto – appeared to be ‘well-fitted’ to Indonesian culture (Jackson 1978: 34). Yet, since he also wrote during major student protests (1974–1978), he concedes that a ‘rising generation of university students constitutes a partial exception to these generalisations’, as ‘the group most likely to label the relationship between bapak and anak buah [protégé] as feudal and corrupt’. Still, Jackson doubts whether these students truly reject ‘the system of their elders’, suggesting that ‘the vehemence of student criticism stems from their being partially excluded’ from it (1978: 36). There seems to be no escaping a system so ‘well-fitted’ to Indonesian culture.

In her analysis of the 1966 student movement, Willner (1968: 6) also stressed the students’ rootedness in bapakisim, as seen in their ‘reluctance to challenge authority too openly or drastically’, so that the ‘legitimacy of formal authority remains recognised’. While opposing Sukarno’s government, she argues, students still sought his ‘guidance’ and rather attacked his aides, but she fails to note that, to Sukarno and the public, there was no mistaking the fact that an attack on his aides was an attack on him personally (see Chapter 6). The tendency to recognise bapakisim everywhere is more explicit in her argument that all public protests in Indonesia ‘tend to be instigated, provoked, and planned from the top or close to it by one or several members of a political elite’ (1968: 7), who use it ‘as a political tactic … in their internecine struggles for power and other objectives’ (1968: 10). As Jackson (1978: 5) also puts it, ‘Whenever mass mobilisation has occurred in Indonesia, the initiative has come from within the elite’.

Stage management is undeniably part of political life. But to explain protest as ‘an institutionalised and even ritualised tactic of the game of politics’ (Willner 1968: 12), in which the elites create the stage and pull the strings – the common analogy is that of the dalang (puppeteer) in wayang theatre – is to essentialise political culture and relations, and to ignore the interests and concerns of those ‘being staged managed’. Moreover, the claim of stage management has political effects, as it is frequently used in the game of politics, in wars of representation,
to discredit protesters and dismiss their claims. The question remains whether elites are the only entrepreneurs in stage management. Protesters are no less keen to manipulate on-stage and off-stage plots. The game of politics is more complex than notions of a ritualised political culture presume, involving differently positioned players, who each stage their own storyline and anticipate and respond to that of others. This is not to say that political action lacks cultural patterning, but rather than being determined by some essential culture, this patterning occurs through strategic invocation of cultural models.

To explain this, let me turn to a cultural model discussed by Anderson ([1972] 1990), on the traditional Javanese idea of Power (spelled with a capital ‘P’ to contrast it with Western ideas). Rather than an institutional or private capacity to be exercised, Power is conceived as a cosmological force to be accumulated and concentrated in a unifying centre. The one threat to Power, then, is its diffusion, which occurs when a ruler, who embodies Power, pursues personal interests. This causes a cosmological imbalance as revealed in natural disaster or social chaos. Thus, political history is interpreted in terms of cycles of the concentration and diffusion of Power, explaining the rise and fall of ancient kings or contemporary presidents. Anderson ([1972] 1990: 20) stresses that this idea of Power is part of a ‘heterogeneous, disjunctive, and internally contradictory’ modern political culture, in which traditional ideas mainly resurface in times of crisis, when people tend to turn to them to interpret confusing events. He leaves implicit, though, that they do not simply resurface by themselves: they are reactivated, and it is then that a productive interplay occurs between model and action.

This can be illustrated by an essay on the student movement written in 1978 by social scientist and former student activist Arief Budiman. Building on Anderson, Budiman argues that there are two ‘traditional mechanisms’ for expressing political criticism in Indonesia, epitomised in two Powerful figures. The first is the wayang figure Semar, the god-clown tasked with guiding the royal family by providing ‘loyal criticism’; he is the only figure licensed to criticise kings, but he can only do so in the form of half-serious jokes. The second figure is the resi, or hermit-sage, who lives secluded from society to cultivate clairvoyance. Free from worldly interests, his ‘role is to diagnose decay within the kingdom and to give warning of the impending downfall of the dynasty’, and if a self-interested ruler ignores the warning and chooses to suppress the resi, ‘this is taken as a sign of the centre’s impending disintegration’ (Budiman 1978: 616–617).

Budiman argues that the student movement embodies both of the Semar and resi figures, and therefore has a legitimate duty to criticise and warn the ruler. He thereby reactivates cultural models to justify student protest, and the timing is no coincidence; in 1978, a major student movement was crushed. Thus, his essay can
be read as a warning to Suharto, who dared to suppress a resi, which would herald his fall. (In 1978 it was hard to imagine that this could take another two decades.) Moreover, it served as a call to action by reminding students of their ‘traditional role’. With this dual political message, the essay represents a striking dialectic of ‘models of’ and ‘models for’ student protest, to take Geertz’s (1973) more useful theory of the dual function of symbolic systems, as interpretive models by which people make sense of reality and which they use as blueprints for acting on that reality. The Semar and resi stories provided students with both a model of their position in the political landscape and a model for political action they should live up to, and a cultural justification to do so. This shows that, rather than determining the game of politics, cultural models are used interpretatively, performatively, and strategically as part of the game. As such they should not be dismissed from political analysis, but examined for the claims and concerns they convey.

The problem arises when cultural models are mistaken for culture and used to explain politics. As Robison (1983: 7) states, to do so is ‘to take politics out of its material context, to portray political systems as harmonious cultural accords between rulers and ruled, and to mask the real processes of coercion and resistance which constitute the stuff of politics’. However, we should also not pitch cultural against material exercises of power. The ‘stuff of politics’ is their systematic integration, which is precisely what made the New Order so powerful. Moreover, a focus on ‘real processes of coercion and resistance’ often still leans towards the coercion part, as seen from the position of coercive rulers, to which the ruled can only resist reactively. As long as the ‘demarcation between the subject and object of power is presumed to be clear cut’, as Heryanto (1999: 156) puts it, political actions by the ‘ruled’ remain invisible. That is why, in early 1998, amidst rising student protests, scholars continued to focus on the centre of power and the tactics of the ‘king and his entourage’, finding it difficult to imagine that actors on the periphery could pose a real threat. Only after 12 May, when students were killed and riots broke out in plain sight of the international press, did they see the power coming from ‘below’. As Forrester (1998: 31), who witnessed the events, noted in his diary entry for 17 May:

The toughest opposition to Suharto will come from neither government nor opposition elites. It is brewing right now among a new generation of young political unknowns in the capital and other cities of Java. They are largely uncoordinated but the increasingly huge crowds they can mobilise do pose a serious threat to Suharto. They have maintained and nurtured the student unrest from its modest beginnings in February until it has become a nationwide movement capable of shaking the foundations of the New Order.
But, as Philpott (2000: xiv) notes, that this ‘brewing’ opposition is ascribed to ‘young political unknowns’ shows only that they were ‘unknown to the discourse of Indonesian politics, as they were not recognised as “political figures”’. Indeed, they seemed ‘uncoordinated’ only from the view that mobilisation is coordinated by known elites. It seems that the events of 1998 confronted Indonesia scholars with their own bias. As Van Klinken (2001: 265) points out, ‘the most important fallacy – because it produced the blind spot that did not see the end of the New Order coming – was probably the assumption that the central state and its leading actors were so autonomous that we could understand Indonesia by reference to them alone’. But has this changed since 1998? While the focus and language did shift – from ‘continuity’ and ‘order’ to ‘transition’ and ‘violence’ – the elite bias has largely remained. Rather than prompting new approaches to account for the role of ‘political unknowns’, there has been a revival of notions of patronage and aliran politics to explain the rise of new political parties and local rulers as new players in the game of power. Thus, even in the diversified, decentralised political landscape, ‘political unknowns’ are still seen as ‘supporting cast’ or ‘stage crew’, if not pawns of the ‘real’ players at the top.

To eliminate the bias, Schulte Nordholt (2003: 7) argues, we need ‘new ways of looking at “the state”’, and acknowledge the links between formal institutions and informal networks. Indeed, ‘state’, ‘civil society’, and ‘student movement’ are not separate entities but represent complex fields of actors who play across fields, and it is through their interactions that political culture takes shape. This means that we also need new ways of looking at political culture. Never stable or uncontested, political culture needs to be understood as a performed discourse articulating ‘mythologies of power’ through which ‘the state tries to make itself real’ (Hansen and Stepputat 2001: 5) and other actors also try to make themselves ‘real’. The student movement is in a special position to do so, as it is part of these mythologies of power. At the same time, it has a specific need to make itself real, due to its ambiguous identity and tenuous agency, constantly wavering between ‘agent of history’, ‘civil society’, and ‘supporting cast’ or ‘stage crew’. This not only applies to Indonesia. Student movements everywhere have a peculiar relationship to power, trapping them in their very own myths of ‘students in revolt’.

The Image of ‘Young Radical’

Since studies of student protests tend to appear alongside the mobilisation under study, most of this literature stems from the late 1960s, when student protests shook societies across the world. Those protests, too, took observers by surprise. It ‘was totally unexpected’, Keniston (1971: viii) notes, as ‘the “silence” of youth during the previous decade was taken as evidence that advanced industrial socie-
ties had effectively “socialised” the young to their purposes’, given the prevailing theory that ‘powerful “systems of social control” guaranteed “social equilibrium” and “incremental change” without conflict’. The theory was proven wrong. Still, to make sense of why a ‘whole generation’ had risen up in revolt, scholars took recourse to conventional paradigms, which still colour perceptions of student protest today.

Much of the 1960s literature focused on the ‘roots’ of rebellion, which were often located in a crisis of modernisation exacerbated by sociopathological crises. Student movements were seen to provide a stage for prolonged re-enactment of youthful rebellion against authority, and its young actors were seen as ‘immature’ and ‘irresponsible’, and as lacking the proper attitude for ‘mature’ politics.7 This view can be traced to Weber’s 1919 lecture, ‘Politics as a Vocation’, in which he makes a distinction between a youthful ‘ethic of absolute ends’ and a mature ‘ethic of responsibility’: while youth seek ‘salvation of the soul’, as manifested in their categorical refusal to compromise on matters of principle, the ‘mature man’ in politics is more realistic in accepting the complex realities of life (in Gerth and Mills 1946: 126).8 Long before, in Rhetoric, Aristotle drew a similar contrast:

[Youth] have strong passions [and] exalted notions, because they have not yet been humbled by life or learnt its necessary limitations. They would rather do noble deeds than useful ones. Their lives are regulated more by moral feeling than by reasoning. They think they know everything and are always quite sure about it; this is why they overdo everything. [Elders] are sure about nothing and under-do everything. They ‘think’ but they never ‘know’. … They guide their lives too much by considerations of what is useful and too little by what is noble – for the useful is what is good for oneself and the noble what is good absolutely. (Quoted in Lipset and Ladd 1972: 66–67)

Whether youth are seen as irresponsible or noble, and the elderly as responsible or compromised, is a matter of perspective. Sympathising scholars will argue that society needs the idealism of youth, precisely to confront the complex realities of life. As Lipset (1967: 16) states, it is their ‘capacity for identification with categories of universal scope, with mankind or the oppressed or the poor and miserable’, which makes youth ‘disproportionately support idealistic movements that take the ideologies or values of the adult world more seriously than does the adult world itself’. In that vein, observers have heralded student movements as a ‘prophetic minority’ (Newfield 1966), or more recently in Indonesia as ‘collective prophets’, who recognise injustice where others see routine politics, and who are not afraid to act upon their vision (Rahardjo 1990; Rahmat and Najib 2001). The currency of such images across time and space again indicates that student movements are readily iconised and decontextualised from actual conditions. Indeed, the ‘portrait of the young radical has great intuitive appeal but little empirical
validation’ (Emmerson 1968: 395). Yet, this intuitive appeal is why it is such a potent trope in political discourse, and a potent tool in wars of representation.

While often romanticised, the image of the young radical is also invested with connotations of risk. Noted scholars such as Shils (1969) have stressed the ‘dark side’ of youth activism, warning that youth, due to naivety and ‘blind fanaticism’, easily fall prey to provocation and manipulation. This view is strikingly prevalent in scholarly accounts as well as political discourses condemning student activism. Researchers of student movements everywhere have noted its recurrence in state-level discourse, and the damaging effects on movements (McAdam 1988; Della Porta 1995, 1999; Calhoun 1995; and Wasserstrom 1991). Moreover, connotations of risk have criminalising and pathologising effects. Categorised as a ‘youth problem’ rather than a political critique, youth activism has been studied in the fields of ‘juvenile deviancy and delinquency’, which provides scientific justification to treat young activists as deviants in need of disciplining. As Gitlin (1980) shows in his study of the 1960s student movement in the United States, authorities were keen to exploit a deviancy discourse – repeatedly highlighting ‘spontaneous violence’, ‘erratic crowd behaviour’, and the ‘eccentricity’ or even ‘lunacy’ of student leaders – which sped up the movement’s decline and marginalised (and radicalised) the surviving parts.

Finally, the image of the young radical can serve to trivialise activism. One common claim is that ageing has a moderating effect, and that once ‘young radicals’ have let loose they are likely to settle down as respectable citizens. Examples are easily found, such as the sixties student leader who turns into the yuppie of the eighties, or the student leaders of the Angkatan 66 who went on to join the establishment. Yet, follow-up studies of student activists from the sixties provide evidence that the majority retains their ‘youthful ideals’ and continues to live by them, even if this costs them dearly in terms of social status, careers, and personal lives (McAdam 1989). Still, as McAdam (1988: 213) argues, the ‘myth of generational sell-out’ is sustained to dissuade students from participation, by conveying the message that ‘it’s no use anyway to continue the fight’. In various ways, then, myths about young radicals have demobilising effects. But to understand the full dynamics of such myths, we should take into account young activists’ complicity and agency in the mythmaking process. If myths were only produced and used by outside opponents, there would be no war of representation.

One myth adopted by student activists in the United States in the 1960s is that of the ‘red-diaper baby’, which explains their activism as the natural outcome of ‘radical’ family backgrounds, and thus depicts their development ‘as smooth and uninterrupted, as a simple assimilation of parental values of dissent’, as Keniston (1968: 47) clarifies. Keniston dismisses this myth, since he found no such smooth
development in his psychological study of the life stories of student activists. But thereby he failed to examine what activists do with the myth, apart from noting that it is ‘a manifestation of the need … to find historical roots by exaggerating the (very real) familial continuities in their lives’ (1968: 47). This is not a trivial matter. Activists produce such myths to make sense of their participation and add legitimacy to it in the face of delegitimization. Moreover, this occurs in specific political circumstances. In the context of wars of representation, that is, they feel especially compelled to magnify the continuities in their lives, to purge personal stories from inconsistencies, and to mould them into a coherent narrative of political identity and agency. Further, stories of a political self are formed in relation to existing political stories. If activists create myths about themselves in order to find ‘historical roots’, this is consistent with existing myths about the historical duty and destiny of students to be political.

**Student Duty and Destiny**

Myths of students’ duty and destiny start from the idea of universities as secluded enclaves in society that offer students temporary shelter from the vicissitudes of ‘real life’. Students are thus seen to possess more freedom than others to critically reflect on social issues, develop idealistic responses, and devote time and energy to political activities; their distance from ‘real-world politics’ further allows them to maintain political autonomy (Lipset and Altbach 1970). As ‘laboratories’ for critical ideas, then, universities are seen as ideal ‘protest-promoting institutions’ (Keniston 1971), epitomising the idea of ‘free spaces’ that escape formal control and supply the necessary ingredients (networks, skills, conceptual frames, solidarity) for launching a movement. According to Sanit (1999a: 36), it is ‘inevitable’ that students engage in political activities, given their ‘inherent idealism’ as future intellectuals and ‘structural autonomy from the power structure and prevailing interests in society’. However, Sanit (1999a: 28) also points to another reason for student political involvement that contradicts the notion of structural autonomy: universities, as ‘breeding grounds for talented young leaders with organisational experience’, are prime sites for political recruitment, which draws students into formal politics. Universities are thus profoundly politicised settings that are structurally tied up with real-world politics. This contradiction in Sanit’s argument is not an error; it points to the coexisting notions of ‘students and politics’ and ‘students in politics’, a subtle difference that signals an inherent ambivalence in the perceived role of students – one with significant implications for what students are expected to be and do.

This partly relates to broader debates on the role of intellectuals. The classical view is that intellectuals must remain independent and never forfeit their inherent
passion to serve the truth by allowing their talents to be exploited for political ends (Coser 1965; Shils 1972). But critics argue that an apolitical stance is impossible. As Colie writes, critiquing historian Johan Huizinga’s neutrality in World War II (the Nazis still detained him): ‘Because he had so long kept politics at a distance from him, he was unprepared for the brute fact that an elderly, respectable, honourable professor is fundamentally a political being’ (quoted in Anchor 1978: 84). Hence, it is the intellectual’s duty to be political. Yet, as Heryanto (2003: 29) notes, the ‘myth of intellectual activism’ is no less problematic, as it requires intellectuals to play up noble motives, lack of self-interest, and distance from power in order to guard their public credibility as intellectuals, while there is always the hint of defending privileged positions, since they appear to be too far removed from the common people (see also Baud and Rutten 2004).

For students, however, despite their status as future intellectuals, ‘intellectual pretence’ is not seen to apply. Their perceived integrity hinges not on a choice to be (or not be) political, but on an aura of pure idealism, which supposedly makes their vision of truth and justice less biased, more open and sublime than that of professors with privileged positions to defend. Thus, even with the view that professors are fundamentally political beings, students are still seen as not. Paradoxically, though, this seems to make them all the more suited for the role of political activism. Ultimately, then, it is not the university or its ‘passion for truth’, neither the space nor the mission shared with professors, but an exclusive narrative of political destiny that invests students with a special capacity to ‘do politics’ without ‘being political’.

According to this narrative, students’ exclusive position in society imparts a sense of social burden that turns into a sense of political destiny when called for by circumstances. As Douglas (1970: 148) argues, secluded campus life generates ‘a lingering uncertainty’ with regard to their relationship to society, which can be ‘resolved in one of two ways: either they immerse themselves in the make-believe world of the campus’, or they ‘attempt to define for themselves some fairly specific role in the social life of the country, usually a role which is at least partly political as well as elitist’. However, students do not define this role by themselves. Especially in societies where access to higher education is restricted and political activity curbed, they may indeed be expected to fulfil a political role, even that of the political vanguard. Students are often regarded as the most suitable group for this role, as they not only possess the necessary skills and social capital, but also the militancy thought to be lacking in older generations (Lipset 1967; Baud and Rutten 2004). Still, for politicisation to occur, Habermas (1971) argues, students’ sense of private and political destinies need to interlock, which is likely to occur in conditions of rapid change, when they experience a ‘rupture’ between society’s
‘traditionalism’ and their ‘consciousness of modernity’. Anderson (1991) shows that the politicising effect of this experience was most acute in colonial contexts, where the private and political destinies of students came to be tied to that of the ‘imagined community’ of their nation. Students then took the lead in national revolutions, and the rest ‘is history’.

History then becomes a self-perpetuating story, as memories of student vanguardism are reproduced in postcolonial repertoires. This imparts high expectations to later student generations, instilling a sense of national duty that in times of crisis becomes a call for action. Otherwise, the sense of duty is kept latent in another myth, that of students’ role as permanent critics of the powers that be. In Indonesia this myth found expression in the idea of students as a ‘moral force’ who criticise rulers as needed, either in a ludic manner, like Semar, or a prophetic manner, like resi. If the ruler really steps out of line, another figure is introduced into this narrative: students will act like ‘cowboys’ to chase him out (see Chapter 6). Students are thus expected to play a key political role in critical times, to step out of the protected campus realm to break a political impasse and pioneer action, and are also expected, after returning to campus, to exercise permanent pressure on the ruling establishment. Their political destiny comes full circle; from political experimentation in the laboratory of campus, to political vanguardism in times of crisis, and back to campus as future-intellectual critics of the powers that be – all, miraculously, without being political.

**Power Structure and Socialisation**

In reality, the student condition is likelier to deter than to stimulate activism. For one thing, the transient status of students makes student movements difficult to sustain, and study obligations can put serious strains on committed participation. Authorities may further exploit these practical issues; in Indonesia, following the repression of the 1970s student protests, study programs were tightened to leave less room for political activity, making the ‘free space’ of campus a lot less free (see Chapter 7). Yet, the idea of campus as free space is illusory to begin with. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) state, universities are the products and reproducers of the dominant order, and commit systematic ‘symbolic violence’ by moulding student subjectivities into that order. Archer (1972) also studied the university’s systemic links to the power structure and its conditioning influence on students’ political subjectivity. But she highlights significant variations, noting that the type of student politics that is likely to develop in a university setting depends on the specific pattern of systemic links in that setting, including the extent of state or corporate funding, inclusion of the state ideology in the curriculum, state control of staff appointments, and party presence on campus. She stresses, however, that
none of these linkages can influence the very occurrence of student activism, for that is a matter of agency.

For a closer look into the relationship between ‘conditioning’ and agency, I turn to the concept of political socialisation. Archer (1972: 9) defines it as ‘the use of higher education for conveying political values’, by which students learn to ‘manifest ideological orthodoxy’, to ‘accept political limitations on the courses available’, and to ‘participate in those kinds of student action and mobilisation deemed appropriate’. Political socialisation, then, seems to be a prime deterrent to activism, or at least a force that constrains the possibilities for action. It is for that reason that Keniston (1971) rejects the concept, arguing that the surge of student protest in the 1960s marks an irrevocable process of ‘de-socialisation’. However, if understood more broadly – as the process of acquiring political knowledge and attitudes by which people learn to conform to, or deviate from, political culture – I consider political socialisation to be a key part of politicisation. According to Almond (1960: 31), political socialisation is ‘basic to the whole field of political analysis, since it not only gives insight into the pattern of political culture and subcultures in that society, but also locates in the socialisation processes of that society the points where particular qualities and elements of the political culture are introduced, and the points where these components are being sustained or modified’. Almond and Verba (1963: 34) further stress that political socialisation requires active engagement, since people are not passive recipients of political culture but bring along ‘political feelings, expectations, and evaluations which result largely from political experience’. By limiting the concept to formal institutions, though, they fail to explain exactly how such experience mediates formal socialisation.

As Jennings and Niemi (1974) argue, socialisation is not just the transmission of dominant values through formal institutions. They point out the influence of subcultural settings on socialisation, and note that dominant socialisation patterns are also subject to change, so that socialisation is always a multifaceted, disjunctive process. Confronted with conflicting influences, youth develop ‘unique solutions that do not directly reflect any particular sources’ (1974: 329). This points to the role of ‘the self as an independent and mediating influence in the socialisation process’ (1974: 331), and since the self is a social being, these solutions are often developed in ‘communities of experience’, potentially leading to ‘what is truly called generational change’ (1974: 334). This outcome can be related to Mannheim’s (1952) theory of political generations that emerge as a result of a young cohort’s shared historical experiences. While differing for each cohort in the same generation, these experiences crystallise into a set of focal points for political consciousness, attitudes, and commitments. Cohorts coming of age in critical
times are thereby likely to develop ‘a characteristic type of historically relevant action’ (Mannheim 1952: 366). Still, it is a far jump from socialisation to politicisation, and all the more to mobilisation, and to posit a causal link between them risks falling into the functionalist trap that has been duly criticised in classical socialisation theory.10

In this study I take a close look into political socialisation, not to explain the ‘roots of rebellion’ but to recognise political becoming as a dialectical process of learning, experience, and practice, a process linking political cultures to personal lives in intricate ways. Recent studies of the role of political socialisation in youth activism show that youth ‘are actively involved in their own political socialisation’, that it is ‘something that youth do for themselves’ (Gordon and Taft 2011: 1500). Agency is vital in this process. As Archer (2000) defines it, agency is the practice of a reflexive self who experiences a multitude of influences and acts on the basis of a dialogue with these experiences. Through this, young people form political subjectivities and are aware of this formation; this reflexive realisation shapes their choices on how to position themselves within the web of narratives that constitute the political culture. This process does not end with assuming specific political roles, such as the role of activist. In fact, for activists, as Crossley (2003) argues, political socialisation is most intense in the context of movement participation, which shapes a ‘radical habitus’ just as regular socialisation shapes a class habitus. This brings me to a strand of theory that takes revolts for what they are: social movements.
Protest and Play: Beyond Paradigms, into Narration

Strategy in Social Movement Theory

To take student movements seriously, it makes sense to view them through the lens of social movement theory. It should be noted, though, that social movement theory is a contentious field that has long been marked by a polemic of opposing paradigms, one focusing on strategy, the other on identity (Edelman 2001; Cohen 1985), which obscures the interplay of structural and cultural relations of which social movements are made. Efforts to synthesise the oppositions have not yet led to a new consensus, so that a ‘paradigm vacuum’ is said to exist (Van Stekelenburg, Roggeband, and Klandermans 2013). Until this vacuum is filled, the more dominant strategy paradigm continues to define our views of social movements, including activists’ own perceptions of themselves, as I illustrate below.

The first to shape the strategy paradigm is resource mobilisation theory, which posits that collective action is about strategic efforts to mobilise necessary resources – namely, followers, funds, and publicity – to achieve goals in a competitive field. McCarthy and Zald (1977) apply a ‘simple economic model’ to this field, in which ‘social movement entrepreneurs’ compete with one another and with other social sectors for the same pool of resources. This turns activists into little more than interest-maximising recruiters, fundraisers, and advertisers in a crowded marketplace of ideas, and ignores what the protest is about and the political conditions in which it occurs. In conditions of severe repression, a social movement’s most vital resource is that intangible spirit of struggle, which cannot be calculated by economic models.

Political opportunity theory, while also preoccupied with strategic calculation, does take political conditions into account by focusing on the opportunities available in the political environment, which can either deter or encourage protest by affecting expectations of success or failure. As Tarrow (1998) argues, success is most likely when ‘windows of opportunity’ open that were earlier closed, notably in the event of intra-elite discord, which decreases the state’s capacity for control and makes available influential allies. Opportunities only matter, though, insofar as activists can identify them as such and translate them into effective strategies.
Activists in Indonesia do calculate their chances this way: carefully reading signs of cracks in the regime, seeking the support and assessing potential elite allies, and seizing any opportunity to mobilise (Aspinall 2005). But opportunities do not guarantee success. Alliances with elites are tricky, and the opening of the political system also opens space for opponents. Conversely, a decrease in opportunities does not preclude action and can be an incentive for protest. The link between opportunity and action may in fact be reversed. As Bratton (quoted in Aspinall 2005: 16) argues, ‘civic action, especially in the form of mass political protest, commonly comes first, precipitating splits within the ruling group and causing the government to concede reforms’. Whichever comes first, ultimately political outcomes are determined in the interactions between activists and rulers.

Some of this interaction is captured in framing theory, which focuses on the ‘collective action frames’ that social movements need to construct to convey their cause and motivate participation. As Gamson (1992a: 7) states, social movements need to activate three types of frames: an injustice frame, to redefine anger over a social issue as a political issue; an identity frame, defining a ‘we’ against a ‘them’ held responsible; and an agency frame, to convince ‘us’ that change is possible and that ‘we’ are the proper group capable of achieving it, and thus ‘to empower people by defining them as potential agents of their own history’. But activists’ framing efforts are bound to meet with counterframing efforts by those they oppose, who usually have greater means at their disposal to influence public opinion and discredit the movement. In that event, reframing is needed to ‘reverse potential damage to the movement’s previous claims’ (Benford and Snow 2000: 626). Thus, activists are deeply embroiled in what Gamson (1992b: 68) calls ‘symbolic contests over which meaning will prevail’, which take place in a ‘field of combat that is already occupied’ by the ‘legitimating frame’ of the state; this may be so hegemonic that activists ‘face the [additional] problem of overcoming a definition of the situation that they themselves may take as part of the natural order’. Mobilisation is as much about transcending and transgressing hegemonies of meaning as it is about seizing opportunities, and the first may be the bigger challenge.

This further indicates that framing is deeply embedded in the political culture. Activists cannot construct any version of reality but need to draw on existing repertoires to make their claims culturally intelligible, and thus frame their causes at least partly in the terms of the dominant political culture. This entails the risk of co-optation, but as Tarrow (1992: 192) argues, that problem can be solved by also drawing on oppositional repertoires, or ‘sets of values that are rejected by many but are inherited from the society’s tradition of collective action’. Frames that blend dominant and oppositional repertoires are most successful, and eventually may become part of the political culture, or ‘part of the reservoir of symbols from
which future movement entrepreneurs can choose’ (Tarrow 1992: 197). Thereby, they may develop into what Snow and Benford (1992) call ‘master frames’ that recur throughout cycles of protest, providing a ‘grammar’ for mobilisation. Myths of student duty and destiny, as discussed in the previous chapter, would certainly qualify for inclusion in this category.

However, although framing theory comes close to the dynamics of protest that I seek to unravel, it is no less limited by the instrumentalist bias that makes most of this literature read like a ‘how-to’ manual: how to maximise resources, opportunities, and frames for the greatest chance of success. Thus, as I found more than once during my research, it is not surprising that activists use these theories as a kind of checklist in planning their strategies, indicating the extent to which they affect activist thinking and practice. Instrumentalist preoccupations in theory and practice are then mutually reinforced, which not only circumscribes definitions of political action, but also what constitutes political personhood.

**Identity, Agency, and Historicity**

This became clear to me in a conversation with one student activist, who was widely admired for her political talent and diligence. Discussing the pressures of organisation work, she said: ‘I often feel like a robot; all I do is calculate political moves – calculate, calculate, calculate! So little by little I lose my humanity’. She was half-joking, but her statement touched me. It draws attention to a key question that the dominant theories leave untouched. As Jasper (1997: 9–10), a proponent of the identity paradigm in social movement theory, puts it, ‘Who are we humans, who protest so much?’ He answers:

> We are … symbol-making creatures, who spin webs of meaning around ourselves. We proliferate metaphors and language for describing the world; we elaborate theories, hypotheses, and predictions to satisfy our curiosity; we create symbols to probe deeper and further and to impress ourselves with their beauty; and we tell each other story after story. Into this roiling cognitive activity we mix emotions and moral evaluations, constructing heroes, villains, and comic jesters, anger, envy, admiration, and indignation. We add layer upon layer, creating thoughts about previous thoughts, attaching new moral values to existing ones, working out how to feel about our own feelings. We are aware of our awareness about our meanings – and so on, with infinite complexity. We are constantly learning, revising our views, adapting to new circumstances that we ourselves often create.

This spinning of webs of meaning goes well beyond framing; it points to what Jasper calls the ‘artful creativity’ that is at the heart of ‘our desires and ability to transform our world’, which is the ‘raison d’être of protest movements’ (1997: 9–10).
Along with Archer’s (2000) notion of ‘dialogic reflexivity’, this comes close to the concept of agency that I wish to develop, denoting the human capacity to create, play with, and act upon stories, which is inextricably tied to the embedded experiences of a reflexive self. To highlight agency is to recognise not only what a young, talented activist is but also what she fears no longer to be, though she refutes her ‘loss of humanity’ by the act of reflecting on and joking about it.

Jasper’s approach emerged in response to the neglect of identity in strategy-oriented theories, although the latter now also recognise the role of identity. As Tilly (2003: 67) states, ‘Identity affirmation has always played a crucial part in social movements, indeed provided one of their major rationales’, and once it is understood as ‘constituted claims for recognition by public authorities, the contradiction between “interest” and “identity” interpretations disappears’. Yet, for Tilly (2003: 61), political identities depend on structural conditions, and ‘alter as political networks, opportunities, and strategies shift’. Polletta and Jasper (2001: 292) also argue that identity and strategy imply and affect one another, but they put identity first: ‘Strategic choices are not simply neutral decisions about what will be most effective’ but ‘statements about identity’. That is why activists often develop styles of action or ‘tactical tastes’ that may not be to their advantage but that articulates their sense of self (Jasper 1997). As Swidler (1986: 277) puts it, people draw on the ‘cultural tool kit’ available to them to construct styles of action that feel proper to them, which are therefore ‘more persistent than the ends people seek to attain’, as ‘people will come to value ends for which their cultural equipment is well suited’, much like habitus guides practice.

Calhoun (1991) also argues that activism is guided by habitus, since activists, like all actors, act on the basis of that practical sensibility rooted in habitus that Bourdieu (1977) calls a ‘feel for the game’. Calhoun (1991: 62) shows that this is especially relevant in high-risk movements, such as the 1989 student movement in Beijing, which he studied, where participation ‘places one’s identity on the line in an especially powerful way’, activating a ‘sense of who one is as a person and what it means to go on living with oneself’, which is ‘sufficiently powerful to outweigh what might ordinarily be paramount prudential concerns’. Few of the students who braved the risks at Tiananmen Square were exceptionally brave or politically minded people. But the habitus acquired within the field of struggle led them to look for guidelines within the stock of cultural memories proper to their identity in that field – as students, future intellectuals, and political actors to boot – which contains ‘mainly tales of bravery rather than prudent common sense’ (Calhoun 1991: 63). Moreover, the activists’ uses of cultural repertoires not only affect their identity and strategy, but also the repertoires. Thus, identity, strategy, and repertoire are mutually redefined in the dynamic habitus of action.
The centrality of culture further indicates what is ultimately at stake in social movements, beyond immediate targets, which is what Touraine (1981, 1988) calls the battle for the control of historicity. By this he refers to the capacity to control the cultural orientations that govern a society’s reproduction; and ‘by cultural orientations’, Touraine (1988: 26) writes, ‘I do not mean values contrary to those of one’s opponents, but on the contrary those held in common with them and defining the stakes of the conflict’. It is in that sense that he speaks of ‘historical actors’ as collective actors engaged in a battle for historicity, not to be mistaken for the myth that ‘social movements are by very definition agents of historical change’ (Touraine 1981: 95). ‘Historical actors’ struggle to control the cultural grounds for change and their own agency in that context, which is indeed complicated by the fact of sharing the same cultural values as those they oppose, just as Gamson (1992b: 68) noted about framing contests. But this is where the reflexivity and creativity of agency make a difference: activists may not be able to fully transcend the cultural hegemonies they challenge, but they can certainly play with the meanings to spin alternative stories of historicity.

A Narrative Approach

This brings me to the subject of narrative, which is central to all social action. As Somers (1994: 614) states, people construct identities ‘by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories’; they ‘make sense of what has happened and is happening to them by attempting to assemble or in some way to integrate these happenings within one or more narratives’, and they ‘are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of the projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public, and cultural narratives’. A ‘narrative identity approach’, Somers (1994: 624) concludes, ‘assumes people act in particular ways because not to do so would fundamentally violate their sense of being at that particular time and place’. Calhoun (1991) similarly noted this aspect of identity coherence about student activists in Beijing. Social movement scholars now also recognise that ‘social movements are dominated by stories and storytelling, and narrative goes to the heart of the very cultural and ideational processes scholars have been addressing, including frames, rhetoric, interpretation, public discourse, movement culture, and collective identity’ (Davis 2002: 4). Even Tilly has turned from a critic (1998) into an advocate (2003) of a narrative approach, though his approach remains structuralist as he insists on proper classification of stories to eliminate their ‘messiness’.

Tilly’s view is consistent with the structuralist tradition in narrative theory that presumes narrative structures to be universally valid. A story is only consid-
ered a narrative if it fits certain criteria of emplotment – with a clear beginning, middle, and end, and characters representing identifiable moral positions, to convey the *logos*, *mythos*, and *telos* of social life. But this disconnects stories from the cultural practice of storytelling, thus ignoring the social life of stories and the agency of its creators, tellers, and receivers. Rather, as Bruner and Gorfain (1984: 56–57) state, all stories take shape in a polyphonic ‘exchange of authoritative and challenging tellings’, as their ‘semiotic openness’, and the ‘inherent versatility in interpretation’, ‘allows for conflicting readings and dissident, challenging voices’; thus, even canonical stories are ‘replete with ambiguity and paradox’. Stories are messy, and any attempt to eliminate the messiness will overlook their relational dynamics and power.

As Polletta (1998a: 141) argues, it is for their ambiguity that stories surrounding social movements grip the imaginations of both the public and the participants themselves, because such polyvalence encourages ‘our interpretive participation, [and] requires that we struggle to fill the gaps and resolve the ambiguities’. It is indeed the undecided plot that makes us care. Especially in high-profile, high-risk movements, it is the suspense that grabs attention: ‘Will there be blood, or victory?’ The ambiguity compels us to look for explanations by adding other, often conflicting stories, and as these stories interact with one another, this further adds to the ambiguity of meaning of the event. At some point, the stories may coalesce into an established master narrative, so that the ambiguity is temporarily relieved, especially if the event seems to have reached its conclusion: ‘The End’. This happened in May 1998, when all stories zoomed in on the student saga, recalling memories of a similar plot with the Angkatan 66 that also seemed to have a clear beginning, mid-point, and end. Yet, a coalescence of ambiguous stories into a master narrative is never stable. Once the plot falls apart, there may be even more ambiguity and tension; there may be an all-out battle of stories vying to translate the events and capture the meaning. This kind of messy situation (perhaps typical of all turbulent political transitions) carries the tag: ‘To be continued’.

Given this competitive aspect and cultural embeddedness of social movement stories, as has been noted for collective action frames, it may appear that activists similarly construct public stories from a strategic blending of dominant and oppositional narratives. But here the difference with framing becomes clear. In their ambiguity, narratives already blur dominant and oppositional components, and in their canonicity they tend to defy strategic uses, for canonical plots are not easily bent. It is in narratives that hegemonies of meaning are most powerfully manifested. Polletta (1998a: 154) thus suggests that, rather than classifying stories as dominant or oppositional, ‘we should ask whether there are features of narrative that make it prone to reproducing hegemonic understandings’. She argues this is
also the case for activist stories, since they, too, must ‘contend with the resonance of conventional narratives’, including those ‘that reduce protest to the ephemeral, the nonrational, and the apolitical’ (Polletta 2002b: 34–35). Take the Angkatan narrative. Students may use it as a mobilising story (and since it is so closely tied to histories of student struggle, it is almost inevitable that they do), but this can have the effect of bolstering the hegemonic myth with its demobilising effects. This problem is not easily solved by strategic uses, for narrative battle is tricky, and strategic intents often backfire. Not only may activists bolster the hegemonic myth, the stories mobilised by authorities may also facilitate protest. In narrative battles, players on each side may inadvertently empower their enemies. We may call this narrative loss or gain, which are not mutually exclusive; players may lose a bit here, gain a bit there. Even a historic loss is rarely final. If it were, the student movement could not have risen from its ashes after losing narrative ground for such a long period of time, and the state could not have reconsolidated its power after losing narrative hegemony. Narrative battle is a battle for historicity, and this battle is ongoing.

To return to Polletta’s question, whether there are features of narrative that reproduce hegemony, I do not think that proneness to reproduction, or transformation, can be located in the narrative form. A narrative has no impact outside its situated users. It might be, as Buker (1987) argues, that narratives contain political power in offering a model of change by laying bare plausible action. But a ‘model of’ becomes a ‘model for’ only through political intent, as Budiman’s (1978) essay on the Semar and resi stories illustrates. Any link between narrative and reproduction or transformation is a matter of agency, which is grounded in experience. As Bruner (1984: 6) argues, reproduction occurs when ‘cultural narratives become personal narratives’, but ‘what begins as reproduction ends as transformation’. This is because the ‘experience of the story induces reflexivity, in that a standardised cultural account is taken over and related to one’s own life situation, leading individuals to reflect on themselves and on uses of the story’ (1984: 10). It is then that ‘the story is transformed and transformative, its inherent possibilities are explored, as in the unfolding of an art style, and the pure play and delight in its various combinations are made manifest’ (Bruner 1986: 146). This brings us back to reflexive, creative, playful agency.

**Why Be So Serious?**

Before everything becomes deadly serious, let us recognise that conversation, contentious politics, and social life in general often centre not on strategic interaction for high stakes but on persiflage, seduction, concealment, and play’. (Tilly 2003: 13)
Tilly raises a crucial point in this quote, which he fails to elaborate: play is vital to protest. It also took me some time before I recognised the significance of play. In fact, activists often teased me for being ‘so serious’: ‘Why always be so serious? Must be because you’re an academic. Relax, you’re with us now!’ Somehow I had the idea that activism is a solemn affair, as activists struggle for serious causes, engage in serious activities, face serious risks, and suffer serious consequences. But I learned that it is fun, especially in a setting of young people, who like to play up a youthful élan, contrary to the dull world of ‘adult’ politics. On any occasion, jokes and funny stories are shared, pranks are pulled, and laughs are loud. Soon, though, I learned that fun is only part of the play, and occasionally I failed to spot a subtle shift to the part involving ritual or risk. At one meeting, where I was tasked with reading the votes in the election of the chairperson, I noticed too late that all others had put on their ceremonial roles, solemn faces and all, while I was still playing with the ballot papers; frowns came my way. During one rally, I was playing with a bamboo stake as I had seen others do just earlier, when someone snapped at me: ‘Drop that, stop messing around!’, lest I provoke the assembled riot police. Clearly, I had much to learn. As an outsider jumping into the situation mid-story I lacked a ‘feel for the game’, since I had not been socialised into it as an actual activist in this political culture would have been. But such incidents, in which I missed the change in tone or missed the point, also sensitised me to the significance of play.

‘Play’ (main) – and also ‘player’, ‘playground’, ‘winning’, ‘losing’, ‘tricking’, ‘cheating’, or ‘bluffing’ – are terms I often heard in everyday activist discourse, and I became intrigued with the implications of the concept of play for student activism. That there is more to play became clear to me in a chat I had with Levi, a senior activist at age 27, whom I had recently befriended. Still giggling as we left a get-together where he and his old comrades had shared some wild stories, he said to me: ‘I guess you’re pretty shocked, huh? Or did you imagine it to be so fucked up?’ Little did he know that I had heard the stories many times before, the personal experiences and the hearsay of political blunder, betrayal, intimidation, violence, and other tense situations that are part and parcel of student activist lore and that are always told with the exuberance typical of all get-togethers of old comrades. Yet, so as not to spoil the fun, I acted shocked: ‘No way! How could I imagine that? It’s crazy!’ Levi inspected my teasing face, nodded, and grinned, acknowledging my knowledge. He adopted a confidential tone: ‘It is crazy. After all this time, even I get shocked, really! But, what can you do if that’s the way it is. It’s political insanity, so why not just enjoy the ride as long as you’re in it’. As we parted in different directions, he added: ‘It’s a game anyway, and we’re still learning, just playing’. As I figured out much later, in Levi’s remarks ‘play’ refers
to key aspects of student activism, including pleasure (‘enjoy’) and political education (‘still learning’), indicating both youthfulness and political ‘infancy’ in the sense of being a novice in the game of politics, which also allows for beginner’s mistakes. As Levi’s comrade Rio told me, explaining why he had made a certain decision in 1998 that he came to regret: ‘We were absolute beginners, a bunch of clumsy people in politics’. However, neither he nor Levi were novices in 1998; they were seasoned activists engaged in campus and off-campus organising. The events of 1998, which student activists like them had set in motion, apparently had changed the rules of the game, and learning how to play it under volatile conditions became part of the game itself.

Back from fieldwork I began looking for relevant theories of play. But I found that much thinking about play has been dominated by game theory, which focuses on universal ‘game mechanisms’ – whether in economics, politics, or social interaction – and presumes the rules of the game and the relationship between means and ends to be clear-cut. Game theory’s limits have led anthropologists to reject the metaphor altogether. As Turner (1974: 140) states, ‘I do not think that man the entrepreneur or man the manipulator – any more than man the thinker, cognitive man – is an adequate description of, or model for, man in politics’, for politics ‘is not merely a game’, it ‘is also idealism, altruism, patriotism, universalism, sacrifice of self-interest’, making people willing to ‘die for values that oppose their interests and promote interests that oppose their values’. Turner (1974: 141) argues that game theory’s shortcomings are most evident in times of political crisis, when normal rules of ‘gentlemanly competition’ do not apply: ‘Where there is radical dissensus there is no game. … One side is playing chess, the other side is playing “for keeps”’. Yet, if game theory fails to capture the complexities of political life, this makes a concept of play all the more relevant.

Theorising Play

No discussion of play can omit Huizinga’s Homo Ludens ([1938] 1955), in which he argues that play is at the basis of civilisation, serving both as a ‘civilising force’ and an ‘imaginative force’, which makes it the ‘ideal path to the vision of a sublime life’ (1955: 13). Unlike game theory’s claim that ‘game rules’ apply to all spheres of life, Huizinga (1955: 13) insists that play must remain within its own spatiotemporal order, as ‘a free activity’ standing outside ‘ordinary life’, a ‘pretending, a stepping outside the world of duty and responsibility’. This separation prevents play from being corrupted by the perversions of real life and degenerating into ‘pseudo-play’ or ‘false play’. To remain pure, then, play must be ‘in the world but not of it’ (1955: 11; this explains Huizinga’s war-time neutrality noted in Chapter 1). This is an interesting point considering the aura of purity that
sticks to the student movement as a badge of honour. Student activists play ‘in the
world’ and seek to influence it through play, but cannot be ‘of the world’ of ‘real
politics’, lest this corrupts the play they are engaged in. But this is a difficult ideal
to maintain, for where does play end and real politics begin?

As Huizinga’s critics argue, play cannot be separated from an external world,
but should be viewed in its symbiotic relationship with the social order, either as
a ritualisation of the social order, conveying its ethic, or as a mirror of social life,
reflecting the dual nature of social life as always both ‘real’ and ‘played’ (Anchor
1978). But this still leaves us with the question of the tenuous boundaries of play.
For what if the playful ritualisation of the social order passes over into that order,
becoming a ritualisation of itself? What if the mirror of play starts mirroring other
mirrors, becoming a reflection of itself? What if play becomes ‘too serious’ and
fantasy slips into reality, so that it is no longer recognised as play? What if real
politics is only recognised as its ritualisation, as play? It is in this uncertainty of
boundaries between ‘play politics’ and ‘real politics’ that the student movement
finds itself, which accounts for much of the ambiguity and anxiety surrounding its
political identity and agency.

Bateson (1956) has theorised just how fragile the boundaries of play are, so
that any ‘passage to play’ requires explicit framing by the meta-message, ‘This is
play’. Gorfain (1986: 15) elaborates that the framing of a play event always in-
volves a double message: the frame refers not only to the play event but also to
the play message itself. This exposes the arbitrariness of the frame, an exposure
that opens it up for manipulation. The play message itself then becomes a thing to
play with, and can no longer function as a definite signifier. Handelman (1990:
69) further notes that this message sustains ‘conditions of uncertainty’, for if the
play boundaries are clear, then the message is redundant, and so the interpretive
frame is itself ‘permeated by uncertainty’. There may be confusion, slippage, faux
pas, or trickery, so that, as Bateson (1978: 8) puts it, ‘the roof blows off and you
don’t know where you are and somebody is either going to laugh, or be hurt’.

This can occur on the slippery grounds of parody and ‘symbolic inversion’, or
any act that ‘inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alter-
native to commonly held cultural codes, values, and norms’ (Babcock 1978: 14).
As Sutton-Smith (1997: 150) puts it, this type of play means that one ‘doesn’t
play within the rules but with the rules, doesn’t play within frames but with the
frames’. It is what distinguishes the ‘playful’ from the ‘regular players’, who are
‘deadly serious about their undertakings and do not typically make light of others
who play around with their play meanings and their play pursuits’ (Sutton-Smith
1997: 148). For all their disruption, the playful are also framed and rule-bound by
their role of playing the playful. Each society has a stage for parody, or a time and
space for role reversals, where the powerful can be ridiculed in ways not tolerated otherwise, as long as it conforms to accepted rules of performance (Bakhtin 1968; Babcock 1978), or as long as the playful ‘stay in play’. But the ‘truly playful’ are capable of playing with even that expectation of staying in play – thus, transgressing the rules of transgression. According to Handelman (1990), this capacity to cast doubt on all certainties, including those of play, is what makes the playful potentially subversive by their very presence, especially when unexpected. When ‘the playful springs forth to shatter routinely accepted arrangements’ and ‘figure possible alternatives’ (1990: 68), this is known to signal ‘uncertainty, processuality, and therefore the presence of change in the happening’ (1990: 72).

The 1998 student movement comes to mind. The unexpected rise of this brash crowd of students – who had ‘regular players’ shaking their heads and the public feeling uncertain about whether they would ‘stay in play’ and abide by the frames of student performance or would transgress the rules of transgression – was seen as a potent sign of change. Furthermore, it was seen as a danger sign of potential escalation, and the students cleverly played with both signs. This is not to say that they fully controlled the signs or the play. In a volatile situation, play with danger signs can turn into dangerous play, or real violence. Bateson (1972: 181) argues that play has an inherent tendency to get out of hand: by intimating potential escalation it may itself escalate. For example, a symbolic play-threat in the form of a clenched fist may suddenly, intentionally or not, become a direct blow in the face. Once escalation occurs, the play message needs to be reconsidered: ‘Is this (still) play?’ In one tricky situation in 2001, as I show in Chapter 13, student activists found themselves in rapidly shifting conditions that caused their role of ‘the playful’ to slip into dangerous play for high stakes, pulling them into a spiral of ‘real’ politics and violence. The public then wondered, ‘Is this (still) the student movement?’ and student activists asked themselves, ‘Is this (still) our play?’ Serious reframing was called for to regain and sustain the ‘playful’ role – including the special license to protest that comes with it – and to prevent further slippage into ‘real danger’.

Besides the risk of escalation, transgressive play involves the risk of repression. As Verkaaik (2003) demonstrates, fun and violence are not far removed in movements representing marginalised collective identities, such as the Muhajir Qaumi Movement in Pakistan, where transgressive play involves a ‘vandalising’ of social categories by reversing social stigmas. The more vandalising the play, the more threatening it becomes to the dominant order, so that it is bound to meet with repression. Gorfain (1986: 218) notes that even repression can take a play form, as authorities may manipulate the play message for a ‘fake game’, feigning to play along with the intent to end the play; they ‘might disarm an opponent by inviting him or her to join in a surrogate form of conflict – say, an organised
game such as a fencing match – but then abrogate the play message by playing for keeps with a secretly untipped sword’. It is then that ‘cat-and-mouse’ games between students and security forces can end in bloodshed. For Gorfain this is the worst form of ‘cheating’, not transgression but destruction of the play message. The play form itself is not destroyed – fencing matches and cat-and-mouse-games will continue – but the play frame will need to be restored to prevent further incidents. This brings us back to Huizinga’s concern with the need to isolate play. It is indeed to prevent escalation that society sets play apart in its own special realms, where the playful can play out their transgression without threatening, or being threatened by, the dominant order.

The Realm of Play

This play realm can be related to Turner’s (1974) concept of liminality, or the in-between condition of the *rite de passage* to a new social status, although for Turner it applies to any condition of in-betweenness when ‘liminaries’ are cast into a realm that sets them apart from the social order. Thus liberated from social categories and reduced to an existential equality, the liminaries develop what Turner calls ‘communitas’, or an intense sense of community that represents the ‘anti-structure’, since it allows them to imagine and play with ‘a potentially unlimited series of alternative social arrangements’ (1974: 240), so that ‘almost anything may happen’ (1974: 13). This makes communitas a potential threat to the social order, one that needs to be hedged in with material and symbolic boundaries. But, according to Turner, the boundaries are lifted in times of crisis or ‘social drama’, when society itself is thrown into a state of liminality. Communitas then appears to offer the more proper model for social organisation, and liminaries become the ‘star group’ of actors (1974: 268). No longer shunned, they are celebrated for heralding the change.

A similar phenomenon is described in Anderson’s (1972) study of the role of youth in Indonesia’s national revolution. Here, the Islamic boarding school, *pesantren*, represents the communitas: a physically and symbolically isolated realm where young men develop ‘a sense of weightlessness, a free-floating intuition of liberation from the tightly ordered rural society’ (1972: 6). Identifying a similar state of being in the traditional band of criminal ‘tough men’, or *jago*, Anderson argues that it was in these two ‘counterinstitutions’ that ‘transcendental vision’ found expression, which in times of crisis would prompt the young men out of seclusion to provide the spirit and vision that society needed. ‘When society itself succumbed to chaos and disintegration’, they offered a model of a transcendent order’, hence the ‘whole society moved to free itself from the cycle of routine and regularity, and accepted the suspended souring of the spirit which underlay the
pesantren’s conception of itself’ (1972: 10). Liminars, then, become the leading force, and the spirit of liminality the norm, though this is temporary; once society returns to order, liminars return to seclusion. Yet, they are ‘always there, built into the traditional society and ready to provide that society with a transcendent conception of itself when the times demanded it’ (1972: 10).

Again, the student movement comes to mind. As in the pesantren, secluded campus life may be experienced as communitas, and the analogy is all the more pertinent considering the temporal limit to the student status. Despite the permanency of the institution as a potential realm of communitas, liminality is a temporary condition, and liminars are not actually cast outside of society (jago, then, as outcasts, do not fit the description). As Turner (1974: 233) puts it, ‘liminars are often moving symbolically to a higher status, and their being stripped of status temporarily is a “ritual,” an “as-if,” or “make-believe” stripping dictated by cultural requirements’. It is play. Yet, this does not make it trivial, because liminality represents ‘a fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities, not by any means a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structures, a gestation process, a fetation of modes appropriate to and anticipating postliminal existence’ (Turner 1984: 42). That is, the practices and visions played with in liminality prepare for possible future arrangements. This also makes it possible to reproduce communitas in other settings, such as brotherhoods, or (post-student) activist organisations. For postliminal communitas to work, according to Turner (1974: 269), the initial separation from the social order must also be reproduced through boundary maintenance: ‘structure has to be constantly maintained and reinforced’. However, society’s structure is not easily kept out. In fact, play needs the social order, if only as something to play with.

This brings us back to the precariousness of boundaries. The fact that boundaries need to be artificially maintained points to the arbitrariness and instability of the separation produced. This means that the antitheses posited in play theories – between a ‘normative order’ and a ‘play realm’, ‘structure’ and ‘anti-structure’, or ‘order’ and ‘disorder’ – also do not apply in reality. The normative order, for one, is not that orderly. In New Order Indonesia, a strictly guarded semblance of order was needed to conceal the pervasive disorder of everyday life. In fact, it was in this disorderly reality that the children of the New Order, who would become activists, learned all the tricks of transgressive play, which they later applied in the ‘play realm’ of student activism. Turner’s order of liminality is then reversed. Structure becomes most visible when it falls apart, which is indeed when the playful move to centre stage. It is in times of ‘social drama’, such as the crisis of 1998 and the subsequent era of reform, that ‘structure’ and ‘play’ – which are otherwise taken as ritualised theatre, an institutionalised ‘game of politics’ – enter into ‘real’ symbolic battles in order to make themselves ‘real’.
Playful protest thus became especially relevant and risky when it moved from the long New Order era of non-politics – in which alternative political vision and practice were not only outlawed but also ‘unlearned’ – into the turbulent era of reform, where student activists had to rediscover and reinvent not just the practice but the very meaning of political activism. They had to do so as the ‘star group’ in the ‘social drama’ of *reformasi*, a role that came with new political opportunities and social expectations, but also shaky boundaries on their performance as ‘the playful’. In this context, what mattered was not the game of politics as such – since this was on shaky grounds, with few rules remaining uncontested and intact – but the process of playing it. Playing politics became a formative and transformative practice, through which they rediscovered, re-enacted, and struggled to control the historicity of their movement. In doing so, they had to contend with persistent myths and taboos surrounding all things related to politics in Indonesia, which the state and other opponents repeatedly used as their trump card in wars of representation. This added yet another sense of danger to their play, beyond the risk of escalation and repression: the spectre of politics itself. For them, this complicated the political play. For me, it complicated my research.

**Methodology: Learning to Play**

The taboo around politics – especially around notions of ‘playing politics’, which comes with all sorts of negative connotations – initially made me hesitate about the title of this study, fearing misinterpretation. I became aware of the sensitive nature of the subject by two kinds of reactions I received regarding my research from scholars and (student) activists in Indonesia. The first was the advice not to focus on the student movement, since it did not represent the ‘real movement’ but ‘just a game’ or ‘theatre’; thus, it was considered not serious enough to merit such research. Second, I was confronted with the paradoxically related idea that the student movement had become ‘too serious’, in the sense of being too enmeshed in the ‘dirty’ world of ‘real politics’; therefore, again, it did not represent the ‘real movement’. In fact, some (former) activists hinted that much ‘political dirt’ could be dug up out of the deeper dungeons of the student movement; any ‘real’ investigation could be dangerous, and I better watch out. One activist put it especially dramatically; while disclosing rather shocking information to me, he said, without a hint of joking: ‘If you’re tired of living, keep digging for real stories’. These concerns indicate, first, the ambiguity of the student movement’s political identity and agency, which causes it to be separated from the category of unambiguously ‘real’ social movements (as is also reflected in the student movement’s neglect in the scholarship on post-Suharto social movements and civil society; see Chapter 1); second, the notion of a divergence between ‘sacred struggle’ and ‘profane
politics’, which causes both categories to remain obscure; and third, the perceived danger of reconnecting these categories.

Methodologically, these concerns meant that access into the field was tricky, though it was not difficult to ‘enter’. As mentioned in the preface, my research assistants with their various affiliations provided me with useful points of access. Yet, as also noted in the preface, the usual pitfalls of ethnographic fieldwork were magnified in conducting cross-network research among radical communities in a contentious field, where outsiders are easily marked as suspect due to long histories of potentially damaging intrusion. Activists in Jakarta, where I did most of my research, are particularly cautious, since proximity to the centre of power significantly increases the risk of intrusion. But their suspicion of researchers has yet another reason. One activist put it bluntly: ‘Researchers have never done us good. You think you can figure it all out, but then what will you do with your precious data besides making a brilliant career out of it?’ Unexpectedly, he later became remarkably open to me, after he had seen me ‘play around’ in the field for a long period of time. My extended fieldwork thus proved to be essential for gaining deeper access into the field. Yet, this also came with the risk of getting enmeshed in the tricky nature of this field, which tends to trap anyone moving within it in intricate political games. In those circumstances, it was essential to construct a clear research position that would allow me to develop a ‘feel for the game’ without becoming part of it.

Like Mische (2008) in her research among youth activist networks in Brazil, I tried to accomplish this by becoming a ‘Simmelian stranger’, someone who is close and empathetic, yet not part of any group or bound by commitments and prejudice, and hence safe to confide in. Like Mische (2008: 9), this allowed me to ‘maintain an outsider’s fresh perspective as I moved between social settings and engaged, sometimes intensively, with insiders’, although this required constant ‘improvisation, learning, and revision’ – and energy. For one thing, the field was too vast and complex to ‘try to talk to everyone’; still, like Mische (2008: 9), I tried ‘almost impossibly to keep up with the schedules and activities of several different sectors at once’. Activists are busy people, as they, too, move between different settings and need to keep up with parallel agendas, which made me all the busier. But intense research did bring me closer to the activist experience. Activists often say it is the adrenalin-like spirit that keeps them going. I experienced some of that by going with the multiple flows of activist life. But I did so in a manner not possible for activists, transcending the different flows of different parts of the field. Unlike Mische (2008: 9), in doing so I never felt I had to make ‘sacrifices of depth in favour of breadth’, as I found depth in linking the experiences of differently positioned actors, which gained me more in-depth insight into the field at large than insiders can hope for. As one activist told me, ‘I envy you. I
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wish I could cross over to see how [other groups] think, just to understand them as fellow fighters, but I’m caged in my political existence’.

But my method also caused tensions of identification. Unlike the activist who admired my ability to cross divides, others were wary about having a researcher around who seemed to be as friendly, or friendlier, with rivals. This in turn made me wary of the extent to which activists scrutinised my interactions with others, especially when meeting rivals at the same event. As Mische (2008: 10) felt, ‘my patterns of sociability at cross-network events were intently studied; it was disconcerting to find myself in the position of the “observer who is observed”’. My Simmelian-stranger position helped to preclude awkward situations due to over-identification with certain groups, but it became more difficult to sustain once I began to engage more closely with some groups than others, especially those whose style of political and social interactions I best identified with, since this allowed me to go into depth in my participant observation in off-stage life worlds. Even with them, though, I tried to remain a Simmelian stranger by making clear at all times (not least to myself) that I was a researcher, who had to stay critical. In that effort I received unsolicited ‘assistance’ from their rivals, who let no opportunity go by to inform me about the bad politics of my new ‘friends’. To me, this concern with ‘correcting’ my possible bias indicated that they still recognised me as a researcher and not ‘one of them’. But more important in helping dissuade me from over-identifying with my ‘friends’ was their own self-criticism. Their remarkable reflexivity in articulating this to me, with clear aims of aiding my analysis rather than their representation, indicated that they, too, recognised my research position and purposes. In the end, I was most appreciated for not being one of them.

Ultimately, I like to think that I succeeded in my research purposes not only through my particular positioning in the field, but also my ‘playful’ approach. ‘Play’ is not usually recognised as a research strategy, but for me it proved to be the most sensible way to develop a feel for the game, in a manner similar (though by no means identical) to the process that teaches novices how to interpret, move through, and perform in a complex political field. This was a complex process of being socialised into the field by tagging along and being tested; by learning through mimicry, trial-and-error, and improvisation; by coming to recognise unclear boundaries by accidentally crossing them; and by starting to understand the shifting maps of political relations and sentiments through double-entendre jokes and playful gestures.

Let me illustrate with an anecdote from fieldwork. One evening I visited the office of group ‘A’, which I had not been in contact with before, after joining a protest rally of group ‘B’. As I waited for the student leader with whom I had the
appointment, I had a casual chat with his comrades, but I sensed that they were keeping a distance and were being suspicious. I could not figure out why, until one of them asked me: ‘So, you’re from “B”? Then I realised that what had bothered them was the ribbon with the ‘B’ logo still wrapped around my arm. Instinctively I joked: ‘Ah, that’s why people are giving me funny looks’, and I explained that I had joined the ‘B’ rally as a researcher from Amsterdam. This instantly broke the ice and started them joking too. One joke was particularly telling:

See, we’re a disciplined organisation. If a member breaks the rules he is punished in one of three ways. The first time, he has to treat us all for a meal. The second time, we beat him up. The third time, he is given a choice: either he changes religion, or worse, he has to join ‘B’!

I hadn’t yet realised that the rivalry between groups ‘A’ and ‘B’ was that strong, since conflicts are usually downplayed to uphold the public image of unity. But this hint in the form of a joke made their relationship plain. Moreover, it sensitised me to the kind of tacit language games that allow for political communication in a tense political climate.

One day, for another example, I witnessed a dialogue between two activists from different socialist groups, who were making each other’s acquaintance at the politically neutral event of an art fair. I was struck by the artful manner in which the two circumvented revealing their political identity, and engaged in a type of cross-questioning that resembled idle chatter. But since I knew both activists and their backgrounds, which they did not realise at that time, I understood what each alluded to in their questions:

– So you’re from faculty [X] of university [Y]; do you happen to know [Z] [a leading activist of organisation A, who also studies there]?  
– Hmm, maybe, but not well [i.e., I’m not in his gang]. Say, isn’t [A] strong on your campus? 
– Oh, that’s just gossip, I don’t think [A] is still strong anywhere [i.e., I don’t think much of A; we’re from different factions]. 
– Yeah, I know, but that’s not what they think [i.e., I don’t think much of A either, so we have at least something in common, and possibly share common political ground]! You know, with their quasi left-ness, just all action and fancy seminars [i.e., Let’s check how far we meet; I’m from the real radical Left, how about you?]! 
– Oh yeah, I know exactly what you mean [i.e., Hey, so am I]!

So the conversation continued. Finally they introduced themselves, exchanged socialist jokes (i.e., continued the cross-examination at a higher level of ideology)
and phone numbers, and agreed to meet more often (i.e., opened the possibility for an alliance). Thus I found that tacit language games – in the form of jokes or playful questioning and roundabout conversation – may serve to both protect and elicit specific knowledge of political identity, which activists often keep private to maintain control. It is for that reason that vital issues related to political identity become difficult to research – not only because matters of identity generally tend to escape explicit discourse, but because, in that context, they are meant to escape discourse and remain hidden in the private knowledge sphere of closed communities. The only way to uncover them is through playful interaction.

Playful interaction also helped me to deal with another pitfall in my research. As I gradually turned from an ignorant outsider to a clued-in semi-participant in a special position to cross divides, this more or less turned me into a ‘node’ in the network. Mische (2008: 10) writes that activists tried to ‘pump [her] for information and analysis of what was going on in other groups or sectors’. This happened to me as well, though few activists made attempts to exploit my position, probably because I had playfully made clear that this would be futile. One student leader, upon hearing I was invited to the congress of a rival group, hinted he was ‘very interested’ in its goings-on and outcome. I realised this was one of those moments in which an ethnographer’s sensibility is tested, and so I joked: ‘So, now I’m your personal intel [agent]?! Well, you have to pay me for that, and I warn you, I’m not cheap, I go to the highest bidder!’ He laughed and never again asked about my findings in other groups. Reassured of my discretion, he began to trust me more, beyond telling private stories or explaining hidden mechanisms straightforwardly. That is, beyond discourse, he (and others around him) began to show me stories and mechanisms by playing them out in my presence. Thus, the oft-cited ‘snowball effect’ of research was less a matter of gaining access to the right people than it was of gaining access to their play.

Clearly, for me as a researcher, play was partial and essentially artificial. I was never a liminar, going through all the phases of becoming an activist. Thus there were limits to how far I could participate, but these were never clear, to me or to them. If certain meetings were initially off-limits to me, later on few seemed to care or notice when I sat in. One limit to my participation was guarded more strictly. I found that activists shielded me from risky events by ‘forgetting’ to inform me of a protest likely to end in violence. Apparently, they felt responsible for the safety of a foreign researcher under their care, but this frustrated me, as I felt I had to witness the vital activist experience of violence up close. One time, towards the end of my research, I did manage to be present at a violent event by joining a less protective group. (I realised later that I had been assigned a ‘bodyguard’.) I refused to be ushered out of harm’s way before the expected clash with
the police broke out. All the female activists had by then retreated, and I had been pushed away from the area along with other civilians by the police, yet I managed to return in time for the clash, owing my escape to the directions yelled at me by one activist running behind me (my bodyguard; see further on this event, Chapter 14). I found that my participation instantly gained me ‘respect’, also from those activists previously overprotective of me, not because my close encounter with violence turned me into one of them, but for demonstrating my commitment as a researcher willing to go quite far to understand what it is like to be an activist in that setting. Interestingly, several activists began sharing ‘secret’ stories with me from that point on. My ‘initiation’ into violence proved to be an advanced step in developing that ‘feel for the game’, a feel considered necessary to give proper meaning to secret stories.

**Narrative beyond Questions**

Shifting limits to my participation put further pressure on my Simmelian-stranger position, so that it became necessary to constantly re-establish the frame, ‘This is research’. Intermittent retreat from the field to organise data helped to sustain this frame. Furthermore, it was reinstated on each semiformal occasion of life-story interviews conducted in the latter half of fieldwork. The life stories became a key part of my research, providing depth, texture, and reason to the turbulent events and jumble of stories encountered in the field. Yet, narrative had to come after play; it was only after sufficient play-time that it made sense for me to narratively frame players’ experiences in terms of ‘data’. To some activists this order initially made no sense at all. Before I started the interviews, one prominent activist, who was used to being interviewed by researchers and journalists, remarked that he was surprised to see me not ‘do any research’: ‘You sure have a funny way of doing research, all you do is play – play here and there, play everywhere, at each demo and happening – but when will you start asking questions?’ I replied, in all honesty, that if I were to ask questions now, I could guess most of the answers, as I was already familiar with their public stories and stances. An all-too-explicit research frame at the outset, as established through explicit questions, would have risked imposing the straitjacket of scholarly discourse on ambiguous stories and extradiscursive knowledge. By joining the play first, the stories and knowledge were already conveyed to me, albeit in the snippets of jokes, funny anecdotes, language play, hints, and gossip.

During the interviews I made no attempt to mould the snippets into a coherent narrative, rather using them as cues to ‘let them know I know’, by casually dropping names or citing an insider joke, to signal that we could move beyond the surface into a reflective exchange on personal experience. This way, I hardly needed
Playing Politics

Participants were encouraged to ‘ask questions’ at all, except for small interventions if the narration tended to lapse into the usual rhetoric. Rather, I allowed participants to pose, structure and ponder the questions they would ask themselves, thus highlighting those aspects of becoming and being an activist that were most meaningful to them, and those issues that they deemed most relevant for their movement, even if they had never thought of it that way before. For the participants, the interviews provided a rare opportunity to reflect on the political and human, indeed agentive, significance of their personal experience, and they generally appreciated this approach. Probably most were also familiar with the student activist life-story format, given the published life story of the most famous student activist of the 1990s, PRD-leader Budiman Sudjatmiko (Gunawan 1999). Yet, some doubted if their personal story was worth recording, or if personal stories are relevant at all for a political analysis of the movement. Again, this indicates the extent to which many had internalised notions of activists as ‘entrepreneurs’ (or ‘robots’), rather than humans.

As Jasper (1997: 55) argues, activists should be understood in terms of that ‘deeply moral construct’ called the self, developed through the ‘idiosyncratic experiences an individual has lived through’, which is ‘what protest taps into’. He even states that to fully understand a movement requires information on personal biographies across the range of participants. But since researchers lack the time to conduct more than a handful of in-depth interviews, we ‘usually stop with those whose views and decisions are most influential, those who are leaders in some formal or informal way, and we only make inferences about the biographical make-up of other participants’ (Jasper 1997: 55). This is regrettable, as influential leaders are also most accustomed to being interviewed, and are likely to skilfully frame their answers into stories that resonate with public agendas, not least with an eye on the war of representation in which they know they are enmeshed. I have tried to preclude this problem, not only by playing first before asking questions, but also by interviewing a broad range of activists in different positions, of different age groups, and from across the spectrum. However, my aim was not to know the movement completely, for there is no distinct movement identity to be reconstructed from the aggregate of individual stories. Rather, it was to trace the interplay between political culture and subjective agency – or between historicity and personal stories – by examining how these intersect in the lived experience of becoming and being an activist.

Life stories, according to Waterson (2007: 2), can provide ‘new insights into wider social and political processes’ by revealing ‘that space where history intersects with personal experience’. Activists’ stories might not be typical for their society and generation, but social and political processes are not about ‘typical’ paths: they are about the range of possibilities available in history, and the various
struggles people engage in to make sense and make the most of them. As Watson puts it, not despite but because of their ‘irreducible uniqueness’ (2007: 5), personal narratives are ‘always representative of the experience of living at that particular historical conjuncture, faced with those particular contradictions, opportunities or constraints’ (2007: 12). Moreover, as Borneman (quoted in Watson 2007: 26) states, by exposing the intersection ‘between personal, subjective experience and the shifting historical and social context within which that experience occurs’, personal narratives illustrate that ‘the recognition and knowledge of one’s own historicity’ is ‘a condition to which one strives and not a state of being’. In that regard, the timing of the narration is crucial. For the activists in my research, it mattered that their life stories were taken at a time of political and personal transition as well as closure and new beginnings in more than one sense. Politically, the sense of the death of reformasi, and personally, the fact that many had recently graduated or were about to leave the liminal student life, meant that it was an appropriate time to take stock of where they were and how they got there, and to reflect on experiences of historicity, both as activists and human beings, as a pathway to their future.

I listened carefully to the multiple stories circulating within, around, and about the student movement. Besides the life stories and everyday anecdotes, there were a plethora of stories in motion – moving from history books, novels, and newspaper op-eds, in official and unofficial printed sources and political course manuals, on the Internet and in student boarding houses, at private meetings and in public pamphlets, in gossip and rhetoric, in fantasy and in performance – each story getting transformed in its circulation, affecting collective and personal lives. I found plenty of discrepancies in all these stories. Tilly (2003: 17) notes that researchers need to constantly check for discrepancies in order to reconstruct a truthful analysis from the respondents’ stories. Yet, it was precisely in the contradictions and gaps, the silences and illogical twists in the plot, that I encountered those lingering issues that are often taken for granted and thus rarely problematised, which proved to be pivotal in the ongoing process of constructing student political identity and agency. Rather than eliminating the ‘messiness’ of stories, making room for the real discrepancies of political life helps lay bare its complex dynamics and brings back human agency into notions of struggle.

Historicity, or the agency in history, is where the various dynamics of playing politics intersect. Historicity is furthermore shaped by these dynamics in the sense of being storied and played out in specific historical contexts, which also means it has a specific history itself. In the following chapters, I first discuss the history of the student movement’s historicity, as it moves and transforms through successive regimes. I trace the formation of political identity and agency in the colonial era and the spirited years of occupation and revolution, to the formation of politi-
cal play under Sukarno’s rule, to the formation of unruly selves in the New Order era, and finally to the turbulent era of reform, in which this entire history was re-enacted and reconstructed. I show how, throughout this history, memory and myth became vital parameters for the reconstruction of the student movement’s ‘play frame’, that is, the material and symbolic spaces in which it could assert its identity and agency. Throughout this discussion, I highlight the significance of personal experience in political processes, and thereby the significance of a ‘spirit of agency’. This spirit is, after all, what drives history.
PART II

STORIES OF STUDENT STRUGGLE IN HISTORY

‘Ikada rally’, 19 September 1945, heralding the National Revolution. The banner reads: ‘If someone asks you: “How many are you?”, then answer: “WE ARE ONE!”’
Students in the Making of History

Agents of a Dawning New Era

The importance attached to the role of youth, especially educated youth, in Indonesian history can hardly be overstated. Both in state propaganda and dissident narrative, youth figure large as vanguards in national struggle. Sukarno and Hatta, Indonesia’s founding fathers, frequently glorified the revolutionary potential of youth. It is also a leitmotif in the work of the dissident writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer; his novels about the coming of age of nationalism vividly narrate how the colonial experience could not but liberate the minds of ‘the young’, *kaum muda*, and spawn in their hearts the will to resist. Outside his novels, too, he proclaimed his faith in youth as the most potent engine of change. To his student followers, who regularly visited him at his Bogor residence after his release from the prison island Buru, he made passionate appeals to mobilise this potential, as he had lost faith in all other actors. As he said to me one evening on the terrace of his Bogor residence, which I visited with two of my respondents in May 2002: ‘If the youth won’t do it, nobody will. It all has to start with the youth’.

Such views illustrate how the narrative of youth’s historical importance serve as ‘model of’ and ‘model for’ student political identity and agency. Each time a Pramoedya, a Sukarno, or a Hatta cites the role of youth as agents of history, this role is brought into being. But it should be noted that Pramoedya, Sukarno, and Hatta spoke from their own past experiences as activist youth, hearkening back to memories of previous ‘model of’ uses that gave meaning to their earlier actions, and using these as a ‘model for’. Experience, practice, and memory are thus dialectically related in shaping the stories, repertoires, and subjectivities of student struggle. In this chapter I show how this relation came into being in the early-to-mid-twentieth century, when educated youth discovered their agency through collective experiences and practices, which subsequently gave shape to identities and stories that set paradigms for the future.

The narrative of youth’s historical agency is inextricably tied to nationalism. In the Netherlands East Indies (hereafter, Indies), nationalism emerged with the spread of modern education as part of the 1901 Ethical Policy, which was to bring the Indies prosperity and progress through ‘native edification’ under Dutch guidance. The narrative of youth’s historical importance serve as ‘model of’ and ‘model for’ student political identity and agency. Each time a Pramoedya, a Sukarno, or a Hatta cites the role of youth as agents of history, this role is brought into being. But it should be noted that Pramoedya, Sukarno, and Hatta spoke from their own past experiences as activist youth, hearkening back to memories of previous ‘model of’ uses that gave meaning to their earlier actions, and using these as a ‘model for’. Experience, practice, and memory are thus dialectically related in shaping the stories, repertoires, and subjectivities of student struggle. In this chapter I show how this relation came into being in the early-to-mid-twentieth century, when educated youth discovered their agency through collective experiences and practices, which subsequently gave shape to identities and stories that set paradigms for the future.

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(STOVIA) in Batavia (now, Jakarta), with the aim of creating a cooperative professional class to meet the need for skilled personnel, and to restrain the influence of Islam by creating an ‘inspiring example for the native population’ (Ricklefs 1991: 156). However, the educated youth developed sensibilities and visions of their own that soon backfired on colonial intents. It is indeed ‘the supreme irony of Dutch rule that the means chosen to defend the colonial regime from the overrated threat of Pan-Islam developed into one of the most potent of forces undermining that regime’ (Kahin 1952: 44).

A crucial condition for this force to emerge was the geographic and cultural displacement produced by modern education, which pulled youth from across the Indies to the colonial cities, where they not only attended school but also collectively embarked on a new life. As Anderson (1972: 18) notes, this life only made sense in terms of nationalism, though ‘insofar as this nationalism was a response to experience, it was necessarily limited to those who could participate more or less directly in that experience’. But this also heightened their sense of solidarity and exclusivity. Despite different ethnic backgrounds, their collective experience formed the basis for a generational identity. Hence, they called themselves ‘the young’, *kaum muda*, feeling more enlightened and civilised than the uneducated masses and their parents’ generation. This identity came with a sensibility of its own, expressed in playful lifestyles. As Mrázek (1997: 137) depicts, they formed ‘a colourful, fast-moving crowd that enjoyed being seen between Greek philosophy and the French Revolution as much as they enjoyed being seen between the wayang and Hollywood’. However, their playfulness also signified ‘a culture that – reacting to a forced silence – was crying out in irony’ (1997: 135). They could never be truly modern under colonial rule, where they would always be labelled an inferior ‘native’.

But this label ‘carried an unintentionally paradoxical semantic load’, since it raised the question, ‘native of what?’ and implied that, ‘in their common inferiority, [they] were equally contemptible’, which made native solidarity the only possible response (Anderson 1991: 122). Moreover, conflicting messages in colonial education undercut the legitimacy of colonialism. Indonesian students ‘could not help noting that the dominant strain in the Dutch national ideology was independence from outside control’, hence found it difficult ‘to understand why the history books on Indonesia painted […] leaders of resistance to the Dutch as worthless traitors’ (Kahin 1952: 49). Colonial education raised more questions than it provided answers, and thus students went searching for explanations themselves, and found all sorts of political theories that acquainted them with different narratives of liberation. News of world events, such as the anticolonial struggle in India and Japan’s victory over Russia, made them further question their inferiority and ina-
bility to self-govern. Moreover, as Frederick (1988: 38) notes, their new political ideas combined with a keen sense of personal success, which created ‘enormously heightened expectations’, forcing ‘young minds to think new thoughts, especially about themselves and the future’. The experience of fending for themselves in a hostile colonial environment further instilled ‘self-confidence and commitment to the principles of personal independence and self-reliance’, which raised the conviction that ‘pragmatic self-help could provide solutions not only to personal difficulties but to the problems of Indonesian society as a whole’ (Frederick 1988: 38). Hence, ideally and pragmatically, kaum muda embraced a commitment to agency, and thought of themselves as the agents of a dawning new era.

**Pergerakan Consciousness**

Soon, there was something called the ‘movement’, or *pergerakan*. This became the ‘all-encompassing word for the whole body of anti-colonial political activity’, including a myriad of groups that were not directly political, since being a ‘man of the movement’ mainly denoted ‘that one was “conscious”’ (Anderson 1990b: 32). The pergerakan was thus not an entity or the sum of its members, but a spirit of consciousness born in, and as, practice. Three practices defined this pergerakan consciousness: education, journalism, and organisation, and ‘men of the movement’ often engaged in more than one. The nationalist narrative, as it evolved in tandem with the practices it described, came to identify organisation as the most prominent element, so much so that the whole pergerakan came to be seen in light of that idea.

Though education is commonly recognised as a precondition for nationalism, the role of pergerakan schools is featured least in this narrative. Yet, it was in the schools that the idea that ‘man determines events and not the other way round’ was expressed most concretely; this was the motto of the Taman Siswa (Student Garden) school founded in 1922 by K. H. Dewantara (Suwardi Surjaningrat). The schools burgeoned despite government efforts to curb them, and reached a much larger proportion of the population than did the government schools. They promoted self-reliance rather than political goals, but it was ‘generally understood that the personal goal of standing on one’s own two feet was analogous to the larger one of going without Dutch rule’ (Frederick 1988: 59). This was also the purpose of another pergerakan vehicle to edify the youth: scouting. Dozens of scouting organisations emerged, and through the ‘singing of anthems, wearing of insignia and military-like uniforms, performing of services for the poor or uneducated, and insistence on the use of the Indonesian language in daily affairs, all worked towards the concretisation of this otherwise abstract national idea’ (Frederick 1988: 68). Yet, the greater impact was made by journalism and organisation.
In official history the ‘national awakening’ is dated 20 May 1908, the birth date of the Javanese organisation Boedi Oetomo (‘Noble Endeavour’). But this credit was not uncontested, as it ignored the role of the pergerakan press. As one Indonesian critic wrote in 1938, when 20 May was declared a national holiday: ‘Not Boedi Oetomo, nor the year 1908, marked the beginning of our national movement, but the year 1903 saw the birth of a nationalist movement, after Dr Rivai had spoken out, which really opened many people’s eyes’ (Latif, quoted in Poeze 1989: 87). In 1903, Abdul Rivai, then a medical student in the Netherlands, launched his journal *Star of the Indies*, to promote the emancipation of his compatriots. Rivai might also be credited with ‘inventing’ kaum muda by invoking its name; it was in one of his articles, published in 1905, that the term was first used to denote ‘the group of those people who had broken free from the old ideas and traditions and were open to western knowledge, without, however, betraying their own background’ (Poeze 1989: 94). Moreover, Rivai called on this group to get organised. Soon, pergerakan newspapers thrived in the Indies. Their titles called into being what they named – *Voice of Freedom, Voice of the People, and World-in-Motion* – and they were filled with political announcements that had inexorable mobilising effects, Anderson (1990b: 34) notes, as each notice of a mass rally ‘made the prophecy come true’ as the expected masses were drawn to that rally by reading the announcement: ‘Newspaper language “leaned into the future,” and in so doing drew men into movement that would confirm that future’.

This was also the effect of the glossaries they contained, explaining concepts such as ‘nationalist’, ‘feudalist’, ‘congress’, and ‘strike’, which one needed to know to understand how to ‘do nationalism’ in line with proper models held to be ‘valid worldwide’ (Anderson 1990b: 35). This consciousness propelled kaum muda into the orbit of a world in motion, which legitimised their cause. Universal ideas of struggle affirmed that they were not alone; it was the feudal and colonial ruler that was out of world-time. Thus, pergerakan journalism involved a strong element of political socialisation, in a dialectical manner: kaum muda wrote about what they aspired to become, and became what they read about: radical nationalists.

**Becoming Radical**

As noted, nationalism was said to be born on 20 May 1908, when students at the STOVIA founded Boedi Oetomo, an organisation promoting a modern yet native identity and emancipation through modern education. The initiative came from journalist Wahidin Sudirohusodo, who had turned to students after failing to gain support among the Javanese aristocracy, the priyayi. The priyayi later jumped on the bandwagon at Boedi Oetomo’s first congress in October 1908, which turned it
into a respectable institution promoting a cultural nationalism acceptable to the Dutch. Indeed, the Dutch took pride in Boedi Oetomo as a ‘child’ of their Ethical Policy. Left untold in this familiar story is the role of students in Boedi Oetomo’s early days, though they ‘were the ones who made Wahidin’s ideals happen; these ideals developed and changed in the hands of students’ (Rahardjo 1990: xiv). In the months that they led Boedi Oetomo, they built a large following among peers – according to Kahin (1956: 56), ‘nearly all the students above the sixth grade in Java and Madura’ were members – and they gained much publicity through articles expressing a more radical view than the Java-centric conservatism for which Boedi Oetomo became known. Their ideas partly stemmed from their contacts with the Indo-Dutch anticolonial publisher E. F. E. Douwes Dekker, whose library near the STOVIA they often visited. As some students leaned towards his ideas and others towards Sudirohusodo, they arrived at their own conclusions.

For the students, Boedi Oetomo was a first step towards a ‘national brotherhood’ that recognised no ethnic, religious, or class divisions. Sudirohusodo’s aim was to promote modern education for lower priyayi to improve their career prospects, but the students went much further, calling for the education of the ‘little people’ and arguing that their task was to establish village schools to increase the people’s self-reliance. As the title of one article by Gunawan Mangunkusumo read, ‘Our work is in the villages’ (Rahardjo 1990: xxii). Published right after the congress, this article underscored the differences between the student-led Batavia branch and the priyayi-led branch in Yogyakarta, the court city where the priyayi elite resided. The congress itself, at which leadership fell into priyayi hands, saw the first indication of a generation gap. As one observer described the policy formulated at the congress: ‘The youth should remain “the motor which drives forward”; the elders should be “the steersmen, who with dexterous hand know how to avoid dangerous rocks in order to bring the boat to safe harbour”’ (Blumberger, quoted in Kahin 1952: 65). For some students this seemed an acceptable division of labour, and they prided themselves on their ability to win the support of priyayi elders. But most were not content in the role of ‘being steered’ and rejected being treated as ‘children’. They left Boedi Oetomo disillusioned, and all the more radicalised. The only student on the board, Tjipto Mangunkusumo, was soon expelled for his proposal to turn Boedi Oetomo into a political movement. ‘Radicalism is not our style’, so the board argued (Abdullah 2001: 30).

As this illustrates, youth radicalism was not just copied from books, newspapers, or established ideologues, but was a response to marginalisation by moderate elders. Moreover, radicalisation followed major demographic shifts, not just among the urban kaum muda but among the population at large, as millions of peasants became labourers on the plantations or in manufacturing industries, where exploitative conditions frequently led to revolts. It was in this context that
students discovered the ‘little people’, or rakyat, as an exploited population and the proper subject for their story of liberation. To them, as the privileged few, it felt natural to give voice to the voiceless by acting as the people’s spokespersons. If that earned them the label of ‘radical’, this merely sharpened their attitude, for this label, too, carried an unintentionally paradoxical semantic load. A ‘radical’ was distinct from a ‘moderate’, a term that was, since Boedi Oetomo’s congress, identified with the elders. ‘Radical’ thus became a badge of honour for youth, as it referred to those who, unlike moderates, had no place in the colonial order and were consequently positioned in opposition to it.

This stance found an outlet in radical organisations. In 1912, Douwes Dekker and two of Boedi Oetomo’s young founders who had left, Suwardi Surjaningrat and Tjipto Mangunkusumo, created the Indies Party, the first to call for independence. At its founding rally they declared ‘war of the shining light against darkness, good against evil, civilisation against tyranny, the colonial tax-paying slave against the Dutch tax-scraping state’, inverting the Dutch language of illuminating native society with the light of Western civilisation (Shiraishi 1990: 58). The party was banned and its leaders were exiled to the Netherlands, but its militant style left a lasting mark on kaum muda sensibilities. The style was emulated by Sarekat Islam (Islamic Union, SI), a former trade union that was banned in 1912 but revived in 1913 under the leadership of the young journalist Tjokroaminoto. SI grew rapidly, with branches across the Indies and two million members by 1919. A new role was thereby created for kaum muda as ‘professional pergerakan leaders, equipped with the necessary expertise, devoting twenty-four hours a day to the SI, and making their livelihood by running it’, so Shiraishi (1990: 59) describes: ‘Never before had anyone been able to live his life in this way’.

Since part of this role was to deliver dramatic speeches at mass rallies, it gave rise to a new dramatic persona, whereby a ‘profound connection’ was established between politics and theatre, including its own ‘scripts’ and ‘a certain fashion – of dress, walk, speech, and affection’ (Anderson 1990b: 37). This persona changed over time. As Shiraishi (1990: 84–85) notes, the one personified by Tjokroaminoto – of a noble knight (ksatrya), with an eloquent voice – steadily lost its appeal, as the people found that his intellectual voice did little to improve their lot. It lost ground to a louder voice, personified by the young writer and SI-member Marco Kartodikromo, who engaged in a ‘war of voice’, attacking the Dutch as a ‘true knight’ would, thus redefining a true pergerakan leader as combative. His writing landed him in prison, but even there his passionate voice affected kaum muda sensibilities through his poems, notably his 1917 poem, ‘Sama Rasa Sama Rata’, or ‘sharing the same feelings, the same fate’. This became a popular pergerakan slogan, denoting egalitarian solidarity and understood as a call to arms against
colonial injustice. Alongside the movement for emancipation, a more militant movement thus emerged for sama rasa sama rata, as the pergerakan shifted to the left and entered a time of action, making the Dutch nervous.

Once it was clear that the pergerakan was there to stay, the Dutch tried to steer it onto a path they could control by providing it an official platform in 1918: the Volksraad (People’s Council). Many younger nationalists mocked it as a puppet show, but SI, Boedi Oetomo, and other organisations did not hesitate to play their part and enrolled as political parties in order to take a seat on this council. This had critical ramifications for SI, as it exacerbated a feud between Islamic and communist factions and led to a split in 1923. The communists joined the Indonesian Communist Party, PKI (founded in 1920), which attracted many radicalised kaum muda. This marked the onset of bitter rivalries within the pergerakan, as each party vied for political leadership. Meanwhile, repression was increasing. Strikes were banned, press freedom and rights of public assembly were curbed, surveillance and intelligence were stepped up, and pergerakan groups outside of the Volksraad were generally criminalised. This combined strategy of co-optation and repression proved to be effective. Only PKI was not easily pacified; it led a successful railroad strike in 1923, and staged a concerted revolt in several cities in 1926. But this revolt was put down, and it provided the government with a pretext to ‘cleanse’ the pergerakan. PKI was banned, party leaders across the spectrum were jailed or exiled, and remaining members went underground.

The repression and the rivalries within the pergerakan generated a deep sense of crisis among kaum muda, who felt that their world-in-motion had reached an impasse. It was then that a new persona, voice, and style of action took the stage, spearheaded by a new generation of students. As one of them, Indonesia’s future vice-president Hatta (1966: 14) later wrote, ‘It was at that moment of hesitancy and anxiety that the youth of Indonesia stepped forward to provide new impetus and spirit to the nationalist movement’.

**Destiny and Destination of the New Student**

The Boedi Oetomo experience had made clear that students needed their own associations if they wished to do their own steering. In 1915, students set up Jong Java (jong is Dutch for ‘young’). Initially named Tri Koro Darmo, or ‘three noble goals’, Jong Java attracted many students subscribing to its three goals of knowledge, unity, and patriotism. Soon, though, they found the goal of unity hampered by a language barrier, as students of different ethnicities could only communicate with each other in Dutch, which contradicted the goal of patriotism. Students of other ethnicities then created their own associations, such as the Jong Sumatranen Bond (Young Sumatrans Union). Yet, the more critical issue was not ethnicity but
politics. Jong Java was nonpolitical, but in an era of party politics this was hard to sustain. In 1924, the chair, Raden Sam, pushed for a political course but he was outvoted, after which he left and created the Jong Islamieten Bond (Islamic Youth Union), which allied with SI. Soon after, Jong Java did turn political, but it did so on its own terms. In 1926, it allowed members to be politically active, and redefined its goal as the unity of a free Indonesia. Other youth associations followed suit. Despite ethnic divisions, then, all were geared towards ‘a colony-wide joint and common project of liberation’ (Anderson 1999: 3). Still, it took the political metamorphosis of students abroad for this common project to materialise.

As the Indies had no universities, students had to travel to the Netherlands for higher education, which was a luxury few Indonesians could afford; in 1900 only five Indonesians were enrolled at Dutch universities. Their numbers increased in the wake of the Ethical Policy, when scholarships were made available and Dutch universities began admitting graduates from the Indies colleges (Bachtiar 1976). Soon, dozens of Indonesians were studying in the Netherlands, where they were exposed more directly to the modern world and could move more freely within it than in the Indies. As Kahin (1952: 50) notes, ‘The civil liberties and democratic government … contrasted so sharply with conditions in Indonesia that they were bound to make a strong impression on these students’. So did the latest political ideas that were in vogue in Europe at that time and the politicised atmosphere of Dutch campuses. This had a marked effect on the students’ political attitudes, though they did not arrive as political greens; many had been leading members of youth associations in the Indies. In Europe, it was not just the liberal climate that fed into their political consciousness, but also the ease of contact with other colonised people and their European allies, all fighting for the cause of liberation. Nationalism was in the air, providing a name to the cause that the various groups of the Indies’ pergerakan had been struggling for under different rubrics.

In this atmosphere, the students’ Indies Association, founded in 1908 in The Hague, turned from a social club into a vibrant activist centre, especially after the arrival of the exiled Indies Party leaders in 1913. In 1922 it was renamed Indonesian Association, soon translated into Indonesian, Perhimpoenan Indonesia (PI); its journal, Hindia Poetra, ‘Sons of the Indies’, was renamed Indonesia Merdeka, ‘Free Indonesia’. PI members felt they were ahead of the struggle back home. As PI chair Gunawan Mangunkusumo (1919–1920) stated, PI ‘is the sensitive barometer of the grand event in the Indies’ (quoted in Hatta 1966: 14). This ‘grand event’ was the struggle for national liberation, and when this came to an impasse with the arrival of the Volksraad, PI was among its harshest critics. PI chair Hatta (1922–1930) was especially critical of its ‘beggar-like’ stance. In Hatta’s (1966: 15) view, the ‘national struggle to achieve a Free Indonesia must be a struggle
based on our own strengths and capacities’, for ‘only non-cooperative action can restore the people’s self-confidence and spark in their hearts political awareness’.

Hatta’s political outspokenness alarmed the Dutch authorities. In 1927, he and other PI leaders were arrested. Their trial six months later attracted much public attention, not least in the Indies, where solidarity rallies were staged. Hatta used the publicity to deliver a stirring defence speech that set the tone for the political consciousness of Indonesian students for generations to come, instilling a sense of national duty and destiny in them. In his closing statement, he stated:

We believe in the future of our nation and we believe in the power of its soul. We know the balance of power in Indonesia is shifting in a direction that is in our favour. … We cannot decide about our nation; history will give the final verdict. But with that nation we shall be doomed or be free, for with that nation we shall rise and with that nation we shall fall. The youth of Indonesia are inseparable from the Indonesian nation that suffers and hopes. They are the voice of the people’s feelings; they are its burning soul that adds colour to the future. The red glow in the sky of the future is already visible. We greet the dawn that is starting to break. The youth of Indonesia also push in the desired direction. Their duty is to speed up the arrival of the new day. Their task is to teach our people to taste life’s sweetness, not just the misery that has to be their burden. May the Indonesian nation experience freedom beneath the blue sky, and may it feel itself to be lord and master in its own country as God’s gift. Highly esteemed judges! As I stand ready awaiting your verdict on our movement, I mutter the words of René de Clercq that represent the course of young Indonesia: ‘There is only one land that I can call my Fatherland. Its greatness follows from effort, and that effort is mine’.

(Quoted in Hatta 1966: 33–34)

The image he painted – of a youth purely driven by the plight of their people, a youth as innocent and natural as daybreak, a prophetic youth, whose only sin is to greet the new day – proved to be so powerful that the PI leaders were acquitted. That a brown-skinned youth was able to defy repression by the mighty Dutch state, purely on the power of words, made a great impression on Indonesian students in the Indies, just as they were making plans to fulfil this national destiny. For Hatta, however, the image of an innocent youth also served to obscure the ‘serious’ politics in which PI was engaged.

Besides envisioning their nation’s future, PI was focused on determining and securing a position for itself within the political arena – in the Netherlands, in the Indies, and on the world stage – where the rise of communism was manifest. For PI, anti-capitalism was akin to anti-imperialism, and since the Dutch Communist Party was the only Dutch party supporting their cause at the time, they viewed the communists as a natural ally. In 1926, Hatta struck a deal for a united front with the exiled PKI-leader Semaun, who agreed to support PI’s bid for leadership of
the nationalist movement. But the deal was revoked, as PKI was accountable to the Communist International (Comintern), which had started to cooperate with colonial powers to defeat fascism; an independent Indonesia would be unable to fend off the Japanese threat. Dismayed, in 1929 PI left the Comintern-dominated League against Imperialism, and struck an alliance with the Dutch Social-Democratic Party that now supported the Indonesian cause. Yet, after Hatta’s return to the Indies in 1932, PI again turned to the communists, and since 1936 its policy shifted to cooperation with the Dutch state (Kahin 1952: 50–51, 89–90). Long before that, though, former PI leaders who had returned to the Indies were well underway with their political agenda, one based on their ‘own strengths and capacities’, convinced that none of the existing political parties could be trusted.

Nationalism was also brewing among Indonesian students in the Middle East, which had been a destination for higher education for centuries. The Dutch had long been nervous about the influence of Pan-Islam in Mecca on Indonesian students, and thus paid less attention to the rise of Islamic reformism in Cairo, while this gained much greater popularity among students for its modern orientations toward personal growth, scientific knowledge, and social justice. In the 1920s, Indonesian students in Cairo, and soon elsewhere in the region, also created associations that advocated Indonesian liberation. When these students returned to the Indies from different parts of the world, they brought back with them radical political ideas and a great deal of political experience – including a practical sensibility of how to play politics on the international stage. They considered it their duty to nurture political awareness among their people, starting with their counterparts in the Indies: students.

Performing National Unity

The radicalisation of Indonesian students abroad did not go by unnoticed. It might be one of the reasons that universities were finally established in the Indies, but if indeed it was the intent to keep a close eye on students, it certainly backfired. The first university, the Bandung Academy of Technology, opened in 1920. Access was still restricted; in the opening year, only six of the twenty-eight students were Indonesian; in 1921 their numbers had barely risen to eleven, among them Sukarno. Despite the opening of the Law Faculty (1924), Medical Faculty (1927, which replaced STOVIA), and other faculties in 1940, the Indonesian student population remained small, growing to just over 600 in 1941 (Ricklefs 1991: 159). Being so few in number heightened their sense of exclusivity and estrangement, as well as their political awareness. As Sukarno later often reminisced, his experience as a brown-skinned minority in a white colonial institution acutely shaped his political views. At the same time, this new breed of university student could no longer
Students in the Making of History

identify with ethnicity-based youth associations and were thus eager for an alternative. Recognising their potential, PI returnees took the initiative to organise the students in ‘study clubs’, such as the Indonesian Study Club in Surabaya (1924) and the General Study Club led by Sukarno in Bandung (1925).

Filling the void left by the pacified pergerakan, the study clubs became prominent nationalist platforms that took the lead in defining the nationalist agenda. This was a serious endeavour. It involved organising investigative committees to map the conditions and problems of the Indonesian people – including problems around education, labour, people’s housing, local elections, and obstacles to political organisation – as well as popularising nationalist ideas and solutions to these problems through publications and public seminars (Akhmad 1989: 85). Thereby, the study clubs contributed to a thriving nationalist public sphere, in which the notion of a free Indonesia gained wider currency. One generation after the rise of kaum muda, then, students defined themselves as nationalist youth, the ‘sons and daughters’ of a nation that had yet to materialise. Since the key concept in this political consciousness was national unity, efforts got underway to unite the youth associations into a national youth union to pioneer the nationalist struggle.

To that end, a Youth Congress was held between 30 April and 2 May 1926. One speaker clearly expressed the sentiment of this event: ‘Youth of Indonesia, rise up for unity, rise up for a Free Indonesia!’ (Martha et al. 1984: 61). The proposed merger of youth associations into a single union was not achieved, but the congress did pave the way for the founding of a national federation three months later, the Union of Indonesian Students (PPPI), which declared that the duty of all Indonesian youth was to achieve Indonesian independence, uphold national unity, and serve and defend their country. In addition, in February 1927, the General Study Club founded Jong Indonesia, soon renamed Pemuda Indonesia, or Youth of Indonesia, with the intent of further unifying youth beyond their ethnic affiliations. Students’ efforts to forge unity had thus given birth to two national organisations, though the ideal of a single union remained. As Jong Indonesia and PPPI stated at a conference in April 1927, ‘all existing youth associations must make the utmost effort to work towards a single youth union’, for ‘the ideal of a Free Indonesia must be the ideal of all sons and daughters of Indonesia’ (Martha et al. 1984: 65). A second Youth Congress was planned. This congress would enter the history books as the birthplace of the Youth Pledge, remembered as the ‘second milestone’ of national struggle, after the birth of Boedi Oetomo.

This Youth Congress, held on 26 to 28 October 1928, was widely discussed in the press for months in advance. Highly anticipated, it became a political spectacle, attended by a host of nationalist leaders and government officials. This also called for heightened security, so the congress was heavily guarded, and some of the scheduled activities, including a parade across Batavia on the final day, were
Playing Politics

banned at the last minute. These changes did not diminish the event, but instead fed into the sense that a historic event was unfolding. This was underlined in the opening speech by PPPI chair Sugondo, who gave an overview of ‘the history of national struggle in Indonesia’: from the birth of Boedi Oetomo, Jong Java, and other youth associations; to the first Youth Congress; up to this moment, which would congeal the ‘spirit of unity that is deeply nested in the souls of Indonesian youth’ (Martha et al. 1984: 75). Next, Jong Sumatranen Bond chair Mohammad Yamin spoke, stating that ‘the foundation for the unity of the Indonesian nation’ had existed since the Srivijaya (650–1377) and Majapahit (1293–1527) empires, but the Dutch could conquer Indonesia due to a lack of will to unite the nation. Now, ‘the will to unite has entered the liberated hearts and souls of youth’, and ‘the will for the new era is implanted in their chests’ and is ‘pouring out like an unstoppable flood wave’ (Martha et al. 1984: 75). Yamin also formulated the resolutions of the congress, later known as the Youth Pledge, which was recited at the closing ceremony:

Firstly, we, the sons and daughters of Indonesia, acknowledge one motherland, Indonesia;
Secondly, we, the sons and daughters of Indonesia, acknowledge one nation, the nation of Indonesia;
Thirdly, we, the sons and daughters of Indonesia, uphold the language of unity, the Indonesian language.

For the participants this resolution of unity was a fitting ending to a successful congress, not the climactic event it was later made out to be. Rather than a ‘milestone’, it represented a roadmap to follow, an intent rather than an achievement. Yet, this eloquently articulated intent did feel like a turning point. As an editorial in the Jong Sumatranen Bond’s journal stated, ‘Our hearts overflow from seeing the spirit that is in the chest of youth. It is today’s youth that will carry the heavy burden in the days to come, to show the way and steer the course of the Indonesian nation’ (Martha et al. 1984: 80). This was a significant shift from previous representations of a youth that needed to be ‘steered’ by elders. Now, it was the youth who would do the steering, not just for themselves but for their nation. This also surpassed the image that Hatta had painted in his defence speech, of a youth who merely greeted the dawn of a new era. Now, youth were seen as making the future, indeed as the key agents of history. This notion was held, first of all, by the students themselves, but through the press it spread among wider publics, which, in turn, amplified its effect on the youth thus represented.

The impact of the notion of youth’s historical agency surprised even the youth leaders who had organised the congress, and it dispelled much of the earlier hesi-
tation to merge existing youth associations, which even Yamin had still resisted during the congress. But the narrative of unity and of the will to unite, as articulated in his speech and resolution, provided an irresistible plot that put unity at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the story. Pemuda Indonesia, Jong Java, Jong Sumatranen Bond, and other youth associations ratified plans for a merger. On 31 December 1930, the national youth union was born, Indonesia Muda (IM), Young Indonesia, which adopted a red-and-white national flag, ‘Indonesia Raya’ as its national anthem, and the 1928 resolution of unity as its ideological basis.

**Losing Playfulness**

But not all youth were convinced of the need to unite. Jong Islamieten Bond and other groups did not join IM, and PPPI remained a separate federation. Despite the pledge for unity, differences were never resolved. Not only did the language of unity exclude the terms to articulate differences, the trope of unity itself became a stake in mutual rivalry. As Martha (1984: 58) notes, the group that most vocally promoted the cause of unity was held to be the ‘most progressive and capable of envisioning a bright future for Indonesia, a future pursued by all Indonesians’ – thus, to be most suited to take the lead in the national struggle – which led to ‘a positive competition’, as Martha puts it, prompting ‘each youth organisation to stand at the forefront and to mobilise the youth masses under the Banner of Unity’. Hence, the ‘banner of unity’ reinforced, and was reinforced by, fierce competition for leadership in the movement, which in turn reinforced political differences. Paradoxically, these differences could not be reconciled as the pursuit of unity precluded open political debate.

This paradox could only be resolved by playing up a common ‘national’ identity. Since this did not yet exist, it had to be made ‘real’. This was most pressing for the language issue, which had proven to be an obstacle since Jong Java’s early troubles in dealing with members of different tongues. The trouble was reflected as well in the 1928 resolution: different from the pattern of the first two pledges for one motherland and one nation, the final pledge read ‘to uphold the language of unity’ rather than ‘to acknowledge one language’. This discrepancy indicated discomfort about acknowledging a language that had barely evolved from bazaar Malay and that students barely knew how to speak. Yet, they insisted on adopting a unifying language that could detach them from the Dutch. A few months before the 1928 Youth Congress, Pemuda Indonesia had declared that all Indonesian youth must use the Indonesian language, a move that positioned them at the forefront of the unity cause and set a paradigm for true nationalists to follow. Thus, at the Youth Congress, the chair forced himself to speak Indonesian; while he did so poorly (for which the Dutch press mocked him), his effort attested to their resolve
not only to proclaim but also to perform and embody a national identity. At the 1930 IM congress, the revised line ‘to acknowledge one language’ was finally adopted, but with the note that this was not to ‘belittle or disregard the cultures of each segment of the Indonesian population, but is meant as the basis for a new culture’ (Foulcher 2000: 383).

The self-conscious formality regarding language indicated a move away ‘from the fluid possibilities of pre-1928’ (Foulcher 2000: 383) towards a standardisation of any identity marker. This included dress: nationalists had to wear a proper uniform, preferably a Safari suit, and a pitji (black velvet cap denoting indigenousness, though the word stems from the Dutch petje), to distinguish themselves from both colonial and traditional society (Mrázek 1997; Schulte Nordholt 1997). It also included proper organisation; all matters pertaining to organisational procedures were thus ‘couchè in terms that made them seem like vital chapters in a survival handbook’ (Frederick 1988: 41). As Mrázek (1997: 139) notes, in facing the ‘colonial giant of neatness’, organisasi (organisation) ‘became a nearly all-explaining, all-defining, all-powerful word’; this bred an anxiety of its own, and ‘who could blame the young rebels if they lost their sense of humour in the process?’ As they turned into serious players by mirroring the dominant order, they lost much of the playfulness of the previous kaum muda generation.

Anxiety about organisation was partly a response to repression. PPPI was hit hardest, since it declared itself a political movement affiliated to Sukarno’s party PNI (see below). Meetings were often dispersed, and in 1932, one PPPI leader was imprisoned for eighteen months for press offences, and after his release, he had to sign a contract that stipulated he would refrain from politics or be barred from resuming his study of law; he refused to sign. In 1936, the PPPI congress was banned (Martha et al. 1984: 96). To prevent such repression, IM had declared itself nonpolitical, but this only gave authorities a pretext to accuse it of violating regulations by labelling all of its activities political (which, of course, they were). There was also indirect pressure through university rectors and activists’ parents (often civil servants or employees in Dutch companies), who were told to persuade their students and children to leave politics be. As this did little to dissuade activist students, in 1933 a ruling came into force to bar PPPI and IM members from university. In Batavia an alternative was offered in the form of a social club, called Unitas Studiosorum Indonesiensis. As Mrázek (1997: 143–144) notes, this club exemplified the new state of mind of students, which was a far cry from the spirit of the past:

Instead of elusiveness, there was a compartmentalised folklore evoking an indulgent smile: ‘Ah, students’. The manners and clothes of these young Indonesians, however flagrant, did not dazzle. They did not disturb the Indies mainstream, neither native nor
They were sadly proper. … They were most visible in their classrooms and student cafés. Too easily could they be dismissed as merely a ‘billiard culture’.

Not long after 1928, then, the student image had shifted to one of politically marginal beings preoccupied with ‘silly games’. This was reflected in nationalist leaders’ ambivalent perceptions of youth. By then, these leaders had constructed a highly romanticised image of youth (thereby exalting their own past role as young pioneers), ascribing them ‘much significance and not a little mystique’ as ‘flower of the nation’ (Frederick 1988: 67). Yet, they also revived the notion that youth needed to be ‘steered’, since they seemed to have lost direction. As one party leader wrote in 1934, the youth lacked discipline and were ‘seriously out of touch with the times’, as they failed to heed ‘what all responsible intellectuals recognised as the proper way to think and proceed towards a correct social future’ (Frederick 1988: 69–70). This view was adopted by party-affiliated youth leaders. One of them stated in 1941: ‘unless something is done, the much-vaunted flower of the nation will turn out in fact to be the trash of society’ (Frederick 1988: 72). But for the maligned youth, there was much to be cynical about, and the criticism added to their cynicism. To them it was neither an attractive nor a sensible option to adopt the discipline of organisations obsessed with formalities of which the purpose was unclear. It was hard to identify with a nationalist political arena that had lost its youthful élan, cleansed as it was of any radical elements.

**Populist Politics at the End of an Era**

The situation had still looked up in the late 1920s, when students went on to build their own parties that posed a serious political threat to the colonial order. In 1927 Sukarno’s study club was transformed into the Indonesian National Party (PNI), which under his charismatic leadership became the leading nationalist party. But its rise was abruptly halted in 1929, when Sukarno was imprisoned for initiating a noncooperative nationalist federation. Like Hatta, Sukarno used his trial to deliver a rousing political speech, ‘Indonesia Accuses’, but to no avail. Two new parties emerged from the defunct PNI; the National Education Club or ‘New PNI’, led by Hatta and fellow former PI leader Sjahrir, and Partindo, led by Sukarno after his release in 1931. But again these parties were prevented from reaching a critical mass: in 1933 Sukarno was exiled to a remote region without trial, as were Hatta and Sjahrir in 1934, where they remained until the end of colonial rule.

The government was intent on removing threats as it embarked on a policy of ‘peace and order’. This was enforced not only by repression but also co-optation of ‘proper’ forms of cultural nationalism, which received a fitting narrative with a proper beginning in the birth of Boedi Oetomo. As Abdullah (2001: 26) argues,
the Dutch selected this event as the birth of Indonesian nationalism to distort the radical type of nationalism they feared. In 1938, Boedi Oetomo’s anniversary was declared a national holiday. Boedi Oetomo no longer existed, but its spirit lived on in the cooperative party Parindra (founded in 1935, from a fusion of Boedi Oetomo and moderate study clubs), whose slogan *Indonesia Mulia* (Noble Indonesia) offered a friendly alternative to ‘Free Indonesia’. By thus severing cultural and political nationalism, the radical form was blocked out. Yet, radical nationalism did not disappear, and its removal from the public political arena only made it more dangerous.

Cynical about the moderation of the mainstream leaders, many radical youth turned to the only radical party left, the Indonesian People’s Movement, Gerindo (founded in 1937). Gerindo could avoid repression as it followed the Comintern policy of cooperation. But while participating in the Volksraad, its Youth Corps built popular underground networks to prepare for revolution, along with the New PNI-affiliated Movement of Indonesian Revolutionary Youth (1932), Partindo-affiliated Torch of Indonesian Youth (1931), and similar groups. For the youth involved, this was often their first direct contact with the rakyat, the little people, who had previously remained a vague concept in nationalist consciousness as an ‘undifferentiated mass’, ‘an abstract or even imaginary social construction around which a good deal of romantic fantasy grew up’ (Frederick 1988: 55). Now, the rakyat became real, which made the youth rethink mainstream nationalist ideas of ‘uplifting the masses’. In addition, as Cribb (1991: 34) points out, the youth came into contact with ‘local bosses’, who represented an alternative model of populist power: ‘unambiguously men of the people’, they suggested ‘important potentials in Indonesian society: daring, self-reliance, dignity, determination’. Further, they commanded what the nationalist youth lacked but would need in the revolution: a popular support base and expertise in violence.

Populist ideas also gained ground in legal youth organisations. In IM, a group led by Ruslan Abdulgani, who was of kampong background, insisted membership must be open to all youth, rich or poor, educated or not. In 1932 his proposal was accepted, which marked a dramatic turn in IM identity and practice. The populist turn offered an escape from the stiff formalities of *organisasi*, as the focus shifted from the campus to the kampong, where standard nationalist practice and rhetoric did not hold. They found that kampong youth were less interested in politics than in education. In the spirit of the original orientations of Boedi Oetomo students, IM members therefore began to engage in village education. This felt as a radical experience, not least as they found kampong residents ‘to be more “radical” than they, especially with regard to feelings about the colonial government’ (Frederick 1988: 58), which, in turn, further radicalised IM. In 1936, the chair position was
won by ‘kampong boy’ Sukarni. This alarmed the Dutch, who identified him as a member of the Communist Volksfront, which in the Indies was developing into a popular front against colonial rule. When IM then called on its members to ‘build a Volksfront’, the government intervened. Sukarni had to go into hiding, and IM was put under close surveillance (Martha et al. 1984: 102).

Despite the repression, a Youth Congress was organised in December 1939; presented as a sequel to the 1928 Youth Congress, it gave birth to the Indonesian Youth Movement Union. But the Jong Islamieten Bond again did not participate. In February 1940 it organised an Islamic Youth Congress, which gave birth to an Islamic youth federation. This reflected the rivalry that had once started as a split within Jong Java, but the rift was not absolute. Both sides cooperated with the Federation of Indonesian Political Parties, which in 1939 hosted the Indonesian People’s Congress, where, almost one decade after the IM congress, Indonesian was ratified as the national language, the red-and-white as the national flag, and ‘Indonesia Raya’ as the national anthem. In various arenas, then, from political platforms to the underground, nationalist youth were preparing for a new phase of struggle.

By then, they had come a long way from the kaum muda consciousness of the early 1900s, which forever set ‘the young’ apart as the enlightened group in society, the group that embraced the spirit of agency; the pergerakan voice and action of the 1910s to early 1920s, which forever established the label of ‘radical’ as the badge of honour of youth; the confident assertion of nationalism by ‘the sons and daughters of Indonesia’ in the mid-1920s to early 1930s, which forever congealed the role of youth as the vanguards in the national struggle; and, lastly, the populist turn in the 1930s, when radical nationalist youth began to connect with the rakyat that had been the subject of their narrative of liberation since the early days of the student-led Boedi Oetomo. Although nationalist youth lost much of their playfulness in the process, along with losing their prominence on the political stage, in their loss they gained something new: the experience of grassroots organisation. Hence, by the 1940s, the story of nationalist, radical, educated youth was coming full circle, as they discovered the meaning of struggle to be multidimensional. Whether ‘playful’ or ‘serious’, high-profile or underground, nationalist youth demonstrated remarkable adaptability to changing political circumstances. Before their efforts could bear fruit, though, the Japanese invaded the Indies and created a dramatically different setting for struggle.
Spirit of Struggle:
The Pemuda in Revolution

The Pemuda Resistance

When the Japanese invaded the Indies in March 1942, releasing Sukarno and the other nationalist leaders who had been detained by the Dutch since the 1930s, and promising self-government for Indonesia soon, Indonesians hailed them as Asian liberators. However, they proved to be oppressive occupiers, interning virtually the entire Dutch population in concentration camps, closing schools and universities, and dissolving political parties and organisations, which also caused the nationalist structure to collapse. In its place the Japanese created an organisation called Putera (Centre of People’s Power), installing Indonesian leaders at its head to secure their support. Sukarno, identified as Indonesia’s natural leader, was sent to tour the country and use his oratorical skills to rally the people behind the Japanese war effort; in turn, he used the channels made available to him to spread nationalist ideas. The radio network was expanded with loudspeakers installed in each village, so no one would miss Sukarno’s speeches and the whole population could be involved in the drama. A new form of mass politics was thus introduced that marked an acute break with the political style of the Dutch. The Japanese one ‘was a profoundly theatrical style’, requiring ‘a massive and participating audience’; hence, ‘a panoply of rituals’ was called into being ‘to give the impression that important and decisive events were taking place’ (Anderson 1972: 31). But as the occupation wore on, those events took a long time coming. In 1944, as it became clear that Putera served nationalist rather than Japanese interests, it was replaced with the tightly controlled Djawa Hokokai (People’s Loyalty Association). While Indonesian leaders kept lobbying the Japanese to fulfil their promise of self-government, both sides seemed to be waiting for the right moment to act – but the youth had grown tired of waiting.

During the occupation, which would last until August 1945, the revolution that the youth of the 1930s had prepared for stood no chance of materialising. The occupation was nevertheless crucial for the expansion of radical attitudes among youth, especially regarding their sense of revolutionary agency – defined as the ‘spirit of struggle’ – which would inform their actions once the revolution did
arrive in September 1945. This revolution, a struggle for independence that would last until 1949, would initially follow the mode of struggle that the Japanese had cultivated among youth. But this was stemmed by the older leaders, who would fall back on the political style of the Dutch. Once again, then, radical youth identity would be pitched against that of cautious elders. This time, though, the stakes were higher: Indonesia’s freedom seemed to depend on the political strategy and sensibility that prevailed: ‘struggle’ or ‘diplomacy’, ‘spirit’ or ‘duty’. In this context, the efforts of youth to carve out an identity and position for themselves were increasingly beyond their control. Under the Japanese, they were able to exploit the political conditions to construct a potent narrative about themselves as revolutionary vanguard, but in the political battles of the revolution this narrative would work against them. By the end of the revolution, few opportunities were available to them other than to draw on the historical memory of colonial-era youth activism – an activism now constrained by the political parameters of the Indonesian nation-state. The history of youth in the 1940s started more expectantly, however, as a story of youth resistance.

While Sukarno and other national leaders were quickly pressed to collaborate with the Japanese, from the outset the youth adopted a stance of resistance. A few months after the Japanese arrival, students at the Medical Faculty in Jakarta (as Batavia was renamed) had staged a protest against the closing of the universities. They were then reprimanded and interrogated by the Japanese, but, emboldened by this relatively ‘soft’ treatment, they staged a more impressive protest when the faculty reopened in 1943 (with Japanese staff and modified curriculum), against the order that all students crop their hair. This protest was beaten down; twenty students were jailed and several were expelled. For most of the students, this was their first experience with violence; under the Dutch they had been discriminated against, harassed, pressured, and occasionally jailed, but never beaten. Shocked, many did not return to campus, and thus joined the legion of suspended students, who were left in a void. For them, the occupation meant a ‘break in the expected trajectory of their careers’ and ‘a suspension of their lives’ for an unknown period of time (Anderson 1972: 19). Some returned to their home regions, while others stayed in the city, benefitting from the jobs left vacant by the interned Dutch, or the jobs that the Japanese soon created specifically for educated youth.

As an outlet for their criticism of the Japanese, many engaged in underground activities. Since universities were closed or under tight control, the nerve centres of student resistance moved to student dormitories, or asrama, from where they linked up with broader underground networks. This was not a subversive type of underground in the sense of overt resistance. Gerindo-leader Syarifuddin did start that type of movement, but this was quickly crushed, making clear that an open
attack on the Japanese was not a viable option. Rather, the focus was on gathering information and raising political awareness, which amounted to ‘exchanging political gossip, discussing Indonesia’s future, speculating on Allied intentions, and criticising Japanese policy within the privacy of closed groups of friends’, as Anderson (1972: 39) describes. These were not trivial activities, as they cultivated a ‘willingness to think of themselves as “thinking dangerous thoughts”’, and the ‘awareness that these attitudes were shared by others, particularly among the young, generated the intuition of a potential for resistance that made the underground so convincing an apparition’ (1972: 39). Ultimately, the impact of participating in the underground was ‘in the political identities they generated, which were to be of signal importance after the end of the war’ (1972: 39).

Though activist youth could build on previous political identities constructed around youth organisations such as IM and PPPI, the collapse of these organisations meant they had to start anew. In doing so, they could not rely on the national leaders, since their closely monitored public role made them ill-suited to lead the resistance. Yet, as Frederick (1988: 152) notes, this also ‘removed some important barriers to further unification of youth activism’, as they realised they ‘would have to rely largely on their own past experiences and present energies in meeting the future’. Hence, the identity they forged for themselves was founded on their common identity as youth qua youth: pemuda.

Platforms and Spirit of Resistance

The choice for asrama as centres of resistance underlined the youth identity. They became nodes in the underground, although most were clearly visible rather than covert places: youth resistance groups were typically known by their asrama’s address. Prominent asrama in Jakarta included that of the Medical Faculty at Prapatan 10, which brought many students into the orbit of resistance who had not been politically active before. It was allied to the Java-wide resistance led by New PNI leader Sjahrir, one of the few national leaders who did not collaborate with the Japanese.¹ The other key asrama in Jakarta, located in a former Dutch hotel at Menteng 31, was established, ironically, by the Japanese propaganda office, the Sendenbu. Called Angkatan Baru Indonesia, or New Generation of Indonesia, it served as a youth political training centre to which many youth leaders were recruited, including former PPPI chair Chaerul Saleh, future PKI leader Aidit, and former IM chair Sukarni. It was Sukarni who proposed the centre to the Japanese, playing on their eagerness to use talented youth as propaganda tools. Sukarni took care that the trainees were drawn from the pre-war youth movements, while using his position at the Sendenbu to establish information flows with nationalist youth working at the Japanese news agency and other offices (Martha et al. 1984: 125–
Thus, the underground consisted of connected circles and networks rather than clearly defined organisations. It was through personal contacts that youth of all stripes engaged in all sorts of nationalist activity, using the platforms and resources available to them to prepare for future revolution.

In 1943, Menteng 31 youth created an organisation, called Buffalo Corps, to provide revolutionary training to urban youth of all social strata, teaching them everything from paramilitary drills with bamboo weapons to patriotic songs and slogans, and providing them a basic political education. While they framed the trainings as serving the Japanese war effort, the youth leaders in fact used them to re-establish their kampong networks. But the Japanese recognised the potential threat: the corps was disbanded and the youth leaders were put under closer surveillance. In 1944, they were placed in a new organisation, Angkatan Muda, or Young Generation. Kahin (1952: 114) notes that this was an ‘ingenious device to control the increasingly hostile educated youth, and especially to keep them from effective participation in underground activity’, as they were ‘forced to assume responsible positions of leadership’ in the organisation, and thus were ‘kept out in the open where the Japanese could more easily watch and control them’. Despite tight control, however, they were able to exploit their formal leadership positions.

The Japanese did try to discipline youth through paramilitary organisations – the largest was the Youth Corps (Seinendan) – which aimed to cultivate a proper spirit based on Japanese bushido (‘way of the warrior’) ethics, teaching the youth that ‘victory in the war and Indonesian independence depended on the semangat (spiritual power) and discipline of the Indonesian people themselves’ (Anderson 1972: 33). According to Anderson (1972: 33), the emphasis on ‘spirit’ resonated with traditional Javanese ideas of Power and jago prowess (see Chapters 1 and 2); yet, rather than a return to the past, the spirit thus instilled in the youth ‘implied a radical critique of the values and political ideas Dutch rule had instilled in their fathers’, as would soon become manifest in the political battles between them. Above all, for all its disciplinary intents, it provided the youth with a powerful style and spirit of action that ‘was vulnerable to unexpected transformations’:

Mass movements had only to move off stage into living reality. Symbolic rallies against imperialism and colonial oppression had only to abandon the stadium and pour into the streets. … Self-sacrifice, austerity, fraternity, and heroism had only to be given concrete opportunities for their realisation. … Well before the revolution broke out, its style had already been discovered. (Anderson 1972: 33–34)

But if this style was a product of Japanese training, the revolutionary spirit was not; the spirit that now received a fitting style harked back to earlier activist experiences. The Japanese programs did intensify a trend that was just developing
in the youth movements of the 1930s: to remove the barriers, however tentative, between elite and kampong youth. This was most manifest in the youth wing of Djawa Hokokai, the Vanguard Corps. In this organisation of more than 80,000 members, from all social strata, ‘the rigid educational stratification which was the legacy of the colonial years began to break down’, as ‘the experience of being in an organisation that pushed the elite youth out into the masses and sucked uneducated youth up towards the elite’ generated a ‘sense of mass power, of fraternal solidarity, of immense possibilities that lies at the heart of popular nationalism’ (Anderson 1972: 31).

Besides a sense of mass power, a sense of exclusive leadership was cultivated among a select group formed within the Vanguard Corps, called the Special Vanguard Corps, to which some one hundred youth leaders were recruited, who were thus identified as the ‘absolute vanguard’. While this might have been intended to control them by ‘keeping them out in the open’, as Kahin (1952: 114) argues, the effect was quite the opposite: putting them in the limelight raised their confidence in the revolution and their role within it. As Frederick (1988: 162) notes, this was the case in Surabaya, where the Japanese created a Youth Committee, in October 1944, to serve ‘as an example to all youth’, but then ‘found themselves struggling to control it’, as it became the centre of ‘an escalation of patriotic rhetoric among pemuda’. The committee persuaded the Japanese to permit a commemoration of the 1928 Youth Congress; at this mass gathering, speakers fiercely linked the ideals of the Youth Pledge to the task of the present youth to pursue a free and united Indonesia (1988: 163). In Surabaya the spirit was unloosed; two youth-led rallies followed, creating a precedent for the revolution to come.

In Jakarta the playing field for youth politics was also shifting. In October 1944, after the Japanese Prime Minister Koiso had stated that Indonesia would be granted independence soon, a new asrama was opened, called Free Indonesia. The initiative came from Vice-Admiral Maeda, who was known for his sympathy for Indonesian nationalism. He ‘became a confidant of many leading Indonesians of all ages’, Ricklefs (1991: 207) notes, ‘and contributed to the process by which the younger and older generations of leaders came to know and understand (if not always to respect) each other in Jakarta’. But some nationalists suspected him of using the asrama to manipulate the youth for his own political agenda of winning influence vis-à-vis the Japanese army commanders in Jakarta, his rivals, who were bypassed in the asrama’s founding. Regardless of Maeda’s intents, nationalist youth were presented with a political opportunity: discord among the Japanese that made them incapable of effective control. This ‘was a weakness the pemuda were able to exploit, and in so doing they abandoned the psychological withdrawal of resistance for an increasingly open opposition’ (Anderson 1972: 49), wasting no time to take advantage of the public platforms made available to them.
First, they needed to bridge political and geographical divides among themselves. Far removed from the politics in Jakarta, youth leaders in other regions were reluctant to commit to plans concocted in the centre. Hence, youth leaders from Jakarta began touring other cities to convince their peers of the urgency of the situation, arguing that liberation was up to them. In this effort to align visions a key role was played by nationalist youth working at the news agency. As the end of the war seemed to draw nearer after Hitler’s defeat, they played up the rhetoric of youth vanguardism, filling the newspapers with passionate calls for the youth to ‘be “brought out of the wings” and allowed to push itself forward … “since it is the youth who will be the builders and defenders of free Indonesia’” (Anderson 1972: 50).

This set the stage for the only wartime Youth Congress, held in Bandung from 16 till 18 May 1945. Since it was hosted by the Sendenbu, the sessions stuck to Japanese rhetoric, but the informal meetings were crucial to rally different groups behind a common vision of struggle. The congress resulted in two resolutions: that all Indonesians unite under a central leadership, and that independence be realised as soon as possible. More important was the underlying message of youth determination to give everything to struggle, as expressed in a slogan that became popular among youth after this congress: ‘freedom or death’. The sense of urgency expressed in this slogan matched the revolutionary narrative and sense of self that by now firmly defined the political identity of youth; they were convinced that their spirit of struggle was the key to achieving independence. However, they found that the national leaders were anything but eager to take part in this story.

**Intergenerational Battles**

Right after the congress, a delegation went to Sukarno’s residence to present the resolutions, but his response was not what they expected. He added to the resolutions that, ‘In the hands of our youth lies the future of the Indonesian people’, but did not make any commitments (Anderson 1972: 52–53). The youth leaders felt that the time for such rhetoric had passed, as the situation called for swift action. Rather than wait upon their leaders, they proceeded with their own plans.

In the following weeks, youth leaders in Jakarta intensified their meetings, agreeing that ‘the youth must launch the struggle for a free Indonesia immediately, based on our own strengths and capacities, and whoever stands in the way is an obstructor and traitor’ (Martha et al. 1984: 133). On 15 June 1945, they proclaimed the Movement of the New Generation of Indonesia. Envoys travelled to cities across Java to coordinate with local groups, and soon rallies were staged in several cities, all turning into ‘pemuda spectacles’ and stressing the role of youth in determining the fate of Indonesia (Frederick 1988: 168). At one rally in Jakarta
it was stated that ‘youth must prepare themselves to carry on the struggle, however bloody’, since, all over the world, ‘it is the youth who are always revolting to combat inappropriate modes of acting and thinking’ (Anderson 1972: 54). The crowd then marched to Sukarno’s residence; he responded with vague salutations, pledging to work hard to fulfil their aspirations. Then they marched on to Hatta’s residence, who said he was ‘delighted to see all of you young people here’, since ‘unity among the youth like this is something I have long dreamed of’. He, too, pledged to work hard to fulfil their aspirations, and reminded them that ‘you will, all of you, soon replace the present leaders, who are getting old’ (Anderson 1972: 55). ‘Soon’ was not ‘now’, however, and his words implied that the youth must patiently await their turn. This was not the kind of response they wanted to hear from their leaders.

A defining moment in the troubled relationship between the youth and the older leaders came on 6 July 1945 at the founding meeting of the New People’s Movement (GRB) that would unite the Djawa Hokokai and the Islamic Masyumi (founded in 1943). Youth leaders arrived at the meeting with the intent of demanding a tough stance. When the elder leaders rejected their proposal to include the words ‘Republic of Indonesia’ in the charter, one of the youth leaders held a fiery speech, warning the elder leaders that the youth would sabotage all their cautious moves. Then they walked out, causing the GRB to collapse before it came into being. They were promptly expelled from the Sendenbu. To the older leaders, this ‘childish’ behaviour was unwarranted, but the greater bitterness and frustration was felt by the youth leaders, who then ‘felt the depth of their estrangement from the established leadership’ (Anderson 1972: 60).

The youth groups now focused on organising the urban kampongs to prepare for revolution. The Hiroshima bombing on 6 August was their cue for action. On the day of Japan’s defeat, 15 August, a youth delegation led by Wikana, known as Sukarno’s protégé, went to his residence to urge him to proclaim independence at once. But Sukarno refused and told them to be patient. As Anderson (1972: 71–72) recounts, Wikana then ‘brought the meeting to an emotional climax by clearly implying that Sukarno was failing to live up to his role as bapak’, and a quarrel broke out. Hatta was called in to restore the peace, but his reasoning to await Japanese consent and avoid reckless action aggravated the youth further, and when he dared them to proclaim independence on their own they walked out, warning they ‘would not answer for the consequences if the proclamation was not made in the next morning at noon’ (1972: 72). According to Anderson (1972: 73):

From the point of view of the older leaders, the meeting had ended satisfactorily, and there is little reason to believe that they regarded the pemuda’s behaviour as any different from what it had been in previous months – youthful bravado, quixotic romanti-
cism, and irrational attitudinising. … From the point of view of the pemuda, however, the meeting had great psychological importance. The threat of mobilising the pemuda was the unplanned outcome of emotions aroused in the debate with Sukarno and Hatta. But the threat had been made, and Hatta’s direct challenge to Wikana, intended as a rebuke to what he saw as the latter’s childishness, was deeply felt.

As this scene illustrates, strategy differences were felt as an unbridgeable gap between young and old. It also illustrates how a play-threat could escalate when the stakes were too high. To the youth, it seemed that their political credibility and legitimacy was at stake, along with the fate of Indonesia to which their political identity was inextricably tied.

To reaffirm their revolutionary role, radical action was needed. According to Shiraishi (1997), the form this action took radically inverted the traditional authority relationship of bapakism, in which a young protégé, such as Wikana, could never challenge the ‘father’, Sukarno. More than just challenging him, the youth went on to kidnap him. In the early hours of 16 August, they awoke Sukarno and Hatta at their residences, warned them of a pending revolt by the Japanese-Indonesian army (PETA), and convinced them to be brought to safety. Sukarno and Hatta only realised what was afoot when after a few hours’ drive they arrived at the village of Rengasdengklok, where a PETA accomplice had disarmed the local Japanese garrison and raised the red-and-white flag. Infuriated, the two leaders refused to proclaim independence without consulting the Japanese. But in Jakarta, Wikana was doing just that, negotiating with the Japanese, who eventually agreed to allow the proclamation, providing it occurred in an orderly manner and they would not be associated with it. The two leaders were returned to Jakarta. On 17 August, Sukarno proclaimed independence and was appointed Indonesia’s first president, with Hatta as vice-president. The Republic of Indonesia was born, but it still needed international recognition.

The Pemuda–Rakyat Revolution

For the youth, the proclamation was a psychological and political victory, but also an anti-climax. The kidnapping became legendary among youth across the country. Yet, it did little to increase their political leverage, as the older leaders were irritated rather than impressed. They felt the affair ‘achieved nothing but a day’s delay in proceedings, that pemuda plans for a revolution … were farcical, and that only the leaders’ ability to negotiate with the Japanese allowed the Republic to get off the ground’ (Reid 1974: 28–29). For them, the priority was to build a proper administration and proceed with diplomatic negotiations to secure international recognition. Although the Japanese had allowed the proclamation, at their
surrender they had to promise to return the conquered Asian dominions to the Allies and to guard the status quo there until their arrival. The Indonesian leaders realised they had to tread carefully so as not to provoke the Allies or the Japanese. The establishment of a Preparatory Committee for Indonesian Independence was the first careful step. Sukarno tried to involve the youth leaders in this committee, but most refused to join this ‘Japanese-made’ assembly. They felt Sukarno was stalling for time, and that freedom could only be defended through real struggle, or *perjuangan*. Frustrated by his refusal to mobilise the people out on the streets, they went on to do so themselves.

On 1 September 1945, Menteng 31 youth set up an action committee, called Youth Generation of Indonesia, or Angkatan Pemuda Indonesia (API, which in Indonesian translates as fire), calling on the people to seize Japanese-controlled enterprises and arms. Within one week, API youth and workers seized Jakarta’s railway and tram system and radio station, which they used to broadcast revolution news across the country. As a symbolic act to break the spell of foreign rule, they hoisted the Indonesian flag over public buildings and painted graffiti across the city, such as, in English, ‘Indonesia never again the life blood of any nation!’ But what truly marked the onset of the revolution was the sense of popular participation generated at mass rallies. Youth in Surabaya staged a series of rallies in the second week of September. API followed with an even greater event in Jakarta, calling upon local bosses and traditional leaders with a popular support base to mobilise as many people as possible. On 18 September they had the mayor of Jakarta announce that the next day a public rally would happen at Ikada Square (now Lapangan Banteng), and that the national leaders would there address the people. But the latter had not been informed, and ordered the plan cancelled. The rally proceeded, though, and with a crowd exceeding 200,000 people it could not be ignored. The cabinet (which was just having its first meeting) felt compelled to attend, and Sukarno gave the awaited speech. He mainly urged the people to stay calm and put their faith in the Republic, and his authority was reaffirmed as the crowd dispersed upon his request. API leaders were arrested. But the fact that the rally proceeded, despite the national leaders’ veto and tight Japanese security, was taken as a sign that the youth could have their way.

Another spark signalling the imminent revolution occurred in Surabaya on the same day. At that time, the Dutch were starting to return from the concentration camps (the liberation of the camps had to await the arrival of the Allied forces, but they had not been tightly guarded since the Japanese surrender), unaware of the nationalist spirit that had been nurtured under the Japanese. On 19 September, Dutch youth raised the Dutch flag over a former Dutch hotel, where it had flown before, not expecting the angry Indonesian crowd that soon gathered there. One Indonesian youth then climbed the building to rip off the Dutch flag’s blue hori-
horizontal stripe, leaving only the Indonesian red-and-white. In the ensuing clash, one Dutch officer was killed. Youth in Surabaya, as one of them later recalled, were ‘instantly jolted out of a “standby mentality”’ (quoted in Frederick 1988: 203). The next day, the local Angkatan Muda branch staged a parade, carrying bamboo stakes as a sign of populist militancy. They renamed themselves Pemuda Republik Indonesia (PRI), Youth of the Republic of Indonesia, and redefined their purpose as giving direction to the energies of the people.

The notion of pemuda leadership proved to have great popular appeal: locals promptly set up neighbourhood PRI ‘branches’. Yet, popular identification also entailed that the youth were swept into a popular movement that was out of their hands. In the following weeks there were many attacks on the Japanese, in which the role of PRI was limited to interventions to prevent further escalation. Like the older leaders, PRI youth were stunned by the outburst of popular fury. But while the older leaders condemned the violence, among the youth leaders it instilled an acute sense of responsibility. Crowds would often call for them during incidents, which they interpreted as a sign of their revolutionary duty to lead the people. They felt popular energies needed to be organised rather than suppressed, and that ‘the rakyat could be transformed into both a remarkably effective weapon against the Dutch and a necessary extension to pemuda forces, which were in fact limited numerically’ (Frederick 1988: 239).

The pemuda-rakyat alliance appeared to be successful. By 2 October, they had taken control of Surabaya from the Japanese, though at the cost of many lives on both sides. This generated a sense of victory, amplified by martyrdom, which was felt to be just what the revolution needed. A special burial ground was established in the city centre for the first fallen heroes of the revolution, who were honoured with a dramatic nationalist ceremony, as a symbol of popular involvement and sacrifice in the national struggle. The symbolism of victory and martyrdom had a galvanising effect on struggles in other cities, which one by one fell into Indonesian hands. But the arrival of the Allied forces put a damper on the revolution.

In Jakarta many spontaneously set up ‘struggle groups’ (badan perjuangan) remained active after API was dissolved. But once the Allied forces arrived on 30 September and took charge of the city, it became impossible to stage any action beyond sporadic urban guerrilla tactics, such as setting up roadblocks or terrorising returned Dutch citizens to prevent a resumption of colonial life. Allied forces retaliated with raids on urban kampongs, which deprived the struggle groups of their urban support base until they were finally driven out of Jakarta. The decline of urban struggle went fast in Bandung, too. Youth groups had taken control of that city in early October, but on 10 October they suffered a humiliating defeat by the Japanese. The humiliation was underlined ‘by a present of lipstick from their
more successful brethren in East Java’ (Reid 1974: 50), which suggested that the defeat was due to lack of manly, martial, youthful spirit (this symbolic token was adopted by student activists in the late 1960s, see Chapter 6). But while the youth in Surabaya seemed to be sufficiently confident to send their Bandung peers this ‘present’, they too were struggling to keep control of the revolution.

Redefining the True Pemuda

In Surabaya, PRI found their role of leading the people to be an illusion. On 6 October, they failed to prevent a mob from breaking into the prison and killing Japanese captives. Alarmed, PRI called for an end to the attacks on the Japanese, and published a PRI constitution, with clear rules and objectives, so no one would misinterpret what the ‘pemuda struggle’ stood for. Once the revolutionary play had gone awry, youth leaders were forced to set rules for the game. However, the promise of revolution made it difficult for even PRI members to follow the rules. Following rumours of an imminent Dutch attack, on 15 October PRI arrested all the Dutch in Surabaya above the age of sixteen. Again, things went awry. As the convoy with Dutch captives arrived at the prison, a mob took hold of them, killing most before PRI guards could end the carnage. For this they needed the assistance of local troops from the fledgling Republican army, which was founded on 5 October to organise the scattered struggle groups that proved to be inefficient in confrontations with Allied forces. The creation of the army implied that independence could not be defended by the pemuda spirit alone. This left youth leaders with an uncertain role in the revolution, especially as it turned more violent.

Another violent incident on the same day as the prison incident was no less disturbing to pemuda sensibilities. At the PRI office an investigative tribunal was set up, but the interrogation led to the torture and murder of dozens of Dutch captives, committed by both kampong youth and PRI members. Shocked, PRI leaders realised that, if setting rules did not suffice, they had better set clear identity standards. In a statement, they stressed that the ‘true pemuda spirit’ was based on a solid ‘understanding of reality’ as ‘a guide to proper action’; that ‘undisciplined action on the basis of rumours or hysteria was not legitimate pemuda behaviour’; and that ‘true pemuda’ were ‘idea carriers’, ‘interpreting and carrying out the will of the people’, which was ‘a different matter from acting on impulse, without discipline or leadership’ (Frederick 1988: 243). In a context of violent escalation, the spirit of struggle was thus put on hold to make way for a sense of duty, as the youth leaders saw themselves forced to sound more like the older leaders whose caution they had disdained.

Not all youth leaders endorsed this shift in the pemuda persona. One of them became famous for upholding a ‘pure pemuda-ness’: Sutomo, better known as
Bung (Brother) Tomo. A person of modest background, he had made furore in the scouting movement, and during the war he worked for the Japanese news agency before joining PRI. He soon left it, though, to travel to Jakarta to witness the situation there first-hand. Aghast to find Jakarta under Allied control, and sceptical of the national leaders’ capacity to lead the revolution, he returned to Surabaya and on 12 October founded the Indonesian People’s Rebellion Front (BPRI), a radical populist organisation that put ‘rakyat’ and ‘rebellion’ above ‘pemuda’ and ‘republic’ (Frederick 1988: 245). Sutomo stood out for his fierce rhetoric: declaring his BPRI to be ‘extremist’, he vowed that ‘together with the rakyat it will mount a rebellion, will make blood flow, if the sovereignty of the republic is threatened or the honour of our leaders is besmirched as they follow the path of negotiation’ (Frederick 1988: 248). He also set up a radio station, ‘Radio Rebellion’, which he used as a vehicle for his unique style of agitation. Opening and closing his radio speeches with thrice yelling ‘Allahuakbar!’, he called on the people to fight for their freedom with all their might, and warned the enemy of the people’s ire in a language beset with fantastic images of violence. This was anathema to PRI leaders, who watched with aversion, but also envy, how he rallied the people behind him in a style wholly different from theirs. As Frederick (1988: 254) notes:

In the BPRI conceptualisation, pemuda leadership was clear but unspoken. No one discussed becoming ‘idea carriers’ of the masses; emphasis was placed instead on joining the rakyat, even becoming the rakyat, and on expressing the popular will by acting it out. It was this distinctive attitude, and the theatrics accompanying it, which eventually came to epitomise the pemuda spirit of the Indonesian revolution, a mentality and soul which, far from being contrived, seemed to express in a single, spontaneous vision both the longings of the pergerakan and the gritty opposition of ordinary urban folk to colonial rule.

Word of Sutomo spread rapidly, and he became a living legend. According to Anderson (1972: 157), his style worked so well since it resonated with traditional ideas: ‘His public promise that he would touch no woman until the Dutch were driven from the land might perhaps be harmonised with the ideals of austerity and commitment of the twentieth-century revolutionary’, but ‘his vow that his hair would remain unshorn until Indonesia was free was drawn straight from the djago tradition’. His contemporaries explained his appeal in similar terms. Just as the Dutch interpreted his ‘personal magnetism in terms of a romantic unlocking of the darkest mystical or Moslem anti-Europeanism that Java had to offer’, nationalists also saw in him a rallying point for the ‘lawless’, ‘savage’, and ‘mystical elements in Javanese life’ (Frederick 1988: 250–251). Yet, Sutomo’s appeal owed less to a traditional aura than to his modern promise of political participation. His
populism was a historical descendant of the budding radicalism in the youth movements of the 1930s, compounded by his own modern experience in the scouting movement. Still, it was as a historically decontextualised icon of the ‘wild pemuda’ that he came to be known and later remembered.

In the end, neither he nor PRI controlled the events. On 25 October British troops landed in Surabaya, and in the battles that soon erupted the British suffered major losses. One local newspaper reported: ‘The rakyat has begun to move, the rakyat alone, not government organisations or official groups, and the masses are now led by extremists and pemuda’ (Frederick 1988: 260). By then, however, the category of pemuda had become blurred, so that ‘the pemuda role in events came to be enlarged unrealistically’, while the population largely acted ‘independently, and, frequently, in opposition to the established principles of pemuda organisation’, and hence ‘came to drive, rather than be driven by, pemuda forces’ (1988: 261). What drove them all, though, was a sense of being betrayed by the leaders in Jakarta. Sukarno apologised to the British for the losses, and admonished Surabayans for allowing ‘a grain of arsenic to poison a whole glass of water’ (1988: 265). Sutomo voiced the anger and defiance now shared by all Surabayans, in a speech that was to become iconic:

Hey Britain, as long as the wild buffalo, the youth of Indonesia, still have red blood that can make a white cloth red and white … we will not surrender. Friends, fellow fighters … especially the youth of Indonesia, we will fight on, we will expel the colonials from our Indonesian land that we love. … Long have we suffered, been exploited, trampled on. Now is the time for us to seize our independence. Our slogan: freedom or death. Allahuakbar! Allahuakbar! Allahuakbar! Merdeka! (Excerpt from radio speech, 9 November 1945)

With these sentiments, on 10 November they entered what would be known as the Battle of Surabaya. After three weeks of intense fighting the British won control, but at a cost they were no longer willing to bear; they soon retreated from Indonesia. While the battle brought international attention to Indonesia, which sped up Sukarno’s diplomacy efforts, in national memory it has been remembered as a key moment of popular heroism. Yet, at that time and place, it was mostly experienced as an anticlimax to what had been built in previous months. Not only was the battle lost, it also marked the end of the merging of the pemuda and the rakyat in the revolution, as the population had evacuated Surabaya, leaving the fighting only to local youth and military forces. Deprived of the rakyat’s energies, the pemuda lost their role as revolutionary leaders.
The Political Turn

The disillusionment among youth leaders was profound. As one of them wrote a few months after the Battle of Surabaya, ‘What are we fighting for?’, and a year later, others bitterly noted that the youth had lost the spirit of struggle: ‘Where are the pemuda of last year? Why has Surabaya been forgotten?’ (Frederick 1988: 284). However, the struggle of youth had not ended; it only shifted to the political arena. Ironically, this process started on the same day as the Battle of Surabaya, 10 November 1945. Two other significant events marked that day. One was the publication of the political pamphlet of Sjahrir, the national leader who had coordinated the underground resistance during the occupation, entitled ‘Our Struggle’. This pamphlet set the tone for the youth’s encapsulation in the field of politics that came to dominate the next phase of the revolution, in which the spirit of struggle lost ground to the strategy of political negotiation. Sjahrir condemned not only ‘collaborators’ in the Republic but also the youth, warning of the dangers of their ‘intoxication with action’:

The remarkable surge of national consciousness that we are now experiencing appears to have been stimulated by the younger generation. It is as though it were they who determine the very rhythm of our struggle. It is as though the revolution we are now undergoing originated in the enthusiasm and stout-heartedness of our youth … that it has been driven forward by pure idealism alone. … [But] their methods of agitation and propaganda among the masses are those they have seen and learnt from the Japanese … the methods of fascism. The present psychological condition of our youth is deeply tragic. In spite of their burning enthusiasm, they are full of confusion and indecision because they have no understanding of the potentialities and perspectives of the struggle they are waging. Thus their vision is necessarily very limited. Many of them simply cling to the slogan Freedom or Death. Whenever they sense that Freedom is still far from certain, and yet they themselves have not faced death, they are seized with doubt and hesitation. The remedy for these doubts is usually sought in constant uninterrupted action. Action thus becomes a psychological opiate. For our nation, our youths’ intoxication with action is actually an inestimable advantage; their activism has been a powerful stimulus to our struggle at its beginning. Nevertheless, through lack of understanding, many of their actions have missed the mark, and have undermined and damaged our cause. (Quoted in Anderson 1972: 192–193)

Sjahrir held that ‘leadership of our revolution’ should not fall into the hands of youth, as their proper role was that of ‘advance guard of the party that leads the struggle’ (Anderson 1972: 193). The real struggle was diplomacy, which youth radicalism only obstructed. On 11 November, Sjahrir became prime minister of the Republic’s first cabinet, the establishment of which was the first official move to make the Republic real and increase its political leverage in the negotiations
for international recognition; this was far from a done deal since the Dutch were looking to re-establish their rule. To ease this process, Sjahrir’s cabinet included no youth leaders or any others that might upset negotiations with the Dutch. Once a linchpin of the resistance, Sjahrir thus became the man of diplomacy, alienating many youth leaders. Still, as Martha (1984: 179) notes, he ‘touched the hearts’ of many other youth, who ‘hoped to see their progressive aspirations channelled into his government’. For his supporters, the diplomatic turn offered a respite from the battlefield, which they knew they no longer controlled.

The political turn was manifest as well at the first post-occupation Youth Congress, held in Yogyakarta on 10 and 11 November, in which all major youth organisations participated, except for Sutomo’s. The presence of the national leaders lent political weight to the event, which exuded much of the same atmosphere as the youth events of their generation. The aim, again, was to create a youth union, but now socialism was added as its ideological basis, revealing the influence of the socialist leader Syarifuddin, who sponsored the event.² Again, the union did not materialise. But API, PRI, and five other organisations merged into Pesindo, the Indonesian Socialist Youth. A federation was also formed, the Council of the Youth Congress of the Republic of Indonesia (BKPRI), whose first mission was to promote youth representation in the government in the form of a youth ministry. This goal was achieved in March 1946 under the second Sjahrir cabinet (the first had fallen), in which Wikana became the first youth minister. Youth goals could thus be pursued at the highest government level.

Meanwhile, though, the rise of Pesindo raised animosity among other groups. According to Anderson (1972: 260), it ‘forced other groups into a much sharper self-awareness and a wider consciousness of latent ideological divisions within Indonesian society’. Indeed, despite the rhetoric of unity, divisions had marked the youth movement since its early days. Yet, it is questionable whether this can be attributed to ‘latent ideological divisions’ (that is, aliran), as it was only in subsequent political processes that the divisions hardened into clear political positions, which would further lead each youth group to ally with political parties. Even then, this did not yet turn them into party onderbouw, if only because the youth groups were initially ‘larger and more powerful than the political parties’, so that ‘in the struggle for power the politicians turned for support to pemuda’, rather than the other way round, though it became increasingly ‘difficult to avoid being drawn into the competition among the elite’ (Anderson 1972: 263–264).

A united front still seemed feasible when, in January 1946, the communist Tan Malaka, who advocated ‘struggle’ rather than diplomacy, initiated a coalition called Struggle Union, which was joined by ‘virtually all major organisations except for the government that seemed increasingly isolated’ (Anderson 1972: 295). With its slogan of ‘100% Freedom’, and its stated goals of a people’s gov-
ernment and a people’s army, it voiced the ‘fighting talk the militant pemudas longed to hear from their leaders’ (Reid 1974: 89). Yet, Malaka’s coalition was in no position to attack the cabinet, as Sjahrir’s supporters, including Pesindo, were among its members. The cabinet’s fall in March 1946 seemed to provide a small opening. By then, API had left Pesindo, disenchanted with the slow diplomacy of Sjahrir, and now urged Sukarno to appoint Malaka as prime minister. But Sukarno had no need for Malaka’s antagonism, as he had just started negotiations with the Dutch for sovereign control of Indonesian territories. Instead, he installed the second Sjahrir cabinet and had Malaka and other Struggle Union leaders imprisoned, on the grounds of threatening ‘to weaken, disrupt and/or break up the firm solidarity between the government and the people’ (Anderson 1972: 327). It was the first time that the Indonesian government showed its repressive face, using a language that set a precedent for future regimes.

But youth groups that had earlier supported Malaka kept their silence. Apparently, the Youth Ministry in Sjahrir’s second cabinet was part of the political bait by which their criticism could be stemmed (Martha et al. 1984: 185). Thus, the political turn meant not only that youth leaders were confronted with the limitations of a political field in which clashing views were settled by those in power, but also that they learned the art of political negotiation in pursuing their interests. Learning to play the game of politics came at the cost of their revolutionary clout, though the spirit of struggle received one more chance to shine in the subsequent period of guerrilla battle.

Political Confusion and Guerrilla Battles

Concluding his narrative of the pemuda’s role in the revolution, Anderson (1972: 407) writes that by mid-1946, their movement came to ‘a historical impasse’, as the ‘logic of diplomasi drove the government to curb and confine the movement, which for itself found no permanent, transcendent meaning in the government’s policy’. In this impasse, youth leaders focused on determining a political position for themselves. This came to be defined as one of political ‘autonomy’, but in a context of political rivalry and uncertainty this was easier said than done, while the lingering lure of struggle complicated taking any firm political stance – hence the result was political hesitancy. This was reflected in the ambivalent stance of the BKPRI federation. As stated at its January 1946 conference:

First, the youth movement is revolutionary in nature and strongly opposed to anarchy. Second, [it] shall not involve itself in the contest for government seats, but it shall not decline if the youth are elected by the people themselves. And third, [it] shall never be the onderbouw of political parties. (In Martha et al. 1984: 186)
That is, they adopted the government stance against violence, yet without closing
the door to radical elements in the movement; they stood above petty politics, yet
without declining the responsibility of government positions if such were the
wish of the people; and they would, always, remain autonomous, though BKPRI
did not prohibit partisanship of its members. The ambivalence was also reflected
in its statement of June 1946, which further indicated that the youth desperately
sought to regain their revolutionary élan, yet were tied down by commitment to the
government:

Considering the critical situation, we, the leadership of youth organisations joined in
BKPRI, instruct all Indonesian youth: 1. To strengthen our militias and establish them
where they are lacking. All healthy youth must begin military training. 2. To eradicate
group-egotism, and forge and strengthen unity. 3. To destroy all obstacles to our com-
mon struggle. 4. To prepare our strengths to assume important government positions.
5. To follow and obey the government as it leads our national and social revolution. (In
Martha et al. 1984: 193)

But unity and commitment to the government dissipated after the November
1946 Linggajati agreement with the Dutch (providing for Republican rule over
Java, Sumatra, and Madura only, as part of a Netherlands–Indonesian Confedera-
tion), which divided the entire political spectrum. BKPRI remained neutral but
was internally torn apart, as each member organisation adopted the line of politi-
cal patrons, despite the pledge never to become onderbouw. While the political
role of youth thus turned ambiguously partisan, across the spectrum many heeded
the call to pick up arms. This marked the onset of the guerrilla period, in which
‘struggle’ again took precedence over ‘politics’, though by now the struggle was
 inexorably affected by political games.

This period began after the Allied forces had taken control of the major cities,
driving out the struggle groups into the rural areas. There, in territories unknown
to urban youth, they had to learn to fend for themselves in new ways, and deal
with other armed groups already established there. Together they became known as
laskar (militia), denoting all armed groups outside the army; the largest were
Pesindo’s armed wing in East Java and the People’s Militia of Greater Jakarta in
West Java, formed by API and other Jakarta-based groups (Cribb 1991). Building
on Japanese military training, the laskar managed to build a firm military position
for themselves, and gained a reputation as ‘fearless freedom fighters’ — largely
owing to Sutomo’s image, whose style was widely imitated. But the army viewed
them as unwanted rivals. With minimal budgets, the army depended on villagers
for supplies; the laskar did as well, making them competitors, and the image of
‘populist radicalism of the pemuda groups made it easier for them to win popular
support’ (Anderson 1972: 265). Thus, building a certain image became a vital part of the competition for scarce resources, giving rise to bitter symbolic battles as both sides attempted to raise their populist credentials and delegitimise the other’s. While the army depicted the laskar as undisciplined amateurs obstructing efficient military strategy and jeopardising a swift military victory, in turn, laskar depicted the army as fascist and too close in spirit to the mercenary armies of the Dutch and Japanese (Cribb 1991: 102).

In West Java, laskar groups found a strong opponent in the commander of the Siliwangi Division, Nasution, who disarmed most laskar in the region by 1947. In East Java the army was less organised, and groups like Pesindo long continued to thrive. In July 1946, Pesindo achieved a major victory when it foiled a rebellion: Sjahrir was abducted by rebels, and the commander of the Yogyakarta Division, Major Suharto (later president), was sent to crush the rebellion but he failed. Then Pesindo stepped in, defeated the rebels, and freed Sjahrir, thus embarrassing the army. Another blow to the army’s reputation was the Dutch military offensive (or ‘police action’, as the Dutch called it, launched after the failure of the Linggajati agreement) from 21 July to 5 August 1947, which forced Nasution’s troops out of West Java. The army-laskar rivalry was further exacerbated by the rivalry among political leaders, as well as Syarifuddin’s efforts to curb the army’s influence. In 1946, as defence minister, he drew on Pesindo’s victory to form a Central Laskar Council, a military body rivalling the army. In 1947, as prime minister, he took Nasution’s defeat as a cue to create a people’s army, recruited from laskar. But the laskar’s influence waned when Hatta became prime minister in January 1948, following the detested Renville agreement that granted the Dutch control of West Java. Hatta disbanded the people’s army and ordered demobilisation of all laskar, and despite stiff resistance, especially from Sutomo, most laskar were disarmed. As the last laskar stronghold, Pesindo turned to a desperate act. In September 1948, in Madiun, East Java, Pesindo and a pro-PKI army unit persuaded the local PKI branch to launch a revolt against the Republic; the PKI top had not been informed but saw itself forced to take leadership. Nasution had little difficulty crushing this revolt, and PKI and the youth involved were marked as national traitors.

The army’s final glory, laying the basis for its claim to political influence, came in the wake of the second Dutch military offensive in December 1948, in which Sukarno, Hatta, and the cabinet were taken captive. Freed from political indecision, the army stepped forward to ‘save the nation’, starting with the ‘long march’ of Nasution’s troops from East Java back into Dutch-controlled West Java, where they fought a heroic guerrilla struggle. Some laskar groups survived, but their role in the struggle seemed to be irrelevant. In the end, the Dutch were
defeated by UN diplomacy, forcing them to transfer sovereignty on 27 December 1949. Long before that time, most youth leaders had been absorbed into partisan politics, either in political parties or the emerging new arena for student politics. For pemuda, then, the revolution was over long before it formally ended. Yet, this period, as the prime expression of the ‘spirit of struggle’, left a lasting imprint on the image of youth, especially their self-image, which was forever established as one of determined fighters, even as their identity returned to the more mundane one of student.

From Pemuda to Mahasiswa, Image to Memory

In the final years of the revolution, new patterns were being set in student politics that would determine student activism for decades to come. Despite the BKPRI pledge in 1946 that the youth shall never be the onderbouw of political parties, in 1947 new organisations emerged that did become party affiliates, though on an informal basis. Besides this reorientation to politics, another significant shift was reflected in the names of these organisations, in which ‘pemuda’ (youth) was replaced with ‘mahasiswa’ (student). The first was the Islamic Student Association (HMI), which was founded in February 1947 and affiliated with Masyumi. Soon after came the Indonesian Catholic Student Association (PMKRI), affiliated with the Catholic Party; the Indonesian Christian Student Movement (GMKI), affiliated with Parkindo; and the Democratic Youth, affiliated with PNI. This emphasis on the student aspect of youth identity (except for Democratic Youth, but PNI, too, would soon have a student affiliate) indicated a move away from the populism associated with the term ‘pemuda’ and a revival of the pre-war role of students, in particular as carriers of the banner of unity. Partisanship and unity might seem contradictory, but in the context of the newly established nation-state it made sense to raise this banner once more precisely to downplay partisanship, as a means to raise political legitimacy. Only by presenting themselves as students, not party affiliates, could youth exert political influence on the national stage. In March 1947, student organisations thus founded the Indonesian Student Council (PPMI) as a platform for united student struggle. More than the individual organisations, this became an influential group with close ties to the national leadership; Sukarno regularly invited PPMI leaders to discuss national politics.

But it was not until the final months of the revolution that the student identity came into its own. By then, national leaders called for a revival of the role that they once played as ‘pioneers of national unity’. Heeding this call, from 16 till 18 August 1949, PPMI hosted an Indonesian Youth Conference; here, the term ‘youth’ referred to the pre-war tradition, not the revolutionary pemuda. In a manifesto, they declared that they stood united behind the Republic and its ideals, as
enshrined in the proclamation of independence on 17 August 1945 and the ideology of Pancasila, or the ‘five basic principles’ of the Republic, as promulgated by Sukarno in June 1945. These principles included belief in the One God Almighty, a just and civilised humanity, Indonesian unity, democracy guided by consensus through collective deliberation (musyawarah mufakat), and social justice. It was the first time that youth of different stripes rallied behind these emblems of the nation-state under the old banner of unity, as if this was what Indonesian youth had struggled for all along.

Continuity and unity were also underscored in a ‘struggle slogan’, stating their loyalty to ‘one nation’, ‘one language’, ‘one country’, and ‘one state’ (Foulcher 2000: 385). The legacy of the 1928 Youth Pledge was unmistakable, except for the striking addition of the state: ‘one nation’ had given way to ‘one nation-state’. The banner of unity seemed to be no longer complete without this addition, which had significant implications for the meaning and scope of student struggle. While the emphasis on the nation-state and its emblems served to bolster the authority of the Republic, its inclusion in the rhetoric of student struggle meant that students could also claim a role on that level; not just as the vanguards of the ‘imagined community’ of the nation (Anderson 1991), but also in defining the direction of the nation-state. This expanded scope of student struggle would be manifested most clearly in the 1960s, when the national role of students came to be defined as the duty to put the nation-state ‘on the right track’, if and when the state took it in the wrong direction. As students then took on the task of ‘correcting the state’, the memory of the pre-war role of students, especially the Youth Pledge, certainly helped to bolster their claims.

Yet initially, it was not the memory of students but that of pemuda as fearless freedom fighters that left the strongest imprint on collective memory. In part, this image survived due to its recurrence in Indonesian and Dutch reports of that time, which served specific purposes in the war of representation. For the Dutch, it served to delegitimise the nationalist struggle, as diplomacy-minded politicians like Sjahrir realised well. But for action-minded nationalists it served to galvanise the struggle. Thus, the image acquired a life of its own, and became increasingly fantastic in mixing various cultural repertoires to infuse it with the desired connotations. According to Gouda (1997), one popular analogy was that of ‘macho cowboys’, mostly used by critics of pemuda. As one such critic wrote in 1947: the ‘nation’s sons have become brash people who behave like highway robbers or think they resemble the pistol-waving heroes they have seen in motion pictures with Humphrey Bogart or the Dead End Kids’ (in Gouda 1997: 73). As an empty signifier that could be filled with any message, the pemuda image became a convenient tool in the contests of political actors who disagreed on political strategy.
But the young fighters were also complicit in the construction of this image, though as an expression of the revolutionary experience. For them, the self-image centred on the spirit of struggle. It was crucial for the lasting power of this self-image that it found a charismatic personification in Sutomo, and moreover found a moving expression in the poetry of Chairil Anwar: in his poems, the pemuda spirit was immortalised. Anwar himself became an icon of the ‘immortal pemuda’ in the sense of the forever young, as he lived wild and died young, succumbing to illness in 1949 just before the end of the revolution. The sense of pemuda immortality can also be read in his famous poem, *Aku*, or ‘I’ (1943):

If my time has come
I don’t want anyone to mourn me
Not even you
No need for that tearful sobbing
I am but a wild animal
Banished from its flock
Though bullets may pierce my skin
I will still rush forward ferociously
Wounds and poison will I take on the run
On the run
Until the stinging pain disappears
And I will care even less
I want to live another thousand years

The spirit described in this poem has little to do with politics. It is about an existential ‘I’ that came into its own in the field of struggle, as the revolution was ‘an experience of personal liberation’ from the ‘apparent fatality of their lives’ (Anderson 1972: 185). This ‘I’ was also a liberated ‘We’, as the revolution, especially the guerrilla period, was a collective experience, creating an ambiance that extolled the virtues of equality and fraternity – communitas. They had to improvise together, were thrown into reliance on each other, experienced the same thrills, and suffered the same hardships – and the intense solidarity this generated overpowered less romantic memories of rivalry, boredom, loneliness, and despair. The sense of solidarity was also expressed in an egalitarian dress style, as they wore the same shirts and khakis as lower-class comrades. This was not to emulate the *jago* look, as scholars have suggested, but to fit more easily into village society, which ‘was much more serious than merely playing at being rakyat’, as they ‘felt that they had truly entered into the life and consciousness of the rakyat’ (Frederick 1988: 243). Moreover, they felt this connection with the rakyat was uniquely theirs – not shared by national leaders, who never experienced village life as they did – which also gave them a special responsibility towards the rakyat.
But therein lay the paradox of pemuda identity. While the sense of existential liberation from the fatality of their social origin – like a ‘wild animal banished from its flock’ – enabled them to identify with the rakyat to begin with, the sense of special responsibility towards the rakyat was not that far removed from the old pergerakan paternalism towards the masses, which took them right back to the flock of elite, intellectual nationalism from which they came, and which they never really left. As Frederick (1988: 286) notes, youth leaders who ‘drew attention to the importance of the rakyat in the revolution also underscored their own significance as protectors and leaders of the rakyat’, and ‘while at pains to identify themselves as “from the rakyat and for the rakyat,” none hesitated either to certify that they were also intellectuals’. Even Sutomo, paragon of populism, stated in a 1946 speech ‘that the proper pemuda role was to understand and lead the rakyat in a disciplined fashion’ (1988: 286). As pemuda were thus drawn back into the flock of responsible nationalists, their radical populism was sacrificed, as was pemuda selfhood.

As one youth leader put it in 1949, in a letter written just before his execution by a Dutch firing squad, ‘Pemuda are like flowers that are about to blossom but are torn down by a strong wind’. The letter was quoted fifty-three years later by Goenawan Mohamad (2002), in a special edition of Tempo magazine on ‘Heroes Day’, as the Battle of Surabaya came to be commemorated since the revolution. Mohamad (2002: 28) comments that there is ‘a sad tone in this sentence but no regrets: the “flower” that is about to blossom, though torn down, has passed by as a breeze of freshness’. Indeed, it passed by as a fresh – but also fleeting – breeze, not destined to outlast the spirited context of the revolution, or to bloom into political maturity. But which was the ‘strong wind’ that ‘killed’ the pemuda before it could blossom: the Dutch enemy, or revolution-era politics?

In a sense, it was iconicity itself that killed them. Ruptured from historical context, competing images could claim the history and agency of the revolution. Once pemuda were associated with the romanticism of struggle, the military role could be reserved for the army. Well before the end of the revolution, the army began to aggrandise its role as ‘saviour of the nation’, with a fitting myth about ‘its own origins and role in the independence war, a myth of an army which virtually created itself, setting up its own institutions and depending for its logistical and financial support on its own efforts and on the direct backing of the Indonesian people’ (Cribb and Collins 1995: 29). This myth served to bolster its position within the political structure of the nation-state. After independence, the army cohort began being known as the War Generation (Angkatan Perang), which was soon used interchangeably with Angkatan 45, the generation that had determined the fate of the nation-state; in this way, the nation-state was tied to the army, in
the historical narrative and in the future as well. With the pemuda struggle mythologised, and the agency of the revolution appropriated by the army, the day-to-day politics of educated youth shifted back to the student arena. The rebirth of the student thus augured the pemuda’s ‘death’.

However, the death of pemuda was only partial; not only because its spirit lived on in memory, but also because it never was an isolated phenomenon without a history, outside of history, or without a future. Recalling Touraine’s (1981, 1988) notion of ‘historical actors’ as those engaged in a battle for historicity, we may recognise that activist, educated youth were the same historical actor, both as revolutionary pemuda or as pre-war and post-revolution students. It becomes clear that there is no death, no end to the story, but rather historical transitions and an accumulation and interplay of historical experiences and stories, which then provide the cultural resources and parameters for future narrative and play.

By the end of the revolution, the experiences of activist youth, and the various ways in which they acted on these experiences in specific historical contexts and political conditions – from colonial rule, to Japanese occupation, to the struggle for independence – had congealed into a specific set of narrative themes. These include the narrative theme of radical, uncompromising youth as a distinct political figure, contrasted with moderate, compromising elders; the theme of youthful progressiveness and vanguardism, contrasted with the conservatism of national leaders; the theme of struggle, *perjuangan*, as populist, militant action, contrasted with the hesitancy of *dipomasi* and the stiff formalities of *organisasi*; and the theme of youth as the carriers of the banner of unity, in its paradoxical relationship to political partisanship and mutual rivalry.

But the overriding narrative theme is that of a determined spirit of struggle, which transcended the context of revolution and became the core of the identity of activist youth, as expressed in staunch idealism, defiance, energy, daring, and verve in playing the field of battle – or so it was performed, and so it is remembered. It is as performed memory that the spirit lives on as the spirit of ‘making history through struggle’, becoming a source of pride in itself, pride in oneself, in their collective identity and agency as history-making beings. It is as history-making beings that students found their ‘national duty’. Yet, the ultimate paradox in their political identity is that ‘duty’ stands in a tense relationship to ‘spirit’. A spirited playfulness, even if this playfulness was taken very seriously, proved difficult to sustain when play slipped into the realms of ‘real’ *organisasi*, politics, or violence. This history – or rather, the narrative themes as shaped in history and the paradoxes they sustain – would recur in the student movement, as it moved into the postcolonial playing field of power games in Sukarno’s ‘era of living dangerously’.
5

Living Dangerously in an Era of Power Plays

The Divided Nation and Its ‘Army of Students’

In his Independence Day address of 17 August 1964, President Sukarno proclaimed it to be the ‘Year of Living Dangerously’ (Tahun Vivere Pericoloso), in which Indonesia would take a final stand against imperialist powers. The address was a tentative climax to a decade marked by rising tensions, in which political actors at all levels had lived dangerously all along, as rivalries had greatly intensified since the revolution – between the political parties, between Sukarno and the army, and between Sukarno and the army against political parties. Students, too, lived dangerously, as they were deeply embroiled in the power struggles. Yet, they did so from an entirely different experience from the national elites. This generation grew up in an independent nation geared towards a brighter future, and there was a strong sense that the future belonged to them. Stories of national duty were no less prominent and meaningful to them than they were to previous generations of young Indonesians. But their plots and meanings changed as they were set in a charged political climate in which the enemy was not a foreign ruler but a shifting constellation of rivals within the national body. The postcolonial era of ‘living dangerously’ also produced its own narratives and repertoires of struggle, though these explicitly tapped into the stock of memories of struggle. Indeed, the dramas played out in this period were set in a political culture that was charged with a deeply politicised consciousness of history. Much of this consciousness centred on students, who were again marked as the ‘hope of the nation’, albeit a nation that was deeply divided.

After years of occupation and war, in which formal education had practically come to a standstill, the 1950s saw a substantial expansion of educational facilities. The political and symbolic value attached to education, especially higher education, was evident from the start. Just weeks after the 1945 Proclamation of Independence, before the constitution was ratified, a provisional state university was founded in Jakarta out of the former Dutch faculties. In February 1946, after the Dutch reoccupied Jakarta and the Republic’s capital moved to Yogyakarta, the Gadjah Mada University (UGM) was founded there. In February 1950, soon
after the transfer of sovereignty, the provisional university in Jakarta was re-opened as the University of Indonesia (UI). Soon, state universities were opened in each provincial capital, along with dozens of private universities founded by large organisations such as Muhammadiyah. The student population accordingly grew from 387 in 1946 to over 100,000 at state universities and 180,000 at private universities in 1964 (Raillon 1984: 9). For Sukarno, this ‘army of students’, as he called it, formed the perfect pool from which to mould the forces needed for his revolutionary nation-building project, and he never failed to remind students of their national duty to deploy their youthful energies for this project.

In the optimistic atmosphere of the early 1950s, students needed little incentive to participate in the life of the nation. They held high expectations of independence and were eager to contribute to the nation’s progress, and they were no less eager to make the most of their study years: ‘books, parties, and love’ was a popular student motto. Adding force to this ambiance of dedication and freedom, a strong sense of student autonomy was cultivated through the flourishing student press and the system of elected student representative bodies, with student councils at the university level, student senates at the faculty level, and other campus-based organisations representing student interests. In 1956 the Indonesian Student Council (MMI) was founded, representing the student councils and senates of all state and private universities, as the highest manifestation of student autonomy and unity.

Yet, the MMI was founded at a time when student autonomy and unity were actually falling apart. While the student press and other campus-based groups still upheld a sense of autonomy, the student representative bodies became politicised as they came under partisan influence. In fact, the MMI’s purpose, though to no avail, was to neutralise the deepening political schisms within the student population that resulted from growing political intervention on campus – by the state, the political parties, and the army, who each brought into play their own political interests and vision of students’ national duty. Around the 1955 legislative elections, universities became political battlegrounds as each party vied to expand its support base among the ‘army of students’. This drew the student population into the game of politics, in which the notions of student autonomy and unity were reduced to political slogans, albeit quite potent ones.

A new paradox was created in the political identity of students: on the one hand, they represented an amorphous ‘army’ to be shaped and directed by ‘commander’ Sukarno (or the actual army commander, Nasution); on the other hand, they formed a fractured field of rivals shaped by the game of politics of national elites. Yet, this picture obscures that – even in a political context in which they were marked as the ‘puppets’ of those in power – the students developed political
sensibilities of their own and exercised considerable political agency. This agency was rooted in historical memories of students as history-making beings – which Sukarno also repeatedly invoked – but it also developed new dimensions through the students’ unique experiences in this period, as they tested their capacities of playing with power in a context of increasingly dangerous power struggle. They developed a unique ‘feel for the game’ through these experiences, over which neither Sukarno, nor the army, nor the political parties had any control. Nevertheless, the rules of the game were still set by Sukarno. And in the latter half of the 1950s, just as students became deeply embroiled in the game of national politics, Sukarno and General Nasution set out to change the rules of the game.

Sukarno’s ‘Ongoing Revolution’

Four parties emerged as winners of the 1955 elections: the nationalist PNI, the modernist-Islamic Masyumi, the syncretic-Islamic NU, and the communist PKI. But since none won a majority the political bickering that had plagued the Republic from its inception continued. Frustrated by the impasse, Sukarno accused the political parties of destabilising the nation. In October 1956, he stated: ‘We are afflicted by the disease of parties which, alas, alas, makes us forever work against one another!’ – but he knew just the solution: ‘Let us bury them, bury them, bury them!’ (quoted in Feith and Castles 1970: 81, 83). In February 1957, he revealed his ideas for a new system of governance, called ‘Guided Democracy’, which would be based on the Javanese traditions of mutual cooperation (gotong royong) and consensus through collective deliberation (musyawarah mufakat), as opposed to what he considered to be liberal democracy’s culture of competition and conflict. True nationalists, so he reasoned, must not copy the democracy of the West.

Sukarno’s ideas shocked liberal democrats like Hatta (who resigned as vice-president in late 1956), but Sukarno found an ally in the army’s chief of staff, Nasution, who abhorred the parliament’s inaction towards regional rebellions, in particular the PRRI rebellion that was led by defecting army officers in Sumatra. In March 1957, after the fall of another cabinet, Nasution persuaded Sukarno to declare martial law. In November 1958, a few months after defeating the PRRI rebellion, Nasution proposed an expanded political role for the army, called the ‘middle way’, in order to safeguard national stability. Wary of the army’s growing power, Sukarno did not comply. But he did follow Nasution’s advice to dissolve the parliament and reinstate the 1945 Constitution that provided for extensive presidential powers. By presidential decree on 5 July 1959, Guided Democracy was born, and with it a new era of dangerous politics.

Sukarno declared a national course of ‘ongoing revolution’, based on the doctrine of Manipol (Political Manifesto) USDEK, an acronym for the 1945 Consti-
tution, Indonesian Socialism, Guided Democracy, Guided Economy, and Indonesian Identity. He also launched his vision for a government based on ‘Nasakom’, denoting a synthesis of the three principal aliran in Indonesian society, according to Sukarno – nationalism, religion, and communism (nasionalisme, agama, komunisme) – which in terms of political parties translated into PNI, NU, and PKI. (Masyumi and the socialist PSI were banned for alleged complicity in the PRRI rebellion.) This concept cast Sukarno in the role of balancer of opposing forces, a role in which he thrived, while also balancing the power of the army. Meanwhile, at the height of the Cold War, Sukarno’s foreign policy became more confrontational, turning against what he called nekolin or ‘neo-colonial and imperialist’ forces. This caused for strained relations with the United States, especially as Sukarno grew closer to communist countries. In 1962 he turned to Russia after the United States refused to supply arms for the ‘liberation’ of West Irian (which was still Dutch territory). In 1964, he turned to China for economic cooperation, telling Western donor countries, ‘Go to hell with your aid!’ He also launched a konfrontasi policy against the ‘nekolin’ puppet state’ of Malaysia, threatening war and using his sweeping oratorical skills to promote anti-Western sentiments.

Yet, for all his ‘efforts to focus hostility on external foes, most Indonesians saw their bitterest enemies within Indonesia itself’ (Cribb and Brown 1995: 95). The rapid rise of PKI, which claimed three million members and sixteen million from ancillary organisations by 1965, and its forceful campaigns for land reforms and a people’s army, made its opponents among the army, Islamic groups, as well as liberals nervous. The issue of Sukarno’s succession further added to their concerns: he was appointed president for life in 1963, but was ageing, which fed into rumours that PKI was preparing to seize power soon and proclaim a communist state. Sukarno dismissed such rumours as ‘komunistofobia’, but the fear led many of PKI’s opponents to turn to the army for support. Thus, the political field came to be marked by an ‘ominous polarisation of political forces around two outstanding rivals for the succession – the PKI and the Army’ (Crouch 1988: 21).

Still, Sukarno persistently played up the impression of solid national unity in a manner reminiscent of the Javanese idea of Power. Facing threats to national unity, he engaged in a symbolic performance of concentrated Power, manifested in a revolutionary nation-building project that was concentrated in Jakarta. Besides ‘Great Leader of the Revolution’, Sukarno adopted two additional titles that shed some light on this performance of Power. First, as ‘extension of the tongue of the people’, he claimed to unite the nation within his own body as the people’s central mouthpiece, as attested in dramatic speeches staged in front of massive crowds, in which he articulated the people’s inner aspirations. ‘That is why’, he claimed, ‘every time I prepare a Seventeenth of August address … I become like
a person possessed’ (quoted in Siegel 1998: 24). Mass politics was turned into a sign of power rather than a means to attain it. Second, as ‘architect of the nation’ (he held a degree in architecture and intensely involved himself in architectural projects), Sukarno remodelled Jakarta by filling its central spaces with ‘Powerful’ modern buildings – sprawling from the grand Hotel Indonesia roundabout in the city centre and linked together by the Thamrin–Sudirman thoroughfare – as well as statues and monuments referring to a precolonial golden age, at the centre of which he ordered construction of the national monument, Monumen Nasional (Monas): a 132-metre tall column topped with a golden flame symbolising an illuminating beacon, as a landmark of progress under his visionary leadership.4

Turned into a spectacle of Power, Jakarta’s central spaces also became a source of Power, and thereby a potential symbolic resource for future student movements. Indeed, the future 1966 student movement derived much of its symbolic force from Sukarno’s politics of concentrating Power. Drawing not only upon symbolic spaces and the whole mass of the Indonesian people as a source of Power, Sukarno also drew upon youth, especially the ‘army of students’. His doing so infused the students with Power. But Sukarno was not the only one attempting to tap into student power: all political players made efforts to do so. To a certain extent, the power struggles of Guided Democracy thus came to a head in the contests to capitalise on student power. That students would be the subject of such power struggles was not directly evident, since the student identity remained enveloped by the dense discourse of unity. But this discourse of unity, and its related promise of power, spurred Sukarno and the army to want to incorporate it in their own sphere of influence. Before this power could be tapped, though, it needed to be properly aligned with Guided Democracy. For that purpose an elaborate system of political socialisation was established.

Socialisation, Ceremony, and Mobilisation

Ever since the pergerakan schools of the 1920s, Indonesian schools had cultivated national loyalty through various patriotic rituals, such as honouring the flag and singing patriotic songs. More systematic political socialisation was introduced in the education system only in 1961. While socialisation programs in elementary and secondary schools fell under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Culture, university students were distinctly targeted when Sukarno instructed the ‘Manipolisation’ of all universities, referring to the Manipol-USDEK ideology of Guided Democracy. To oversee that process, a Ministry of Higher Education and Sciences was established, headed by the army officer Syarif Thayeb. He had been nominated by Nasution, who also caused two professors with army backgrounds to be appointed as rectors at two key universities, UI in Jakarta and ITB (formerly
the Academy of Technology) in Bandung. Seemingly ignoring the army’s growing influence in the educational sphere, Sukarno proceeded with his mission of cultivating student loyalty, touring campuses across the country to reiterate that universities must not be ivory towers but put their energies to revolutionary uses. As he stated in a speech at UI in February 1963: ‘I am a person who knows that education is just a tool. Education in and of itself, in and of itself, for me there is little use for it, brothers. Education only has value as it is related to human efforts to achieve something’ (quoted in Douglas 1971: 59). This ‘something’ was his revolution; thus, as a tool of revolution, education served to properly indoctrinate students in that direction.

While younger pupils were taught the ideology through songs like ‘United in Nasakom, Nasakom My Soul’, high-school students had to study new civics textbooks, and university students were presented an 850-page volume entitled *Seven Basic Indoctrination Materials*, published in 1963 by the Committee for the Cultivation of the Revolutionary Spirit. Virtually all of Sukarno’s political texts were included in the curriculum, and each semester the students had to pass a Manipol-USDEK course (Douglas 1971: 70–73). Yet, the indoctrination program was far from effective, as the ideology of Guided Democracy was not a clear-cut model that could be transmitted straightforwardly. The program was ‘a hodgepodge of Koranic dictums, extracts form Marx and Dewey, the speeches of Sukarno, all the various current ideological slogans and a host of speculations which the majority of students find dull or irritating’, reflecting the ‘amorphousness’ of the ideology that made it ‘virtually useless for purposes of indoctrination’ (Fisher 1965: 110). There was simply ‘too much to indoctrinate’, and Sukarno’s prolific invention of ideological slogans and acronyms did not make the teachers’ task easier (Douglas 1971: 68). Hence, teachers stuck to the textbook and students digested the material in the same form as it was presented to them: political slogans.

But formal education was not the only means to incorporate students into the political culture. In fact, Sukarno and Nasution attached more value to bodily and mental participation. For Sukarno, his political rallies were the means to achieve this. For the army, it was military ceremony. In July 1957, a Youth–Army Cooperation Body was formed, involving the youth branches of political parties, with a council representing 125 youth organisations. The founding ceremony was held at the Kalibata Heroes Burial Site, the final resting place of national heroes, where youth leaders signed a contract for the ‘Five Loyalties of the Youth of the Republic of Indonesia’. This set forth, first, the martial values of *ksatrya* (knightliness) and the Guided Democracy values of *musyawarah* (collective deliberation); second, the 1928 Youth Pledge; third, the ideals of the Proclamation of Independence; fourth, the role of youth as vanguards of national unity; and fifth, the youth’s
‘willingness to sacrifice for the glory of the Indonesian State and Nation’ (Martha et al. 1984: 243). It was a clear reminder of the national duty of youth, yet here their loyalty to the values enshrined in the Youth Pledge and the Proclamation of Independence was tied to the martial values of the army and the Guided Democracy values of the state. Furthermore, in the fifth ‘loyalty’, the state comes before the nation.

The campus-based student regiments were a more tangible manifestation of ‘student-army cooperation’. The first was created around the birth of Guided Democracy in mid-1959 in Bandung, where a first batch of students received military training from the Siliwangi Unit, Nasution’s old unit. For Nasution as well as Sukarno, military drill and ceremony served to ‘return the youth to the right track’ (as the Guided Democracy discourse went) of defending the unitary nation-state, and thereby to draw them away from party influence. A critical momentum in this effort was the campaign to annex West Irian from the Dutch, launched in 1961 with the slogan ‘Trikora’, an acronym for the ‘people’s three commands’ for the liberation of West Irian. Student regiments were set up at all of the state universities, providing military training to prepare students for battle. This was mainly symbolic, as few students were deployed to West Irian, but as a symbol of mass mobilisation the campaign provided just the sweeping rally point for the ‘army of students’ that Sukarno had been looking for. In 1962, the otherwise rivalling student federation PPMI (representing the partisan national student organisations) and student council MMI (representing the nonpartisan student councils) jointly organised the International Student Solidarity Meeting on West Irian, where student delegates from all continents declared their ‘moral support for the struggle of Indonesian students to liberate West Irian’ (Martha et al. 1984: 263). Thus, the campaign was framed not as a military operation, which led to the annexation of West Irian in May 1963, but as part of the ongoing narrative of student struggle. Recognising the mobilising power of this narrative, Sukarno made sure to incorporate it into the political culture he sought to cultivate.

**Sukarno’s Narrative of the ‘Spirit of Youth’**

The official narrative began to take form in 1948, when Boedi Oetomo’s anniversary became a national holiday. This had happened before, ten years earlier, as a colonial effort to pacify nationalism, but now the anniversary was reclaimed for the Indonesian Republic by naming it ‘National Awakening Day’: the first milestone in the history of national struggle. The second milestone, the declaration of the Youth Pledge, had also met specific political needs, leading to the declaration of its anniversary as a national holiday in 1955, right after the politically divisive elections. As Foulcher (2000: 388–389) notes, the Youth Pledge was thus born
not in 1928 but, as an iconic moment, in 1955, in the sense that it was ‘reconfigured in a way that deems it to be a founding moment of nation and national identity’, and ‘adjusted to the form [that serves] the interests of a unitary state ideology’. Ironically, it was the Youth Pledge’s creator, now Culture Minister Yamin, who did most of the ‘adjusting’. In a text entitled ‘The Oath of Greater Indonesia’ (1955), he presented the Youth Pledge as a direct descendant of the Srivijaya and Majapahit empires (though at the 1928 Youth Congress he had lamented a ‘lack of will to unity’ in those empires). Linking the pledge to a glorious precolonial past lent an aura of authenticity to the national struggle for unity started by youth, making it intrinsically part of Indonesian culture.

Once reclaimed for the unitary nation-state, Sukarno began using the Youth Pledge as an ideological weapon against his opponents, speaking of the ‘betrayal’ of those who ‘sinned’ against it by putting national unity in danger. As the PKI’s newspaper reported in 1955, ‘The President states that the celebration of 28 October is a freshing up, a revitalisation of the spirit of unity, which is recently being disturbed’, thus ‘it is about time to commemorate the Youth Pledge, not just each year, but each day, each hour, each minute, and each second’ (Foulcher 2000: 389). The Youth Pledge was also used in Sukarno’s campaigns to ‘liberate’ West Irian, ‘crush’ Malaysia, and prevail in other episodes in his ongoing revolution, which he indeed presented as the ongoing struggle of youth.

The manner in which he infused the Youth Pledge with his ideology, and then used it to appeal directly to students, is manifested most clearly in his address at the pledge’s thirty-fourth anniversary in 1962. This address is worth discussing at length, as it not only affirmed the notion of youth as a force to reckon with, but also introduced a set of concepts around the historical position and duty of youth that have since profoundly shaped student political consciousness. Before a boisterous audience of tens of thousands of students gathered at the Sports Palace, Sukarno began his speech by urging them not to calm down, as an organiser had just told them to do, for ‘youth who are not spirited are better carried to their graves’ (quoted in Sumohadiwidjojo and Mas 1988: 134). He then exalted the spirit and power of youth:

I am convinced that the fate of our country depends on youth, young men and women. As I stand here and see your faces, your radiant eyes, I don’t see the ray of human eyes, I see eternal stars, yes, the eternal star of Indonesia, the star of Indonesia’s future. … In recent years I have pointed to the disease of komunisto-fobia. … Now I add to this, hey Indonesian elders, don’t suffer from youth phobia. Many elders in Indonesia suffer from the disease of youth phobia; they fear the youth, fear the dynamic of youth, fear the spirit of youth, fear the dialectics of youth, fear the influence of youth. That is why, Brothers and Sisters, corruptors must know that the eyes of youth are staring at
them. … I say, ‘Give me one thousand, ten thousand, one hundred thousand, one million older people to move the Mountain Semeru from here to there. But give me one thousand youth, one hundred youth, no, ten youth, but ten youth whose hearts are aflame, and with these ten youth I can make the whole world tremble. … Well, what we have here are not ten youth, but ten million youth. Don’t tell me that with ten million youth we can’t build our nation-state? Don’t tell me that with ten million youth we can’t build our society? Don’t tell me that with ten million youth we can’t achieve the three frames of the Indonesian revolution [see below]? … If ten youth enable me to make the world tremble, ten million Indonesian youth, who will become eleven million, fifteen million, twenty million and twenty-five million, will surely enable me to build an entirely new world. A new world, and isn’t that your destiny, hey young people, to build a new world, just as we have proclaimed our independence? (Quoted in Sumohadiwidjojo and Mas 1988: 134–135)

Note that it is not the youth who ‘make the world tremble’ – they enable Sukarno to do so. It is his lack of ‘youth phobia’ that allows him to see ‘the eternal star’ of Indonesia’s future in their eyes, and to recognise their potential to build the nation-state and an entirely new world. His apparent lack of youth phobia, in contrast to other political ‘elders’, also signifies Sukarno’s own ‘eternal youth’; a quality that he liked to play up in his persona, presenting himself as the rare kind of leader who had kept his youthful charm and bravado.5 According to the image he painted, then, the revolutionary spirit of youth was embodied within himself, and it could only fulfil its potential under his personal leadership. In his role as the ‘extension of the tongue of the people’, he further reminded the students that the struggle of youth was built on the sacrifice of the people:

It is fitting for you to celebrate the Youth Pledge’s thirty-fourth anniversary full of spirit. But, hey youth, as I always say, ‘Don’t be over het paard getild’ [Dutch]. It means, don’t be conceited; don’t think that you alone are the creators of Indonesia’s history. Indonesian history is created by the Indonesian people from Sabang to Merauke6… the Indonesian people who suffered, the Indonesian people who were jailed, the Indonesian people who were hung by the Dutch, the Indonesian people who burnt down their houses because they didn’t want to see them occupied by Dutch soldiers, the Indonesian people who went through all the bitterness and sacrifice. The Indonesian people, who carried on the struggle for decades, they are the authors of Indonesian history. … That is why I give a slogan to all the Indonesian people, especially to the youth; that slogan is Ampera, the Message of the People’s Suffering. We all carry that message [which consists] of the three frames [of the revolution]: a Free Indonesia, the Unitary State of the Indonesian Republic [Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia, NKRI] from Sabang to Merauke, and a just and prosperous society without … exploitation de l’homme par l’homme, solidarity among all the peoples [of the world]; that is what the people struggle for. That is the message to you, hey youth, so that you continue the struggle in its course. (Quoted in Sumohadiwidjojo and Mas 1988: 136–137)
Sukarno further reminded his young audience that the achievements of any young generation follow from those of the preceding ones, because ‘history is one continuous stream’, although certain events in this ‘chain of events’ deserve a special salute:

Hey youth, don’t think that the Youth Pledge of 28 October 1928 stands on its own, that you … are its sole maker. … No! No! The Youth Pledge is just one spark in the course of history of the Indonesian nation that started decades earlier and that remains unfinished today. … One chain of events… it is all one stream. The Youth Pledge is just one point in that one long stream. Don’t think that you were the first to express that Indonesian unity is the absolute condition to achieve victory. Oh, no, remember, before you there was E.F.E. Douwes Dekker … with his slogan: Indiërs unite… Before you PNI already stated: the Unity of Indonesia is the absolute condition to achieve a Free Indonesia! Yet, you did render a service; you worked harder to congeal this reality, to firmly state the conviction that the absolute condition to achieve freedom … the absolute condition for nation building, is unity and unison. That is the absolute condition that was hammered out by the youth on 28 October 1928. And for this the Indonesian people should take their hats off and bring an ere-saluut, a salute of honour to the Indonesian young generation. (Quoted in Sumohadiwidjojo and Mas 1988: 138–139)

In this period, Sukarno often spoke of those young generations that deserved a salute of honour: the great Angkatan. In his definition these were, first, the ‘Pioneer Generation’, covering the period from Boedi Oetomo’s founding in 1908 to the 1926 PKI revolt; second, the ‘Promulgating Generation’, spearheaded by Sukarno himself and Hatta, who paved the way for the Youth Pledge; and, third, the ‘Breakthrough Generation’ of brave pemuda, who in 1945 started the revolution. (Sukarno omitted how pemuda broke through the impasse: by kidnapping a hesitant Sukarno and Hatta.) Different from the New Order version, in which the Angkatan are designated by a specific year (Angkatan 28, etcetera), in Sukarno’s version their struggles are one and ongoing, coalescing into one long stream of struggle that flows on to the present generation. That is why he could address his young audience – born long after 1928 – as if they embodied the Youth Pledge of 1928, reminding them that ‘you, hey youth, are not its sole makers’. For Sukarno, there were no sole history makers, for the ongoing struggle was part of a long history that ultimately fell back on the people. Each historical milestone was not the making of any or all Angkatan, but an expression of the Message of the People’s Suffering, a message for the youth to carry close to their hearts.

However, although Sukarno gave his exact interpretation of this message – the ‘three frames of the revolution’ – his narrative had the unintended implication of transcending the politics of Guided Democracy and his own person and position. For if the youth should not be conceited about their past and present role in histo-
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ry, then neither should Sukarno. What’s more, if Sukarno could claim the role of interpreter and spokesperson of the people on the grounds of his personal qualities as Great Leader of the Revolution – of which his quality of ‘eternal youth’ was most pronounced – then those more ‘revolutionary’ and surely more youthful than him might qualify for this role just as well. Thus, Sukarno’s Message of the People’s Suffering could also be used against him, once its ‘carriers’, the youth, could expose him to be ‘betraying’ this message through policies that exacerbated the people’s suffering. In the end, Sukarno’s political message to students made a great impression, but not only on those who supported him, but also on those who would soon rise up against him as the ‘true carriers of Ampera’. The impact of Sukarno’s narrative untied it from its narrator, and ultimately backfired. This was because he ignored the fact that the students were not a blank paper on which to write narratives to his liking. They had their own political experiences.

**Student Politics and Playing with Power**

The trend of student organisations affiliating with political parties, which started in 1947 with the founding of the Islamic Student Association, HMI (affiliated to Masyumi), received new impetus around the 1955 elections, and soon each party had an apparent student affiliate. The largest were the Indonesian National Student Movement (GMNI, 1954), affiliated to PNI; the Indonesian Student Movement Concentration (CGMI, 1956), affiliated to PKI; the Indonesian Socialist Student Movement (Gemsos, 1957), affiliated to PSI; and the Indonesian Islamic Student Association (PMII, 1960), affiliated to NU. Hence, student politics developed into a ‘microcosm’ of the Republic (as students still call it), in which the distribution of power was undecided, so that the power struggles in the ‘adult’ political arena had a direct bearing on the political life of students. Yet, student politics were not merely a reflection of the partisan politics of the elites. They had their own dynamics and their own impact on national politics. In fact, as many political parties were being torn apart by internal rivalry, marginalised, banned, or otherwise ‘buried’, student politics became all the more prominent as the power struggles shifted to the student arena. In the process, these power struggles came to be redefined according to the narrative tropes of student struggle.

The prevailing notion among many observers (e.g., Douglas 1970; Willner 1966) that student politics in this period amounted to little more than onderbouw functions – such as issuing statements that echoed the stances of the ‘parent’ parties, or supplying the ‘masses’ for their political rallies – ignores the historical context of party affiliation. In the context of Guided Democracy, it was mainly due to the Nasakom policy, which required all organisations to represent one of the three aliran identified by Sukarno: nationalism, religion, or communism. This
presented many student organisations with a dilemma, and the found solution was often a compromise. As CGMI chair Hardoyo recalls:

I was national chair from 1960–63, which were very difficult years, because during Guided Democracy, we had the policy of ‘Nasakomisation’. … So there had to be a communist student organisation, because there were nationalist students and different religious student groups. This presented a challenge for the CGMI. If CGMI did not call itself ‘Kom’ then the executive could not be represented on the national union of students. Finally we asked the PKI, ‘Can we declare ourselves “Kom”?’ [PKI chair] Aidit’s reply was, ‘How can you do that? Who is the “Kom” in CGMI? How do you get to be “Kom”?’ The CGMI executive explained to Aidit, ‘Bung Aidit, it’s like this. According to Bung Karno everyone should be taught Marxism. We want the PKI to teach us Marxism.’ So a compromise was reached in 1964, with the CGMI becoming ‘a communist and progressive non-communist student organisation’. (Quoted in Lucas 2010: 9)

Despite this required ideological affiliation to political parties, each student organisations still upheld the principle of autonomy, insisting they had no formal ties to any party and refusing to be directed by elite patrons. HMI, despite being affiliated with Masyumi, had the principle of autonomy written in its statutes and stressed that it was merely on the basis of ‘similar aspirations’ that it combined forces with other Islamic organisations (Karim 1997: 102). GMNI’s relationship to PNI further illustrates that political affiliation was a complex affair. At its 1954 founding congress, there was heated debate on two issues with a direct bearing on its political identity and agency. The first concerned its ideological basis: whether to adopt Sukarno’s concept of Marhaenism, a form of Marxism adapted to the plight of Indonesian rakyat, as was PNI’s ideological basis. The second concerned its relationship to PNI; whether to limit this to ideological links, or to become formal affiliates, which would grant GMNI full material and political support in return for compliance with the PNI program. In the end, GMNI opted to adopt Marhaenism and to reject the onderbouw role. As the chair stated, it was in their interest to maintain autonomy, since ‘GMNI can look much further into the future of its own development and growth’; hence, ‘we ask the gentlemen of PNI not to try to influence GMNI or its members in any improper way’, neither ‘to transfer current or future conflicts within PNI to GMNI’, but to ‘allow the GMNI’s young soul that is still pure and clean to find its own way in the struggle to realise its goals on the same ideological basis as PNI’ (quoted in Suhawi 2009: 89). This outcome was not what PNI had expected; the party promptly cut its financial support for the congress from Rp 100,000 to Rp 25,000.

To GMNI, this negative gesture merely boosted its sense of autonomy. The students took pride in their choice, and did not fail to point out that it was the only
organisation of its kind progressive enough to go without party patronage, in contrast, so they claimed, to their rival, HMI, whom they derided as Masyumi’s pawns. In turn, HMI claimed to be the more autonomous one compared to its enemy, CGMI, whom they saw as PKI’s pawns. Thus, the issue of autonomy versus patronage became a key theme in the war of representation among student rivals. In that context, the question who could rightfully claim to be most autonomous was beside the point. More significant was that they all still upheld and passionately defended the principle of student political autonomy, indicating the extent to which they internalised the idea that they formed a distinctive category of political actors, defined by their ‘young soul, still pure and clean’. Rejecting the onderbouw role was indeed the strategic choice – even a ‘prophetic’ one, as the GMNI chair implied in stating their capacity to ‘look much further into the future’ – considering that political parties were at the mercy of volatile conditions, and perhaps anticipating that political parties would soon lose much of their power.

But in volatile conditions, other political choices that seemed to be wise at the time proved to be miscalculations in the long run. GMNI’s choice of allies indicated that it played for high stakes, which made their playing with power all the more dangerous. This was a risk they were willing to take – and indeed they had no choice but to take it, as it spoke to their collective sense of self as revolutionaries. While refusing to be PNI onderbouw, GMNI tied itself all the more loyally to Sukarno, whom the students idolised as the personification of the progressive-revolutionary nationalist they aspired and imagined themselves to be. Likewise, CGMI’s first and foremost identification was with Sukarno, rather than PKI. Both GMNI and CGMI thus passionately played the role of true defenders of Sukarno’s vision, which brought them closer together, but also saw them go head to head with Sukarno’s contenders, especially the army. This would have catastrophic consequences for both student organisations. Initially, though, they appeared to have the upper hand.

In 1964, GMNI and CGMI launched an attack against a coalition called Supporters of Sukarnoism – involving the army’s party, IPKI; the small communist party, Murba; and the non-communist labour union, SOKSI – which claimed to protect Sukarno’s ideology against unspecified corrupting influences around him, implicitly referring to PKI. GMNI and CGMI accused the coalition of being part of a CIA conspiracy to subvert Sukarno, and they persuaded Sukarno to dissolve Murba and SOKSI; the army’s party, obviously, could not be dissolved. During this affair GMNI was frustrated by the slow response of PNI, which was internally divided between a moderate leadership and radical challengers. For GMNI, then, the next task was to help ‘revolutionise’ PNI. Thus, though it had asked PNI ‘not to influence GMNI or its members in any improper way’, GMNI now did all it could to influence PNI members and exploit the party’s internal conflict to en-
sure that like-minded radicals would win the PNI leadership. The mission succeeded, and the students took pride in helping to radicalise the country’s biggest political party.

As the story of GMNI illustrates, the paradoxical dualism of student political identity under Guided Democracy – as Sukarno’s revolutionary ‘student army’ and a fractured body of partisan rivals – led students to transcend both representations and to set their own agendas. As the designated carriers of the Message of the People’s Suffering, or ‘Ampera’, they felt they could ‘look much further into the future’ than any of their elite patrons, even Sukarno, whom the students felt compelled to offer their political advice. In the process, their self-image as revolutionary nationalists also came to transcend the discourse of Ampera, or that of an Angkatan that deserved a national ere-salut. Different from Sukarno’s generation, and the succeeding generation of pemuda, the students who were politically raised under Guided Democracy were not looking to act as spokespersons for the people, nor were they after symbolic recognition. They were too caught up in their own play with power to concern themselves with such matters. The higher the stakes in this game, the more they were willing to take risks.

**Competition and Intimidation**

While student politics thus came to shape and reflect national power struggles, contributing to national political dynamics as much as being affected by them, the students also fought their own battles amongst themselves, using the national student federation PPMI and the national student council MMI as battlegrounds. The rivalry was fiercest between the Islamic students of HMI and the radical left-wing students of GMNI and CGMI. HMI was especially resentful about the rapid rise of CGMI, though in terms of influence GMNI posed the bigger challenge. At the 1961 PPMI Congress, GMNI won most of the leadership positions hitherto held by HMI. The 1964 MMI Congress saw another victory for GMNI, which led to charges of fraud from HMI. The battle continued at the student council elections at each university. In Jakarta, GMNI won the chair position of the UI Student Council. In Bandung, the chair position of the ITB Student Council was retained by a HMI member, who ‘barely stood his ground amidst storms of attacks under the Nasakom slogan’ (Martha et al. 1984: 272). GMNI’s growing influence within key student representative bodies meant that Sukarno’s mission to win over the ‘army of students’ for Guided Democracy was bearing fruit, though less as a result of the formal socialisation than owing to the efforts and convictions of the students themselves.

While HMI could still claim the largest numbers with some 150,000 members in 1965 (Douglas 1970: 183n), GMNI was catching up and growing rapidly, from
around 8,000 members in 1958 to 105,000 in 1965, or more than 38 percent of all Indonesian students (Suhawi 2009: 92). CGMI also experienced rapid growth, from 7,000 members in 1960 to 17,000 in 1963 (Hindley 1964: 196). It was still the smallest of the three, but while HMI had lost its political ally after Masyumi was banned, and GMNI was affiliated to a divided party and deriving support mainly from Sukarno, CGMI was backed by the growing PKI giant. Although its affiliation with PKI was a matter of circumstance rather than choice, it provided CGMI sufficient clout to challenge HMI. This was still risky, as HMI enjoyed the support of Islamic groups and the army. The radicalisation of student representative bodies under GMNI influence did not go by unnoticed to the army, and it is likely that the army provided HMI with additional moral, if not material, support to stay ahead of the radical students. Little factual information is available on this, either then or now, but rumours must have abounded about HMI’s powerful patrons. Hence, rather than a frontal attack, HMI’s rivals embarked on a war of representation.7

This started as rumours circulated through anonymous leaflets, with anti-HMI slogans such as ‘HMI is pro-Malaysia!’ and ‘HMI is anti-Bung Karno!’ Soon, the charges became more serious, accusing HMI of complicity in the PRRI rebellion as an agent of the CIA, and in a 1957 assassination attempt on Sukarno that was attributed to the Darul Islam movement. Then the calls came to ban HMI. In May 1964, the dean of the Law Faculty at Brawijaya University in Surabaya, a radical PNI member, was the first to heed the call, banning HMI from his faculty. That same month, GMNI and CGMI pushed for HMI’s expulsion from PPMI; the proposal was outvoted, but HMI was expelled from several local PPMI branches. In October, HMI was fully expelled from PPMI, the federation it once founded.

Sukarno, too, began to reproach HMI for what he called its ‘reactionary’ and ‘contra-revolutionary’ attitude, alluding to secret ties with the CIA. HMI would have been disbanded, if it were not for the intervention of the Religious Affairs Minister, who threatened to resign. Instead, the HMI leaders were forced to swear allegiance to Sukarno and the state ideology of Pancasila, and to accept guidance in order to become ‘more revolutionary’ (Sulastomo 2008: 109). But by then, the HMI controversy had become a national issue that could no longer be contained. The climax came on 29 September 1965 at the CGMI Congress, where PKI chair Aidit declared a ‘war’ on HMI, urging CGMI ‘to think bravely and act bravely: act, act, act!’; he added that if they failed to ‘crush HMI’ they better start wearing sarongs (Martha et al. 1984: 283). This met with loud applause, all broadcast on television. According to Martha (1984: 283), ‘The communist students were like possessed in demanding HMI’s immediate disbanding, since they saw HMI as the “DI [Darul Islam]” or the devil of university’. Yet, the CGMI students were also apprehensive about the growing tensions, as well as about ‘rumours [that] began
to spread saying that the CGMI had become a “communist organisation” and all sorts of things’, as then CGMI chair Hardoyo put it (quoted in Lukas 2010: 7).

Many felt that this psychological warfare served both to intimidate opponents and to boost a spirit of battle among pro-PKI students. A sense of ‘us or them’ was growing on both sides, and the attacked side leapt to the defence. In September 1965, the youth branches of Islamic parties and organisations began staging pro-HMI rallies, with slogans such as ‘Step over our dead bodies before crushing HMI’ (Sulastomo 2008: 66). Islamic groups were not the only ones feeling the threat. There were also plans to disband local student organisations, which were marked as ‘trivial’ to Sukarno’s revolution since they could not be fitted into the mould of Nasakom. In response, in June 1965 they merged into a national Joint Secretariat of Local Student Organisations, or Somal, which was affiliated to the Joint Secretariat of Functional Groups, or Sekber Golkar, an army-backed organisation founded in 1964 to join anti-communist groups that later evolved into the New Order ruling party. Indeed, the army felt threatened, too. As army commander Ahmad Yani stated in a meeting with HMI leaders, ‘To be honest, of course I keep a close eye on the HMI situation. If today HMI and SOKSI are subverted and crushed by PKI, it is not unlikely that tomorrow or the day after it will subvert the army’ (quoted in Sulastomo 2008: 109).

By September 1965, then, the rivalry between the HMI camp and the GMNI-CMNI camp was reaching a climax, and it was difficult to tell whether it spurred or was spurred by political rivalries among national elites. Escalation appeared to be imminent. On either side there was the realisation that this was no longer the regular game of politics; as the pro-HMI banner illustrates, it felt like a matter of life and death. The sense of threat further hardened the respective political positions. At this point, the essential student identity – with its aura of autonomy and unity – might appear to have lost all its relevance. Yet, in a sense it still played a crucial role in student politics, as both sides accused the other of betraying that very identity. That is why the symbolic battles, in the form of rumours and slander to and fro, had such a deep emotional as well as political impact. The question was not only who could represent Indonesian students in their role of ‘determining national history’, but also in the very definition of what it meant to be ‘student’. For that reason, the everyday atmosphere on campus was no less significant than the battles fought out in formal arenas.

**Walking on Hot Coals**

The sense of threat was indeed manifest in the deteriorating everyday atmosphere on campuses, which affected all students, not just the politically active. Sukarno’s ‘Manipolisation’ of the university generated an atmosphere of censorship that
impinged more directly on students’ sense of freedom than did formal indoctrination. Students outside GMNI and CGMI felt that critical thinking was at risk as universities were being ‘terrorised’ with the slogan ‘Nasakom first, then scientists’, which meant that there could be no other source of truth than Sukarno, and that differing voices were silenced. Sukarno fulminated against lecturers whose ‘contra-revolutionary’ teaching corrupted young minds, and warned of ‘mental subversion’ if Indonesians continued to copy ‘Western textbook thinking’. Western ‘capitalist’ books were eventually banned at state universities (Martha et al. 1984: 269–270).\(^9\) And following a bitter struggle between writers of the PKI-affiliated Institute for the People’s Culture (Lekra) and liberal writers joined under their Cultural Manifesto, which was banned in 1964, the works of the latter group were also banned. Book burnings on campus became a familiar sight.

In addition, the student press – which seemed to be the last bastion of genuine student autonomy – was increasingly stifled. The Indonesian Student Press Union was branded a ‘Masyumi-PSI agent’ for refusing to include the Manipol-USDEK ideology in its statutes, and affiliated student journals were banned. Last, but not least, students were facing attacks on their entertainment and lifestyle. Sukarno’s mission to protect Indonesian culture from corrupting Western influences led to a prohibition of Hollywood movies and rock-and-roll and other Western popular music, symbolically enforced by public burnings of Elvis Presley records as well as disciplining of youth sporting a ‘Beatles look’, who were publicly shamed by groups of pro-Sukarno students roaming the campus armed with scissors to cut their hair. Thus, from the books they read, to the movies they watched and the music they listened to, to their outfits and hairstyles, students had to be constantly on their guard for making a wrong impression that contravened Manipol-USDEK dictates. As UI student and Somal activist Yozar Anwar put it, ‘the campus community lived on hot coals’ (in Martha et al. 1984: 270).

But students who felt cornered did not sit still. Anwar and his comrades, for example, were preparing to resist their enemy by studying it intensely, collecting all available material on PKI and communism in general, and discussing strategic responses in study groups set up for that purpose (Anwar 1982: 14). Meanwhile, many socialist student activists from Gemsos, which was affiliated to the banned PSI, joined the underground Reform Movement sponsored by former PSI chair and Trade Minister Djojohadikusumo, who had been exiled. One of them was the soon to be famous Soe Hok Gie. As noted in one of his biographies, the work of this underground movement was in part an uphill battle against fear:

[Reform Movement] youth, including Hok Gie, struggled to awaken the people from their apathetic slumber. Since early 1965 Hok Gie diligently slipped pamphlets under the doors of people’s houses. These became the subject of whispered talk in society.
Nobody dared to openly express that they agreed with it, let alone criticise the government for fear of being labelled anti-revolutionary and getting arrested. Many were so scared that they considered the … pamphlets an incursion on their privacy. They feared that if the state apparatus would find them in their homes, they would be arrested. Even some of his friends distanced themselves from Hok Gie out of fear. (Badil et al. 2009: 201)

Fear gripped university and society, since it was unimaginable that, soon, the tables would be turned so dramatically. Once that occurred, it did so violently. As one HMI-activist later put it: ‘Everyone who felt hurt by the behaviour of the leftists and had hidden their feelings in their hearts for years, now exploded like a volcano’ (Saidi 1989: 86). The image of a ‘volcano eruption’ is not uncommon in accounts of the events that followed, as if the events concerned a natural disaster, triggered by a sudden release of pent-up emotions. In a different interpretation, McVey (1979: 20) explains the subsequent rise of the anti-PKI student movement as the combined result of radical youth attitudes with a conservative middle-class outlook, producing a ‘virulent anti-communism’. But both accounts fail to appreciate the significance of the students’ prior formative experience of playing dangerous politics on either side of the rivalry, which did much to prepare them for the serious battles to come.

The dramatic politics of Guided Democracy had a defining impact on student political identity and agency. Both formal socialisation and the students’ subjective experiences in the national and student political arenas shaped a profoundly politicised self that led them to act in ways consistent with their narrated national duty as history-making beings. On both sides of the rivalry, this sense of self was infused with Sukarno’s rhetoric of students as the revolutionary vanguard – as the carriers of Ampera, or the Message of the People’s Suffering – although based on their own political experiences the students transcended the socialisation purposes of this message. In this context, they acquired an ambivalent position and attitude within and vis-à-vis the political culture of Guided Democracy, simultaneously as Sukarno’s united army of students and as bitter political rivals. By acting on these experiences from their own sense of self, they developed a strategic feel for the game of playing with power, in a manner that was uniquely theirs, rather than a reflection of elite politics. Rather than an unforeseen eruption of virulent, pent-up emotions, then, it was this feel for the game that informed their moves as students entered a completely new arena of battle and acquired a new sense of historicity as the first mass student movement in Indonesia, as the new Angkatan.
‘A Jacket Drenched in Blood’:
The 1966 Student Movement

Between History and Narration

By mid-1965 Indonesia was plagued by multiple crises. Besides the political crisis, Sukarno’s policies had drained the state’s funds, plunging the country into a deep economic recession. In this context of rising tensions, a coup was attempted on the night of 30 September, in which six army generals and one officer were abducted and murdered; Nasution narrowly escaped. The insurgents, led by Colonel Untung, the chief of the Cakrabirawa presidential bodyguards, were quickly defeated by the Strategic Reserves (Kostrad) commander, Suharto. He promptly accused PKI of plotting the coup, which he named the ‘30 September Movement of PKI’ (Gerakan 30 September/PKI), in short ‘Gestapu/PKI’ (suggestive of the Nazi Gestapo) or ‘G30S/PKI’. To convince the public of PKI’s guilt, the army launched a black propaganda campaign, filling the media with stories and images that exposed the ‘evils’ of PKI, including a photo of the murdered generals’ mutilated bodies, with details of the vicious torture they suffered, and the story that death lists had been discovered and thousands of burial holes across the country meant for PKI’s rivals. Such stories ‘promoted the idea of “kill” or be “killed”’ (Goodfellow 1995: 3), thus, ‘communists were marked for extermination’ (1995: 5). In the following months an estimated 500,000 to 1,000,000 people suspected of PKI affiliation were killed, including Aidit and other PKI-leaders, mostly at the hands of Islamic youth militia and local gangsters in collaboration with the army (Cribb 1990). Tens of thousands were imprisoned without trial.

Sukarno failed to respond to the events in a resolute manner, claiming he was working quietly on a political solution. For its part, the army, weakened by the loss of top generals (Nasution, who lost a daughter in the abduction attempt, temporarily retreated), was in no position to make political moves by itself. It needed the support and moral legitimacy of a ‘partner’ that seemed to be untainted by the power struggles of the era. Students served as just that partner. Regardless of their entanglement in political battles, they were still associated with the narrative of autonomy, unity, and national struggle, as had also been cultivated during Guided Democracy. In the following months, as the student-army ‘partnership’ led to the
rise and dramatic performance of Indonesia’s first mass-based student movement – called KAMI (Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Indonesia), or the Indonesian Student Action Front – the narrative of student struggle was reproduced and transformed into the grand narrative of the Angkatan 66.

The widespread acceptance of this narrative has since obscured the political processes at work and the lived experiences of the students involved. Due to its focus on the straight road to ‘victory’ – namely, ‘crushing G30S/PKI’ and paving the way for the New Order – and its smooth narrative arc and timeline of struggle – with the beginning set at the founding of KAMI on 25 October 1965, the mid-story embellishing the spectacle of student struggle and sacrifice, as symbolised by a student’s jacket drenched in blood, and ‘The End’ set at Suharto’s winning of executive power on 11 March 1966 – the myth of the Angkatan 66 omits what the student movement was in fact about: the symbolic significance of their tactics of struggle, the fundamentally anti-authoritarian discourse and beliefs they held to, the reflexive foundation of their spirit of struggle, and the struggle for historicity that they were engaged in, as part of a world-beat of ‘young radicals’ striving for freedom and justice. The myth turned them into national heroes, but in the end they became heroes in vain, whose subjective views and experiences had no place in the future history textbooks of the New Order.

But there was one account of the 1966 student movement in which the myth and the lived experience coalesced. This was the diary of KAMI activist Yozar Anwar, published in 1980 as Angkatan 66: A Student Diary. In this chapter I draw extensively on this diary to portray some of the experience of student struggle in 1966 Jakarta, and how it was shaped by a keen awareness of history and historicity. Anwar notes that he had kept a diary since high school to reflect on the knowledge acquired from books and personal interactions rather than formal education. And he describes how reading the Diary of Anne Frank, Becke’s Student’s Diary of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, and other historical diaries inspired him to keep a diary of KAMI, demonstrating his awareness of KAMI’s historical significance. In the preface, he recalls how he wrote the diary amidst action, in the little free time he had, jotted down on loose papers, and that he only found time to turn these snippets into a narrative in May 1966; that is, after KAMI’s ‘victory’ on 11 March. Inevitably, this timeline coloured the plot he constructed; his last diary entry, ‘The End’, is dated 12 March, although KAMI’s struggle continued long after. Still, Anwar’s diary offers a valuable glimpse into the experience of student struggle, not only highlighting spirited times, but also depicting the doubts and fears that frequently struck the movement.

KAMI did not come into existence overnight. First, on 4 October, a broad coalition of anti-PKI organisations was formed, called Action Unit to Crush the
30 September Movement (KAP-Gestapu), which staged massive anti-PKI rallies in Jakarta and coordinated attacks on PKI buildings, under the army’s protective eye. On 18 October, anti-PKI students rallied at the UI campus in Central Jakarta (the old STOVIA/Medical Faculty building, a historic site for student struggle), calling on the Higher Education Minister, Thayeb, to ban the communist student organisation CGMI and expel all students ‘involved in Gestapu/PKI’. This turn from being threatened under Guided Democracy to doing the threatening reflected a boost of confidence among anti-PKI students, especially the Islamic student organisation HMI, who had almost been banned by Sukarno, and whom PKI had pledged to ‘crush’ just one day before the foiled coup. HMI called for an emergency congress of the national student federation PPMI, which was controlled by its rivals, the pro-Sukarno GMNI and CGMI. But Thayeb intervened, urging them to ‘postpone student politics’, since ‘the priority is to crush Gestapu/PKI’ (Martha 1984: 300). On 25 October the minister called a meeting of all student organisations (except for CGMI) to discuss a proper course of action. To appease GMNI Thayeb decided to sustain PPMI (although it soon collapsed), but he also created a new organisation: KAMI.

Thayeb defined KAMI’s goals as ‘to defend Pancasila, fight nekolim domination, and support the army in crushing Gestapu/PKI’ (Martha et al. 1984: 302). This linked KAMI to the state, the army, and also Guided Democracy, revealing, as Anwar (in Martha et al. 1984: 302) recalls, how far Thayeb stood from the students’ political sensibilities as had developed in the past years. The KAMI presidium appointed by Thayeb included only members of student organisations that were affiliated with legal political parties – thus excluding HMI – with a GMNI member appointed as chair. As Anwar (in Martha et al. 1984: 302) notes, Thayeb thus ‘held to the typical view of rulers who can only approach problems in terms of political party forces’, and ‘ignored the objective condition of student organisations themselves’. In the end, GMNI refused to join its rivals in KAMI, and the other organisations formed their own KAMI presidium, with members from HMI, the moderate Islamic PMII, the Catholic PMKRI, the Pancasila Students (Mapancas, affiliated to the army’s party), the Regional Student Union (IMADA), and the organisation of local student organisations SOMAL (of which Yozar Anwar was a member). This was still a heterogeneous coalition of groups with dissimilar political views and identities, but the differences were subsumed for the duration of KAMI’s soon-to-be ‘heroic student struggle’.

GMNI was thrown into limbo, and Sukarno’s indecision weakened its position. We may wonder what might have become of KAMI if GMNI had accepted its chair position. The student movement might have taken a very different turn; it might have collapsed before making history. Thus, rather than being an inevitable event, whether a spontaneous revolt erupting from virulent sentiments or a prod-
uct of army plotting, history was made through a series of impromptu decisions, including GMNI’s refusal to join and lead KAMI – a decision that was not based on instrumental considerations but on their political sense of self. Nor did KAMI immediately realise that they were engaged in making history, concerned as they were in the first months with making the student movement. In doing so they laid claim, ever more exclusively, on student movement identity. As GMNI was not part of, and indeed opposed to KAMI, it was excluded from this identity, though GMNI also mobilised en masse in the following months. There could be only one student movement, one Angkatan 66. And their claim to the movement was fixed not only through later official narration, but also by KAMI during this period of mobilisation.

The Spirited Rise of KAMI

Building on the member organisations’ established networks, KAMI experienced rapid growth. Branches opened at universities across the country, with the nerve centres located at the University of Indonesia (UI) in Jakarta and the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB). KAMI transcended the partisan identity of member organisations, attracting many students who had never been politically active, by taking up popular public causes linked to the economic crisis. With the devaluation of the rupiah and further price hikes announced in December, the economic crisis was a problem that concerned everyone. On 8 January 1966, KAMI students marched from the UI campus to the State Secretariat to meet Vice-Prime Minister (and Angkatan 45 figure) Chaerul Saleh, demanding that the price hikes be revoked. They left the meeting empty-handed, but the impressive march inspired KAMI to reconsider its strategy. They decided that the student movement’s struggle was twofold: ‘conceptual struggle’ and ‘street struggle’.

For this struggle KAMI conceived of a clever slogan, ‘Tritura’, an acronym for the ‘people’s three demands’ (tiga tuntutan rakyat): disband PKI, retool the cabinet, and lower the prices. The first demand was consistent with KAMI’s goal as defined by Thayeb, but the other two were the students’. Tritura thus transcended the ‘student-army partnership’ for which KAMI was created, linking them to larger narratives of national struggle. It invoked Sukarno’s slogan of ‘Trikora’, or the ‘people’s three commands’ for the liberation of West Irian, which in Tritura became the three demands for the liberation of the whole nation: liberation from PKI ‘terror’ and from the incapable cabinet and the economic hardships caused by its policies. Tritura also invoked Sukarno’s ‘three frames of revolution’, which he had presented as Ampera, the Message of the People’s Suffering, in his 1962 Youth Pledge Day speech. Carrying this message and continuing the national struggle, as Sukarno had urged students to do, was how KAMI presented itself.
The Tritura struggle was launched on 10 January 1966, which KAMI dubbed ‘Student Awakening Day’. Just as National Awakening Day commemorated the birth of the nationalist movement, for KAMI this day marked the birth of the student movement on their own terms. Indeed, Anwar’s (1980) first diary entry was not 25 October 1965, when Thayeb founded KAMI, but 8 January 1966, when the students were redefining their struggle. The ‘conceptual struggle’ kicked off with a seminar series on the economy. This had to break the spell of Guided Democracy, in which merely discussing the economy in other terms than Sukarno’s was labelled subversive; the ‘conceptual struggle’ thus signalled intellectual liberation. But in this phase, most attention went to the ‘street struggle’. This kicked off with a mass rally at UI, where Storm Troops (RPKAD) commander Sarwo Edhie gave a speech: ‘It is a great honour for me as troops commander to speak before the students of the capital joined here in KAMI. I wish to thank Bung Aidit and his Gestapu for reuniting students as we see today. Had he not caused trouble, I might not have had this opportunity to speak before you students’ (Anwar 1980: 5). The students cheered, ‘thanking’ PKI-leader Aidit. Edhie stressed that since both students and the army were victims of PKI slander, it was their joint struggle to ‘crush Gestapu/PKI’. But when the students proclaimed their Tritura right after Edhie’s speech, they made clear that their struggle was also more than that.

The students then again marched to the State Secretariat to deliver the Tritura demands. Finding Chaerul Saleh absent, they staged a sit-in in front of the State Secretariat, blocking traffic for hours, while chanting slogans, singing songs, and holding banners up high. When army tanks arrived to guard the situation, students climbed them, yelling: ‘Long live the army!’, and when Saleh finally arrived they ‘instantly [rose] up as one; their yells echoing in the sky like a hungry giant’ (Anwar 1980: 9). KAMI leader Cosmas Batubara held a speech, calling for economic policies that benefit the people: ‘KAMI rejects political, economic, or monetary policies that only benefit state interests and that disregard, or fail to carry out, Ampera that prioritises the People rather than the State’ (1980: 9). The Message of the People’s Suffering was thus reclaimed from, and put in opposition to, the state. KAMI also announced a study strike until the price hikes were revoked, and then marched back to campus. Anwar (1980: 11) reflects on the impression this day of student struggle made on the public, and thereby themselves:

Today’s revolutionary training made a great impression. The people have witnessed the spirit of students, young men and women, and are full of admiration. News of the revolutionary event quickly spreads among students, arousing in their hearts the will to always struggle for justice. The people have witnessed it and become ideal propaganda channels, spreading the news into the kampongs, through the alleys, to their neighbours, until practically each home talks about today’s student protest. Meanwhile, the
press spreads the message to the regions, to the international world, that Indonesian students have arisen in their struggle for justice.

In the following weeks, universities in Jakarta and other cities were immobilised by student protest. Many street actions were staged, to make the public ‘witnesses’ and ‘propaganda channels’ of KAMI’s struggle. In Jakarta, thousands of students swarmed the streets, filling the city with graffiti with ‘Tritura’ and other slogans such as: ‘The prices are crazy!’ and ‘The people don’t like to eat promises!’ Ubiquitous graffiti, unseen since the early days of the revolution, became a hallmark of the ‘street struggle’, serving as a form of protest in itself and a means to familiarise demands to the public in a manner that could not be ignored. The street struggle thus meant a dramatic intervention in public life, and in Jakarta, it meant that KAMI took control of Sukarno’s beloved capital, as they drew on his symbolic framework of Power to make the capital their own. By re-inscribing the city with their own signs of Power – mass rallies representing their own powerful collective of the people, posters and graffiti filling the city with their own powerful message of the people – KAMI appropriated Sukarno’s role as ‘architect of the nation’ and ‘extension of the tongue of the people’.

KAMI also imposed their power on the city by playing up their ability to issue threats. For example, the students urged commuters to pay the old, lower bus fare, adding that ‘if the conductor rejects, please note the vehicle number and report to us, we will take care of it’ (Anwar 1980: 12). They left implicit how they would ‘take care’ of reluctant conductors or others failing to obey their ‘requests’, but they felt powerful enough to make such claims. Undoubtedly, the army’s backing contributed to their sense of power. Apart from that, they might have felt like the pemuda of 1945, who also claimed their power over cities by threatening violence in the name of the people’s liberation, or like all revolutionaries in world history, claiming the power to impose the will of the people, in this case, as symbolised by affordable bus fares.

Indeed, Anwar’s diary reveals identification with other major revolutions, as in his entry for 12 January. That day, tens of thousands of students marched from the UI campus to the Parliament – via the Hotel Indonesia roundabout and Sudirman Road, passing over the flyover at the end of that road, Semanggi Bridge, and moving onto Gatot Subroto Road, where the Parliament is located. They called this a ‘long march’, and this phrase is still used and this route is still followed by student protestors today. It is unclear whether the phrase referred to the legendary long march of Nasution’s troops in 1949, but the term acquired a new meaning, denoting the urban spectacle of student masses marching through the city’s arteries, yelling slogans, chanting songs, and waving banners and flags. In Indonesia,
each university has its own colour, which is worn in students’ formal jackets; the long march was full of campus colours, but the most conspicuous colour seen in those days was the bright yellow of UI. Anwar (1980: 15) describes the thrill of participating in this spectacle:

As we stand on the Semanggi Bridge, and look down on the sea of people flooding Sudirman like voracious ants, automatically all kinds of thoughts enter our mind. A creative-positive fantasy may crop up! I am spellbound. I make contact with the notes of history. Right then, I imagine it to be like the French Revolution in 1789 that hit the city of Paris, I imagine us to be like the people who stormed the Bastille.

Anwar further muses about world revolutions, about meeting Latin American student activists during his study abroad in the United States, and about the strong characters of the National Revolution – people like Sjahrrir, ‘whose sharp, brilliant ideas influenced students and intellectuals’, or Tan Malaka, ‘whose experience in movement matters inspired pemuda like Chaerul Saleh and Sukarni’ (1980: 17). He did not mention the rivalry between Sjahrrir and Malaka during the revolution; the political games of the past had no place in the stirring revolutionary memories raised in the present. Yet he did allude to the political games of the present: ‘Each movement has such people, with a firm attitude’, but each movement also has ‘those that hesitate’, who ‘are two-faced’ and ‘fish in muddy waters, and they live in all ages’, and he concludes: ‘The political game has a long way to go’ (1980: 17). Anwar’s fantasies come with bitter realisations. Amidst the thrill of action, he is thrown back into the reality of the political battles that lie ahead, against known enemies and the ‘two-faced’, whoever they might turn out to be. In the flow of action, though, such doubts were set aside for political performance.

At the Parliament, the KAMI leader delivered a speech before the assembly, giving further shape to the narrative of their struggle: ‘The parliament is the place to convey the voice of the people. Students are the people, the children of the Indonesian people, thus we convey the voice of the people’, asking the parliament to reconsider the cabinet ministers’ position, who ‘deviate from Ampera’ (Anwar 1980: 17). The parliament’s chair, an army man, pledged to convey the demands to Sukarno, adding that the parliament had expelled PKI members and advised the disbandment of PKI and ‘neo-PKI’: ‘If the parliament hesitates or sways, you can burn this building down!’ (Anwar 1980: 19). The students cheered, as they felt they had won over the parliament; an important political victory.

Redirecting Plots of Struggle

But Sukarno was not won over. He responded that he understood the demands but deplored KAMI’s mode of action. Upon hearing this, Anwar (1980: 20) reflects
Playing Politics

on Sukarno’s position in his old age, facing a rising tide of students who had re-
discovered their duty towards the people:

Bung Karno in his youth struggled in the pergerakan, and as a student he paved the
way for a Free Indonesia. His vision was rousing. … Now, he is quite tragic in his old
age, facing the challenge of the younger generation, especially students. … There are
two choices left for Bung Karno. He can correct his ways and try to improve the rotten
situation and fulfil the people’s demands. Or, if he continues to falter, he will be
pushed aside by the waves of history that are steadily advancing. … Given the stu-
dents’ progression in the present arena of political chess, their role is clearly growing.
… As the hope of the nation, students want to direct their actions in constructive ways,
and fulfil the Message of the People’s Suffering.

Indeed, it was Sukarno who had aroused in students a spirit to struggle for the
people, both through Guided Democracy indoctrination and by his own example
as a young struggler with a rousing vision. He was the one who had stated, in his
1962 Youth Pledge Day speech, that ‘students who are not spirited are better car-
rried to their graves’. Interestingly, in a speech at KAMI’s rally at UI on the next
day, 13 January, a similar statement was made by Nasution, who was now openly
critical of Sukarno. Nasution took one of Sukarno’s famed phrases and handed it
over to the students, retorting, to loud cheers: ‘Recently, Jakarta has become more
dangerous with all the student actions. But students aren’t students if they do not
live dangerously (vivere pericoloso)!’ (quoted in Anwar 1980: 24). Cheers also
rang out when Suharto’s letter to KAMI was read out at the rally; it emphasised
the students’ pure motives as ‘intellectual strugglers and struggling intellectuals’,
whose actions ‘are a form of spontaneity and social control in response to the
suffering of the people, the place where the students come from and where they
were raised’ (1980: 25).

Suharto’s claim that KAMI served the people’s interests was validated later
that day, when the Jakarta governor announced a cut in bus fares from Rp. 1,000
to the old fare of Rp. 200, just as KAMI demanded. To a public long resigned to
spiralling inflation and still sceptical of KAMI’s actions, it was astonishing news.
It was a turning point in KAMI’s campaign, and its effect was reinforced the next
day, when the state oil company also conceded to KAMI’s demand of restoring
the previous price for fuel. These victories boosted KAMI’s sense of power, and
further engrossed them in the logic of action. As Anwar (1980: 26) notes, ‘This is
vital to stimulate the spirit of struggle. That spirit must be nurtured, as the “battle”
is still long in the mission to win the real “war”’.

What this ‘real war’ entailed came to be realised in the course of struggle.
That evening, the KAMI leaders received an invitation to the next day’s cabinet
meeting at Sukarno’s palace in Bogor. As Anwar (1980: 29) reports, it was in the
discussion that followed that they discovered the real target of their movement:

By Allah, I never expected such discussion among students criticising government
policy. Without hesitation, without fear of being shot or jailed, they express sharp criti-
cism. … All this time the voice of criticism was buried in their hearts. Tonight, they
vent it all, things we could never read in the newspapers for the past four or five years.
Amazing! All this time, the Old Order curbed freedom of expression. Critical opinion
was taboo, all the more difference of opinion from the government. They all had Mani-
pol/USDEK indoctrination. None of it lasts. On the contrary, it has raised a bitterness
among the young generation that is now erupting like a ‘volcano’. In the end, it is de-
cided: ‘Whatever may happen, students will continue the struggle for Tritura until we
succeed.’

Their bitter frustrations were linked directly to the ‘Old Order’, as Guided
Democracy was now called. It all began to make sense: the background, motives,
and meaning of their struggle. Their task was not just to ‘crush PKI’ but to end
the ‘tyranny’ of Sukarno’s regime. A new plot was unfolding, including its end:
‘until we succeed’. This new story of struggle could be aligned, as Anwar did,
with the French Revolution, or the National Revolution in the tradition of a bril-
liant Sjahrir, an experienced Tan Malaka, and a rousing young Sukarno, who was
now a tragic old man falling behind the times. Since KAMI was tied to the power
struggles of the era, the anti-PKI rhetoric remained, but ‘by this stage this would
merely be a reproach to Sukarno, since there was little of PKI left to ban’ (Rick-

KAMI accepted the invitation to the cabinet meeting, but ignored the request
to send a small delegation. In the morning of 15 January, thousands of students
left Jakarta in trucks for the fifty-kilometre trip to Bogor, ‘saluted by the people
and the army, who wave in sympathy, all friendly smiles, excited cheers, and fists
thrown in the air’ (Anwar 1980: 31). In Bogor, overwhelming the Cakrabirawa
guards with their unexpected numbers, they took up position near the palace gate
to greet the arriving ministers with jeers. When students broke through the gate,
warning shots were fired and the masses ducked down. Then they rose up again,
yelling ‘Long live the army!’; hinting at the army-Cakrabirawa rivalry, which led
to more warning shots. Just then, Anwar (1980: 33) notes, ‘rain start[ed] pouring
down, making the atmosphere even more dramatic and romantic’. Then, too, Su-
harto arrived at the gate, asking the students to disperse while awaiting the meet-
ing’s outcome. It was the monsoon rain that led most students to seek cover, but
many stood their ground, singing songs and staging theatrical performances that
mocked the ministers. When Suharto returned to inform the students that deci-
sions on price cuts had not been made, they responded with ‘hysteric cries of dis-
appointment’ (1980: 33). Suharto was visibly irritated by this rude response, but was forced to smile as KAMI leaders led the masses to yell ‘Long live Suharto!’ and ‘Crush PKI!’ Suharto ‘diplomatically replie[d] that “PKI is already gone,” and the students cheered, “PKI is gone!”’ (1980: 34).

Suharto’s arrival had the effect of shifting attention from government policy to PKI, or from structural issues to a ghost that was ‘already gone’. But for KAMI this was now part of the game of protest that they came to master well. Chasing ‘ghosts’ was an effective strategy to win the ‘real war’. And as the game became more dangerous, they further embellished their tactics of action and narrative of struggle to stay ahead of their ‘real enemy’, which was not a ‘ghost’, but those in power – who understood the threat students posed quite well.

**A Tricky Phase**

Sukarno was furious about KAMI’s action and ordered a ban on demonstrations in Jakarta. In a radio speech on 16 January, Foreign Affairs Minister Subandrio, Sukarno’s right hand, called on ‘the entire nation not to wait another second’ to form a Sukarno Front, and he questioned KAMI’s integrity:

After [the foiled coup] we thought the nation’s inner suffering was limited to that event. Suddenly, the capital is confronted with a new event that shocks all our souls. In staging demonstrations that go from bad to worse … students commit acts that violate the norms of decency and deviate from Indonesian morals. Words and graffiti targeting officials, up to the Great Leader of the Revolution himself, truly shock the decent citizens. Are such acts really by the students’ own doing? Or are they manipulated by the enemies of the revolution, nekolim from outside and contra-revolutionaries from inside, who deflect our students’ good intentions? (Quoted in Anwar 1980: 39)

KAMI was shocked. The allegations that they were violating Indonesian morals and being manipulated deeply offended their sense of identity and agency, and they realised that the battle was taking a critical turn. Yet, Subandrio’s attack also signalled that Sukarno felt cornered, which attested to the power of their movement. In considering possible responses, the students began comparing their situation with that of other student movements that had gone through similar tricky phases. Indeed, this allowed them to identify the situation as merely a phase that could be overcome, a turn of plot that was to be expected, an episode of suspense in the larger story towards the anticipated end. ‘Whatever may happen’, Anwar (1980: 40) wrote, ‘they can no longer stem the will of the Indonesian people and students, who anticipate a new life; a betterment of the people’s fate in a democratic climate, in which the freedom to think and speak is guaranteed. This life will surely come one day’.
KAMI announced that ‘the student struggle to carry Ampera continues’, since ‘the spirit is high’. However, the restriction made itself felt. The KAMI Bandung branch planned to perform a long march from Bandung, through the mountain pass of Puncak, to Jakarta, but just outside Bandung the students were blocked. Also, anonymous leaflets began to appear on campuses with anti-KAMI messages. Anwar (1980: 41) feared this could lead to violence – ‘is that what Subandrio wants?’ On 17 January, KAMI paid Subandrio a ‘visit’ (a euphemism to dodge the demonstration ban) at his residence to call him to account. Subandrio received a delegation, who dared him to address the masses outside and revoke his allegations. As he replied, ‘I, too, have masses’, they retorted, ‘So, you intend to play your masses against our masses?’ (1980: 43). Subandrio denied this, and then addressed the crowd, stating that he did not mean to insult them, only to remind them to beware of manipulation, but the students scolded him as ‘Peking dog’, or China’s lackey. As the police arrived to disperse them, they yelled, ‘Long live the army!’, ‘Long live Bung Karno!’ (Sukarno), and ‘KAMI does not oppose Bung Karno, KAMI opposes Durno!’ (1980: 43). (Durno is a shrewd wayang figure who plays two kingdoms against each other, here referring to Subandrio.)

The slogans in support of Sukarno should be read in the context of the symbolic battle in which KAMI found itself. Previously, such slogans were rarely heard at KAMI’s actions, but they now served to counter allegations of disloyalty in a manner that could not be deemed suspicious, especially since the slogans were a familiar part of Guided Democracy culture. To mend their tarnished image, then, KAMI included the character of Sukarno in the public narrative of their struggle, positioning him on their side. This strategy was also evident in their meeting with Sukarno, right after the rally at Subandrio, which Anwar (1980: 44) describes as a ‘dialogue between father and children’. The students pledged their loyalty, stating that they meant ‘to support Bung Karno’s leadership and authority by exposing, in all sincerity, the evil influence of opportunists around the Great Leader of the Revolution, the fortune-seekers who seek to distort his vision with misinformation and abuse the president’s signature’; and further, that they intended ‘to tear down that milieu, so that Bung Karno will not be isolated and distanced from his people’, but can ‘return to the indivisible trinity of Bung Karno, the Armed Forces, and the People, including students as the people’s children and the carriers of Ampera’ (1980: 44–45). In turn, Sukarno declared his faith in their integrity, yet again warned that their actions tended towards ‘material and mental vandalism’ and risked being ‘manipulated by nekolim and other forces seeking to break the unity between Sukarno and students’ (1980: 46). While Sukarno thus refused to be tempted into KAMI’s plot, the ‘dialogue between father and children’ did create common ground with a story of the unity between them. On that ground, the battle continued.
The story of loyalty and unity enabled KAMI to dodge the demonstration ban. At each of Sukarno’s rallies they turned out in masses to ostensibly show support, but bringing their own banners to demonstrate the continued struggle. But tensions rose as Sukarno’s ‘true defenders’, GMNI, also turned out, which led to a clash at the State Palace on 20 January. Realising that their enemy still matched them in physical strength, KAMI then took back the initiative in the war of representation. On 21 January, they spread a pamphlet across Jakarta:

Hey, truly progressive-revolutionary, Pancasilaist people of Indonesia!!! Remember, we all suffer due to the government’s irresponsibility in raising the prices… We can no longer bear it! We, the Indonesian people, have been exploited, deceived, scapegoated, and made into guinea pigs by those in power who think they are the president-directors of the Indonesian Republic. They trample on Ampera and manipulate the integrity of the struggle of the truly Pancasilaist [referring to the state ideology Pancasila] people of Indonesia. PKI-Gestapu has been allowed to ruin our economy. Thus, together with all the truly Pancasilaist students of Indonesia, shoulder to shoulder with the army, let us demand price cuts, economic stability, disbandment of PKI and its mass organisations. Radically retool the cabinet with its incapable presidium. Replace it with people who truly struggle for the people. (Anwar 1980: 53)

Using army trucks, KAMI then drove in to yet another mass rally of Sukarno, where another clash with GMNI could barely be prevented. In a ‘show of force’, they marched back to UI on foot, waving university flags in front ‘to demonstrate their solid unity and integrity in struggling for Tritura’, and, seeing people’s sympathetic reactions, they marched on ‘with more determined step, a step in critical times, at a decisive moment in history, heading for change. History is in a long march!!! Nobody can stop it!’ (1980: 54).

But the ‘long march of history’ was put on hold with the start of the Islamic fasting month on 23 January. In later student movements, too, the fasting month signalled a pause of action, a time for internal consolidation and reflection, but also a risky time precisely due to the lack of action. It was also a time to negotiate with officials, which carried its own risks. After negotiations with Thayeb, the KAMI presidium called an end to the study strike on 1 February, despite objections from the rank-and-file who were disgruntled about the inaction. However, the KAMI Jakarta branch decided to ignore the order. In this decision they joined the radical Bandung branch, whose leaders arrived in Jakarta the previous night, stating that, ‘If the Jakarta students grow soft, the Bandung students will continue the struggle with action – we won’t retreat a single millicron’ (Anwar 1980: 83). On 3 February, the Jakarta students rallied at various sites, including the graves of the six slain generals, pledging ‘to continue their struggle’, and the United States
Embassy to protest the Vietnam War, demonstrating that ‘the young generation refuses to be a lackey of the West’ (1980: 87), thus countering allegations of CIA backing. At the Chinese Embassy, protesting the Chinese news agency’s negative reporting of KAMI, students were arrested but they were soon released. This day of action left them elated that the spirit of struggle had not faded. To nurture the spirit they continued to stage small actions, such as a ‘strolling action’, in which a long line of students strolled through Jakarta wearing slogans on their chest; when passing strategic sites security forces would jump to be on guard, but the students would ‘just pass by calmly, smiling, laughing, joking, singing, while the people convey[ed] their sympathy’ (1980: 98).

However, there was a growing sense of insecurity. The divergent course of the Jakarta and Bandung branches from the presidium accentuated uncertainty about KAMI’s direction, and there were many violent incidents. On 7 February a GMNI member stabbed the chair of the UI Student Council, a KAMI member, and later that day the Jakarta military garrison dispersed a meeting of KAMI Jakarta. On 9 February several Jakarta leaders were arrested. They were released two days later, but it was clear that the students had entered a situation in which it was ‘hard to distinguish friend from foe’ (Anwar 1980: 95). Adding to the threat, on 15 February Sukarno held a meeting with loyalist students, in which Subandrio urged them to step up the Sukarno Front; as Chaerul Saleh explained, this should ‘start as a mental force, then proceed to become a physical force’ (1980: 116). It was then that KAMI leaders began to approach the army more directly. Not all leaders agreed to this, but as rumours grew that Sukarno was preparing to ‘crush’ his opponents, those who initially opposed army involvement gave in, though only after the experience of bloodshed.

‘A Jacket Drenched in Blood’

To calm the unrest Sukarno agreed to retool the cabinet, but his new cabinet still included too many ‘corrupt figures’ for KAMI. On 23 February, the day before the cabinet’s installation, KAMI attended a ‘Mass Call for Loyalty to Sukarno’ at the State Palace, only to march on to the State Secretariat to declare their stance. On their way security forces blocked them and ordered their retreat. After some debate KAMI decided to comply, so as to prevent escalation. But as the students began retreating shots were fired: two students were wounded. Once the shooting stopped KAMI decided to march on as planned. At the State Secretariat they had to wait outside, but after three hours they ran out of patience; the building was stormed and wrecked. Entering Cakrabirawa tanks were blocked by the students, who now were reinforced by their high-school allies of KAPPI, or the Indonesian Pupils Action Front, which had been founded on 9 February to support KAMI.
KAPPI blocked the opposite road, and in unison the KAPPI and KAMI masses scolded the Cakrabirawa. Tensions increased when the blood-stained UI jacket of one of the wounded students was hoisted on a stake and waved about above the crowds. At last, the students decided to retreat. But then shots were again fired and three more students were wounded. As Anwar (1980: 131–132) describes the drama in his diary:

The long line [of students], resembling a giant dragon, stops; confused, tense, angry, and suddenly turns to storm the Cakrabirawa, like a predator pouncing on his prey. Many students are stabbed by bayonets. Blood drips on the road. It is chaos! The students can’t do anything. They are unarmed and refuse to surrender. They respond by throwing stones, but it’s no use. They return to the State Secretariat and batter at the door. … The shooting stops! Bystanders who first only looked on now express their anger. They hate seeing students shot like that. Like animals! The KAPPI masses shout and raise their fists at the Cakrabirawa. People, pupils, and students, their spirits ablaze and boiling with anger, become one, creating a courage that is reminiscent of the struggle in 1945.

Eleven students were wounded by gunshots, others suffered bayonet wounds. As KAMI finally marched back to UI, shouting out along the road, more gunfire was heard near the campus, but no one else was wounded. That night officials visited the campus to convey their sympathy, and Jakarta residents began donating food packages. For Anwar (1980: 134), these expressions of solidarity signified a recognition of the heroism and historicity of their struggle, befitting an Angkatan:

Today the people truly admire how heroically students have faced bullets and bayonets. They are not afraid as they are certain that the struggle is on the right track. … In these times, the students’ courage is comparable to that of pemuda in 1945. … Their generation is known as Angkatan 45, the Pioneering Angkatan. How will KAMI’s struggle be seen? KAMI wants to enforce justice and truth. Thus it should be known as the Justice Angkatan, Ampera Angkatan, or Angkatan 66. History will rank it so!

But the students had little time to muse over titles of honour. The next day the cabinet would be installed at the State Palace; they had to disrupt the event in a spectacular manner. That night, they went out in small groups to deflate car tires and use the cars to obstruct the roads, so as to prevent the ministers from reaching their destination. By dawn, all the roads to the State Palace were blocked, and traffic was immobilised. Jakarta held its breath; shops and offices were closed. Sukarno and his cabinet still managed to reach the site by helicopter, while the students, hoisting the blood-stained shirts of their wounded comrades, moved in to surround the place from multiple directions. Near the State Palace, the students
broke through a cordon of security forces, but at a high cost. Anwar (1980: 136–137) describes:

The women’s ranks bravely march forward, followed by the men. They march on, tailed by tanks and soldiers. … Suddenly, like an arrow released from its bow, the students run at full speed … reaching the road in front of the Palace. Here they are halted again! There are rows of security troops! … The students keep pushing forward. Yells echo in the sky. … Amidst this thundering atmosphere the hail of AK machine guns is suddenly heard. The students did not see it coming and duck down. The [front troops] and the soldiers on tanks are also forced to duck down, because the shots come from behind them, probably from Cakrabirawa. The shooting gets more intense! Several people are hit. One of them is Arief Rachman Hakim. Blood drips [on the road]. The shooting stops! All eyes are on Arief, who is drenched in blood. From his comrade’s lap, Arief can still utter some words. ‘Yellow jackets, keep moving forward!’ The students’ blood is boiling. Their hearts are burning! Their teeth grinding from anger. Why are we being shot? Why?

UI student Arief Rahman Hakim died on the spot. The first student martyr had fallen. The drama of this tragedy instantly hit home for the students. In front of the Army Ministry, down the road, they sat down to sing ‘Gugur Bunga’, Fallen Flower, a patriotic song in honour of fallen heroes. This most poignant of patriotic songs immediately conveyed strong emotions and channelled them into well-rehearsed narratives of struggle and sacrifice for the crowds. No one seemed to be confused about what to feel or do. The tragic death of a fellow student in struggle instantly made sense, and could only make sense, in the form of drama, which provided reason and purpose. Even the dying student knew what to say in his last breath: ‘Yellow jackets, keep moving forward!’ His comrades also knew what to make of this message. As Anwar (1980: 138) puts it ‘Arief’s supreme sacrifice is not in vain. It becomes a whip for his comrades to continue the struggle and never retreat, even if death intercepts’. The public, too, knew how to respond: piles of floral wreaths were laid at the UI campus gates, and flags were hung at half-mast across Jakarta. The next morning, thousands gathered at UI to pay their respects to the fallen student, who received the title ‘Hero of Ampera’, a student hero who carried the Message of the People’s Suffering and gave his life for it.

The drama drew not only from national repertoires. While the patriotic songs, floral wreaths, and half-mast flags matched the collective memory of other fallen heroes (recently, the slain generals), the students added elements from international repertoires, indicating that their struggle and sacrifice also related to universal causes. Many students wore black headbands, ‘recalling how students in South Korea had mourned their fallen comrade by strapping white ribbons around the head’ (Anwar 1980: 140). Like their Korean peers, they felt they struggled for the
same causes that students everywhere seemed to be fighting for: justice, truth, and an end to any form of tyranny. Yet, in their public performance the national repertoire prevailed, and universal causes were framed in terms that made sense within this political culture.

Arief’s funeral the next day became a national drama, sanctifying the student struggle. A long convoy of vehicles escorted his body to the cemetery – carrying floral wreaths from student organisations, political parties, religious organisations, army divisions, and the widows of the slain generals – followed by masses of students wearing their campus jackets. The route was lined with thousands of people, many offering the students drinks and snacks. The burial scene was all the more poignant. Anwar (1980: 144) describes:

At the cemetery … as Arief’s body, covered in the Red-and-White, is lowered into his grave, people proclaim God’s greatness: ‘Allahuakbar! Allahuakbar!’ The sound fills the empty hearts and cuts through the souls of everyone present. It is heard repeatedly from behind the bier, where Arief’s blood-stained yellow jacket is hoisted. Posters of student organisations and the pictures of the Heroes of Revolution [the slain generals] are held up high.

The drama was not limited to this moment. It transcended even this student movement, as the story of student struggle and sacrifice – fittingly visualised by a blood-stained campus jacket – came to signify something larger than the politics of that era, defining and attesting to the determination of student struggle in general. Before Arief’s death, during the previous day’s battle, students had hoisted the blood-stained jackets of wounded comrades as a badge of honour and sign of courage rather than defeat. It was then, amidst battle, that they felt related to the pemuda of 1945, which added historical significance to an intimidating situation, turning them into ‘fearless freedom fighters’. Also, it was then that the thought first came up that they, too, were an Angkatan, for displaying the same courage as the Angkatan 45. But it took Arief’s death for this courage to be immortalised.

As in the revolution era, poetry played an important role in this immortalisation. Just as the ‘spirit of 1945’ had its chronicler in Chairil Anwar, so the ‘spirit of 1966’ was articulated in the poems of Taufiq Ismail, a young UI graduate, opponent of Guided Democracy (he lost his teaching job at a state university after signing the Cultural Manifesto), and avid reader of Chairil Anwar. In 1966 he published *Tirani*, which included the poem, ‘A Jacket Drenched in Blood’:

A jacket drenched in blood
we all beheld you
we shared our noble sorrow
in poignancy for years on end.
A river separates us
beneath the burning sun of Jakarta
between freedom and oppression
stand rows of guns and bayonet armour.
Will we retreat now
and utter, ‘Farewell struggle’
pledge loyalty to Tyranny
and put on the oversized attire of servants?
That soiled banner, yes that banner
we all beheld you
and on top of the buildings
flags are bowing half-mast.
The funeral procession
they say
everybody says
continue the struggle!

Partnerships in Battle

While the student struggle was already being mythologised, the battles were not yet over. On the day of Arief’s death, while students battled at the State Palace, the UI campus was attacked by Sukarno-loyal militia. Then, upon returning from Arief’s funeral the next day, the students found troops and tanks from Kostrad, Suharto’s division, on the campus, offering protection. Many students were hesitant to accept this offer, seeing the army’s presence on campus as an ‘insult to the free space and sovereignty of the alma mater’ (Anwar 1980: 145). But as it was explained to them that the Cakrabirawa planned to seize the campus, the students began ‘to think like military’ themselves, as Anwar (1980: 146) reports: ignoring the Kostrad reinforcements, students began to gather stones, wooden blocks, and bamboo stakes:

Yes, these are the weapons of students, besides knives, machetes, and the spirit to struggle. I am convinced that no bullet can destroy the student spirit that has hardened as steel and that is determined to fight until the last drop of blood. This is not just spirit in speech, but spirit that has been attested to by the victims sprawled out everywhere. There is no turning back!

Alarmed by the escalation, Sukarno declared a state of emergency and KAMI was banned. KAMI regrouped in campus-based cells. The leaders found refuge at Kostrad quarters, where a radio station was set up to broadcast propaganda, coordinate action, and provide the scattered students a continuing bond with the orga-
nisation. Kostrad also arranged for bodyguards for KAMI leaders. In this period of danger, then, the student-army partnership came into full effect. As Suharto told Kostrad Chief of Staff Kemal Idris, ‘Take care of the students, don’t let them become a victim; their movement is our movement too’ (quoted in Mun’im 1999: 32). It was also then, in ‘partnership’ with Nasution (who had been dismissed by Sukarno), that KAMI assumed the title of Angkatan 66. According to Nasution (1979: 13), he proposed this title in a meeting with KAMI, on 26 February, ‘to declare a new phase in the national struggle’ and to make the students ‘aware that with their articulation of “truth and justice” and “Tritura” they had established a new “milestone” in our history’. In fact, the students were aware of their movement’s historicity from the moment they launched Tritura on ‘Student Awakening Day’. Yet it took Nasution’s explication to determine that KAMI would not be known as ‘Justice Angkatan’ or ‘Angkatan Ampera’, as Anwar had imagined, but as ‘Angkatan 66’. With its survival on the line, it was just what KAMI needed: a historic name to adorn their story of struggle, co-authored by the army.

The army’s open support of KAMI further agitated its opponents. Sukarno Front units were formed at each campus. On 28 February, Sukarno-loyal students rallied at the Sports Palace, where Subandrio called on them to prepare for battle, for ‘terror must be fought with counter-terror!’ (Anwar 1980: 151). The masses then drove off to UI for a show of force. KAMI students responded by throwing stones, and a clash ensued. Still, KAMI had reason to feel secure, as it not only enjoyed the army’s protection but also broad support from all groups that had felt suppressed under Guided Democracy. After Arief’s death, several organisations were created to mobilise material and moral support for KAMI, such as the Indonesian Scholars Action Front and similar ‘action fronts’ for teachers, workers, women, and entrepreneurs. But KAMI’s most valued allies were the high school pupils of KAPPI – the ‘army of ants’, as the students affectionately called them – who provided them with additional body and spirit, and now filled the void left after KAMI was banned from the work of street struggle.

On 1 March, KAPPI rallied at the Education and Culture Ministry, calling for the minister’s resignation, then marched to UI to show their solidarity. As they left at dusk they sang ‘Sayonara’, creating a ‘truly heroic and romantic atmosphere of solidarity between KAPPI and KAMI’ (Anwar 1980: 175). In the following days, KAPPI paraded Jakarta in army trucks, attacking ministries, covering walls with graffiti, and hanging flags half-mast. Seeing that the UI campus had become a rallying point for the even more militant KAPPI youth, Sukarno ordered its closure. But the students were determined to ‘defend the symbol of KAMI’s struggle with all their might’ (1980: 178), and with Kostrad backing the campus remained the movement’s nerve centre. On 4 March, a ceremony was held there to launch a
A Jacket Drenched in Blood

student brigade called Laskar Arief Rachman Hakim, consisting of seven units named after the slain generals. Thousands of people attended this event, including Arief’s mother, who had travelled from Sumatra to give her blessing. Her speech made a deep impression; with a broken voice, her body supported by students, she reiterated her son’s last words: ‘I hope my children will continue the struggle on the basis of truth’. This led ‘many Ampera strugglers to wipe their tears’, and feeling ‘whipped up’ to continue on with the fight (1980: 180–181).

In the following week, the students performed an aggressive urban guerrilla operation. The role of KAPPI youth in the battles was exalted, as they gave fresh impetus to the spirit of struggle, restoring what the students seemed to have lost. Indeed, as the story of the student struggle evolved, increasingly it took the form of a fixed national narrative; actions became a familiar national drama, and students became characters called ‘Angkatan 66’. This was at the cost of their initial sense of spontaneity. But the stories of KAPPI – often children still, between the ages of twelve and eighteen – could not be domesticated, remaining wild, funny anecdotes. This is illustrated in one anecdote in Anwar’s otherwise increasingly serious diary. On 5 March, KAMI and KAPPI marched to Subandrio’s residence to burn his effigy (a statue of a dog with sunglasses, his signature accessory), but they were blocked by security forces:

A boy, 12 or 14 years old at most … steps forward. … ‘Sir, let us pass, okay Sir?’ … ‘We’re doing our job’, is the response. ‘Oh come on Sir, why be like that to us! Have a heart.’ The soldiers can’t help being touched, their hearts shrink seeing such cute kids demonstrate. They open the blockade. … The masses storm to Subandrio’s house… There is much police. But the pupils keep pushing… The police shoot in the air! The masses duck down … one of them wets his pants. ‘Hey, your pants are wet, did you piss yourself?’, asks his friend behind him. ‘Oh-oh, I was startled. I’m scared!’ His friend grins. Everyone laughs while facing down on the ground. Once the shooting stops, the masses rise up. Even with their pants pissed their spirit is not put out, ‘Hang Subandrio!’ … The masses breach through Subandrio’s yard. They torch the effigy … then return to UI. (1980: 182–183)

The ‘cute kids’, though, were well groomed for battle. Each morning, KAPPI leaders gathered at UI to discuss the day’s strategy with KAMI, both sides contributing their own expertise. The KAPPI youth had useful ‘street knowledge’, as they grew up in Jakarta and were often involved in street brawls between school gangs; the students had insider political information and knowledge of strategy, acquired from the army and from the literature on revolutions that many KAMI leaders read. It was thus that KAMI and KAPPI embarked on a combination of ‘blitzkrieg’ and ‘street war’ strategies, occupying ministries, wrecking Chinese institutes, defeating Sukarno Front units on the streets, while marching through
the city, on foot and in army trucks, deflating cars, spraying graffiti, and staging rallies, in a power display suggesting imminent victory.

‘Victory’ arrived on 11 March. In the morning, after Kostrad troops left the UI campus to stage their own drama, the campus was promptly raided by Cakrabirawa troops and militias. Undeterred, KAMI proceeded with its ‘pamphlet war’ as planned; while loyalty statements to Sukarno were spread over Jakarta from helicopters, KAMI distributed its counter-pamphlets. Shootings between rival military divisions occurred throughout the city. Sukarno called an emergency cabinet meeting, but when he heard that the State Palace was being surrounded by army troops, he fled to Bogor by helicopter. At last, the chaos provided Suharto with the opportunity to take control. Travelling after Sukarno, he pressured him to sign a letter – known as ‘Supersemar’, or ‘written order of 11 March’ – which granted Suharto full authority to restore order. Suharto’s first act was to ban PKI. KAMI and KAPPI immediately staged victory parades. Yet, there were also misgivings. As Anwar (1980: 199–200) warned:

Too many questions crop up on this day of victory. One thing is certain; the struggle is not over yet. History teaches us how our Revolution established a new state and breathed life into national identity. But our Revolution failed to realise its social ideals. This bitter experience cannot be repeated. … The Indonesian people can no longer accept a victory in name and form only. They want a substantial and meaningful victory. Victory with hope for real change in their fate, for justice and equality. … Many issues remain to be resolved. The struggle for democracy is not a temporary but a continuous struggle. [It] has no need for mere promises, speeches, notes, and resolutions, but requires real work, clear concepts, and exemplary leadership. … If not, one day we will be disappointed, apathetic, and pessimistic again. That’s when our long struggle will have been in vain! Then we will again look back sadly to those who do not want to learn from history.

Anwar’s diary ends on 11 March. In most accounts, this is ‘The End’ of the story of 1966, and the end of the student movement, though KAMI lasted for another few years. According to Jackson (1978: 7), the student movement’s end was inevitable, given KAMI’s structure of dependency: ‘The ephemeral nature of the student mobilisation into politics and its dependence on the older generation for leadership and financial resources were evidenced by the rapidity with which the movement collapsed in 1968–69, once the “elders” withdrew their behind-the-scenes support from the once-mighty KAMI’. But decline not only followed the withdrawal of elite support. It was a combination of persuasion and repression, rivalries harkening back to the student politics of the past, and clashing visions that eventually closed the book on KAMI. In that regard, the story of decline is no less significant than the story of action, and there is no clear separation between
these two parts of the struggle. As Anwar sensed, ‘the struggle [was] not over yet’, and neither were the battles.

**Struggle after the Story of Struggle**

Despite the sense of victory the students remained on their guard. The battles had made them wary and cynical. They wryly noted that newspapers that had earlier branded them ‘wild terrorists’ were now suddenly ‘filled with adoration’ (Imawan 1966: 50). KAMI had become everyone’s hero, but the students had paid a heavy price. On 14 March, they performed a silent parade to mourn the seven comrades who had been killed by that point (besides Arief, they included two school youth in Jakarta and two in Yogyakarta, as well as two students in Makassar); the song ‘Gugur Bunga’ could again be heard, and they vowed to continue the struggle.

With the first Tritura demand fulfilled, the focus shifted to the second, which was redefined as ‘clean government’. On 15 March, KAMI led a ‘one-million’ rally in Jakarta; the next day they rallied at the Parliament to demand the resignation of twenty-four ministers, and occupied Subandrio’s two residences. Sukarno condemned these actions as ‘the efforts of a minority to impose their will on the people’ (Imawan 1966: 56). Earlier, on 12 March, he had also announced that he had gotten hold of a CIA manual listing ‘400 strategies to topple a government’, which advised that, to control power, it is necessary to control the streets, for ‘he who controls the streets, controls the masses’, and to control the streets, the key strategy is to mobilise youth to ‘act brutally’ (Imawan 1966: 49). As this insinuation of KAMI’s ties with the CIA indicates, after losing executive power to Suharto, Sukarno still attempted to keep control in the war of representation. But such statements had lost their effect. On 17 March, KAMI and KAPPI occupied the disputed ministries, taking ministers into custody at Kostrad quarters. Jakarta still lived in suspense. Troops were stationed across the city, trains and roads to the airport were blocked, and radio stations had stopped broadcasting news. On 18 March, Suharto announced the arrest of dozens of ministers, politicians, youth leaders, journalists, lecturers, and other public figures for ‘Gestapu/PKI involvement’. This ‘cleansing’ act seemed to fulfil the second Tritura demand. But the students thought differently, and their movement was still growing.

On 31 March, after the composition of the new cabinet was revealed, KAMI stated its rejection of it, and called on ‘all progressive forces in society to join hands with KAMI in the continued struggle for restoration of all matters pertaining to the state, the economy, and society, on the basis of pure implementation of the Pancasila and 1945 Constitution’ (Imawan 1966: 61). The latter phrase was in fact a theme of Guided Democracy. But now it signified a new phase of struggle for a clean government, which required more than just ‘PKI cleansing’. For the
students, it required rational policies, responsible leadership, and an end to corruption. That they framed this in terms of the ‘Pancasila and 1945 Constitution’ reflected their embeddedness in the political culture. However, this was a political culture in a state of flux – Guided Democracy was dying but the New Order had yet to be born – and the student movement was in a similar state of new, uncertain directions. In the continued struggle, then, the reconceptualisation of both the political culture and the student movement was at stake.

In this phase, ‘conceptual struggle’ became more prominent. It attested that a student action front, accused by some of ‘street terror’, was quite capable of tackling national issues in a constructive manner. Beginning in April, KAMI hosted a series of prominent seminars to discuss political, economic, educational, cultural, and press reforms, and other themes deemed relevant to building the New Order. Thereby, a new role was established for students as public opinion makers. This was also visible in the prominent status of the student press that emerged in the wake of KAMI, whose scope and influence extended well beyond the university, redefining the role of the student press as an ‘instrument of struggle’. Most prominent were Harian KAMI (KAMI Daily) and Mahasiswa Indonesia (Indonesian Student), which gained a reputation as quality intellectual press. The student publications and public seminars became so successful that the ‘conceptual struggle’ soon eclipsed the ‘street struggle’.

One KAMI event that stood out was a symposium held at UI in May 1966: ‘The Rise of the Spirit of 66: Exploring a New Track’. While covering a range of national issues, a substantial part of the discussion focused on the Angkatan 66. As the UI rector stated in his opening speech, ‘the current national situation is marked by the rise of the Angkatan 66; the young generation that, with its spirit and determination, succeeded in battering down all sins and deviations of the past era and has opened the gates to a new political, economic, and social climate that is no longer dominated by one group with its mental terror’ (in Wardhana 1966: 6). The keynote speech was given by Hatta, who stated that, ‘with their Angkatan 66, students have revived an old tradition that adds fragrance to the name of youth in Indonesian history’ (1966: 12). Discussing this ‘tradition’ at length, he concluded: ‘So it was that at each decisive moment in national history, Indonesian students knew their duty and contributed their valuable service to the people and the fatherland’ – so the Angkatan 66 also knew their duty, once it became clear ‘that our state was deviating from the straight path of Pancasila’ (1966: 17). Yet, as noted in Chapter 4, the difference with the ‘old tradition’ was that, with the narrative of the Angkatan 66, the scope of student struggle was significantly expanded from forging a ‘nation’ to correcting the ‘state’. Different from Hatta’s days, the national duty of students was now to draw attention to and demand fixes
for the ‘deviations’ of the state. Since this did not properly fit the old narrative, new narratives were called for, which were mostly spun by the students.

At the symposium, KAMI leaders seemed adamant about keeping control over the representation of their movement. As one of them stated, in response to those still doubting their intents, KAMI arose because ‘our hearts are not content if we cannot bluntly expose deviations from our Constitution’ and ‘correct what must and can be corrected’ (in Wardhana 1966: 152). Others also stressed their ‘true motives’ in order to counter ‘wrong impressions’, apparently sensing that these threatened to undermine the spirit of struggle. KAMI leader Abdul Gafur stated:

[We] were branded contra-revolutionary, terrorist, CIA-funded, nekolin lackey, low-life. [But] we were not ordered, funded, or manipulated. Sure, we were manipulated by our pure conscience, the conscience of the people. … We don’t count on benefits; we left our study desks with no other asset than our strong conviction, the deep conviction that truth will always triumph; so we descended onto the streets to give voice to the people who call for justice and truth. We were chased by Subandrio’s wild troops, our friends were jailed, slandered, terrorised, and hundreds of millions of rupiah were wasted on efforts to crush us; our organisation, KAMI, was even banned. … It did not matter. What matters is that the soul and spirit are still ablaze. We keep moving forward, will not retreat, for retreat means ruin, standstill, and collapse. (In Wardhana 1966: 241–242)

Gafur then stated his misgivings about the Angkatan title, which should not obscure or corrupt the spirit of struggle, as it did with previous Angkatan:

Nowadays we are given the name Angkatan 66, the Angkatan that broke the impasse and so on. But we warn you that we will not be mesmerised by flattery and compliments, for that is not our style. [We] do not want this Angkatan to become one that expects future rewards for its service. Experience has taught us that once the Angkatan 45 became an institution, they expected reward for their service, and they became part of the vested interest establishment. … Therefore we do not want – I repeat, we do not want – the Angkatan 66 to become an institution like the Angkatan 45. … We do not pursue positions, we pursue justice and truth. (In Wardhana 1966: 242–243)

Soon, however, many KAMI leaders (and Gafur, too, a few years later) would accept similar ‘rewards’ in the form of government positions, thus becoming the butt of criticism of later student generations. But at the time of the symposium it was unthinkable for students to retreat from the struggle, as there was much still to ‘correct’. Hence, while the ‘conceptual struggle’ gained momentum, the ‘street struggle’ received new impetus as well.

At one mass rally on 5 April, in response to calls for the students to ‘return to campus’ now that ‘victory’ was achieved, KAMI retorted, ‘We refuse to sacrifice
the people for the sake of study as long as political and economic life remains a mess!’ (Imawan 1966: 63). Not only was the struggle unfinished, its scope became all the more sweeping as KAMI expanded the third Tritura demand to ‘social justice’. But the first target was Sukarno. KAMI called for a Special Session of the People’s Consultative Assembly to call Sukarno to account. This session was held between 20 June and 6 July, resulting in ratification of the ‘Supersemar’ authorities granted to Suharto, legal banning of the PKI and Marxist teachings, and removal of Sukarno’s title of president-for-life. KAMI then called for Sukarno’s resignation and trial, and since the ‘constitutional path felt too slow for the young generation … they took the radical path’ (Martha et al. 1984: 348). In the subsequent process of radicalisation, which is all left out of the Angkatan 66 narrative, students began to clash with their erstwhile partner, the army. For months, they staged anti-Sukarno protests that were violently repressed, leaving many injured and an unknown number dead. But no more public services for ‘fallen heroes’ were staged, no flower wreaths from the army sent.

Concerned about the radicalisation, officials called on KAMI to move their struggle onto legal platforms by joining the parliament as a student faction. With KAMI leader Gafur’s statement fresh in mind, the proposal prompted heated debate within KAMI. Many opposed government co-optation, but thirteen leaders accepted the offer; not as ‘reward’ for services rendered, they maintained, but to advance the struggle with the real means of power. They were installed in the parliament on 28 January 1967. Among those who declined was Anwar, whose focus shifted to journalism. As he wrote in February in *Mahasiswa Indonesia*: ‘KAMI’s struggle is now two-faced’, split between ‘parliamentary, constitutional struggle’ and ‘extra-parliamentary struggle or street parliament’ (Anwar 1982: 67). Though he was part of the latter camp, Anwar recognised that having a student presence in the parliament could restore people’s faith in the institution. Indeed, the ‘parliamentary struggle’ went fast. In a special session of the People’s Consultative Assembly, held between 7 and 12 March, Sukarno was forced to resign. (He was put under house arrest, and died in 1977.) Suharto was installed as acting president, and as full president one year later. The New Order was born.

Sukarno’s fall added to the students’ sense of power and resolve to pursue the grand struggle for social justice. As Anwar (1982: 68) wrote in the article mentioned above, ‘the most important struggle, the principal work to be done, is amidst society’; it is there ‘that we must raise our militancy and revolutionary souls’ to ‘lead the people’s movements in pursuit of real betterment of their plight’. On 13 March, KAMI leader Cosmas Batubara (who had joined parliament) declared that the new goal was to eradicate all forms of corruption. Soon, however, KAMI was gripped by a sense of decline. For some months a call to rally was held at UI each
Saturday, for which classes were specially dismissed. But this became a routine; participation rapidly dwindled. The spirit of struggle was slipping away. This was perhaps inevitable, once the major battles were won. Suharto also insisted that the student struggle was complete; they should be proud of their achievements, and now focus on contributing to the New Order.

**Disenchantment: Exposing the Myth**

Rather than pride, the general sentiment was frustration. As Anwar (1982: 71) put it in July 1967, ‘there are still no signs of a breakthrough in the development of the New Order’, but ‘if the people’s faith is not restored, they will be gripped by anxiety, pessimism, and cynicism’. The only viable response, Anwar (1982: 76–77) wrote later that month, was to keep fighting:

> When the curve of struggle is declining, a sense of confusion and frustration arises, followed by the question: where to go from here? What next? … In this situation, we need to act fast and not be easily content. … We need the courage to criticise everything and everyone … if necessary even President Suharto as the present national leader. Criticism is essential, if we want the democratic process to develop. … Freedom, Justice and Rights are not gifts from the state or leaders, but a property we have to fight for, again and again, each day, each minute.

But no agitation could prevent the feared stage of paralysis. Many blamed this on the growing rivalry among the KAMI leaders. As KAMI activist Soe Hok Gie wrote in *Kompas* (26 October 1967), as a coalition of existing student organisations affiliated to existing parties, KAMI was in fact a ‘product of the Old Order’, and thus bound to reproduce old political conflicts (quoted in Anwar 1982: 101). KAMI Jakarta chair Marsillam Simandjuntak similarly noted that KAMI was ‘an unplanned product of history’, and it was to be expected that, once the momentum passed, the leaders would return to their old allegiances, crippling KAMI’s ‘capacity and courage to see problems fundamentally and achieve radical change’ (quoted in Anwar 1982: 104). On Tritura’s third anniversary, 10 January 1969, Anwar (1982: 96–97) also wrote that KAMI’s unity was an illusion to begin with:

> KAMI is an artificial union. … Any artificial union, however attractive on the outside, is sure to end in disaster. … In such a union there will always be theatre. Decisions will always be general and superficial … and will never touch the heart and base of the problem, since these have to be pushed aside for the sake of unity. … Artificial unity is not effective. It is nice to see, but meaningless as a solid instrument of struggle. If we compare it to a flower, it is a beautiful flower for decoration only, not a flower that will bear fruit.
Playing Politics

Not only was KAMI criticised from within its own ranks, for the first time in the Indonesian movement history, too, the narrative of unity was questioned. The narrative that had accompanied student struggle for many generations was thus exposed as an artificial and harmful fabrication, a myth that obscured the reality of ‘fundamental differences’ and obstructed the student struggle in getting to the ‘heart and base of the problem’. Returning to what they considered to be the ‘real struggle’ of intra-campus student activism, Soe Hok Gie and other former KAMI activists then regrouped in the UI Discussion Group. In a ‘Memorandum to All Indonesian Students’, published in January 1969, they stated:

The KAMI structure is flawed because it fails to represent intra-campus interests and potentials, while these form the backbone of all student movements. KAMI’s structure divides students on the basis of ideology and narrow loyalties. … Forces from outside the university now exploit KAMI and its personnel for their own interests. It is no longer a secret that many KAMI leaders do not defend the interests of society and students, but serve as a tool of those forces ([political] parties, vested interest groups). … Student unity must be based on students’ genuine awareness. As long as most students in Indonesia are willing to serve as a tool of outside forces, as long as students remain indifferent to social and campus issues, student unity on any basis is pointless. Our present task is to raise awareness among students to abandon narrow affiliations and to always be oriented towards the alma mater. So we may find the courage to recognise that difference of opinion is a natural, healthy thing, and efforts to impose uniformity in the name of unity is a bad thing. (Quoted in Anwar 1982: 108–109)

But since ‘unity’ was so interwoven with the narrative of student struggle, the end of ‘unity’ also seemed to imply the end of ‘student struggle’, at least in the form of KAMI. On 11 January 1969, Anwar (1982: 98) concluded that ‘all that remains of KAMI is a historical monument to reminisce’. One by one, member organisations withdrew from KAMI. What was still left of KAMI, mainly HMI, simply disappeared by 1970. Few students mourned KAMI’s slow death. While Marsillam Simandjuntak (quoted in Anwar 1982: 104) stated in December 1968 that KAMI had no future to begin with, he also stressed that ‘this does not mean that students’ aspirations for struggle will die along with KAMI’, and he warned of the danger of misrepresentation, as ‘vested interest groups’ will try to ‘make people think’ that ‘KAMI is identical with the student struggle’.

Indeed, the Angkatan 66 narrative that came to define KAMI also confined the student struggle to this one organisation and a circumscribed period: the year 1966. In 1967 Suharto had insisted that the student struggle was over, so when protests against corruption and price hikes continued in 1968 – notably by KAPPI youth, who were not easily co-opted – he imposed a demonstration ban, arguing that the protests were politically motivated. Finally, in 1969, Suharto summoned
KAPPI leaders to ‘remind’ them that street actions ‘are no longer compatible with the present situation, for in an era of development such activities can disturb public order and disrupt efforts to stabilise political life’ (Dwipayana and Nazaruddin 1991: 91). Suharto’s tacit threat was understood; thereafter the streets remained quiet. Moreover, it is likely that Suharto made lucrative offers to KAPPI leaders that were hard to resist, given that former KAPPI leaders were later rumoured to act as Suharto’s henchmen, ironically, in the suppression of future student movements. The combination, then, of mythologisation and co-optation, rivalries and repression, had closed the book on this episode of student struggle. Yet, although the streets were calm, the symbolic battles continued on.

Myth, Cowboy, and Character

Hatta was not the only paragon of the ‘old tradition’ of student struggle who saluted the Angkatan 66. In April 1966, the legendary pemuda leader Sutomo also made several public statements lauding the Angkatan 66 for ‘giving new direction to Indonesia’s national history’ in a manner ‘more impressive’ than his generation, as they struggled ‘without weapons other than courage, intelligence, political awareness, and pure motives’ (quoted in Aly 2011, web). Like Sutomo’s generation, then, the Angkatan 66 was instantly romanticised: granted historic status, it was detached from its historical context, which furthered the interests of the new regime. Soon, those elements of KAMI’s rhetoric and style deemed too close in spirit to the Sukarno era – including Ampera and all references to revolutionary vision – were filtered out of the narrative. Once cleansed from these elements, the memory of the Angkatan 66 could be used as the founding story of the New Order. Over the years, this memory was consecrated in official tokens: in 1982, the title of ‘Campus of New Order Struggle’ was bestowed to the UI campus, which has since then figured proudly on a sign at its entrance (until students removed it in 1998), and in 1997, a ‘Monument of the Spirit of 66’, shaped in the number ‘66’, was erected in Jakarta. Through these tokens, conferred many years later, the Angkatan 66 myth (along with that of the ‘communist threat’, see Chapter 7) was revived whenever the state needed to reaffirm its moral legitimacy. As Budiman (1978) notes, had it not been for the star role of students, the founding of the New Order would be a banal story of a military coup and countercoup in a crisis of succession. But the colourful image of students in the frontline of battle, with blood-stained yellow jackets hoisted in front, turned this power struggle into a romantic saga of student heroism.

Students also contributed to their heroic image. Yet, for them, it served other purposes, conveying very different political messages. While focusing on student heroism served to consecrate the New Order as a hard-fought achievement and
bestowed legitimacy upon the sitting political leaders, for students it served as a reminder of the righteous motives of their struggle. Take, for example, Soe Hok Gie’s poem ‘Message’ (Pesan), published posthumously in 1973:

Today again I see
soft faces with harsh expressions
speaking about freedom
and democracy
and aspiring
to topple a tyrant.
I know them
those who, without an army
want to wage war
against a dictator
and without money
want to fight corruption.
Comrades, I give you my love
and will you hold hands
forever in this life?

At first glance, this poem seems to represent a typical romanticisation of student struggle. However, coming from Soe Hok Gie, a former KAMI leader who condemned the decision to join the establishment, the plea, ‘will you hold hands forever’, acquires a different meaning: ‘will you stay true forever, not forsake our common struggle against corrupt rulers by becoming one of them?’ Gie’s representations of student struggle, which were widely disseminated through his radio broadcasts and prolific newspaper writings, could not be detached from political context, nor from his radical personal subjectivity.

Gie was an activist at heart. While refusing to join the KAMI presidium, he worked behind the scenes as a key figure in the movement; purportedly he was the brains behind many of its slogans and actions. Moreover, he is said to have played a central role in opening up channels to the army. But this was something he came to regret, seeing that the army, once in power, showed its true ‘tyrannical’ face. Like Anwar, Gie’s disenchantment with KAMI, the New Order, and the ‘dirty game’ of politics was profound. On 5 March 1967 (not long after KAMI leaders had entered parliament), he wrote a letter to a friend explaining his decision to turn his back on politics:

First, because I don’t want to be a politician, that’s filthy, foul work. Second, I don’t feel I have a task left [in politics]. I feel the task of our kind is to pioneer a breakthrough. In the past, nobody dared to force a breakthrough, since Sukarno was strong
Gie became famous; not as a representative of the Angkatan 66, a role he left to others, but as a brave young intellectual who dared to discuss taboo issues and expose public secrets of corruption and human rights violations. He was among the first to expose the political reality behind the anti-communist killings that had been silenced by most politicians, intellectuals, and students, lest it blemish the myth of a clean victory of the Angkatan 66. He was also the first to express concerns about growing restrictions on freedom of expression, as ever more books were banned, and not just ‘PKI’ books, since Suharto came to power. Given that frustration over Guided Democracy’s climate of censorship was a driving force for the student movement, this felt ironic indeed. As Gie wrote in June 1968:

Since 1966 the situation has changed. But the structure and consciousness did not change, only the rulers. … Freedom of expression has never returned. It remains a luxury item too expensive for Indonesian students. … The [banning of books] is a manifestation of fear. Fear for freedom of expression at the university. Even more saddening is the lack of protest from students and lecturers at the Indonesian Letters department, or from Indonesian writers themselves, against the fact that freedom of expression is being trampled by the boot called power. (In Prasetyo 2009: 368)

Gie’s criticisms also extended to less obvious injustices. In his article, ‘The Generation Born after the Year 45’, published on 16 August 1969, he exposed the dashed dreams of his generation, young people who entered the university full of aspirations – as Sukarno always said in his speeches: ‘Hang your aspirations high as the sky, oh youth of Indonesia’ – only to find them shattered by the reality that there was no room for idealism in a corrupt society:

This is the reality that confronts the idealist Indonesian youth, which leaves him two options. The first is to hang on to idealism; to become a non-compromising human. People will look at him warily and shake their heads: ‘He is smart and honest, but too bad his feet aren’t on the ground’. Or he can compromise with the situation. Forget about his idealism and go with the flow. He can join powerful groups … and learn the techniques of slander and licking heels. His career will take a flight. … Whichever road is taken, all end up in frustration. The one feels like Don Quixote fighting windmills, the other feels like a pilot who shall never fly. (In Badil et al. 2009: 465–466)

This, for Gie, was the main tragedy of his generation; groomed as hope of the nation, but doomed to frustration. The consequence, for those refusing to forsake
their deals, was to become a romantic but tragic persona, not a heroic Angkatan but a misunderstood idealist, who experiences inner turmoil in trying to uphold integrity, yet also derives a sense of self-worth from this choice of being. Gie’s motto was, ‘better to be marginalised than to surrender to hypocrisy’. This motto has since been adopted by many students after his generation. For, rather than the myth of the Angkatan 66, it was Gie’s persona that left the deepest imprint on student consciousness. Though Gie likened this persona to Don Quixote, it was more closely related to images of the ‘young radical’ circulating around the world at that time, resonating with universal stories of youth idealism. Thus, while representing a disillusioned generation in Indonesia, the idealist student personified by Gie was also part of a hopeful world beat. The knowledge of not being alone in the world in taking the idealist path was an important incentive to resist ‘wiser’ choices made by those ‘learning to lick heels’.

If Gie personified the eternal idealist, the opposite character was represented by the KAMI leaders who had joined Parliament. On 12 December 1969, Gie sent each of them a package containing cosmetics and a note: ‘We send you a small gift in the form of cosmetics and a small mirror so that you, our respected brothers, may make yourself even prettier in the eyes of the ruler and your colleagues in parliament. Work well, long live the New Order! Enjoy your soft seats, sleep well! From your student friends in Jakarta and ex-demonstrators of 66’ (quoted in Badil et al. 2009: 290–291). This symbolic act became an oft-cited part of student activist lore and its message still resonates: politics is a corrupting game.

In opposition to this dirty game, Gie and his comrades created their own myth about the true path of student struggle. For this, they took inspiration from the repertoire of Western popular culture, which since its suppression under Guided Democracy acquired a rebellious aura. As one of Gie’s friends recalls, their generation was influenced by Hollywood cowboy movies, which inspired them to re-fashion the story of student struggle into a cowboy story (Badil et al. 2009: 238). This was not the cowboy figure of the 1940s to which the pemuda were likened; rather than a rough figure wildly shooting about to get what he wants, the cowboy of the 1960s was a pensive, moral character, who hits the target in the name of justice. Arief Budiman, Gie’s older brother, first broadcast this story in 1967 as a critique of the co-opted KAMI leaders. As Budiman (in his preface to Sanit 1999: xiii) recounts, he compared the student movement to a movie called Shane, about a cowboy who arrives in a small town that is being terrorised by bandits. In the end Shane fights the bandit leader in a duel and kills him. The citizens rejoice, for at last they are freed from the clutches of the bandits who had ruled the town for years. As they go to reward Shane by appointing him as the town’s sheriff, they see him disappear on his horse into the mountains. The film ends with the cry of a
small boy, who runs after Shane and calls out repeatedly: ‘Shane, come back!’ In this tale, Budiman suggests that the student movement should follow the footsteps of this cowboy and become a ‘moral force’ – by not assuming power.

This plea to student leaders to uphold their integrity and decline government positions, as Shane declined the sheriff’s post, was to no avail. Even those who had earlier stated their objections, like Gafur, eventually joined the establishment. Yet, Anwar, Budiman, Gie, and many other activists remained ‘cowboys’. Moreover, the message that the student movement should be a ‘moral force’ provided a persuasive ‘model of’ and ‘model for’ action (see Chapter 1) that transcended the politics of the era. Part of its power lay in the fact that the story has no definite end; contrary to the Angkatan narrative that ends in 1966, the story of the cowboy is ‘to be continued’. Different from Shane, who disappears forever, in the story authored by Budiman and Gie the cowboy vows to return one day, when new bandits come to terrorise the town; hence, he is destined to return. This added another dimension to the story of the student movement as a ‘moral force’, defined not only as uncorrupted by institutions of power, but also as a sort of messiah figure that waits in the wings, who can return to save the nation once again. The righteous cowboy figure can do so, because, like the resi (further discussed in the next chapter), he remains ‘clean’ from worldly affairs.

However, this moral identity also set high standards that were difficult to meet in practice. It was impossible to stay completely ‘clean’ of politics for any student activist, even Gie, who struggled with this reality until his early death in December 1969. Gie is often cited as saying, ‘I only feel clean on top of a mountain’. For Gie, an avid mountaineer, dirty politics was opposed to the purity of nature; high mountains offered an escape from low politics. Four days after sending cosmetics to his former comrades in parliament – symbolising the ‘artificial beauty’ of ‘parliamentary struggle’ in contrast to the ‘natural beauty’ of ‘student struggle’ – he went to climb Mount Semeru with friends for his twenty-seventh birthday. Gie and one friend died after inhaling toxic gasses. News of his death made tremendous impact. Student journals and national newspapers published obituaries, praising Gie not only for his role in the student movement but especially for his staunch moral integrity in politics, which was known to be the exception rather than the rule. As the obituary in Mahasiswa Indonesia puts it:

Perhaps the straight path pursued by Soe Hok Gie is not easy to practice in political struggle. But without expecting everyone to be a Soe Hok Gie, we acclaim this youth as a model of integrity in struggle. Not everyone can or has to become a Soe Hok Gie. But we need people like him as a warning sign to remind us when we make mistakes. (In Badil et al. 2009: 93)
As Anderson wrote in 1970 (he and Gie became friends when Gie visited the United States in 1968), ‘He was in a way a symbol of all our hopes’ (quoted in Badil et al. 2009: 414). As such, Gie became larger than life, epitomising a superior path in life that few people, especially in politics, can hope or be expected to follow. The notion that not everyone can be a Soe Hok Gie implies that almost nobody can. Still, many try.

Gie’s death represented the end of an era, but his persona, and his legend, had lasting appeal. Students of later generations were introduced to him through his diary, published in 1983 as *Soe Hok Gie: An Activist’s Diary*, which has held a cult status ever since. Unlike Anwar’s (1980) diary, in Gie’s diary there is little reference to grand narratives of national struggle or discourse of national drama; only everyday experiences, ideological reflections, and matter-of-factly personal reports – without clear dating, beginnings, and endings – of a political insider whose main activity is not so much grand struggle but personal interaction with other insiders. Without the drama – without narrative – the diary also becomes ‘real’ and recognisable for other students. Indeed, the image that emerges from the diary is not a ‘generation’, but the student Gie, who happens to be an activist, but more importantly is a person criticising not only his opponents but also the hypocrisy around him. Sitha, one of the participants in my research, recalled that reading this diary in high school made her realise that ‘I want to be like Soe Hok Gie’, or indeed that she was a ‘Soe Hok Gie’, because suddenly her rebellion since childhood against everyday hypocrisy and corruption started to make sense (see Chapter 9 and 10). It made her aware that she was not alone in her resistance, not then, in the New Order of the 1990s, and not in history. In contrast, she never thought of wanting to become an Angkatan.

Narratives of student struggle can prepare students for their ‘destined’ role in history. But no student activist in Indonesian history set out on the struggle with the idea of being or becoming an Angkatan. Rather, they were inspired by stories of young people-in-struggle, who embodied and gave voice to the spirit of struggle that was said to be theirs, too, as students. As Anwar’s diary illustrates, spirit and story then feed into one another in the course of action, breeding a growing awareness of historicity. Anwar referred to past revolutions to make sense of the spirit moving them in the present. Yet, at certain critical points in the struggle, when wars of representation turn into battles worth real sacrifice – symbolised by a yellow jacket drenched in blood – ‘story’ can come to stand in a tense relationship to ‘spirit’. The more ‘serious’ and ‘historic’ the student struggle became, the more its actions became a performance of its own narration. The more the student movement became an Angkatan, the more difficult it became to nurture the playful spirit of the early phases of mobilisation. Without actual defeat or retreat, the
student movement thus slowly died out after losing its most vital resource: the rousing spirit that featured so monumentally in Anwar’s experience and narration, which was also a spirit of idealism and integrity, as most legendary embodied by Gie. Without that spirit there was no historicity, only the myth of the Angkatan 66. With that myth students entered the new era of the New Order.
From Loyal Critic to Young Radical in the Early New Order

Building the New Order

In the 1970s, as the Angkatan 66 myth was being institutionalised as the founding story of the New Order, and the ‘student-army partnership’ that had brought the New Order into being came to an end, the narrative of students as a ‘moral force’ continued to spur action. In this first decade of the New Order, both the student movement and the state still struggled to redefine themselves and legitimate their presence. The state needed to represent itself and its opponents in a manner that legitimated its ascendancy, and the students needed to represent themselves and their targets in a manner that justified mobilisation when the national struggle was said to be completed. Hence, both sides engaged in a war of representation, elaborating existing narratives and spinning new ones that helped to define what they became: an authoritarian regime and its radical opponents. In this narrative battle, the students still had sufficient political clout and public credibility to be considered a legitimate challenger to the state, at least in the field of representation. This made them sufficiently confident to play risky politics – striking risky alliances and openly attacking the state – but in doing so they overplayed their hand, which led to major crackdowns in 1974 and 1978. Only after winning these battles could Suharto consolidate his regime, although the building blocks of the New Order were introduced from the moment he came to power.

From the start, Suharto defined the New Order as the antithesis of Sukarno’s ‘Old Order’. As he stated in his 1967 Independence Day address, the New Order arrived to ‘perform total correction of all forms of deviation by the order that was in power at that time, which is now called the Old Order’ (quoted in Widjojo 2005: 46). This echoed the discourse of the 1966 student movement, but with a crucial difference: for the students, the ‘Old Order’ meant the repressive regime of Guided Democracy, but for Suharto it referred to the preceding era of liberal democracy in the 1950s. As he stated in his 1969 Independence Day address, liberal democracy had caused ‘the spirit of national unity’ to be ‘defeated by narrow group passions’, resulting in political instability and ‘uncontrolled differences of opinion’ (quoted in Widjojo 2005: 47). In emphasising contrast, Suharto opportunistically omitted the fact that this statement resonated with Sukarno’s views at the
turn to Guided Democracy

A clear manifestation of this contrast was the Sacred Pancasila Monument, a memorial to PKI’s defeat that was erected in 1968 in an area known as the ‘Crocodile Pit’, where the bodies of the murdered generals were found. The monument features large statues of the generals, shielded by a giant eagle (the national emblem, Garuda), on top of a pedestal with a frieze depicting the story of ‘PKI treason’. The images begin with the 1948 Madiun revolt, followed by the 1965 coup attempt (with graphic scenes of the torture and sexual humiliation of the generals by female communists), then scenes of student protest (depicted in the background, with General Edhie, the students’ ‘partner’, prominently pictured at the front) and military action under the emblem of the national ideology Pancasila. Then, Suharto enters the story, signing the ‘Supersemar’ letter that granted him authority to restore order and being installed as president, and finally the restoration of order. The contrast between ‘before’ and ‘after’ PKI’s defeat and the rise of the New Order could not be more explicit:

‘Before’ appears as a time of chaos, with men and women angrily gesticulating and debating. Then Suharto takes control – the symbol of reason and harmony. ‘After’ shows people quietly going about their business, under the protective eye of the military. … This was the ideological thrust of the New Order: stability and pembangunan [development] and no politics – a complete reversal of the Sukarno period. (Abeyasekere 1987: 237)

In this transition from Sukarno’s politicised streets to the tranquil space of the New Order, the army is presented as the key actor and the guarantor of national stability and unity; the role of students is recognised, but mainly as the army’s supporters. To bolster this claim, new stories were spun that magnified the army’s role in history, since the New Order also promised ‘total correction’ of historical memory. ‘Histories were (re)written, monuments erected, and ceremonies inaugurated to establish a particular memory and memorialising process that ultimately served to legitimise and stabilise the new regime’ (Schreiner 2005: 262). History was ‘put in a uniform’ (McGregor 2007). The army further claimed ownership of the national ideology, Pancasila, which Suharto turned into a sacred emblem of national stability and harmony, presenting the army as its only true defender. Constructed in this way, the army had no choice but to play a central role in the political life of the nation.

The army’s political role was the pillar of New Order power. It was enshrined in the doctrine of ‘dwifungsi ABRI’, or the ‘dual function’ of the Armed Forces (to which the police were included), extending ABRI’s role to domestic political affairs. It meant that ABRI held reserved seats in the parliament and top positions
in the bureaucracy. In addition, the military structure was extended to each administrative level, at the top of which was established the Operational Command for Restoration of Security and Order, or Kopkamtib. Still, the New Order was not presented as a military regime, and Suharto did not present himself as a military leader. Once he became president Suharto exchanged his army attire for a civilian suit with Javanese accents, and he had himself addressed as *Bapak* (father, sir), not General Suharto. The New Order was a Pancasila Order, which meant it was a Suharto Order, as Suharto presented himself as the Pancasila’s embodiment. Like Pancasila, he claimed to stand above the military and politics. Yet, Suharto was the military, and he was a shrewd political player, whose most ingenious political move was to get rid of politics.

Under Suharto, Golkar became the state party, though formally it was a ‘non-political party’ representing the ‘functional groups’ (*golongan karya*) in society, including civil servants, who had to observe ‘mono-loyalty’ to Golkar. After the 1971 elections – which Golkar overwhelmingly won, taking 236 of 360 parliament seats – the nine existing political parties were merged into two: the United Development Party (PPP) for Islamic parties, and the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) for all other parties. Moreover, political parties were no longer allowed to operate below the district level, which provided Golkar, as ‘nonpolitical party’, a head start in extending its local influence. This ‘modernisation’ of the political system, as Suharto framed it, was consistent with the New Order principle of the ‘floating mass’, which held that political participation should be limited to elections so that society’s energies could be dedicated to development. As one New Order slogan put it: ‘Politics No! Development Yes!’

Development (*pembangunan*) was the New Order mantra. Each cabinet was titled ‘Development Cabinet’, and Suharto was titled ‘Father of Development’. Under the direction of a group of US-trained technocrats based at UI (known as the ‘Berkeley mafia’), assisted by IMF and World Bank experts, the New Order economic policy focused on macro-economic growth, centrally managed by the National Planning Board. This resulted in rapid economic growth, accelerated by the oil boom in the 1970s, which greatly impressed foreign investors and donor agencies as well as the growing Indonesian middle classes. The New Order economic success story became the key source of the regime’s legitimacy. It justified the New Order precept that political stability and centralised administration were key conditions for progress, which also implied that any group causing political instability could be branded ‘anti-development’, in addition to ‘anti-Pancasila’.

But the success story masked structural flaws in the economy, including rampant corruption and favouritism and the intermingling of the political elite and the capitalist class, which produced growing socioeconomic inequity (Robison 1986). For the middle classes, it seemed that only those playing by the New Order rules
stood a chance of benefiting from economic progress. For students, this posed a
dilemma that acutely affected their sense of identity and agency: they could either
accept incorporation into the depoliticised, corporate structure of the New Order,
or remain faithful to the ‘path of struggle’ entrusted to them by their predecessors.
There was no easy solution to this dilemma, and those who chose the latter path
initially did so by playing with and around the rules rather than breaking them,
though eventually the break was absolute. Others decided to play by the rules.

Gains and Losses of New Order Incorporation

Of all the groups in society, students held the highest expectations of the New
Order, since they had helped to formulate its early design and ideology. But they
were also the first to criticise the unequal distribution of its benefits, and were all
the more disillusioned once it became clear that the New Order repeated many of
the ‘sins’ of Guided Democracy. In 1966, one reason KAMI bet on the army as a
suitable ‘partner’ was their seemingly shared vision of a clean, rational govern-
ment. The many corruption cases that soon surfaced showed the contrary, as did
the flagrantly luxurious lifestyle of top military figures, which contrasted sharply
with the plight of the poor who were hit hardest by the continuing price hikes. But
the rise of a new student movement after KAMI’s slow death seemed unlikely, as
it left a major organisational gap, and efforts to replace it with a similar national
organisation failed. Above all, any new attempts to revive the student movement
were thwarted by the government-promoted idea that the founding of the New
Order meant that the student struggle was ‘completed’, and that students should
return to (and remain on) campus to contribute to development.

The only lasting initiative after KAMI was the Cipayung group, a loose forum
of the main national student organisations (HMI, GMKI, PMKRI, GMNI, PMII),
founded in 1972 to align their respective visions about the national role of stu-
dents (Saidi 1993). In terms of numbers, this forum represented a massive poten-
tial; HMI membership alone exceeded 150,000 in 1967. But given that many of
its leading members and alumni had become part of the establishment, they were
hardly suited for an oppositional role. Such a role was fully precluded when the
Cipayung organisations accepted membership in the Indonesian National Youth
Committee, or KNPI, a government-sponsored institute that was founded in 1973
to guide the younger generation’s proper participation in national development
(Saidi 1992). While the youth wings of the political parties and other organisa-
tions readily accepted KNPI membership, the students initially resisted this form
of government co-optation, fearing that it could lead to the loss of their respective
ideological identities, or ‘de-ideologisation’ as they called it, which was not a far-
fetchsed concern given the ‘simplification’ of the political parties (Suhawi 2009).
It was only after heated debate and government pressure that they joined. Part of the incentive was undoubtedly the flow of government funds and career prospects that KNPI membership guaranteed, yet KNPI was not just about resources. It also imparted a grand identity to youth, confirming their national role, which at the time was appealing since this role had become anything but clear. As the KNPI’s statutes state:

The young generation has a dynamism, militancy, and idealism of its own. The pioneering role of youth stands out in launching groundbreaking ideas, as demonstrated in 1928, 1945, and 1966, when they stood up to defend justice and truth under the banner of Tritura, which became the basis of the New Order struggle. The youth, as part of the Indonesian nation, have a national responsibility to develop an awareness of national citizenship that is based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, is oriented towards the course of the state, contributes to freedom by developing the mentality of nationalism, and accelerates national development for the progress and prosperity of society. In order to continue and realise the nation’s aspirations, and to prepare the promising hope of the nation to fulfil their historical call and duty, youth organisations and the full potential of the Indonesian youth are joined together in KNPI, with the spirit of unity, to cultivate, mobilise, and channel the dynamism, militancy, and idealism of the Indonesian youth towards a better future.  

By associating itself with the struggle of the Angkatan, and interlocking this struggle with the New Order ‘struggle for development’, KNPI served to incorporate the ‘full potential of the Indonesian youth’ into the New Order. Furthermore, since it fell under the jurisdiction of the Youth Ministry and not the Higher Education Ministry, member student organisations were detached from the politicised atmosphere of campus, instead forming a separate youth sphere that became an integral part of the New Order focus on development. Once highly politicised and ideologically charged, these student organisations were thus administratively stripped of their autonomous political identity, which was replaced by the closely monitored corporate identity of ‘New Order youth’.

As part of the New Order corporate structure, the national student organisations also came to resemble corporate structures, becoming increasingly absorbed in the programmatic operations of organisasi – such as recruitment, multi-level leadership training programs, and intricate meeting procedures – which became ritualised affairs. They still called themselves the ‘student movement’, and still claimed to struggle for national ideals, but these terms acquired a bureaucratic flavour. ‘Struggle’ was now played as a game within the rules of the New Order, in which the mobilisation, or rather the accumulation of resources – in particular political capital, or connections with those in power – became the key concern. When played well, this game promised the prize of virtually limitless funds and
facilities as well as future top positions in the New Order bureaucracy or business corporations. Because this came at the cost of the ‘spirit of struggle’ – still highly valued among the student population at large – the national student organisations lost much of their prestige on campus.

Among the new generation of students many developed an antipathy toward these co-opted student organisations – especially HMI, which benefited the most from New Order political connections – criticising them for being self-centred, self-interested, and insensitive to social problems, or for looking ‘upwards’ to the state rather than ‘downwards’ to the people. The government’s move to incorporate the national student organisations and draw them away from campus thus had the effect of raising a new self-awareness among students, who began to redefine the meaning of ‘student movement’ in opposition to the corporate character of HMI and its peers. Meanwhile, the government’s ‘back to campus’ campaign had the effect of bolstering the role of campus-based organisations, which had hitherto been overshadowed by the national organisations. Thus, in the 1970s, faculty-level student senates, university student councils, and other campus organisations were at the forefront of a surge of political activity on campus, creating a vibrant political atmosphere with a flurry of critical discussions – on development, the debt trap, and power abuses, mostly inspired by the dependency theories of the time – accompanied by ludic ‘happenings’ and poetry readings. But the public reappearance of student protest was initially spearheaded by former members of the 1966 generation (who had not been co-opted), including Arief Budiman.

**Turning Radical**

Student protests in the 1970s started around the fourth anniversary of Tritura, 10 January 1970, when ‘new Tritura’ anti-corruption movements were launched in several cities. The largest was in Jakarta, where Budiman and other former KAMI activists, joined by thousands of students mobilised by UI student senates (though the HMI-controlled student council of UI did not join), launched the ‘Students Accuse’ movement against corruption and price hikes that they argued ‘hampers development’ (Aly 2004: 82). Using the New Order language of ‘development’, they thus presented themselves as critical supporters rather than opponents of the government, merely advising that the problems damaged ‘its good name in the eyes of the rakyat’; since students had ‘helped to establish the New Order’, they insisted they felt ‘a responsibility for its good name’ (Budiman 1973: 80). This ‘implied that once students drew the attention of the nation’s rulers to their own failings, those rulers would correct their own errors’ (Aspinall 1993: 7).

Budiman (1978: 620) later wrote that the students then were ‘ideologically innocent’; while criticising the government they still believed in Suharto’s devel-
opment strategy, and many felt that Suharto – seen as an ‘honest person from a poor peasant family’ – was little to blame, and was simply surrounded by corrupt people with a bad influence: the ministers, the generals, even his wife. However, recalling how KAMI had expressed a similar attitude towards Sukarno in 1966, claiming to defend him by warning against the corruptors around him, it becomes clear that the claim of ‘defending Suharto’s good name’ should also be considered a rhetorical move. Playing on the traditional Javanese worldview for which Suharto was known, the students’ stance evoked the figures of the Javanese sagas – the resi, the clairvoyant hermit who warns of the kingdom’s disintegration, and Semar, the god-clown who provides loyal criticism via half-jokes – which Budiman (1978) attached to his narrative of students as a moral force to turn it into a story of students as ‘loyal critics’. This served to downplay the possibility that the students, let alone seasoned activists like Budiman, might not be that ‘ideologically innocent’. Like Sukarno, Suharto played along with the story but did not fall for it, stating that he appreciated the students’ concerns, though also warning that they might be manipulated by ‘illegal political groups and ambitious persons who wanted the presidency’ (Budiman 1978: 622).

Yet, the intensity of the protest and the sympathetic press coverage it received prompted Suharto to demonstrate his commitment to a clean government. On 31 January 1970 he set up a commission to investigate corruption in the government. The student protests then quieted, according to Budiman (1983: 159) ‘to give the impression as if students are “resi” whose task is done because his request is fulfilled’, and ‘to show that students do not have any hidden motives’. After five months the commission completed its work; the report was confidential but it was leaked to the press, exposing various corruption cases involving high military and government officials close to Suharto. It became a major public scandal, but the government denied all allegations. In a meeting with students on 14 July, Suharto explained that he could not fight corruption without clear evidence, but he offered to reserve a weekly ‘student hour’ for them to submit such evidence. The students returned four days later with proof of a secret bank account of one of Suharto’s associates, yet Suharto claimed he saw no irregularity, and again insinuated that the students might be manipulated by ‘ambitious politicians’ (Aly 2004: 88). One week later students submitted new data but again Suharto brushed it aside, citing the Javanese saying: ‘Do things slowly, as long as it gets done’ (alon-alon asal kelakon). The journal Mahasiswa Indonesia then retorted that resorting to ancient Javanese sayings to tackle pressing twentieth-century issues was truly behind the times: ‘For at least two generations the Javanes have bought watches. Time has become a factor. … In this day and age the Divine Ogre from the Mahabharata is facing the international slogan: Now or Never’ (Aly 2004: 88–89). This was not the kind of response one would expect from a resi. Soon, Suharto’s student hour
was terminated. The students promptly resumed their protests, and the loyal critic posture was abandoned as the ruler showed its oppressive face.

The anti-corruption protests receded when an anti-corruption bill was issued, but there were many other reasons to protest, such as the ‘excessive’ behaviour of the military. One incident, which Aly (2004: 100) calls the ‘first deep wound’ in student–military relations, occurred in October 1970 in Bandung, where a football match between Police Academy and ITB students ended in a brawl; shots were fired, and that night the police students killed one ITB student. Thousands of students in Bandung then took to the streets to condemn the incident, linking it to the unrestrained behaviour of ABRI in general. The day after, a few hundred students travelled from Bandung to Suharto’s residence in Jakarta to deliver a letter condemning ABRI’s violation of civil rights; unless the situation improved, the students would ‘no longer trust ABRI as partner, nor as guardians of the Indonesian people’ (2004: 101). This was a clear break with the New Order dictum of army guardianship, paving the way for more radical stances. In several cities, students held solidarity rallies with anti-ABRI slogans, such as: ‘Is ABRI the guardian or murderer of the people?!’ (2004: 102). In the aftermath, the perpetrators of the assault were put before a military tribunal, but the main suspect, a general’s son, was acquitted. To students, this was a clear sign that ABRI stood above the law, and subsequent experiences further hardened their attitudes.

In December 1971 students began mobilising against the construction of the Beautiful Indonesia in Miniature Park, Taman Mini, a theme park at the outskirts of Jakarta that was meant to symbolise Indonesia’s cultural diversity as an idealised space of the nation. For the students, though, this prestige project symbolised the wastefulness and injustice of the development policy; besides its astronomical cost, thousands of villagers were evicted for its construction without adequate compensation. Students in several cities staged massive protests by names such as ‘Anti-Extravagance League’ and ‘Movement to Save the People’s Money’. Since Taman Mini was known to be the First Lady’s pet project, Suharto felt personally attacked. On 6 January 1972, he furiously stated that the students ‘abused democracy’ and were backed by hidden figures with subversive intents; if people were out to topple him they should use the constitutional path, or else, Suharto warned, he would ‘strike hard’ as when he ‘crushed PKI’ (Budiman 1973: 84). This was a striking threat, and Suharto did strike hard: troops and thugs were sent to beat the protests apart, there were mass arrests, and student journals that reported on the protests or the repression received phone threats. On 17 January, Kopkamtib declared all ‘extra-parliamentary action’ prohibited.

In response, Budiman and his comrades issued the ‘Grey January’ statement, stating that they still opposed Taman Mini but were forced to surrender:
In contrasting students’ innocence to the excessive violence of the regime, the statement represents the students as the moral victors. But the bitterly ironic tone – with a reminder that Suharto owed his position to students – also expressed that things had gone too far to keep up a resist role. State violence destroyed the ‘loyal critic’ story. Budiman, student leaders, and NGO activists who joined the protests were jailed for one month without trial. Yet, student protests continued, which again and again led to allegations about manipulation by ‘hidden actors’. To the students, who put their bodies on the line against the ‘fully armed armed forces’, this was deeply offending, and it radicalised them further.

Several events in 1973 further sharpened the students’ attitudes. On 5 August, riots broke out in Bandung, mostly targeted at ethnic Chinese. The Bandung governor identified it as a politically motivated ‘PKI guerrilla’ action, and Kopkamtib urged the press not to report on the riots lest it incite racial unrest. But as students argued in several statements, which were promptly banned, the riots were caused by a sense of social injustice that could be related to the structural injustice of the development policy. Another issue preoccupying students was the domination of foreign, especially Japanese, capital due to preferential policies, as manifested in troubled small businesses suffering from unfair Japanese competition, and unfair treatment of Indonesian workers at Japanese companies. Students learned about the problems as the small business owners and workers actively approached them to voice their complaints, finding that the government turned a deaf ear to their concerns and only responded with ‘empty promises’ (Aly 2004: 270). Similarly, during social service duties in villages as part of their curriculum, students often found villagers eager to voice their complaints to them as they felt they had no one else to turn to. These experiences not only made theories of injustice ‘real’ to the students, it also strengthened their sense of responsibility towards the people. A radical critique of the New Order was thus forming, in which its development policy, represented by the government as a blessing for the nation, was inverted as a ‘national disaster’. Hence, the students adopted the familiar narrative that it was their national duty to save the nation from this ‘disaster’.
Yet it was around an unrelated issue that students also rediscovered the power of mass mobilisation. From September to November 1973, Islamic students led a wave of protests against the ‘marriage bill’ that Islamic groups viewed as ‘veiled Christianisation’, and students framed as a sign of ‘national moral degeneration’. On 27 September Islamic youth and student organisations briefly occupied the Parliament; many were arrested, and again Kopkamtib warned of a hidden actor. But the students’ taste for mobilisation was aroused. Finally, Indonesian students were deeply impressed by events in Thailand, where, in October 1973, the student movement toppled the military regime. Since the Thai student movement had also been formed to address development issues, a comparison was readily made. Students in Indonesia began to calculate their chances.

Drama, Dangerous Alliances, and Disaster

In order to calm the unrest, Suharto instructed Kopkamtib chief Sumitro to tour universities. But rather than admonishing the students, Sumitro showed sympathy for their causes. At one meeting with students in Yogyakarta, he also hinted at the possibility of ‘a change in leadership from authoritarian leadership to democratic leadership’, involving greater ‘two-way communication’ between the government and the people (Aly 2004: 312). This was read as a sign of imminent change in the national leadership, especially since Sumitro was known to be the rival of Ali Murtopo, the chief of Suharto’s ‘personal assistants’, or Aspri (a team of advisors composed of top generals). Hence, presented with an intra-regime conflict apparently reaching a climax, the students once again assumed the role of the national student movement.

On 28 October 1973, Youth Pledge Day, a debate was held at UI on the ‘role of the young generation today’. Speakers included representatives of all the great Angkatan, while the chair of the UI student council, Hariman Siregar, represented the ‘post-1966 Angkatan’. Thus, the students gave off the signal of following the footsteps of the great Angkatan, though the undecided end to their story was evident from the affix ‘post-1966’. The sense of history and historicity was underscored in the closing ceremony, held at the Kalibata Heroes Burial Site. Siregar stated the students’ ‘anxiety about the current situation that is deviating from our nation’s hopes and aspirations’, and urged the government to ‘reconsider the development strategy’, to ‘liberate the people from legal insecurity, violation of law, rampant corruption, power abuses, price hikes, and unemployment’, to ‘strengthen institutions for channelling the people’s opinions’, and to acknowledge that students ‘are the ones with the greatest interest in the future, therefore the act of determining the future, which cannot be separated from the current situation, is also our right and obligation’. He concluded, ‘in front of the spirit of the National
Heroes, we accept the national duty of students to control the government and society for consistency with the national struggle’ (in Siregar 1994: 42).

In the following months, as Sumitro’s shifting stance made Kopkamtib more tolerant, the street protests grew more massive, reviving memories of 1966 with the sight of masses of students wearing colourful campus jackets, waving flags, hoisting banners, yelling slogans, singing songs, distributing pamphlets, as well as painting the city with graffiti. The revival of the story and repertoire of student struggle also resonated with the icons of previous Angkatan, such as Hatta and the legendary pemuda leader Sutomo, who often joined the students’ increasingly dramatic events. One such event was the ‘Night of Concern’, held at UI on New Year’s Eve. Attended by students from various cities, the repertoire of national drama was performed with verve at this event: the national anthem was sung, a moment of meditation was observed, and dramatic speeches were made about students’ historical burden to liberate the people. New elements were also added to the familiar rhetoric, related to the injustices of the New Order development policy and system of power, which, they made clear, could not be combated by students alone. Siregar called on the government ‘to correct the economic system at once’, and if it failed to respond he urged all of society to join the struggle: ‘let us all together correct the government’ (in Siregar 1994: 3). The threat to mobilise non-student sectors of society further radicalised the image of students who had hitherto played the ‘moral force’ trump card, and gradually the thought of overthrowing the regime took shape.

Yet, beneath the coat of united struggle the students were plagued by internal strife and engaged in complex political games, with many mutual accusations of outside influences. Siregar, for one, was rumoured to strike deals with different actors, and his leadership was not uncontested. At UI, one group of dissenters rejecting Siregar was expelled from the student council on charges of infiltrating for General Murtopo. Meanwhile, Siregar was said to owe his chair position to the support of Murtopo’s faction in Golkar, with which he had close relations until he ‘betrayed’ them by picking a different candidate for the vice-chair position than theirs. It was then that Murtopo began to suspect Siregar of allying with his rival, Sumitro, also since Siregar stated on several occasions that Suharto was better replaced by Sumitro. In Sumitro’s eyes, however, Siregar was still Murtopo’s ally. Suharto, too, was under that impression, as Murtopo reported to him that Siregar was under his control. But when Suharto instructed Murtopo to instruct Siregar to end the protests, Murtopo was in no position to do so, though he tried by sending middlemen to lobby Siregar (Aly 2004: 353–354). Even had he succeeded in winning back Siregar’s support, the assumption that this would end the protests was based on the assumption that Siregar controlled the student movement. He did not; the student councils did, and at each university and in each city they had
priorities and alliances of their own. As this story illustrates, ultimately none of
the actors was in control, yet each believed that someone was. In this situation,
differences and distrust between the various actors – within the student movement
and within the state – were further exacerbated, creating the ground for the pitfall
in which the students soon found themselves trapped.

After the New Year’s Eve event, students stepped up their protests, building
towards the Japanese prime minister’s visit on 15 January 1974. On that day, the
plan was to march from various campuses to the National Monument, near the
State Palace where Suharto would meet with Prime Minister Tanaka. But the plan
went awry. Following rumours of ‘efforts to terrorise the student movement’, at
the last minute the rallying point was relocated to Trisakti University. Once they
had arrived there, the news reached them that riots had erupted at several places
in the city. The students decided to cancel the protest and return to their cam-
puses, avoiding the riots. But on their way back, the UI students were halted by
security forces and redirected to a different route, where they found themselves
right in the middle of the riots. They still reached the UI campus, where they
stayed overnight as the riots continued. By all accounts, ‘uncontrollable masses’
were fired up by the protests and had run amok, setting cars alight and ransacking
buildings. The next morning, rioters arrived at the UI gates, calling on the stu-
dents to come out and lead the people. The students declined and tried to per-
suade them to end the riots. But the riots continued throughout the day.

Later that day, Sumitro, Murtopo, and other Kopkamtib and Aspri generals
shelved their rivalry and stood shoulder to shoulder at a press conference to con-
demn the ‘destructive, emotional wild action’, announcing that ‘the situation now
forces us, who have been patient until the very limit, to take firm action and occasion-
ally use violence’ (Aly 2004: 367). In this ‘firm action’, eleven people were
killed. Jakarta was placed under curfew, and universities and schools were tempo-
arily closed. At the press conference ABRI did not mention the student protests,
but the blaming finger was quickly pointed, first, by other students. HMI was the
first to issue a statement, asserting that while it is ‘natural for the young genera-
tion to voice aspirations … as long as it is done responsibly’, they regretted ‘the
destructive acts committed in the framework of protest by the young generation
that can lapse into anarchy’ (Aly 2004: 368). The other national student organisa-
tions made similar statements, so did the political parties and Golkar. That night,
Siregar and the UI rector held their press conference to clarify that the stu-
dents were not involved, but to no avail. In the aftermath of the riots, which became
known as Malari, an acronym for the ‘Fifteenth January Disaster’, Siregar and
forty-eight other student leaders were arrested, along with several opposition fig-
ures for their alleged role as ‘mastermind’, and some seven hundred other people.
Newspapers that had reported on the events were banned, including *Harian KAMI* and *Mahasiswa Indonesia*.

**A Narrative Battle**

Budiman, who was also arrested as one of the alleged ‘masterminds’, still made an effort in his 1978 article to attach a resi-story to the event, though he admitted that this story was over.

The student leaders … tried to save their resi posture by condemning the destruction of cars and buildings, but it was too late. Suharto could no longer afford to play the free-from-worldly-interest-king vis-à-vis the resi. … The King had been made angry now, although according to the cultural norms, by acting as such he was showing weakness and the whole thing was a sign of his downfall. In this case, however, it appears that Suharto emerged stronger than before and the incident ultimately served as a reaffirmation of his political and military power. (Budiman 1978: 623–624)

The public secret was that Murtopo had staged the riots to discredit the students and set the stage for a crackdown, which would also discredit Sumitro for letting the protests get out of hand. The accepted story became that the students, especially Siregar, had misread the political opportunities and bet on the ‘wrong man’. However, if the students had bet on anything it was on the power of their own story, and thereby they misread the situation of the ruling elites. Despite the internal friction, the state stood ready to bring about its own version of events. As Kopkamtib chief-of-staff Sudomo stated on 20 January, the students’ initial intents were ‘pure and proper’, but ‘they chose the path of radicalism and shows of moral force in dangerous political ways’, forgetting that ‘each movement will be exploited by other parties’, such as ‘remnants from G30S/PKI’ (quoted in Siregar 1994: 19). A story was thus spun of students as ‘political radicals’, in which the ‘political’ was tied to the attribute of ‘dangerous’ – prone to manipulation, and likely to end in ‘disaster’.

After losing the battle as the legitimate student movement, students saw themselves forced to set the story straight about their identity as ‘students’ rather than ‘radicals’, and they used Siregar’s trial in November 1974 as a platform to present this story. His defence was conducted by a team of young lawyers, with the title: ‘The Indonesian Young Generation on Trial’. One of the lawyers, Tasrif, argued that ‘the aspirations of the young generation in our fatherland today’ are at stake, comparing Siregar’s trial with that of Hatta and other PI leaders in 1928 in the Netherlands (in Siregar 1994: 24–25). But in his speech the figure of the ‘young generation’ was framed not only in terms of the familiar Angkatan narrative, but also in terms of global narratives of a ‘generation gap’ and ‘youth idealism’. To-
together, they implied a biting critique of the ‘old generation’ in Indonesia. Tasrif stated: ‘The young generation’s restlessness and anxiety is often misunderstood by the old generation’ who form ‘the establishment’, and who ‘tend to receive the young generation’s aspirations with the a priori attitude that father knows best’. This makes them feel threatened by, and overreact to, the youth’s aspirations, so that they try to ‘tame the young generation’ through co-optation, as in KNPI, ‘which the old generation still controls … by remote control’, or to ‘eliminate the movement of this young generation, if necessary by force’ (in Siregar, 1994: 26).

The frequent use of English phrases in this speech, and in many other student speeches in this period, indicates the students’ connection to global sensibilities around the self-image of youth and generational protest. Tasrif thus quoted from Bob Dylan’s iconic song ‘The Times They Are a-Changing’ (‘Come mothers and fathers throughout the land; And don’t criticise what you can’t understand; Your sons and daughters are now beyond your command’), and recited the saying discussed by the American scholar of student activism, Lipset (1971: 19): ‘He who is not a radical at twenty does not have a heart’ (yet omitting the second part: ‘He who is still a radical at forty does not have a head’). Tasrif further cited from the report of a recent international conference on youth, held in Italy, which recommended taking the ideas and ideals of the youth seriously and involving them in shaping a new world. He then argued that the youth in Indonesia and other developing nations were confronted directly with the reality that ‘amidst the people’s poverty a small elite of the old generation parades its riches, obtained by corruption and power abuse’, and that ‘human rights are pushed aside and injustice and social inequality grow, adding to the restlessness and anxiety felt in their souls in connection with their future’. Therefore, ‘our young generation experiences a crisis of confidence in the power and authority of elders, teachers, and rulers’, and can no longer blindly accept the ‘moral teaching … received from our ancestors’ that the authority of elders comes before all else (in Siregar 1994: 31–32). The argument of ‘Indonesian morals’, frequently used by the ‘old generation’, was rendered meaningless if these morals were made to legitimise the lawlessness and despotism of ‘elders, teachers, and rulers’. Naturally, ‘this gives rise to a sense of moral outrage among our young generation’ (in Siregar 1994: 36).

According to Tasrif, this ‘moral outrage’ was well developed among students, as they ‘have critical views and are well versed in articulating them’, and ‘are generally the ones who launch new ideas of social reform’. Moreover, students are ‘aware of their noblesse oblige’, knowing that ‘the common people are incapable of voicing their inner feelings’ and therefore ‘hang their hopes on students as aspirant leaders of the future’ (in Siregar 1994: 38). He cited several scholars of student protest to support this claim (e.g., Lipset and Altbach; see Chapter 1).
Indeed, the government should be grateful:

The old generation should be proud of the social awareness shown by students, UI students in particular, while they wrestle to finish their studies, face exams, etc. How easy it would be for them to enjoy their youth partying, dating, dancing, etc. What do the leaders of the UI student council have to gain from spending the final months of their study years involving themselves in society’s problems, so that their studies become a mess? If they had just kept silent without contributing their thoughts on social problems outside campus, they would have received their diplomas by now and [Siregar] would not be sitting here as the accused before this court. But [Siregar] and his friends in the UI student council are the prototype of transgressive students, who are infused with the idealism to struggle for structural changes in society, so that a society may emerge that meets their sense of justice ... [and] are infused with the greatest sense of responsibility for the future of our country and nation. (In Siregar 1994: 41)

In their closing statement, the lawyers reiterated ‘what is at stake’ in this trial. Not only was the ‘Indonesian young generation on trial’, but also ‘freedom of expression’. They pointed to the official ‘three duties’ (Tri Dharma) of universities: teaching and learning, research and development, and service to society – which meant that ‘students must make every effort to understand the complaints of the people and must have the moral courage to voice the people’s inner feelings’, and for that ‘must be free to discuss and analyse all that happens’; this was ‘only possible when freedom of expression in the campus environment is truly guaranteed and respected’ (in Siregar 1994: 137). Finally, the lawyers stressed that this trial was a challenge for the New Order justice system, again drawing the comparison with Hatta’s trial and reminding the judges that, in 1928, even the Dutch Court ‘proved to understand the aspirations of Indonesian students’ by acquitting them of all charges (in Siregar 1994: 140). But the Indonesian court was less understanding. Siregar was sentenced to six years prison. The narrative battle was lost. As for the student movement, the crackdown was sufficiently effective to halt its momentum and dissolve the networks – among student organisations and with reform-minded elites – that had been built over the past year.

**Targeting the Regime**

After the Malari riots, Suharto reorganised ABRI to prevent future rivalries from destabilising the regime: Aspri was abolished, Sumitro was pressured to resign, and Suharto assumed command of Kopkamtib, thus concentrating power in his own hands. This significantly narrowed the space for alliances between opposition groups and regime factions. To take the wind out of the opposition’s sails, Suharto also announced a reform of the development policy to make even distri-
bution a national priority, and he began making work of building his Pancasila nation. In his Independence Day address on 17 August 1974, he stressed the need to break once and for all with ‘the old [political and social] arrangements that had existed before 1966’, and that had ‘fragmented our whole society into small groups who involved themselves directly in practical politics’. The opposite of dangerous ‘practical politics’, he asserted, was the ‘Pancasila democracy’, which thus needed to be reinforced by ‘enhancing mutual consent between the government and social forces’ (in Widjojo 2005: 52). To that end, a commission was established for the ‘guidance of the young generation’, tasked with standardising school curriculums to ensure national coherence.

When they reopened in February, universities were required to follow new procedures to enhance control over students’ activities. The Education Minister, Syarif Thayeb (who had created KAMI and was now called back from his ambassadorship abroad to create order on campus), issued Decree 28, which prohibited political activities on campus and stipulated that all ‘extracurricular activities’ required prior written approval from the rector, thus holding the rectors responsible for all that took place on campus. This virtually eliminated the autonomy of the student representative bodies and the very notion of the campus as a ‘free space’, which students in the early 1970s still held high. Students and rectors opposed the decree, and in the following years students frequently staged protests against it, which rectors and faculty members tacitly or openly supported. In July 1977 the decree was finally revoked, yet only after all universities had established campus regulations in the spirit of the decree. By then, however, the student movement had regained its strength.

The students’ preoccupation with the decree, which was seen as an ‘internal campus issue’, had long kept their protests on campus and off the streets. The events of 1974 had also effectively deterred them from engaging in street action. After the Malari riots, the streets were seen as a ‘dangerous’ place, where things could easily get out of hand, and the ‘rakyat’ as potentially ‘dangerous masses’, who were better kept at bay. The image of such masses battering at the UI gates to lure the students out was sufficiently menacing to keep campus gates closed. In fact, notions of ‘dangerous streets’ and ‘dangerous masses’ were consistent with middle-class sensibilities, but this did not deter the middle-class students before. Previously, the 1973 riots in Bandung had a mobilising effect, as they brought the students’ sense of social injustice into sharp focus. But the fact that ‘Malari’ was explicitly linked to student protest had a paralysing effect. Still, the riots alone would not have quelled the movement as abruptly as they did if it were not for the repression. In that regard, the danger not only lurked on the streets. On campus, there was growing intimidation to deter criticism; state intelligence increased, and
members of student representative bodies reported being tailed from campus and being harassed on the streets by unknown men.

But the temporary halt on mobilisation also enabled students to rethink their strategy and position. Sentiments against ‘playing politics’, especially in the sense of allying with elite players, increased after Malari, so did the antipathy towards the military. It was with this anti-politics sentiment that students engaged in alternative activities to channel their criticism. Discussion groups flourished, as did artistic activities such as poetry readings and theatre, which provided a ‘safe’ yet inventive means to criticise the regime through ridicule. Through these activities the targets of student criticism developed further: clean government, participatory democracy, rule of law, and equitable development remained popular themes, and as Malari moved further into the past the students became bolder in voicing these ideas. Moreover, as many student activists went on to become public intellectuals, these themes spread to a wider public, so that students were no longer the only carriers of reformist ideas.

Yet, there remained an edge of danger to student criticism. Amidst the public vogue for reformism, the students retained a distinctly populist rhetoric, which seemed sufficiently radical to put off older reform-minded intellectuals and political actors. While sympathising with the students’ call for reforms, these ‘regularisers’, as Feith (1978: 22) calls them, were unwilling to support them, as they were ‘positively frightened by student leaders and others who talk about the need for action by the people’, which ‘[struck] them as dangerously likely to produce a situation of serious rioting as in 1973 and 1974 (if not one of inter-communal massacre as in 1965–66)’. Thus, the students once again had to bear the ‘historical burden’ of a ‘struggle for the people’ on their own, or so they felt, and so this struggle was once again constructed as a national student movement, although the students also attempted to avoid the ‘mistakes’ of 1974, and those of 1966.

The May 1977 elections provided a timely political momentum. By then, the regime had helped to create the conditions for opposition to grow, by creating a story meant to deter opposition, which then backfired. In the months ahead of the elections, hundreds of people were arrested on charges of terrorist activities as part of a mysterious ‘Komando Jihad’, allegedly a resurrection of the Darul Islam. The Islamic party PPP, whose growing popularity made the regime nervous, was discredited for alleged ties with this group. The affair also hit Islamic student organisations, in particular HMI, but this pushed them into a role of opposition; not by the name of HMI but through its members in the student councils, which HMI largely dominated. The role of student councils as the engine of the student movement was thus resumed, and they played the role industriously: besides organising seminars with politicians, students went to investigate the electoral process in the regions, exposing numerous irregularities such as vote-rigging, bribery, and inti-
Playing Politics

...midation to secure a landmark victory for Golkar, and the findings were broadly published in the press.

In contrast to previous student movements, the initiative largely came from students at smaller private universities, such as the Institute of Teacher Training and Education (IKIP) in Jakarta. At the time of the elections, the student council of UI was in the midst of a leadership transition, so that UI, historically the ‘vanguard of student struggle’, was slow to act. This led students at private universities to mock UI for their ‘lack of militancy’ and for ‘missing the train’ (Budiyarso 2000: 72). Similarly, they mocked ITB students for their ‘Anti-Ignorance Movement’ against the national education policy, launched in April 1977, because this seemed to moderate a movement that was heading towards political targets. Yet, the ITB students also targeted the elections as part of a systematic plot to ‘fool the people’, relating it to structural injustices, while the relatively ‘safe’ issue of education allowed them to tour universities in order to rebuild a national activist network. By the time the ITB campaign dissolved after the elections, this network was firmly in place. In the end, while a sense of competition between students at private and state universities lingered on (and resurfaced in the 1990s), they came to collaborate around the same goal: targeting the regime.

Unsurprisingly, the elections resulted in a victory for Golkar, and in the new cabinet ABRI took even more positions. But PPP gained several local victories and a famous majority in Jakarta, which further emboldened the students. In the months after, students voiced sharp criticism of the unfair elections, the Golkar–ABRI collaboration, and militarism in general, calling for a substantial reduction of ABRI’s political role and abolition of Kopkamtib. This assertiveness revived memories of students’ role as the defenders of the people, and once again the student councils received many letters and visits from various groups voicing their concerns. The public ‘remembered’ to whom to turn, placing high hopes in the students, which was the clearest sign that the student movement was back. It was also affirmed by the support students received from prominent figures like Hatta, who urged them to expose the truth that ‘democracy is being tortured’ (Budiyarso 2000: 78). There was also furtive support. At UI, students had close contact with seven UI professors sitting in the cabinet: the so-called ‘Berkeley Mafia’, who had designed the development policy but had grown disappointed in the regime, and who now passed on insider information on corruption within the government. This information rapidly spread across student networks, and helped to convince large numbers of students of the need to challenge the regime.

Soon, student action committees were formed across the country that took up any issue – from price hikes, to corruption, to the ‘Javanisation’ of the bureaucracy – to perform the familiar repertoire of street protest. In an effort to appease the
students, Suharto sent a ‘dialogue team’ of cabinet ministers to tour universities and explain the government’s policies. But wherever they arrived they were met with jeers and critical questions, and at several universities students blocked their entry. The team was disbanded, and students continued their actions, including a brief occupation of the Parliament in September, where students installed a mock parliament to show that even they could do a better job at governing the country.

With the upcoming People’s Consultative Assembly in March 1978, in which Suharto would be re-appointed for his third term, the students received broader support, including from ‘regularisers’ in the government, who saw this as ‘a rare opportunity to effect far-reaching renewal with a minimal danger of violence … hoping that the student movement would serve as catalyst for this kind of change’ (Feith 1978: 24). Yet, elite support also made the students wary of ‘repeating the mistakes of 1974’, when the student movement had failed, as they also saw it, due to elite manipulation. The UI student council, which bore the heaviest brunt of the blame in 1974, was especially wary of hidden agendas. Thus, when ITB students proposed to host a national student conference, others only agreed to participate after guarantees that this was ‘purely a student initiative’ (Budiyarso 2000: 84).

The ITB conference was held from 24 to 28 October 1977, Youth Pledge Day. With prominent speakers and a broad range of issues discussed it was reminiscent of the Spirit of 66 symposium of 1966; like then, the aim was to draft a plan for a new system of governance. But behind the scenes, the students disagreed on the most critical issue: whether or not to aim for toppling Suharto. The ITB students had already decided on that target, but as this made the UI students suspicious of ‘political agendas’ they stuck to the target of a ‘clean government’, which in turn led to accusations of a ploy to moderate the movement. In the end, a consensus was reached and a joint declaration read out. This started with the familiar rhetoric, calling for ‘a clean government that can be trusted to realise the aspirations of the struggle for independence’, one that ‘returns to the spirit of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution in a pure and consistent manner’, and stressing the students’ ‘resolve to uphold unity and solidarity in our struggle for truth and justice in the people’s interest’. The declaration further listed all the faults of the New Order, including the widening income gap, foreign debt trap, ABRI’s abuse of dwifungsi, unfair elections, the equation of the state with Suharto, the misappropriation of the ‘land, forests, and sea by certain figures with the government’s blessing’, and the erosion of freedom of expression. Finally, it concluded that they rejected Suharto’s re-appointment and wanted him impeached (Budiyarso 2000: 102–104). To add force to the declaration, the thousands of students then marched the streets around the ITB campus.

On 10 November, Heroes Day, students in several cities staged massive long marches with the familiar attributes of student struggle: colourful campus jackets,
flags, banners, songs, slogans, and a spirit of struggle. While this raised memories of the student protests prior to Malari, which ended in ‘disaster’, the press rather compared it to the 1966 student movement, which ended in ‘victory’. Thus, high expectations were raised.

‘Shock Therapy’ against ‘Extremism’

The regime issued thinly veiled threats that these ‘minority actions’ could not be tolerated, but by now the students were gripped by a sense of urgency. This was reinforced by any news of corruption or people’s suffering, such as a famine in Karawang near Jakarta, which according to the students was a sign that Suharto had failed in his duty to care for the people and therefore had to resign. On New Year’s Eve, rallies were held at campuses in several cities. In Jakarta, the students rallied at Atma Jaya University, with dramatic poetry performances and speeches expressing their awareness of the risks of the struggle to come. As the chair of the UI student council stated: ‘Perhaps among us victims will fall by bullets, but that is the risk of student struggle as a moral force’ (Budiyarso 2000: 178). The more they were threatened, the more intently they played the role of student movement, using the entire narrative repertoire of student struggle to legitimise their actions, as they knew they were heading for a dangerous climax.

On 10 January 1978, the anniversary of Tritura, mass actions were performed on campuses across the country. At UGM in Yogyakarta, students carried a bier around with the text, ‘The death of democracy’. At ITB a giant banner was hung, reading: ‘We have no faith in Suharto and reject his return as president’. In Surabaya the day ended violently as security forces attacked the students. This was the first violent repression of student protest since 1973 (with the anti-Taman Mini protests), and it was accompanied by a representational attack, as ABRI defended the violence by stating that the students had become ‘extremists’. While this label did not deter the students, it did test differences within the student movement, in particular between the ‘radical’ ITB and the ‘moderate’ UI. The latter proposed to halt their actions in order to prepare for a ‘white revolution’ during the People’s Consultative Assembly in March, and a commemoration of Malari planned at UI on 15 January was cancelled. This event was then moved to ITB, where Hariman Siregar (who had just been released from prison) made an appearance, encouraging the students to continue the fight. The ITB students then published the White Book of Student Struggle, which contained a biting critique of the New Order and called for fundamental political change, including Suharto’s resignation and restriction of the presidential term. The next day, thousands of students in Bandung marched through the city. Feeling left behind, students in Jakarta then urged their leaders to resume action. The student leaders in Jakarta felt that the ITB students
had acted before their turn, but felt forced to join the anti-Suharto movement. On 18 January, student leaders from Jakarta, Bandung, and other cities forced their way into Suharto’s presidential office to submit a letter calling for his voluntary resignation, or else, they threatened, ‘there will be a repeat of the overthrow of the government as happened in the final days of the late President Sukarno’ (in Hariyadhie 1998: 92). For Suharto this was the final straw.

On 19 and 20 January, all student protests were violently repressed. Several campuses were raided with overwhelming military force, including tanks entering the campuses. Hundreds of students and supporters were arrested in the following weeks. The student councils were frozen and most student journals were banned, as were six newspapers for their ‘unbalanced’ reports of the events. Kopkamtib chief-of-staff Sudomo justified the crackdown by saying students needed ‘shock therapy’, as he had intercepted plans for ‘a second Malari’ (Budiyarso 2000: 217).

On 23 January, Sudomo and Thayeb called a meeting with university rectors, and instructed them to restore order on campus and to ensure that the student leaders who had escaped the arrests reported to Kopkamtib. But the rectors were enraged by the violation of their campus, and several sent a letter to Suharto, requesting that the student councils be permitted to resume activity, to no avail.

Throughout February, campuses were repeatedly raided to end protests and make arrests, and the most strategic ones were occupied: ITB in Bandung, UI and IKIP in Jakarta, UGM in Yogyakarta, and Unair in Surabaya. The roads between Jakarta and Bandung were blocked and students were pulled off buses, cutting communication and mobility between these strategic cities. Besides sending in troops, ABRI also employed militias to intimidate students who persisted in protesting. But students continued to voice criticism in any manner they could. At ITB, students kept putting up anti-regime posters each time the troops took them down, even managing to hang a giant banner on the rooftop of the main campus building, stating: ‘Hang Suharto!’ (A similar banner was placed on the roof of the cultural centre TIM in central Jakarta, close to Suharto’s residence.) The banner incident led to the arrest of the ITB rector, which led ITB students to start a study strike that spread to other campuses in Bandung and Jakarta, lasting for weeks. Yet, against superior military strength, the students were indeed ‘defenceless’.

The ‘shock therapy’ seemed to be working, but considering that the students had enjoyed broad public support, Sudomo also attempted to cushion the shock by arguing that the military operation was in the interest of the student population at large, to prevent a dangerous mixing of students and the masses, or a second Malari. Thus, to justify the campus raids, a second round of ‘shock therapy’ was needed in the form of a war of representation, including the following statements by Sudomo:
In a systematic and programmatic manner, certain persons (oknum) from the student councils and senates, who act in an extremist manner due to agitation by extremist elements, have repeatedly conducted actions that abuse freedom, abuse democracy, and result in criminal acts that violate the constitution. Using the excuse of freedom of expression, the mask of scientific debate, some sort of discussions were held on campus to which ‘outsiders’ were invited and which amounted to nothing but slander, instigation, insult, contempt, and a twist of the truth about others, groups they don’t like, officials, the state apparatus. They talk about the need to change the national leadership with the aim of changing the national structure. … ABRI respects the younger generation’s critical stance and concern for social problems, but this should be based on their status as future scholars. Students can be a moral force to initiate change from campus. But once students step outside campus, or once other groups have infiltrated campus, students lose their status as a moral force and become a political force. Once campus is politicised, the scientific quality will be lost in the political atmosphere.\textsuperscript{8}

The label of ‘political extremist’ denied the students their identity as a ‘moral force’. By laying the blame on ‘certain persons’ within the student councils, who were manipulated by ‘outsiders’ – the term used for both was oknum, or ‘shady figures involved’ – the students were denied their legitimacy as a genuine student movement. Once campuses were made to represent no longer the student movement, but rather a weak spot for infiltration by oknum with political intents, ABRI could claim as their legitimate duty ‘neutralising’ them. In addition, according to Sudomo, the students’ ‘extremism’ was not only due to ‘outside political forces’ but also the ‘bad influence of foreign television series’.\textsuperscript{9} The ‘practical politics’ they engaged in was thus framed as a deviation from Indonesian culture. Thereafter, ‘political extremism’ paired with ‘cultural deviation’ became recurring motifs in New Order stories to discredit the student movement. But the students struck back with their own story to discredit the regime.

The ‘Gangster Regime’ vs. ‘Latent Communist Danger’

On 11 March 1978, the People’s Consultative Assembly re-appointed Suharto for his third term. Most of the arrested students were then released; the momentum had passed. But twenty-eight student leaders were put on trial in January 1979, initially on charges of subversion, but after public pressure this was changed into ‘contempt of the head of state and state institutions’ under the infamous ‘hate sowing’ articles (haatzaai artikelen; a legacy of the colonial state). As in 1974, the trial of student leaders became a political spectacle in several cities, attracting much media attention and public attendance, including masses of rowdy students at each session. Heavily armed troops with tanks stood guard outside the courts, and at each session the defendants were escorted by armed guards, so that the
trials ‘resembled the trial of war criminals’ (Budiyarso 2000: 251). The impression of ‘danger’ served to make clear to the public that political oknum were on trial, not students on a moral mission.

Yet, again students used their trial as a public stage, this time to present their most comprehensive critique of the New Order thus far, interwoven with the familiar narrative of student struggle to reclaim their identity and legitimacy as a student movement. As the vice-chair of the UI student council, Dodi Suriadiredja, stated in his defence speech, after referring to the colonial-era role of students in Boedi Oetomo and PI: ‘High hopes have been invested in universities to become agents of change in the interest of the people’, as institutions such as the parliament no longer function; thus, the students ‘have acted to fulfil the duty of [their] existence’ to heed ‘the call of history’ (in Budiyarso 2000: 267). But the students felt they could no longer stick to the ‘moral force’ story, or to merely ‘remind’ and ‘correct’ the ‘deviating’ government, since there was little to ‘correct’ about a system of power that according to them was rotten to the core. Thus, rather than highlighting students’ role as ‘cowboys’, they focused on exposing the ‘villains in town’. At the opening of his defence, Suriadiredja argued that each nation needs a leader to achieve greatness, but Suharto was not a real leader, he was an oppressive dictator:

A ‘leader’ who is only concerned with defending his position is not a leader. A ‘leader’ who leads solely on the basis of power and force does not lead. A ‘leader’ who leads on the basis of power and force is a ‘gangster leader’. A Gangster Leader whose territory of power covers a country is a ‘dictator’. (In Budiyarso 2000: 264–265)

This ‘gangster’ story was elaborated in the defence speech of the ITB student council member Indro Tjahjono, entitled ‘Indonesia under Military Boots’, which condemned ‘the will of the dictatorial totalitarian regime to kill the rights of its citizens’, and exposed the mechanisms of power by which this was achieved. He pointed to the New Order policy of the ‘floating mass’ that enabled the ‘annexation’ of the people by political elites, especially Golkar as the army’s ally, and to the criminalisation of the student movement, which served ‘to kill the future of the youth in performing their proper role in society’, so that ‘students no longer rise up and are forever scared to demonstrate’ (in Budiyarso 2000: 279–280). By stressing the ‘will to kill’, rather than merely ‘suppress’, Tjahjono highlighted the military and criminal nature of the regime. He went on to ‘expose the [real] history of the power of this totalitarian regime’, in which the military were not the saviours of the nation against national traitors, but were the real national traitors themselves:
The Gangsters of Suharto (the Suharto Group) are the symbol of the military jaws that have always stood ready to pounce on power since the 1950s. … The long history of the armed forces is a dark history of mutiny, murder, and terror. This is plain from the outset of Indonesia’s independence, with intense rivalries within the military body [that led to the] failed coup of 3 July 1946 in Yogyakarta; the Madiun rebellion, 1948; PRRI; DI TII; the abortive coup on 17 October 1952 and G30S/PKI. (In Budiyarso 2000: 281)

This list of historical events of national ‘mutiny, murder, and terror’ committed by parts of the army – including those events used by the regime, most strikingly the G30S, to legitimise its ascendancy – was drawn further into the present: ‘The terror continued during the 1977 elections’. Tjahjono cited from students’ investigative reports of military abuse and intimidation ahead of the elections, and he described at length the military’s everyday ‘gangster’ behaviour: how they not only claimed positions of influence but also demanded free bus rides, free meals at food stalls, and preferential treatment in public offices; and how Murtopo’s son shot another child with his father’s gun but was never prosecuted. In conclusion, he proclaimed: ‘the people are sick of it’ (in Budiyarso 2000: 282–283). Thus, the story of the ‘gangster regime’ deconstructed the official myths of the New Order, and was further made to resonate with people’s everyday sense of injustice, so as to provoke a sense of moral outrage. But, although it did shape a negative popular consciousness of and attitudes towards the power abuses of the ‘gangster regime’, the story stood no chance of competing with official narratives. Rather, it became a ‘hidden transcript’, or a tacit critique of power spoken behind the back of rulers as the only means available to people to criticise the regime’s official stories or ‘public transcript’ (Scott 1990).

The trial of the student leaders was the last occasion, for a long time, for such fundamental critique of the New Order to be heard in public. The student leaders were sentenced to several years in prison. Records of their defence speeches were banned, confiscated, and destroyed, as were the documents of the student councils throughout the country. No newspapers or history books were allowed to mention this student movement. Thus, the suppression of activists went hand in hand with the silencing of the story of the student movement, indeed ‘killing’ their stories. Yet, this was not enough. The regime was well aware that student activism could not simply be wiped out. The student movement’s revival after the 1974 crackdown had proven its resilience. Hence, in order to silence opposition and simultaneously repair ABRI’s tarnished image and restore the regime’s legitimacy, the resilience of activism was twisted into a story of dangerous resurrection.

In his Independence Day address on 17 August 1977, while the student movement was gaining momentum, Suharto had already warned for a ‘resurrection of
G30S and remaining communist cells. In 1979, this story of ‘latent communist danger’, was institutionalised as ABRI doctrine, as ABRI published its own White Book (to compete with the students’ White Book of Student Struggle, though this had long been destroyed), presenting the ‘true story’ of the G30S/PKI affair, and further launched a program of ‘national vigilance’ against the ‘latent communist danger’ in Indonesian society (Honna 2001). In a document on ‘Subversion and Its Prevention’, ABRI warned that ‘PKI activities’ were being resumed under the guise of the New Left movement – which ABRI labelled ‘new style communism’, abbreviated as ‘KGB’ (komunisme gaya baru) – whose strategy was to infiltrate mass organisations and to use labour and land conflicts to garner support among ‘extremist’ students and intellectuals. Although ABRI also identified an ‘extreme right’ in the form of Islamic fundamentalism, the emphasis was on maintaining constant, high alertness to ‘communist resurrection’, in line with the New Order legitimising narrative of ‘crushing G30S/PKI’. This story then became a defining element of the New Order political culture; throughout the New Order it would be frequently used against opposition figures, especially ‘extremist students’.

Depoliticisation at the End of History

Following the 1978 crackdown, concrete steps were taken to exert control over students. In April 1978, the new Education Minister, Daud Yusuf (an associate of Murtopo), called a meeting with university rectors to discuss a policy called the ‘normalisation of campus life’, or NKK. Most rectors were hesitant to comply, but under pressure they eventually eliminated the student councils as requested. In its place came ‘student coordination boards’, or BKK, which served to monitor extracurricular activities on campus and to censor such when necessary. Further, student senates, the student press, and other student bodies were restricted to the faculty level and formal coordination between them, and with the national student organisations, was prohibited, which severed the organisational networks that had provided the synergy of student political life. NKK/BKK, as the measures were called, thus meant the transformation of the campus administration into a censoring body and arm of the state, and the loss of student sovereignty. It enabled systematic repression of student activism on campus. Students could be expelled for breaking NKK/BKK regulations, which happened frequently at universities that had been hotbeds of student activism.

Another effect was routine military surveillance on campus. Regional military offices had regular contact with the vice-rectors for student affairs who headed the BKK, and ABRI deployed undercover intelligence agents to monitor suspicious activities. While such agents were often easily identifiable by their military demeanour, ABRI also recruited students as paid informers; spies could thus be
peers, and the student regiments served as on-campus intelligence networks. The potential omnipresence of intelligence agents gave rise to a ‘culture of paranoia’ on campus, deterring most students from engaging in any activity that might be seen as politically suspicious.

Yusuf acknowledged that NKK/BKK was meant to ‘clean campus of politics’. As his deputy stated: ‘This is indeed the depoliticisation of campus, for politics should be removed from campus’; he argued that ‘depoliticisation’ was the very purpose of the student councils when they were founded in the 1950s amidst the divisive politicised atmosphere on campus (see Chapter 5), hence the government merely restored this original purpose. Ten years later, Yusuf further explained that the NKK/BKK measures were meant ‘to ensure that students used their time wisely: “Fill it up with reading, writing, conducting research; don’t waste it in the streets”’ (Aspinall 2005: 121). Thus, depoliticisation was necessary to help them concentrate on their core task: to prepare themselves for future professional roles in the technostructure of the New Order. According to critics, however, it rather had the effect of turning campuses into ‘sterile’ places, producing a generation of pragmatic and individualist careerists who tended to remain passive and lacked ideals (see e.g., Sanit 1999: 175).

Yet, student criticism was not obliterated. In 1979, NKK/BKK itself was the target of student protests, mostly initiated by student press organisations that now filled the void left by the eliminated student councils. The protests faded after the critical student journals were banned between September 1979 and May 1980. Student activism then continued underground, which had the effect of radicalising student activists further (see Chapter 9). The NKK/BKK policy might have actually contributed to a new awareness among students of their political identity and agency. By targeting students for depoliticisation, the regime acknowledged their political potential: after all, one cannot depoliticise what is not political. The deprivation of political agency under the NKK/BKK policy was thus felt as a stolen agency – and what has been stolen can, with some effort, be taken back.

As far as the regime was concerned, the loss of political agency was compensated for by the official narrative of the role of youth in national history. Like the narrative of ‘latent communist danger’, it was only after 1978 that this narrative was institutionalised. In October 1980, a symposium was held at the presidential office, called ‘Youth in Historical Perspective’, in which it was proposed to write a ‘complete history’ of the role of youth in the national struggle. A research and writing team was set up, with leading historians and Angkatan 66 representatives who worked as journalists, one of them being Yozar Anwar. The team was supervised by ABRI’s historian Nugroho Notosusanto, who had also authored the official account of G30S/PKI (published in 1968) and much of the ‘militarisation of
history’ mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The result was published in 1984, entitled *Indonesian Youth in the Historical Dimension of National Struggle* (Martha et al. 1984). The fact that Noto susanto led the construction of both the ‘history of communist treason and latent danger’ and the ‘history of the struggle of youth’ indicates the symbiotic relationship between these two narratives in the master narrative of the New Order. Both served as ‘lessons’ for the present, as mnemonic devices to comprehend the present task of national struggle in the New Order, and to warn against the dangers that might subvert this task. As Suharto wrote in his foreword to this official history of the historical role of youth, history is a reminder of the correct path to the future:

> The role of youth in bringing Indonesia Freedom, in upholding and defending the Freedom of Indonesia, in giving birth to the Order of Development as a continuation of the struggle to give substance to National Freedom, constitutes an invaluable experience and rich part of the history of our nation. For the young generation, the great ideas and great deeds that they have contributed to their nation and state with all their heart, surely is a source of pride. But neither the young generation, nor any of us, should be fettered by the history of the past. We must work hard to make the future more brilliant and create a better life than in the past, by constantly nurturing continuity, making improvements, and modernising all that we have achieved up to now. In order to carry the joint task and responsibility to build that future, we must know the history of our past and take wisdom from it as good as we can. We must learn from our past successes, so that we can continue them with self-confidence. We also must learn from our past mistakes, so that we can, in full awareness, prevent a repeat in the future. (In Martha et al. 1984: xxiii–xxiv)

Throughout the book, the authors broadly follow Suharto’s discourse set out in this foreword, and the history presented ends with the Angkatan 66. In the last chapter, cursory mention is made of Malari as one ‘historical error’ to learn from, without relating this event to the 1974 student protests; the student movement of 1977–1978 is silenced. The remainder is an epilogue on ‘giving substance’ to the era of development and the key role of youth in this national project as channelled through KNPI. With the birth of the New Order, the ‘complete history of the role of youth in the national struggle’ thus comes to an end. In this narrative, history is a story about the ‘milestones’, or finished achievements, in the national struggle that culminated in the New Order, in which the role of youth is immobilised as fait accompli. The authorised ‘The End’ of this narrative signalled the ‘ending’ of student struggle.

In light of this ‘end of history’, younger generations of the present and future could only be an appendix. While they were incorporated into the narrative as the so-called ‘generations that continue’ the national struggle, or *angkatan penerus*
(note the lack of capitals), they were denied a part in the story line. As was stated at a government symposium on ‘Political Education for the Young Generation’ in 1981, political education is ‘simply the implementation of the concept of a relay, in which the older generation hands the stick of the values of the national struggle over to the next generation, so that the values of unity and willingness to sacrifice are preserved among the Indonesian youth; political education is a transfer of the political culture from generation to generation’ (Kansil 1985: 24–25). Political culture was thus constructed in terms of a legacy for ‘continuing generations’ to preserve rather than to which they could contribute. However, as Abdullah (1974: 6–7) noted already in 1974 (though he became one of the consulted historians for the official history), this ‘historical marginalisation’ was bound to raise uncomfortable questions among the youth:

What does it mean … to always stand in the shadow of the glorious achievements of the older generations? Is this young generation merely an epigone that can only accept the legacy of its predecessors? Glorious event evoke feelings of pride, but for the generation that is excluded from the glory, it also raises doubts: ‘where is our place in history?’, ‘who are we?’, ‘can we decide for ourselves who we really are?’, ‘are we merely stone-carriers to a building that has been completed?’, ‘or do we have the right to erect a new, more fitting building of our own?’

Such questions could, Abdullah (1974: 6) emphasised, engender ‘a sense of estrangement’. Yet, they may also contain the seeds of criticism, especially when combined with lived memories rather than official histories of student struggle. While the official history was under construction, it was already being undercut by the lived experiences of student struggle that were revived with the publication of Anwar’s diary (1980), Anwar’s collection (1982) of critical newspaper articles from the late 1960s, and Soe Hok Gie’s diary (1983). Even in the official history, lived experience had a way of surfacing through the veneer of the permitted narrative. Certain characters and events could be censored from *Indonesian Youth in the Historical Dimension of National Struggle* (notably the perspective of GMNI and CGMI in the 1960s, and the student movements of the 1970s), but the experience of the ‘spirit of struggle’ of the authors themselves, such as Anwar, could not be excluded. They remembered this spirit from their days of student activism, and while their narrative was adapted to the New Order discourse and cleansed from revolutionary rhetoric, in their writing the sensation of collective action for ‘justice and truth’ seeped through.

As the authors put it in their preface, their aim was to highlight the ‘spirit of idealism, patriotism, and vanguardism of youth’ throughout the times, ‘so that the young generation not only observes a chain of historical facts linking one event to
another, but more importantly can see the thread of motivation that underlies historical events’ (Martha et al. 1984: xvii). This emphasis on motivation carries the connotation that history is driven by the will to effect change, the will of agency, which was inextricably tied to youth. The authors’ wish for the present youth to recognise this underlying will behind the official history carried the message that ‘making history’ is a choice made by actors. This was also the message of a prologue by former KAMI leader and now Youth Minister Abdul Gafur:

One of our famous philosophers said … that humans not only have history but do history. Perhaps he meant that, besides being part of the historical process, humans actively ‘make’ history – they desire, they act – and they are also aware of the unbroken link between themselves and history. In other words, their deeds are not just part of the dynamics of history, they are aware, too, of the historical nature of their deeds. Thus we can imagine that the actions of youth … are not just triggered by the structural imperatives around them. Their actions result from conscious decisions, after they enter into a dialogue with their social environment and the times they live in. Their actions are based on their interpretation of the surrounding social-historical environment and the normative desires (or even philosophical tendencies) that they already have. Thus, as historical actors, youth are not simply swept by structural imperatives, but make ‘choices’ among the options available within that structure. (In Martha et al. 1984: xxviii)

Gafur argues that the tendency to become historical agents is most manifest among educated youth because of their ‘intellectual disposition to question the situation “as it is” and to problematise “how it should be”’, though the realisation of this tendency hinged, above all, on self-definition and social expectation (in Martha et al. 1984: xxviii). As Gafur thus well understood, the interplay between disposition, choice (or agency), and social as well as self-definition (or narrative) would continue to invest students with a ‘historical calling’, even after ‘the end of history’. Along with the official narratives, the notion of a ‘historical calling’ of students – once introduced by the brothers Soe Hok Gie and Arief Budiman as a story of ‘cowboys’ and a ‘moral force’ – thus became a contradictory part of the New Order political culture. This contradiction made itself felt in the subsequent ‘era of stability’, when a new generation of students was raised to become the ‘building blocks’ of the ‘Order of Development’, yet could not help but to see and to question the discrepancies between ‘how it is’ and ‘how it should be’.

In the following decades, the experiences of the student movements of the 1970s – though silenced in history – still impacted student political consciousness through frequent contacts between activist generations; Hariman Siregar, for one, was a frequent speaker at student events even during my fieldwork research in 2002–2003, and ITB student council activist Indro Tjahjono became a prominent
environmental activist who maintained close contacts with younger generations of student activists. These contacts helped to hammer in the lessons of the 1970s: that political opportunities, such as intra-regime discord, should not be taken at face value, that ‘playing politics’ with elites can be disastrous, that the New Order was an authoritarian ‘gangster regime’, willing and able to repress all opposition, and that the student movement must therefore trust on its own strengths and capacities, recalling Hatta’s conviction in the 1920s – as well as the people’s, so the rhetoric went, recalling the populism of the 1930s and 1940s, which in the 1980s and 1990s moved further into practice – in order to challenge the despotic ruler. Moreover, the experiences of the 1970s hammered in the awareness that student activism was also about a war of representations. In 1978, the narrative battle was won by the regime, but in the process it set the stage for a permanent opposition by students, who could no longer be ‘resi’ but were transformed into the character of ‘young radicals’ – and who, twenty years later, would finally topple Suharto. Yet, future student generations did not become ‘young radicals’ on the basis of the narratives of previous generations, whether official or oppositional. The basis of their ‘radicalism’ was, first and foremost, personal experience.
PART III:

SOCIALISATION, REBELLION, AND RESISTANCE

Student initiation at UI, 1980, with students dressed up as ‘Student Regiment reserves’
(Source:http://s156.photobucket.com/user/tyoaja/media/S1%20FISIP%20UI%20Angkatan%2080/Wanwansib/inibukandemo.jpg.html?sort=6&o=5)
Order and Disorder: Socialisation in the ‘Era of Stability’

Framing a Problematic Generation

The 1978 crackdown paved the way for an apparent ‘era of stability’ in the 1980s, during which Suharto’s power was at its height. Politics was declared taboo. In its place, a timeless version of Pancasila was imposed as the sole ideology and identity of the New Order nation, constructed as a ‘harmonious family’ into which the entire middle class was incorporated. Everything outside the norm of Pancasila, and anyone outside the ‘Pancasila family’ was marked as a potentially dangerous, yet as signs of danger these ‘others’ were repeatedly played up in order to haunt the middle class and make them keep their children in check. To ensure the compliance of the ‘children of the New Order’, an intricate socialisation program was started, teaching the ‘right’ way of Pancasila and the ‘wrong’ way of opposition, as epitomised in the spectre of communism. The generation born in the 1970s and growing up in the 1980s thus seemed to be ‘born to be meek’ (Cohen 1991).

Yet, rather than producing a meek generation who dutifully fulfilled its task in national development, this political climate bred a problematic, seemingly out-of-control generation, with many engaged in ‘unruly’ behaviour. Moreover, not only was this generation politically muted and excluded from the narrative of national history, they seemed to be drifting away from the values of the Angkatan. Such a ‘drift’ had been seen as a threat even in the early 1970s, when, amidst the student protests, Suharto expressed concerns about a growing gap between the values of his generation and those of the youth. Seeing this as a threat to national stability, he declared it a national priority to bridge this gap. As he stated at an ABRI seminar in March 1972, there were signs of ‘estrangement of the younger generation precisely from the history of the national struggle and the national identity’, so that ‘they tend to orient themselves towards an alien culture, not their own’ (quoted in Anderson 1978: 312). Hence, there was a need to ‘bequeath’ the values of the Angkatan 45 to the youth. As Anderson (1978: 313) points out, this notion of ‘bequest’ formed the basis for the narrative of the New Order ‘family’, headed by ‘Father Suharto’, to whom the well-being of his ‘children’ was of special concern. But this kinship metaphor also obscured very real generational issues that had
Suharto’s generation deeply worried. As Anderson (1978: 314) wrote at that time: ‘there is a real and painful paradox in the position of Indonesia’s rulers. They wield vast power over the political life of the nation, but find the culture, morals, and values of their younger kinfolk increasingly out of their control’.

Despite concerted socialisation efforts, especially after 1978, to ‘bequeath’ the correct values, the discourse of an alienated youth did not abate in the 1980s, and became all the more pronounced in the ‘era of globalisation’ (as ABRI called it) of the 1990s. This view was also widely shared by intellectuals as well as foreign observers. Consider, for example, Anderson’s (1999: 10) remark in his speech, ‘Indonesian Nationalism Today and in the Future’, delivered in Jakarta in 1999:

I believe in (and hope for) a real revival of the common project which was initiated almost a hundred years ago. A great project of this kind tends to produce great men and women. … How sad it is to compare those times with the present. Over the past dozen years I have been accustomed to asking Indonesian youngsters … this simple question: Who in Indonesia do you admire and look up to? The common response is, first, bewilderment at the question, then a long scratching of the head, and finally a hesitant … Iwan Fals [a rock star]. Isn’t this rather terrifying? I don’t mean that everyone can or should become a great man or woman. But I think that every man and woman can decide not to be a dwarf.

While Anderson stresses that nationalism is not an inheritance but an ongoing common project for liberation, in this remark he seems to reproduce the dominant narrative of nationalism with its cult of heroes. From that perspective, the youth he spoke to fail to take over the baton in the relay of national struggle; worse still, they fail to identify with the great men and women who initiated the struggle, and thereby they ‘dwarf’ their own agency. Yet, Anderson misses a crucial point. The ‘terrifying’ answer he received is not that far removed from what he had hoped to hear: a national hero. The popular rock balladeer Iwan Fals – whose songs narrate the silenced stories of the rakyat, the ‘losers’ of the New Order success story, and blatantly criticise the rulers in a manner rarely heard since the 1970s – personifies a popular heroism that is not marked by historic deeds but articulates the artful agency of everyday resistance. By showing to his tens of thousands of young fans that there is still room for doubt, outrage, and rebellion, Fals is as much a ‘freedom fighter’ as the great men and women of history.

Socialisation occurs not only through formal channels, but also through everyday experiences of political culture and with alternative sources of socialisation. These experiences result in what Williams (2001 [1961]) has called the ‘structure of feeling’ of a particular generation, reflecting the lived experience and quality of life at that particular time and place. This shared experience creates a common
set of perceptions and values, which according to Williams is most clearly reflected in artistic expression, such as the songs of Fals. The lived experience of young people growing up in the New Order, and the structure of feeling it gave rise to, could thus undercut the very disciplining and indoctrination to which they were subjected. Moreover, their experience exposed the fact that the dominant political culture into which they were socialised was not as solid as it was made to appear, but was full of contradictions created by the regime itself.

The conformity demanded of the Pancasila nation could only be sustained through the creation of internal ‘others’, marking the boundaries between ‘order’ and ‘disorder’. But while the regime systematically played up threats in order to discipline both the New Order family and its unruly others, people could not help but noting that the rulers themselves also transgressed the boundaries, so that their arbitrariness was exposed. As Van Dijk (2002: 87) points out, the ‘realms of order and disorder’ in New Order Indonesia were not far apart, and in their everyday lives young people constantly moved between them. In fact, the one sustained the other. Given that Suharto’s ‘order’ was a direct response to the ‘disorder’ he sought to eradicate, ‘disorder’ was built into the very discourse of ‘order’.

**Pancasila Socialisation**

In 1967, Suharto stated that it was no longer necessary to talk about ideology, ‘as we already have an ideology, Pancasila’ (quoted in Dwipayana and Nazaruddin 1991: 217). As discussed in Chapter 7, Pancasila was presented as the cure to the disorder of the Sukarno era. But it was only after the final repression of disorder in the form of the student movement that the Pancasila order could come into full effect. After the 1978 crackdown, during his re-appointment in March, Suharto announced plans to make Pancasila the ‘sole ideological basis’ (azas tunggal) not only of the state but of all society. In 1985 this proposition was passed: all organisations were required to adopt Pancasila as their sole ideology. There was some resistance from Islamic organisations, especially within the student organisation HMI, but under strong pressure they were forced to comply.²

According to Suharto, the ‘sole ideology’ was necessary to end ‘sectarian’ interests. He held that ‘Pancasila democracy’ was the authentic Indonesian form of organisation, in which community interests prevailed. As he stated in his 1978 Independence Day address, ‘More than just freedom, the essence of democracy is harmony’ (quoted in Widjojo 2005: 58). The Pancasila system was presented as the authentic manifestation of the Indonesian culture of ‘consensus through collective deliberation’ (musyawarah mufakat), which ruled out ‘Western style’ opposition (just as Sukarno had proposed for Guided Democracy). Framed as ‘alien’ to Indonesian culture, opposition was referred to by the term ‘oppositionalism’,
placing it in the same category of other alien ‘-isms’ – communism, fundamentalism, and extremism – none of which had a place in Pancasila democracy.

Socialisation into this Pancasila order got underway right after the 1978 crackdown. On 28 October 1978, Youth Pledge Day, a ‘Policy for Nurturing and Developing the Young Generation’ was launched. A course was added to the school curriculum, called ‘Education in Pancasila and Citizenship’, PPKN; an advanced course was introduced for civil servants and university students, called ‘Guidelines for the Complete Comprehension and Experience of Pancasila’, P4. The P4 course served to explain and legitimise government policies in terms of Pancasila (Morfit 1981). It presented Pancasila as the bridge from the nation’s past to the nation’s future of development under New Order guidance, including the guidance of ABRI, whose role as the defenders of Pancasila was expounded at length in the course. As Morfit (1981: 842) notes, the ‘P4 present[ed] an extraordinarily static ideology’ that, ‘despite its invocation of the past and hopes for the future … seem[ed] to rob Pancasila of all sense of historical dynamism’, thus turning it into ‘an ideology of containment rather than one of mobilisation’. The emphasis was on stability, which implied a ‘no-change future’ (Anderson 1983: 490).

Indeed, the purpose of Pancasila socialisation was not mobilisation but ‘kaderisasi’ (cadre-isation), or the ‘cultivation’ of youth as loyal ‘cadres’ of the New Order, a concept that underlines the corporatist nature of the type of participation expected of the youth. As stated in the 1978 Broad Outlines of State Policy: ‘The cultivation of the young generation is oriented towards preparing cadres for the continuation of the national struggle and national development’ (Kansil 1986: 1). In 1982, Deputy Secretary of Youth Affairs Abdul Gafur further specified that the objective was to form ‘national cadres’, ‘cadres of development’, and ‘patriotic cadres’, who are devoted to God and Pancasila; are ‘progressive and modern but retain the character of the Indonesian national identity’; have ‘a strong sense of responsibility, a dedicated soul, and a pioneering spirit’; and ‘continue the ideals of the Proclamation of Independence’ (Kansil 1986: 68). Further, in his August 1982 decree for ‘the political education of the young generation’, Suharto introduced the concept of regenerasi (‘regeneration’, which fittingly includes the word ‘generasi’, or generation), arguing that the cultivation of youth was part of a ‘process of regeneration of national political life in the frame of creating a political system that is truly democratic, dynamic, stable, effective, and efficient’ (Kansil 1986: 7). Regenerasi implied the transfer of political culture from one generation to the next, and connoted a ‘natural’ process of restoration of the national values that were perpetually at risk, precisely due to the ‘alienation’ of the youth. The Pancasila democracy served to facilitate this process in a ‘stable, effective, and efficient’ manner, so that the nation could move forward on its path of develop-
ment. Indeed, the stated purpose of political education was to serve as ‘an instrument to support the maintenance of national stability, so as to accelerate the effort to realise the national aspirations through development’ (Kansil 1986: 7).

Suharto’s decree further specified that political education should include the lessons to be drawn from national history. He left implicit which elements of that past were to be used for this purpose, but as noted in Chapter 7, the role of youth received pride of place, at least under Youth Minister (since 1983) and former KAMI activist Gafur. As Gafur (in Kansil 1986: 202) asserted in his 1985 ‘Basic Plan for the Guidance and Cultivation of the Young Generation’:

> Historical experience provides a model and example from which we can draw meaning and inspiration. That way, from the full experience of history in political education, the young generation will be stimulated to continue to improve its role from era to era. … The national history of Indonesia is essentially a reflection of the history of the struggle of the young generation. On many occasions, the Indonesian young generation has demonstrated its pioneership, driven by a spirit that knows no surrender and a willingness to sacrifice, providing an example and model to the nation about the service to the nation that should be given to defend the interests of the nation and the state.

Yet, further on in this policy text, Gafur’s discourse shifts to the other narrative of youth as threatened by anti-Pancasilaist alien influences:

> Subversion, infiltration, espionage, or mutiny from within and outside the country can cause division and conflict in society, especially among the young generation. They frequently become a target. Young age makes them more open to new things, disposed to adventure and a desire to live freely. The progress in knowledge and technology that the young generation enjoys can also bring negative influences. A loss of feelings of patriotism and nationalism, and [a rise in] feelings of low esteem may occur. … [The] influence of ideas adhered to by certain countries, which oppose the values of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, is quite dominant, such as capitalism and liberalism with its individualism, communism with its collectivism, extreme theocracy in the guise of religious movements, along with their new forms, known as the new left movement or extreme right movement. … These movements have also been detected in Indonesia. … It is quite possible that the young generation – without the ability to filter their inner feelings – will openly accept values from outside that they consider to be part of their life, which will then crystallise and harden as their way of thinking. As a result, they will struggle to justify values that originate from a worldview that deviates from Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, and orient themselves towards tendencies that betray their own nation. (In Kansil 1986: 209–210)

The claim that national stability was at stake, if the youth were not equipped with the ability to filter alien ideas, underscored the need for proper political edu-
cation. Yet the ‘filter’ was not determined by Gafur, but by Education and Culture Minister Notosusanto, the army’s erstwhile historian who, in the position since 1983, had brought a markedly military flavour to political education. In 1985, he introduced a course called ‘Education in the History of National Struggle’, PSPB, which became a mandatory part of the curriculum at all levels, from kindergarten to university. Its purpose was ‘the use of historical episodes as a means of inculcating in students Pancasila values such as “cooperation” and “togetherness” as well as martial values such as “heroism,” “bravery,” “willingness to sacrifice” and so on’ (Bourchier 1994: 51). The transfer of national values through history lessons thus became a matter of transferring ABRI values.

In designing the PSPB course, Notosusanto was advised by Suharto to stress the chaos of Sukarno’s era, so that ‘the young generation would not see as right what was wrong and not wrong what was right’ (quoted in Leigh 1991: 29). What was ‘right’, above all, was the ‘wrong’ of communism, as attested by the foiled coup of 1965, or ‘G30S/PKI’. In the course, this murky event was presented as a horror story of ‘communist cruelty’, a lesson that needed to be inculcated from an early age. As McGregor (2005: 219) illustrates:

A unit of Nugroho’s PSPB history course for primary school students, for example, included a dramatic script of the events at Lubang Buaya to be used to stage class plays. Students were required to depict ‘the cruelty at Lubang Buaya’ using replica weapons. Dialogue consisted of simplified phrases such as ‘kill him, kill him’, ‘cut up his flesh’, ‘crush his head’, and ‘cut off his tongue and his hands’.

This horror story was deemed to be so vital to the political education of youth that it was not only instructed through school texts and plays but also in cinematic form. On 30 September 1984, the anniversary of the coup attempt, the government released a four-and-a-half-hour long film, The Treason of G30S/PKI, which was screened annually on all television channels. Narrated in the style of a gangster movie, the film contains gruesome images of violence, yet its principal target audience was schoolchildren, who had to watch the film in class each year. If a school could afford it, school trips were also made to a museum that was opened in 1981 on the site of the Sacred Pancasila Monument, carrying the same name as the film and showing equally graphic images of ‘communist cruelty’. Repeated examination on the subject thus forced children to record the violence in memory, acting in school plays forced them to memorise it in bodily moves and speech, and film viewings and museum trips further compelled them to accept the ‘right’ version of the story. As I will illustrate in Chapter 9, this could be a traumatic experience, especially if the child’s parents were marked as being on the ‘wrong’ side of history.
The emphasis on ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ was also used in Pancasila lessons, especially in the course ‘Education in Pancasila Morals’, PMP, which under Notosusanto replaced the PPKN course. In the new course, citizenship lost all its connotations of political participation and was reduced to membership in the Pancasila nation. As Leigh (1999: 48) notes, both the PSPB and PMP courses taught that there could only be one version of the truth, so that the boundary between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ became absolute:

The major function of the PMP is to delineate the acceptable – that is, to show the mirage of a firmly delineated boundary. … ‘True or False’ are offered as the [only] options with regard to political behaviour. For example, ‘Only government servants have a duty to practise and apply the principles of Pancasila’ – ‘True or False?’ The given answer to the question is ‘false’, although the fact that the question is included is perhaps indicative of a prevailing perception among many citizens in Indonesia that the real answer is – or used to be – ‘true’. When it comes to the ordering of priorities, students are asked, ‘One’s attitude towards the life of the Indonesian nation is more important than the life of the individual’ – True or False? The answer is ‘true’. Students learn that the individual should be subsumed within what the state-makers determine as the national good.

This method of ‘constantly legitimated dichotomous learning’, Leigh (1999: 35) argues, reproduces a ‘master-pattern, wherein the boundaries between correct and incorrect political behaviour’ could be ‘more sharply incised on the minds of young people’. Through repetition of this master-pattern ‘a process takes place in which the boundaries of legitimate action are internalised’, so that ‘children assimilate what is acceptable behaviour – even what are acceptable thoughts’ (Leigh 1999: 47). Yet, this seems to overestimate the impact of indoctrination. Through rote memorisation children did internalise the ‘master-pattern’ of correct answers, so they could give them without much thought, but what they did with the knowledge was a different matter, and depended on other sources of knowledge they were exposed to. Usually, they did little if anything with it, for the more predictable the material became, the less it raised their interest. ‘Textbook history and Pancasila courses did their best to render the past bland and uncontroversial, and there was plenty of evidence that young people found it … frankly boring’ (Reid 2005: 189). As Van Klinken (2005: 237) puts it, youth ‘had their past served to them from above as a “legacy,” merely requiring passive assent. Suharto’s New Order history textbooks, like their Stalinist counterparts, were mind-numbingly dull accounts, liberally sprinkled with bad photographs of soldiers and rows of grim men at diplomatic conferences’. Like Guided Democracy indoctrination, the New Order indoctrination transmitted textbook knowledge that was detached from everyday experience. Absolute truths and firmly delineated boundaries did
not hold in the world outside, not even in the carefully groomed world of the New Order middle-class ‘family’.

The New Order Family and Its Other

As ‘Father of Development’, Suharto was also the head of the New Order ‘family’ and especially of the middle class, who embodied the ideal of the New Order nation devoted to development under Suharto’s ‘fatherly care’. This can be interpreted in terms of two types of relationship. The first is the dependency relationship of ‘bapakism’, or patronage. Significant parts of the middle class, in business and bureaucratic circles, were heavily dependent on state patronage, ‘for jobs, contracts and, more broadly, as the engine of economic growth’ (Robison 1996: 81), which made them overwhelmingly support the policies of the state. Second, as Heryanto (1988: 21) notes, Suharto’s ‘father’ role had the deeper implication of ‘naturalising’ his authority. More than the ‘father–patron’ who takes care of his protégés in return for loyalty, the ‘family father’ is there to raise and guide his ‘children’ unconditionally, for such is his ‘destiny’. Indeed, Suharto characterised his style of governance by the Javanese saying ‘tut wuri handayani’, or ‘to guide from behind’, like a father supporting his children as they learn to walk. As a stern but just and loving father he occasionally needed to discipline his children, but only for their own good, to raise them as decent Pancasilaist human beings (the ‘whole human being’, manusia seutuhnya, was the New Order term) and guide them into their bright future as ‘cadres of development’.

This bright future was made visible in the modern cityscapes that arose in the 1980s and 1990s to showcase the success story of Suharto’s development policy. Especially Jakarta underwent an impressive metamorphosis into a modern dreamscape, including new business districts adorned with skyscrapers, shopping malls, and five-star hotels, surrounded by luxury apartment complexes, gated villa compounds, golf courses, an amusement park called Dunia Fantasi, Fantasy World, to complement Taman Mini, and toll roads linking these modern spaces together. In addition, on billboards across the cities and along the highways – as well as in television commercials, magazine ads, and soap operas – the image of the happy, affluent, modern middle-class family reaping the benefits of development pervaded the public sphere and public space, creating the impression that participation in development brought such prosperity within reach. By providing these modern facilities, Suharto thus showed he took care of his ‘family’.

But this modernity was a restricted and disciplinary space that excluded those ‘other’ to the middle-class family: the poor, the unruly, and the ‘non-modern’. In Jakarta, areas were regularly ‘cleansed’ from ‘urban excesses’, with police raids on street vendors, beggars, and becak (pedicab) drivers, whose ‘backward and
dangerous’ vehicles (that mainly served the poor) were considered ‘too slow’ for the modern economy (Kusno 2000: 109). Not only were the poor seen as a nuisance, they were framed as a security risk that had to be removed from middle-class spaces in order to protect the safety and property of middle-class families. Thus, the material and security needs of the middle class were constructed as one and the same concern, and the state took care of both. As Kusno (2000: 109) puts it, the spatial reordering, cleansing, and disciplining of Jakarta represented a new urban form that would accommodate, as well as produce, “modern” and obedient members of the national family’, in a manner that accentuated the ‘overlapping interests’ of the middle class and the state. Middle-class fears about the loss of benefits and positions were symbolically tied to fears of disorder, to instil the idea that all can be lost without the patronage and protection of the state. Hence, the ideal image of the modern New Order family was paired to the counter-image of the non-modern, uneducated, and unruly masses, or massa.

The counter-image of the massa was defined by the spaces they occupied: the streets. Compared to modern middle-class spaces, the streets were associated with heat, dirt, danger, and – especially since the Malari riots – potential disturbance. The massa were identified not only as undisciplined but also ‘undeveloped’ and ‘still ignorant’ (masih bodoh), which marked them as an object rather than actor of development. Distinction in spatial and educational, rather than socioeconomic terms served to avoid the subject of class difference, the existence of which was denied. Socioeconomic disparity was presented as only a phase of development, which would solve itself through a harmonious ‘Pancasila partnership’ between employers and workers; the former acting as a ‘father’ for the latter, and both working for the prosperity of the nation. Yet, this social harmony model further sustained social exclusion, for only the educated ‘father’ in this partnership could be part of the New Order family. The rest – workers, farmers, servants, and others formerly designated as rakyat – disappeared into the nebulous category of massa. Thus, in contrast to Sukarno’s one-body nation, which was metaphorically built on the efforts of the rakyat, the New Order nation was divided into two disparate bodies, occupying separate spaces, which further fed into middle-class fears of unrest from ‘below’. As Kusno (2000: 118) argues, the separation of the middle class and ‘under class’ served ‘to initiate a form of social and political violence which would eliminate their potentially revolutionary unification’.

Corporal violence inflicted upon the ‘under class’ was a tried and true method to sustain the separation. In the early 1980s, a blatant effort to this effect were the ‘mysterious murders’, or pembunuhan misterius, abbreviated as ‘Petrus’, targeted against petty criminals. Between 1983 and 1985, five to ten thousand mutilated bodies, some beheaded, were found in the streets of Jakarta and other cities; they all had tattoos, which were commonly seen as a marker of criminality. Although
the murders were never solved, it was a public secret that the state was involved. The technique of the murders – sadistic, yet executed with great (military) precision; covert, yet out in the open – indicated that this served as a public spectacle of violence with disciplinary purposes. Besides disciplining the ‘underworld’, it served to discipline the middle class, feeding into fears of the streets as a site of lawlessness and underscoring dependency on the state to maintain order. Suharto himself admitted in his 1989 autobiography: ‘This was meant as shock therapy so that people would realise that loathsome acts would meet with strong action … so that the public would understand that, faced with criminals, there are still some who would act and would control them’ (quoted in Siegel 1998: 110). This ‘shock therapy’ (a term also used to justify the 1978 crackdown on student protest), was meant to cure a sick – still undisciplined – nation, and thus it was directed not at ‘criminals’ but at the general public. It served to create a sense that ‘danger’ was omnipresent yet also obscure, thus turning criminality into a spectre rather than a social problem, which could then be linked to other spectres of danger. As Siegel (1998: 110) argues, fear of the massa interlocked with fear of the resurgence of ‘rebels and revolutionaries’ (recalling the spectre of communism), thus becoming a generalised fear of disturbance from ‘outside’ the safe realm of the middle-class family. Since none of these spectres could be pinpointed they kept haunting the middle class, and the ‘deeper one’s fear of such outside danger is, the stronger is the grip of Bapak [Father Suharto] over one’s life’ (Shiraishi 1997: 35).

Yet the effects on middle-class sensibilities were more complex than that. The Petrus affair generated discomfort, but less about criminals than about the state: ‘although in favour of a low crime rate, many Indonesians were disturbed nonetheless by the government’s blatant disrespect for the law’ (Schwartz 1999: 249). Indeed, the violence exposed the cruelty behind the veneer of civilisation upheld by the state. Hence, while separating the middle class from the massa, the affair also mentally separated them from what had revealed itself as an ‘uncivil’ state. At the same time, though, it kindled a middle-class fascination with crime and violence, nourished by sensational tabloids as well as intellectual magazines that frequently reported on crime. In the 1990s, this taste for ‘violence realism’ (Van Leeuwen 2005: 220) became a feature of popular ‘crime and investigation’ television programs. They glorified (violent) police work – conveying the message that the state was on the criminals’ tail, and justifying a strong-arm approach against disorder – yet the public could not help but get the impression that crime was on the rise, making it doubtful that the state was in control. A sense of insecurity was thus increased rather than mitigated. The middle-class reaction was not to demand more security from the state, but to take security measures themselves, retreating to compounds behind barb-wired walls and guarded gates, and hiding from the
‘dangerous’ streets behind air-conditioned lifestyles (Van Leeuwen, 1997, 2005), which further deepened the separation of classes. The overall effect was a normalisation of violence, in which the state continued to play the role of protecting its ‘family’ from the massa, regardless of whether this play of control was still convincing to its audiences.

The elections, taking place every five years, were an important occasion for ritualised violence, especially during the campaign period: this was the only time that the depoliticised ‘floating mass’ could ‘participate’ in the political process by providing the masses for political rallies. This participation of otherwise muted masses – hoisting party banners, yelling party slogans, and clogging the roads in rowdy motor parades that always caused deadly accidents – gave the impression of imminent escalation, as attested by frequent clashes between supporters of different parties and incidents of supporters ‘running amok’. ABRI referred to such incidents with the normalising phrase ‘campaign excesses’, implying they were still in control, but there were always rumours of worse violence ahead, which were routinely linked to rumours of a hidden actor (dalang). The rumours tended to disappear in the ‘cooling down’ period before election day, which proceeded in an orderly fashion, as a matter of routine. Thus, while confirming the New Order dictum that politics, especially when involving the masses, equals disorder, the state could demonstrate its ability to keep ‘excesses’ and ‘dalang’ in check and to guide the nation safely through this period of danger. Yet, as Pemberton (1986: 19–20) argues, this ‘ritual of restoration of order’ was never entirely convincing; heavy military presence along campaign routes might serve as a sign of order but ‘signalled just the opposite, order’s absence’, leaving the public with a ‘sense of another reality, behind or beyond calm appearances’. In this other reality, the New Order proved to be a ‘state of violence’ rather than a state of order (Schulte Nordholt 2002).

Indeed, the overall effect of New Order rituals of violence was a disconcerting sense of discrepancy between the appearances of ‘security and order’ and the reality of a society that did not accord with its middle-class image of a civilised modernity. The discrepancy was also apparent in the appearances of development: ‘here too exists the sense of another reality, represented nightly on national television evening pembangunan reports, where the scenes of model neighbourhoods and villages on the screen never match up with local scenes, no matter how much pembangunan appears to have been implemented’ (Pemberton 1994: 20). This discrepancy was most acutely felt by the middle-class ‘children of the New Order’. For many of them, violence was not just a New Order ritual but an everyday experience.
New Order Children ‘Out of Control’

In the New Order, youth were constructed as the ‘hope of the nation’ in a different sense than in Sukarno’s era. Rather than a revolutionary force, their role was defined, as UI economist Tjiptoherijanto (1996: xv) puts it, as ‘the engine behind the national economy’ and ‘the most potent human capital for national development’; since youth were ‘vertically and horizontally the most mobile part of society’, they were the ones to ‘accomplish the socioeconomic transformation’ that would ‘elevate Indonesia to a higher level’. Yet, this narrative of ‘hope of the nation’ was marred by the other narrative of youth as a ‘lost generation’ going astray from the national family. Rather than complying with the dictum of ‘order’, youth appeared to be the epitome of ‘disorder’. ‘Campaign excesses’, for one, often involved not just any massa but masses of school children. During the 1982 election campaigns, most of the 318 people arrested for disturbances were schoolboys; they were soon released, given that, as innocent children, they were ‘just tagging along’, as Kopkamtib chief-of-staff Sudomo said (quoted in Pemberton 1986: 15), yet their role in the ‘disorder’ raised the concern of middle-class parents as well as the state.

Most disturbing to the New Order family were the massive school brawls that became a common sight in the major cities. Especially in Jakarta, violent clashes involving dozens of boys from different schools, wearing their school uniforms, occurred several times a week, resulting in material damage, injuries, and occasionally deaths. Since the early 1980s, school brawls became so routine that they became another instance of the normalisation of violence, though in this case the state could hardly claim control. The official response was that such unruliness was to blame on foreign influences. As Gafur stated in his 1982 national youth policy: ‘Criminal deeds in the form of lawless school brawls’ – and as manifested in ‘defying parents and teachers, challenging security forces, using foul language’ – were symptoms of a ‘national problem’ caused by the ‘side effects’ of development, which was giving rise to a ‘shift towards individualism and consumerism’; especially in the cities, ‘the influence of the penetration of foreign culture through various media on the behaviour of youth’ was making itself felt (in Kansil 1986: 59). The theme of ‘foreign influence’ was repeatedly raised in official statements to explain youth unruliness, including signs of ‘moral decay’, such as alcohol and drug use, sexual liberty, and ‘free behaviour’ in general. Another perceived sign of youth unruliness were the disturbances that occasionally accompanied rock concerts. Curiously, ‘rock riots’ mainly occurred at the concerts of critical rock stars such as Iwan Fals and the rock band Slank (see below), which were usually accompanied by heavy police presence, or Western rock bands such as Metallica, whose concert in Jakarta in 1993 became the scene of riots in the adjacent area;
according to one of my respondents, the police provoked the riots as a pretext to ban such concerts. In any case, rock riots offered a convenient target for condemnation; as the Coordinating Minister of Political and Security Affairs Sudarman stated after the Metallica concert, it proved that ‘the public [was] not yet ready for an alien culture’ (quoted in Van Dijk 2002: 80).

But concerned intellectuals pointed to other side effects of development. As Van Dijk (2008: 80–81) describes their concerns, youth unruliness was usually blamed on a lack of parental care and supervision, which was related to the economic climate since both parents had to ‘work to make ends meet or, when they belong to the rich upper-middle class are completely absorbed by their individual business ventures and social obligations’. One Indonesian psychologist noted that this could cause a sense of ‘loneliness amidst the busy life in a big city, which may turn into aggression’ (quoted in Van Dijk 2002: 81). Van Dijk (2002: 81) adds that the layout of densely populated cities, especially Jakarta, was also conducive to conflicts; a lack of ‘adequate schooling and recreational facilities’, and the fact that schools were located ‘in the vicinity of urban trouble spots, such as bus terminals, rubbish-dumps, and slums’, as well as ‘in each other’s proximity’, easily caused tensions. According to Van Dijk (2002: 87), the fact of the matter was that the ‘realms of order and disorder’ were not far apart: at school, children ‘may be required to march or stand to attention drawn up in orderly rows’, but once ‘outside the environments where discipline and etiquette rule’ and ‘when the formal function is over, disorder as it were can prevail’.

The thin boundary between the realms of order and disorder was indeed most evident in the contrast between school drills and school brawls. But this was not simply a matter of easily moving between the two realms, for in fact they were not that different to begin with. A closer look at both reveals the extent to which the routine practices of one realm could flow into the other, and become one and the same mode of practice. Characteristic for the modes of practice in both realms was military hierarchy and discipline. In the school’s orderly realm, correct behaviour was inculcated through weekly ritualised drills, in which the school children had to line up in the schoolyard and march in formation under the command of a ‘sergeant’ selected from among the children, performing the martial values of hierarchy, obedience, and discipline. By involving children in the command structure they were made accomplices to the act of disciplining. A similar principle underlay the system of class elders, who read the daily roll call and reprimanded unruly classmates. By attaching a high level of prestige and special privileges, as well as responsibilities, to these positions, disciplining – both one’s peers and oneself – was constructed as desirable. Thus, a ‘taste’ for discipline developed, which could then transcend and be detached from the system of order it was used to support.
If we then take a closer look at the disorderly realm of school brawls, it becomes apparent that a similar pattern of military discipline prevailed. The school gangs had clear hierarchies and divisions of tasks. Street fights had routines into which novices were strictly trained (see Chapter 9). Youth unruliness had clear rules. Pemberton (1994) describes campaign-period violence as orderly disorder in ‘another reality, behind or beyond calm appearances’, and the same could be said about the school brawls. They were a manifestation of the combined taste for discipline and seemingly opposite ‘taste’ for violence that children acquired in the semi-orderly realm of New Order middle-class existence. Hence, for all the blame put on foreign influence, patterns of youth disorder were very much birthed inside the New Order system, even quite literally, as the ‘sergeant’ of school drills might also be the ‘field commander’ in school brawls, who could very likely be the son of an ABRI general. If only for that reason, New Order political education, built on the premise of creating a ‘harmonious family’ by exorcising an ‘outside’ that was actually ‘inside’, was doomed to fail from the outset.

A ‘Blue Generation’

By the 1990s, more than a decade into the ‘era of stability’, it became clear that the regime’s socialisation efforts did not produce the desired results. On the contrary, the youth seemed to be drifting ever further away from the ‘national values’. As Cohen noted in 1991 (38):

Never before have young Indonesians been so detached from the political life of the nation. As the generation gap widens, the youth of Indonesia, raised to be politically passive, seem to have taken this habit to heart. … What’s left for Indonesia’s young people? To some extent, materialism without apology. ‘We just want to make our fortunes’, says Mohamed Syarif Bustaman, vice-president of the Indonesian Student Association for International Studies. Such values provoke growls from professors, especially former youth leaders. ‘They are bourgeois brats. I hate them to their bones’, says Dorodjatun Kuntjorojakti, associate dean for academic affairs at the [UI]. ‘They are partly like tourists. Less than 10% are interested in what’s going on in Indonesia’.

As a representative of the Angkatan 66, the former KAMI activist Kuntjorojakti cited in this quote might have also lamented the lack of historical awareness and identification and lack of ‘spirit’ among the younger generation. Yet, when young people did show interest in national history, their orientation was not to the liking of the generation of Kuntjorojakti, much less to Suharto’s generation. To their dismay, the youth of the 1980s and 1990s were especially attracted to Sukarno, despite – or, rather, because of – Suharto’s efforts to discredit him. The more Sukarno was marginalised in official history, the more mythical his image
became in the eyes of youth, as he represented everything that Suharto and the New Order were not: rousing, dynamic politics – and ‘spirit’. Cohen (1991: 39) writes:

In opinion polls and press interviews, high school and college students talk of the former president’s charisma, his bold revolutionary stance, his riveting speeches. … In Blitar, the East Java site of Sukarno’s tomb, the former president shares superhero status on T-shirts also printed with Batman. Students surreptitiously trade old recordings of his speeches and look for old textbooks describing his exploits. The trend saddens some political observers. ‘It only proves that the political culture here is very poor’, says Marsillam Simanjuntak, a founder of Democracy Forum and formerly an anti-Sukarno student leader. ‘Youth are denied the ability to have a forward-looking imagination. The only way to avoid what is given to them is looking back’.

But the ‘children of the New Order’ very much lived in the New Order present. Sukarno’s popularity had little to do with nostalgia; it was a critical commentary on, and a rejection of, the New Order present. If this rejection took the form of ‘T-shirt adulation’, this was because no channels were available to express criticism of the New Order, other than popular culture and lifestyle. As I have previously discussed in my study on youth lifestyles in the New Order, the lifestyles of middle-class youth were deeply ambivalent towards the New Order culture (Sastramidjaja 2000). On the one hand, they were a product of the New Order, reproducing much of its middle-class values: upward mobility, outward appearances, and a culture of instant gratification (reflecting both the denial of long-term imagination and the pervasive consumerism of New Order culture). On the other hand, these youth lifestyles contributed to the corrosion of the New Order ideology. There was a strong sense of choice and control over their lifestyles, which furthermore had a strong element of ‘do-it-yourself’ ideology, allowing them to create what the New Order did not provide for: a realm to be oneself, which in itself was a critique of the New Order. The outfits they wore or designed, the music they listened to and produced, the lingo they spoke among themselves (which was incomprehensible to elders and outsiders), their deeply ironic sense of humour, and the distinctly youthful identities and communities they formed – these all professed a different social reality, one outside of the regime’s control and thus a realm of tacit resistance. It was in this realm that young people rediscovered the art of agency.

From that perspective, it can hardly be considered ‘terrifying’ that the youth quizzed by Anderson proposed Iwan Fals as a national hero. Fals was more than a rock icon; he was the grassroots ‘extension of the tongue of the people’ in a manner even Sukarno never had been. He was the voice of populism in an era when identification with the rakyat was constructed as ‘dangerous’, expressing a deep-
felt critique of the New Order, and he aroused young people to join him in voicing their resistance. Cohen (1991: 38) records a typical scene: ‘In Solo, Fals had the entire stadium singing along to his 1990 hit *Demo lish*: “Oppression and abuses of power / Are too numerous to mention / Stop, stop, don’t go on / We’re fed up with greed and uncertainty”.

Had Anderson asked his question later in the 1990s, young Indonesians might also have proposed the popular rock band Slank, founded in 1983 by a group of high-school boys in Jakarta, who broke through on the national scene in 1990. The unique style of their music, lyrics, and demeanour – unruly, unpretentiously raw, upfront, energetic, and with a great sense of irony typical of the ‘structure of feeling’ of that generation in that context – was highly appealing to a youth made ‘hopeless’ and cynical, yet deeply concerned with their ‘impossible’ identity as middle-class children running away from the ‘flock’ of the New Order family (recalling Chairil Anwar’s poem cited in Chapter 2). Their songs criticise power abuses, everyday hypocrisy, and the unbearable as well as futile stifling of youth. One song, titled after Suharto’s motto discussed above, ‘Tut Wuri Handayani’ (1996), simply lists ‘Father’s teachings’ to his ‘children’: ‘go to school’, ‘learn diligently’, ‘don’t hang around’, ‘so as not to grow up becoming a hoodlum’. The song ‘Blue Generation’ (1994) is most explicit:

I’m not a pawn in a chess game
I don’t like to be regulated
Don’t try to get in my way
Because I’m the Blue Generation
I don’t want to be engineered
I want to think freely
Don’t try anything
Because I’m the Blue Generation
Let them be open widely
No need to shut my eyes
I want to see clearly
This is the age of the Blue Generation
Let me shout at the top of my lungs
I want to sing out loudly
This is the song of the Blue Generation
I’m not your child
My dreams belong to me

The ‘blue generation’ was not the happy young generation of the New Order family, nor was it the ‘meek’ generation produced by New Order depoliticisation and indoctrination. Rather, it was a highly self-aware generation that refused to be
stifled, a ‘shouting’ generation of independent youth (‘not your child’) with their own thoughts, vision, voice, and dreams – with their own agency. The same sentiment was expressed in a song by the popular pop band Dewa 19, called ‘Format of the Future’ (1994):

Excuse us, relics of the past; allow us our own path
We’re here with innovation; don’t get in our way no more
The winds of cultural change; and waves of globalisation
Smash hard on the depths of our soul
Shattering a bureaucracy (stupidity… poverty…)
We are the force, the force of the dawning era
The format of the future
The filter of globalisation; transfer of technology
We are the youth, who are full of obsessions
With high mobility, craving for real reforms
Raise your souls, raise your bodies
We are all shackled by the rats of bureaucracy

In contrast to the image of an apathetic and backward-looking generation, such songs reveal a generation with a forward-looking imagination. In fact, they were already moving fast forward into their future, a future without bureaucratic control, driven by their own desires for change and the ‘waves of globalisation’. In that regard, the regime’s fear of the influence of globalisation was not entirely ungrounded. By the early 1990s, in a sense marking the end of the ‘era of stability’, state-controlled media found stiff competition from private and international media in an increasingly diversified mediascape, which made it more difficult to secure censorship and control (Sen and Hill 2000). This was most evident in the expansion of popular media, including the emergence of numerous youth magazines and the launch of MTV Asia (1992) and MTV Indonesia (1993), which sought to profit from the notion that youth rebellion sells. These media were not simply about the ‘ecstasy of lifestyle’, as intellectuals often bemoaned (Ibrahim 1997). Rather, much of their popularity derived from responding to real concerns among youth. For example, the teen magazine HAI, besides discussing the latest trends, featured sections on topics that were taboo in the realm of order, such as school brawls and other types of violence, or sexuality, and included a 1991 issue titled ‘Youth Also Need Politics’ (Cohen 1991: 39). These alternative channels contributed to the development of imagined communities of youth, constituting ‘a kind of counter-nation’, as Comaroff and Comaroff (2000: 306–307) put it, or ‘a virtual citizenry with its own twilight economies, its own spaces of production and recreation and its own modalities of politics with which to address the economic and political conditions that determine its plight’. Shunning the cultural
politics of the state, these youthful ‘modalities of politics’ represent ‘potent, if unconventional, forms of politicisation’, in which the trope of young generation ‘became a concrete principle of mobilisation, inflecting other dimensions of difference, not least class’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 307).

By the 1990s, then, there were three competing narratives around the trope of ‘young generation’. The first centred on the past achievements of the Angkatan and the second on an alienated youth that was out of control; these were inherently connected, as the first narrative was used to discipline the latter, while the latter mediated resistance against what the former represented: an establishment that had muted the youth politically and marginalised them historically, and that did not allow for alternative expression and forward-looking imagination. This gave rise to a third narrative constructed by youth themselves, based on their own experiences as a ‘blue generation’, experiences that exposed the arbitrariness of the boundaries between order and disorder. The fact that Siregar’s defence, in the early 1970s, included a reference to the Bob Dylan song ‘The Times They Are a-Changing’ (see Chapter 7), suggests that the ‘structure of feeling’ of this third narrative was already well developed. In the 1970s, however, the global ‘youth-in-revolt’ narrative was still tied to the Angkatan framework. Twenty years later it had been ‘liberated’ from this framework. Youth narratives still told a story of struggle, but the meaning of struggle shifted from an ordered sequence of historic struggle to the disorderly array of everyday personal struggles that the ‘children of the New Order’ engaged in. These everyday struggles profoundly shaped the politics and practices of the activists with whom I conducted my research.
Stories of Everyday ‘No’s’

‘With rebellion, awareness is born’, so Camus (1991 [1956]: 15) writes. By saying ‘no’, in the act of refusal, which according to Camus is an act of instinct, the rebel becomes aware of the boundary between the tolerable and intolerable, becoming engulfed in a new imagination of what is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong’. For the ‘rebels of the New Order’, the future activists in my research, this was a very different right and wrong from what they were taught at school. Camus’ notion of rebellion reverses the premise that one needs awareness, first, in order to rebel. Rather, agency in the form of rebellion comes before (political) awareness, before a person is aware of even having such a thing as agency, before a name or narrative is attached to it – even in a context where the room for agency appears to be lacking. This lack partly explains where rebellion comes from; one rebels against restriction. For the ‘children of the New Order’ there were plenty of restrictions, hence there was every reason to rebel. Yet, most youth did not rebel. Those who did also did not do so with a sudden ‘no’. For them, their refusal developed more gradually, haphazardly, through numerous smaller ‘no’s’ provoked by everyday experiences of discrepancy, and arising from the many ‘why’s’ confronting them as reflexive selves, even in childhood.

These activists came of age in a political climate that raised them to be part of the New Order family, yet confronted them with the contradictions that sustained it: order and disorder, discipline and violence, prosperity and poverty, and absolute truths that proved to be lies. Their agency, and the art of expressing it, took shape in the experience of living through those contradictions. If they were supposed to answer ‘yes’ to a question on a Pancasila or history school exam, when their experience told them that the real answer was ‘not really’ or ‘far from it’, then a small ‘no’ already cropped up. A series of such small ‘no’s’ could make a child wonder whether the whole master pattern behind the ‘correct’ knowledge might be wrong. Yet, for a child to connect the dots and reach such an awareness, she needs to rebel. Indeed, for many young people, rebellion seemed to be the only, though ‘impossible’, response to the contradictions they faced. And even if
their rebellion usually did not (could not) take the form of outright protest, all the
everyday silent ‘why’s’ and subtle ‘no’s’ distanced them further from the domi-
nant political culture. The art of agency, then, was about transcending the hegem-
ony of meaning and the legitimising narratives of the political culture in which
they were raised. As Camus suggests, this was not simply a matter of becoming
aware of the oppressive conditions and then acting upon that awareness. First of
all, it was a matter of trying to make sense of the reality in which they grew up.
With each ‘why’ and ‘no’ uttered in this process, they discovered and developed
the ‘deeply moral construct’ called the self (Jasper 1997: 55), and gradually came
to see themselves, through relations with others, as oppositional selves, located in
specific social positions with specific capacities to act.

This is not to say that such personal experiences are a precondition for protest,
much less for collective action. But it is relevant to note, as Keniston (1968: 75)
does in his study of 1960s student activists in the United States, that the ‘issues
that now concern them as political actors first became important to them long
before they awoke to full consciousness of the broader political scene’. According
to Keniston (1968: 75), this was because ‘these particular individuals, from an
early age, were more attuned to the historical currents in their lives than are most
children’. This implies that they were somehow ‘special’, or at least felt that way.
Keniston (1968: 73) indeed argues that the activists in his study ‘were concerned
with moral issues at an age when most of their classmates were not’, and stood
out by ‘their talent, their orientation to principle, their sensitivity to conflict and
struggle, and their feeling – often based in a correct perception of themselves –
that they were in many ways different from their contemporaries’, and hence they
developed ‘a sense of specialness … associated partly with their intellectual supe-
riority, their ability to lead, their capacity to defend right against wrong, and their
identification with the principles of their parents’ (recall the ‘red-diaper-baby’
story that explains activism as a natural outcome of ‘radical’ family backgrounds,
see Chapter 1). Thus, they felt ‘special’ in their capacity to say ‘no’ from a strong
sense of moral self.

But once the ‘no’ becomes a narrative of the self, it comes with high expecta-
tions. As Keniston (1968: 73) notes, it ‘is not easy to be special, and it is espe-
cially hard to live with the high ethical standards that give one the need to be es-
pecially right’. It meant that ‘it was not enough merely to “have principles”; it
was necessary to live by their principles’, which raised constant anxiety about
failing to do so (1968: 99). We may recall how Soe Hok Gie – the epitome of the
Indonesian student activist, who set high moral standards for his peers and future
generations – also struggled with the self-imposed principle of ‘staying clean’
(see Chapter 6). However, for most activists, this narrative of the principled self
only crystallised after becoming an activist, often in the context of facing concrete political dilemmas. Moreover, not all activists were principally motivated by moral principle, then or now. There could be many different reasons to rebel or to become an activist that had little to do with a moral high ground. There is no ‘activist disposition’ to be distilled from a young person’s moral fibre, nor are there certain patterns in personal background that are more likely to lead to activism. Like Keniston, McAdam (1988: 35) argues that ‘some combinations of biographical factors render some people more susceptible to the force of history than others’. This seems unlikely, though, given the sheer diversity of biographies that I encountered among the activists in my research.

For one thing, the factor of politically-minded family backgrounds, stressed by Keniston, was not evident in the stories of the activists in my research. Even when anti-regime sentiments, or a history of political opposition, were present in the family, this did not necessarily form the initial basis for their personal ‘no’s’. In fact, as illustrated below, the New Order climate was highly unconducive to the open sharing of ‘radical’ family stories with children; often it was only after a child’s ‘no’ that older family members became willing to share such stories, or that the child was willing to accept them. Most student activists, though, did not have ‘radical’ family backgrounds but were truly ‘children of the New Order’, in the sense of coming from decent middle-class families that formed the backbone of the ‘New Order family’, which generally shied away from political positions. Many of their parents worked as teachers or civil servants (which automatically made them Golkar voters), or were small entrepreneurs who also tended to avoid political positions. Where, then, did their ‘no’ come from?

As one might guess, the reasons varied. The only pattern to be distilled from their personal stories is that their ‘no’ emerged from their idiosyncratic experiences of everyday discrepancies. If they reacted more strongly to these than others did, it often followed less from moral principle or upbringing than from chance encounters and incidents that held up a mirror to the self. No clear patterns can be drawn from this, since real lives are too complex, too messy for that. If anything, the childhood stories of the activists in my research offer a stark illustration of the messiness of growing up in the New Order. Their lived experience of this mess served as real-life political lessons, teaching them about the mechanisms of power of the system they came to rebel against. The discrepancies of New Order society came up in all of the childhood stories of the activists I interviewed. As middle-class children they were part of the idealised ‘national family’, yet were confronted with the reality of socioeconomic and power inequities, both within their own middle-class families and in relation to those less fortunate or more powerful than them. The New Order denial of class was thus constitutive of their experience of everyday contradictions. As Agus (born 1971) recalled, the greatest influence in
his childhood was not his ‘normal family’ upbringing, as he called it (his parents were teachers), but ‘the reality of my environment’ in a cramped area in Jakarta:

Probably what formed me was the reality of my environment. As a kid I wondered why some of my neighbourhood friends didn’t move on to junior high, when I did. Again, when I went to high school, I saw friends dropping out. Actually, before that, when I was in elementary school, I wondered why other kids could stay home while I had to go to school. I asked my mother, and her answer was realistic: ‘Their parents can’t afford it’. ‘Why not?’ ‘Because they’re not educated. Go ask them if their parents finished school. If you want to advance in life you have to be well educated’. She was also realistic about why I went to a government school and not a private school, because [my parents] couldn’t afford that. So in the same neighbourhood the difference between one family and the other was truly felt. … This was reality to me until I went to ITB. On campus, I was shocked to see how many of the students were actually rich! That was a real eye-opener. Most of my study friends were from the upper middle-classes. … Again, I felt the great difference.

The feeling of difference and of being different (but not necessarily ‘special’ in the sense Keniston refers to) was a recurring leitmotif in the activists’ stories. But each of the stories highlighted a unique experience of such difference, each illustrating specific aspects of the difficulties and struggles that growing up in the New Order entailed, and the range of ways of dealing with these difficulties.

The Logic of Street Citizenship

Sometimes the disparity within New Order society was felt more acutely. Yodi (born 1975), who was from ‘a bureaucratic family’ (one parent was a teacher, the other a civil servant), described his childhood situation as that of a ‘have-not’ who happened to live in a typical ‘Orba [popular abbreviation of Orde Baru, or New Order, here meaning ‘elite’] neighbourhood’ – namely, Menteng in Central Jakarta, where Suharto and many top officials were resident – and who went to a ‘typical Orba school’. Each day he was confronted with the New Order hierarchy of power, which turned him into a ‘cynic’ from a very young age.

My elementary school was totally Orba. Suharto’s grandchildren went there, the children of all kinds of corrupt New Order officials, totally Orba. Peer groups were divided into haves and have-nots. In practice you could still fit in if you wanted to, because at a small school like that you had to mingle. But I kept my distance; I didn’t like them. I was cynical about people who bought their friends with a new pair of shoes, a new shirt, whatever. If you weren’t good in sports like basketball you got marginalised anyway, so I never did fit in. Fine with me – I had my own life as a kind of pariah. I didn’t trust anyone. Not that I didn’t get along, I just didn’t attach, except
maybe with like-minded cynics. We had to be more creative. For example, one time, we sneered ‘Oil!’ at a friend of the grandson of Ibnu Sutowo [director of the state oil company], just as he was doing a somersault in gym class; he fell and complained. Cynics like us always got punished, but that was our [sense of] superiority. …

Junior high was just up one level – if my elementary school was elite now several elite elementary schools merged, so I faced an even bigger population of rich kids. This trained me in being critical of people’s arrogance. All I could think was, ‘How come you’re so smug – because you’re talented or because you’ll inherit something, because of daddy and mommy?’ I couldn’t remain silent, as it affected me too. For example, the composition of the basketball team was based on the gifts they gave to the teacher, and that happened openly! Some kids got all the benefits in class. Yeah, teachers were the enemy too, they had to be opposed. …

The point is that you don’t connect once you’re made to feel inferior. For me it was right in my face. Each day on my way to school I had to pass Cendana, Suharto’s place. He used to hold open house there, so people would come from all over Jakarta to receive a salam tempel [‘sticky handshake’, envelope filled with money]. Rp 5000, not bad in 1985. With my friends who were also have-nots I often lit firecrackers near the house and then the guards would chase us, stuff like that. That’s how it was to live in that environment. There was more interaction with those reaping all the benefits of the New Order, and because I didn’t get any of that I got to resist the New Order.

During Yodi’s childhood, not just the socioeconomic disparity but the power hierarchy and the corruption that were part and parcel of the New Order were ‘right in his face’. This provoked in him a sense of disgust before it evolved into moral outrage. Yodi became cynical – but proudly so, making this the core of his self-identity – before becoming morally principled. He came to rebel not simply because he ‘didn’t get any of that’, but because, from that position, he didn’t want to have anything to do with it. Hence, Yodi’s ‘no’ led him to resist the New Order before questioning it, and he rebelled through mischief first before protest. Everyone (except for the rare fellow cynics) was the enemy, and provoking punishment from those in power (such as teachers and presidential guards) marked his creative, intellectual, and moral superiority.

Yet, even to the most cynical child, certain ‘typical Orba’ experiences still generated moral shock. Often it was from such experiences that this child’s questioning of the system of power – the ‘why’ rather than just the everyday ‘no’ – intuitively emerged. In the New Order this often concerned experiences with the military. Yodi mentioned several encounters that made him detest the military, but the first times that he became ‘really fed up and angry’ with them left the deepest impression:

The aparat [military] were truly excessive. I saw how Suharto’s guards harassed the maids – all young girls fresh from the village – and I saw with my own eyes how they
grabbed them under their skirts when they passed by, but because they were military
the girls didn’t dare to object. Surely if they weren’t military the girls would’ve been
angry. … Also, one day, I was biking to school, and I had to pass Cendana. Because
there were guests there, all cars were stopped [and checked], but I wasn’t on four
wheels so I felt there was no reason for me to stop; how can a small kid on a bike pose
a threat? Then I saw the guards chase a bajaj [motorised pedicab] driving in front of
me and they ripped the canvas off the bajaj’s top. I was stunned; ‘That’s crazy’, I
thought, and, ‘Jeez, these guys are strong’. All the time I kept biking, but then one
guard turned on me and kicked me off my bike. Now, why did they have to do that! I
thought, this is crazy, just because he’s powerful he can kick people like that?

Thus, Yodi was well ‘socialised’ into New Order patterns of power and vio-
ence from an early age. When he moved on to high school, his experiences with
the normalcy of violence intensified as he was confronted with the ‘hereditary
vengeance’ cultivated there, with seniors telling newcomers ‘which school is or
which schools are their “enemy”’ (Van Dijk 2002: 75). Elite schools, such as the
one Yodi attended, were deeply involved in school brawls, which was, according
to Yodi, due to the presence of the sons of army generals:

I had wanted to go to a high school in a different area, but my parents didn’t want to go
through the bureaucratic hassle so I ended up in the same district. This was really an
outcast school, notorious for the gang fights. That’s what you get in Orba schools with
the offspring of Orba officials. With their daddies firmly in power it was truly the
cowboy era. A few years earlier there had been an incident where the son of an Orba
official was killed by Ali Murtopo’s son; you see, in the Malari days, Murtopo once
challenged Sumitro with a gun, just like in a cowboy movie; it was excessive and their
children were just like that. … Anak kolong [soldier child] is how they’re called.

The ‘enemy’ of this school was a nearby ‘have-not’ school, which added a
dimension of class and power inequity to the fights. According to Yodi, the dif-
fERENCE was also reflected in the field techniques and weapons used, one school
gang fighting ‘orderly’, with ‘military discipline’, the other disorderly and ‘riot-
ous’, like ‘mobs’; one using guns and knives, the other any metal object at hand.
Although Yodi still considered the military sons at his school his prime enemy
rather than their ‘have-not’ opponents, he was nonetheless compelled to join their
gang for security reasons. The fights he got involved in taught him valuable
skills, or so he recognised in retrospect, citing an analysis he once read by Bud-
iman of student activists’ militancy in facing the military at Semanggi in 1998:

The most important experience I got in this environment was to join collective action,
with all the gang fights, because the gang fights were truly collective action. Like Arief
Budiman said, about Semanggi: the students’ militancy was so high because they were the graduates of New Order schools where fights were part of their everyday lives – so they knew how to move, how to allocate field roles. … The instinct was there from high school. … Not that I had a choice to join. It was mandatory – I mean, if you didn’t join, what were you to do? Then you basically had to fend for yourself; if you got stabbed or beaten up it wouldn’t be the seniors’ responsibility to back you up. That’s when many at school give in, once they were harassed once or twice. For me, it happened close to home: I was walking to the bus stop and saw a white object flying my way, bang! It was a stone. Eventually I joined. Enemies were always around, and they were from schools with have-not backgrounds. I was a have-not myself, so I know. Most kids in Jakarta don’t want to go to school, they want to work and make money, so when they’re forced to go to school they bring all kinds of weapons along, like iron rulers, bicycle chains, cutters. Defending yourself against those people was hopeless. You could really get hurt. I had no choice, I had to join.

By joining a school gang, though, out of ‘necessity’ or for other reasons, even those cynics who had hitherto kept their distance were transported into a different reality, with its own logic and moral standards, which were difficult to escape.

Every day upon entering the school, all the seniors were lined up in the hallway to take your lunch money. They had to, to maintain their authority. After school the kids would gather somewhere, usually at Sarinah [a shopping mall in central Jakarta], to do their city wars. One time the seniors ordered a huge group of kids to do push ups in South Jakarta, which is a long way from school, by way of war of duty. Yeah, the idea of war of duty was pretty well cultivated. So we were split into two large gangs, named Kizrek and Sosok. And each afternoon there was a fight. When you moved to a higher class the schedules changed to morning and midday fights. Each and every day. So there was simply no time left for study, we didn’t learn! My sophomore year I almost begged my teacher not to move me up to the next grade, because I was bad in physics and I needed that for my study, but he let me pass. As a result none of us had an image of the future, nobody also cared at that time. Now they’re drug addicts, convicts – they were just formed like that.

Ritualised violence instead of ordered education, ‘city wars’ instead of Pancasila cultivation, ‘wars of duty’ instead of national development – for many schoolboys in the New Order, this was their everyday reality. Yodi drew a parallel with the harsh reality of public transport in Jakarta. As Van Dijk (2002: 75) notes, schoolboys fostered a ‘hostility’ towards public buses, manifested in throwing stones at buses on school routes, as bus drivers were often reluctant to take them aboard because of their notorious vandalism and because they paid a cheaper fare, which meant that they were left waiting for a ride home for hours. Yodi mentioned this problem, too, but the parallel he drew was also metaphorical,
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illustrating that city life felt like a ‘jungle’, a far cry from the New Order image of decent citizenship. This, too, became a valuable lesson for him:

School resembled public transport in Jakarta: it was equally cruel. After school you wanted to get home quick, but by bus you wouldn’t get there until nine o’clock, and that’s if you live close by; otherwise it can easily become ten or eleven. So no wonder you become savage the more you dwell in this public facility, which takes ages and is jam-packed with all kinds of commuters. No wonder you become crazy, if each time you have to jump in front of a bus going at full speed and risk your life to make it stop. Yeah, school was like that. For the have-nots it just becomes survival – how to get out of that in one piece. … But the benefit was that it gave you the experience to cope with complicated situations on the streets. It taught you about how the streets work, how society works, about the logic of citizenship at the street level. It has its own logic that is totally different from the ideal logic of citizenship. Once, I was mugged and beaten up in a bus filled with decent men and women, who only started to make a fuss when I got out. … What’s the use? At that time it confused me, but I learned that there’s something called a silent platform, which can be stopped if you challenge them.

The ‘logic of citizenship at the street level’, as Yodi put it, revealed that the realms of order and disorder were separated by only a thin veneer. Little was left of the ‘ideal logic of citizenship’ once a schoolboy found himself assaulted in a crowded bus. But such incidents also made him ‘street smart’. From a ‘cynical nerd’, then, Yodi became an ‘urban warrior’, equipped with fighting skills and embodied knowledge of street politics and strategy. These experiences, confusing at first, gradually formed into stories in his mind – about the violent reality of power relations, which forced a child to make strategic choices that went against his sense of self, joining his elite enemies in the practices that made him despise them to begin with; and about the lie of the decent citizenry, which proved to be an accomplice to everyday violence, needing to be challenged in order to be awakened.

These stories, based on a school-lifetime of lived experiences that gradually hardened his instinctive ‘no’s’, formed the basis for the moral principles and strategic political insights that would guide Yodi’s actions as a leading member of the 1998 student movement. Yodi’s story is not unique; many future activists grew up with similar experiences of the everyday violence of New Order school and city life. Yet, many others with the same experience ended up as ‘drug addicts, convicts’, rather than politically minded students and activists. Here, the individual ‘specialness’ noted by Keniston might be what made the difference, though in a slightly different sense: Yodi and others were ‘special’ not because they were exceptionally strong moral individuals since childhood, but because they ‘survived the jungle’ of New Order life ‘in one piece’, with their character
intact, and thereby emerged more ‘principled’ out of it. Often it was only after ‘surviving’ this school climate, in the final year of high school or first year at university, that would-be activists began to recognise and reconstruct their sense of self and personal principles as ‘anti-regime’. In many of the cases that I recorded, this happened in conjunction with tracing the genealogy of these principles in history and within their own family.

Dealing with Dark Histories

Most activists in my research seemed to come from apolitical middle-class families, but in the New Order, appearances could be deceiving. The ‘national family’ included many people with dissident histories, but their stories usually remained unspoken, even within the family. As a rule, New Order families did not talk politics. Douglas (1970) notes a similar tendency to avoid political discussion within families during Guided Democracy; according to him this was due to traditional values of social harmony, but the fear for reprisal by Sukarno’s regime was a more likely cause, as it would be in the New Order. In the New Order, though, parents and children were even more wary of political issues due to the institutionalised taboo around politics and the sense of danger attached to it. Hence, many children found out only in their late teens, if at all, that family members had a dissident history.

Yodi learned at age eighteen that his grandfather was a Masyumi activist in the 1950s, who during the repression of the PRRI rebellion had fled into the mountains. Even then, the story remained vague, told in the ‘restricted, staged language of my parents’, as Yodi put it. It was only after becoming a student activist that he dared to ask about the whole story, and found out that his grandfather, during the anti-communist killings of 1965–’66, had assisted PKI members who had fled into the mountains, since PKI members had helped him during the PRRI repression. Yodi’s parents then admitted that, despite the routine vilification of PKI at extended family gatherings, and despite the accepted official narrative that Muslims and communists have always been archenemies, ‘PKI and Masyumi really got along just fine in West Sumatra’; indeed, for both, the real enemy was the army. This new knowledge about his ‘hidden’ family history spurred Yodi to further investigate this political history – ‘and yeah, that eventually became my identity’.

The ‘staged language’ of Yodi’s parents was common in families whose histories had even a hint of PKI presence, especially in relation to the killings of 1965–’66. As Heryanto (1999: 152) argues, parents and grandparents kept silent about this dark episode not simply for fear of reprisal, but because ‘there seems to be no ready discourse to structure and narrate the traumatic past’. No narrative structure
for this past was available or could be developed in an era where the hegemony of the official ‘G30S/PKI’ narrative was so scrupulously guarded. The parents’ and grandparents’ inability to tell an alternate story was further compounded by children’s inability to hear, due to the systematic indoctrination of the official narrative to which they were subjected. Thus, links to dangerous family histories were severed from the side of both generations. Yet, however much silenced, the past could not be erased. Often it was just lingering uncomfortably in the background, waiting to be rediscovered.

One striking example is the story of Vishnu (born 1977), whose father was a former political prisoner. He was a high-ranking ABRI officer until he was imprisoned in 1972 for alleged PKI-membership; in truth, he had rejected Suharto’s offer to take seat in his first ‘development cabinet’ (1971), and moreover dared to propose an alternative political system. According to Vishnu, ‘he would rather be labelled PKI than become part of a corrupt cabinet that was bound to fail, so he was jailed for five years without trial’. While her father was moved from prison to prison, her mother took the children on the move in search of a safe place to stay, ending up at the southern outskirts of Jakarta, a desolate woodland at that time (now a bustling area near UI and other campuses), where Vishnu was born as the fourth of seven children. Vishnu experienced her childhood as a confusing state of tension between the New Order education at school and anti-New Order upbringing at home. Since in both realms ‘order’ was maintained equally strict, and the stories presented were equally incomplete, it was difficult for her to navigate between them, thus creating ‘disorder’ in her beliefs and sense of self:

Because of Dad’s political background, Mom was the head of family. Mom was rarely home since she ran the family business [a newspaper retail agency], and so Dad ran the house, with discipline. He made an exact schedule for everything we had to do: bathing time, suppertime, study time, and so on; up to the minute, it was written on the blackboard. Playtime was limited from 15:30 till 16:00, then we had to study again. Sometimes we snuck out the window to play by the river; we got a beating when we were caught. TV was also restricted; we weren’t even allowed to watch ‘Unyil’ [a popular children’s series] because he said it was damaging. You see, Pak Ogah [a comical figure in the series] said things like cepek [Betawi, or Jakarta vernacular, term for Rp. 500], and we weren’t allowed to use that kind of language. So although I grew up in Jakarta I didn’t know what cepek or jigo [Rp. 25] meant till high school! Yeah, my relationship with Dad was unique. I hated him for his strictness, and he scared me. But he also taught me a lot. He used to tell me bedtime stories like Kancil, and he often took me to bookstores. He also encouraged me to read the biographies of Sukarno – he had the whole collection. You see, he was a Sukarno admirer, so he wanted his children to learn about him. That started when I was in third grade of elementary school.

By fourth grade I had already read that thick Cindy Adams book [Sukarno: An Autobi-
ography, 1965] twice. I liked these books, they gave me this image of Sukarno as a charming man; I had no political impression of him at all, nothing heroic. I just liked the stories about him, they were funny. …

But then, Dad started talking about the Old Order, the New Order, and I hated that! At that time we were learning PSPB at school, about PKI and all that, and here was my Dad telling me another story, a version that was totally different from PSPB! This confused me; at school I learned that Suharto is the Father of Development, but Dad seemed to really hate Suharto, he talked about all the bad things in his government, such as the wood smuggle and their support for the nekolim state Malaysia, and so on. So, for years I just tried to avoid listening to Dad’s stories. I thought, because he hated Suharto so much he had to be PKI. And for a kid that age, that’s pretty embarrassing, since we were indoctrinated that political prisoners were, let’s say, part of a minority. I was ashamed and tried to cover it up; I didn’t want to believe my parents’ stories. That’s the greatest triumph of the New Order, you know, it was so powerful that it could make children doubt their own father. It had the power to distort. …

The problem was that Dad never talked explicitly about PKI or things like that. My parents never talked about their past; the only thing that came to the surface was their intense hate for Suharto, but where this came from I didn’t understand. For all I knew it was just because Dad was a Sukarno fan, because at home we had lots of big portraits of Sukarno. In fact, I didn’t even know that Dad was a former political prisoner until shortly before his death, when I was in third grade of junior high. I was sorting the family papers when I saw the mark on his identity card: ‘ET’, eks tapol [former political prisoner]. He had never talked about his prison experiences. At most, he talked about the prison food, that they only got three spoons of rice a day and had to eat rats since there was nothing else to eat, and even this I only heard shortly before he died, when I grew closer to him since I had to take care of him. But I was shocked when I found out. I was really torn between believing and disbelieving. I only started to believe in ’96, when there was a lot of media attention for the opposition movement. That’s when I started to ask questions, in his final months. But I had to pull it all out of him, about his guerrilla years [1945–’49] and after, and still his stories remained superficial. All I got were the same anecdotes over and over again, so in the end I got tired of it. At his deathbed he was still shouting about Suharto. I thought, ‘Ridiculous, even in his last breath he persists to hate another man’.

Indeed, the ‘triumph of the New Order’ was its power to distort – to the extent that Vishnu felt torn between two ‘truths’ for years after discovering the mark of danger on her father’s identity card, rather than making her question the dominant truth that contradicted her father’s story. For lack of a ready discourse, her father could only ‘shout’ his bits of truth about the Old Order and the New Order, Sukarno and Suharto, and for a child this was no less obscuring than the silencing that occurs in other families with similar pasts. Her father’s ‘shouts’ just became part of the disciplinary atmosphere at a home that was run like a military barrack; in comparison, school and the clear-cut stories told there almost felt as a relief.
She was left with the impression that politics is too complicated to bother with, a cause for stress and shame. Yet, Vishnu did not attach moral judgments of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ to either ‘truth’; she was not ashamed of her father’s past because New Order education taught her that PKI was ‘evil’, but because any association with PKI turned her into an outsider (‘minority’) in New Order society, while she already felt like an outsider at school for not being allowed to watch ‘Unyil’ and knowing the meaning of cepek and jigo.

As an outsider, though, she felt comfortable cultivating habits encouraged by her father in which most of her peers did not engage, in particular reading books, including grown-up books on politics. She was able to enjoy these books because, at such a young age, she did not yet associate them with politics, just with ‘funny stories’ about a ‘charming’ Sukarno, a man who was ostracised in the New Order but whose portrait adorned the walls in their house. As Vishnu thus grew up with Sukarno and a father who admired him and hated Suharto, she was sensitised to alternative political narratives even as she avoided listening to the alternative stories of her father. Her reading habits also raised an interest in politics despite her aversion to it, which made her even more of an outsider in an environment where politics was not only taboo but also considered boring. But this also prepared her to delve into personal political histories on her own:

In high school I was still not attracted to politics. Seeing how Dad had been a victim of politics I just thought, why bother. Well, I did continue to read newspapers and political books like dad had accustomed me to do, and I continued to collect news clippings about political items, the MPR [People’s Consultative Assembly] session and things like that. … I never brought such issues up to friends at school. Most were police kids anyway. My school was close to the police complex, so there were many police kids. What’s the use talking politics with police kids, it wouldn’t ‘connect’. Even now, if I meet them it’s all just ‘mall’ talk; I never raise political issues, they wouldn’t understand. I didn’t share my thoughts about politics with anyone. I just kept a diary. … Actually, this situation irritated me. I knew all these things and none of my friends could be bothered about it. What could I do? If I wanted to shout, who was I to shout to? My older siblings were just as ignorant as everyone else, and I didn’t want to bother Mom since she was a single parent who was always out working. …

It was up to me to find answers to the questions I had. All that Dad had left me with was a blur. So in my mind I tried to connect the bits and pieces from my parents’ stories, and then crosschecked it with Dad’s acquaintances who were still alive. Bit by bit I discovered the past. I don’t believe in genetics, but I found out that my great-grandfather from Mom’s side was a red SI [Sarekat Islam, see Chapter 3] activist, who died in prison. My great-grandfather from Dad’s side was a political activist, too, and Dad’s sister died in ’65 from a stroke; she was accused of being PKI and was terrorised by Anshor militia [the youth wing of the Islamic organisation NU]; they threw her
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around, slaughtered her livestock before her eyes, and took all her belongings just to intimidate her. Then there were Mom’s stories about having to move around. In ’65 she was pregnant so she didn’t dare follow Dad to Jakarta with the killings going on; she moved to a village, but that became even more stressful because everyone turned their heads on her, so she had to move back and forth. I heard these stories since junior high. Oh, by the way, I also wasn’t allowed to watch the G30S/PKI film [The Treason of G30S/PKI, see Chapter 8]. My parents would just turn off the TV: ‘Don’t bother with those lies’, they said, ‘you’re too small, go to bed’. The first time I saw the film was at school. It was disgusting, pure horror, so I thought that maybe my parents wanted to protect me, to prevent me from having nightmares. But I was already immune from the horror stories that they had given me themselves. …

The irony is that none of my parents’ children, apart from me, came to join a good political organisation. In fact, my brother joined KNPI, which is Suharto’s organisation! He even became a member of the equivalent of Pancasila Youth, the onderbouw of Golkar. But I have constructed my own theory of that; I think it’s because Dad was an ET [former political prisoner] and my brother wanted to hush all the rumours [that the family was anti-Pancasila], to cover up Dad’s past. It also used to puzzle me why we never really got into trouble because of Dad’s past; for example, how come he could vote during elections if he was an ET? Could he have just faked it? But then why was his name listed in the voter register? It didn’t make sense. I had so many questions, but I didn’t know whom to ask. In the end I just kept them to myself, and I tried to think of answers by connecting it all, pure guesswork.

Vishnu’s fascinating story illustrates that, in some cases, a young person’s emerging political awareness was not so much a matter of rebellion against the everyday injustices in her surroundings (she was the only activist interviewed in my research who did not raise this theme in connection with childhood memories) than it was of accepting a family history that was difficult to digest. Acceptance was not felt as relief, however, but rather became even more burdensome since there were still too many gaps in the stories; moreover, there was still no discourse to articulate the past. Hence, once Vishnu had accepted the past, she was still left with a blur, which in her raised burning questions, a ‘why’ that prompted her to search for answers that were not readily available. From the bits of information she had – her father being an ET forced to eat rats in prison, her pregnant mother being shunned by neighbours (the ‘silent platform’ from Yodi’s story), her aunt being terrorised by political opponents, her great-grandparents being ‘red’ political activists, Suharto being a liar – she pieced together a story on her own, which became the story of her political identity.

Yet, even before she could structure them, the narrative elements were already present in her childhood: the Sukarno portraits on the walls and the Sukarno biographies that she had read twice as a nine-year old, the news-clippings that she began to collect and write about in her diary as a twelve-year old, her lonely fas-
cination with the unpopular subject of politics. Despite her aversion to politics, which had brought her family nothing but trouble, she thus developed a strong taste for politics. Politics was her private pastime, for which she later – as a student at the UI Social and Political Sciences Faculty, where she was no longer alone in her political interests – finally found an outlet in political activism. By then, she could wear her identity as a ‘red child’ with pride. In 2002, during the campaigns for the UI student senate elections in which she stood as a candidate, I saw her confidently climb the speaker’s platform while students in the audience yelled, ‘Watch out, here comes Gerwani’, referring to the PKI-affiliated women’s organisation; whether this was meant as a joke, an insult, or perhaps a compliment, not unlikely in the era of reform, Vishnu could not be bothered.

**Born for Activism**

For all its uniqueness, Vishnu’s story is not exceptional. Although most of the activists I met were from ‘normal’ middle-class families, like Agus and Yodi, in all parts and at all levels of the movement I also met activists with dissident family histories that had a more complex influence on their political formation than simple inheritance. Take, for example, the story of Sitha (born 1975). Her father was also a former high-ranking ABRI officer, who resigned in the 1970s out of principle, rejecting Suharto’s regime, and her mother was a former GMNI student activist. Sitha thus seemed to be ‘born’ for activism, in the sense suggested by Keniston. Indeed, from an early age, she began to rebel against the ‘big lies’ told at school and to develop deep moral indignation at the wrongs and absurdities she experienced there. Yet, her rebellion was her own personal ‘no’ that only later combined with a ‘yes’ to her parents’ principles and other dissident stories, such as Soe Hok Gie’s. As Sitha described the evolution of her political awareness:

> In fifth grade of elementary school I began to argue with my teacher, who tried to indoctrinate us into believing that if Golkar didn’t win the elections, the wheel of development would stop and the people would become poor, so we had to tell our parents to vote Golkar. I didn’t know anything about politics then, but I was confused, because if that was true then why did PPP and PDI exist? The teacher also said that Golkar had been leading the country for a long time, but this made me wonder why so many of my friends who live in the kampongs are still poor? I felt that the teacher was a big liar and that I was being fooled, so I just stood up from my bench and left class before it was over. Since then I often left class when I was fed up with the lies. Mom and Dad were never angry about this; they were amused, so I felt supported. The only trouble was for my friends, who had a hard time defending me in school.

> I began to hear Mom and Dad discuss politics more often. First I liked to listen and reflect on their stories, but I didn’t understand any of it and it gave me a headache.
They talked about all kinds of stuff like Suharto being a bastard; students having grown weak; Petrus [the ‘mysterious murders’]; the Tanjung Priok incident [a bloody repression of a Muslim protest in 1984]; [Golkar chair] Harmoko’s embezzlement of funds; their shame when they discovered Ginandjar Kartasasmita [a Golkar top man] was a distant relative; the murder of a stewardess, whose husband was Dad’s friend, said to be shot on the order of Tutut [Suharto’s eldest daughter]; and so on. I heard these stories over and over again, but to me they seemed absurd. I felt that Dad was mistaken, that Indonesia was a safe and peaceful place under Suharto’s leadership, even if many were still living in poverty. But even though I didn’t understand, it must have left a strong imprint in my mind. …

In sixth grade I moved to a school in the military district in East Jakarta. That’s where my dislike for the military began to develop, because those kids behaved really badly. They liked to steal and get drunk, sell drugs, and they got into fights. A kid once died in a fight, but since the police was too scared of the military nobody was arrested. These kids always said they weren’t afraid of anything because ‘my daddy is ABRI’. … The most unique experience I had at this school was that I had two bodyguards, a girl and a boy who escorted me after school until I got safely into the car. I don’t know why they did that, I never asked. Later I heard they had been drug dealers since fourth grade – in elementary school! Can you believe it? Those army kids were mad! But the school itself was bad, too. At the end of the year, just before the finals, the principal instructed me to hand out the answers in advance, so that they could keep the general scores high. I knew this was wrong; that’s why I didn’t dare to tell Dad about it, I was afraid he would send me to another school again. But at that time it felt heroic, too, it felt like I was helping my friends. And this was known as one of the best elementary school in Jakarta! That’s how bad the educational system is in Indonesia. …

I was constantly confronted with the rotten condition of the nation’s education system and mentality. I didn’t get into the junior high of my choice because this school demanded an ‘extra tuition fee’ and Dad refused to bribe them. So for the most part in junior high I didn’t care much about school and the other children. I felt that something was unjust, and this made me angry. … In high school, I often got into conflicts with teachers and I often got punished, because I always questioned the lessons, or because I was singing during exams and listening to music during recess; back then I liked Nirvana, Red Hot Chilli Peppers, and Metallica. I was considered bad mannered because I rejected the school ceremonies. I thought they were useless; how can they make people nationalists, if all you do is just stand there and chat with the other kids? In class I didn’t pay attention. I was bored. …

In the second year of high school I started to hang out with the mountaineers [a distinctive subculture in Indonesia, heir to Soe Hok Gie’s favourite pastime] and my looks changed dramatically; from being a trendy girl, looking like the kids from the Hollywood series Beverly Hills 90210, I cut my hair and started wearing worn-out T-shirts and jeans with slippers. I had new friends with different interests, who gave me new input. They talked about Arief Budiman’s Golput [election boycott] movement, but I didn’t understand. There was a lot of talk about corruption, and I started to read Soe Hok Gie’s diary with them. Soe Hok Gie was not only a legendary activist but also
a great mountaineer, so it was mandatory reading for the nature kids. When climbing a mountain or entering a cave they imagined themselves to be Soe Hok Gie. So I also wanted to know how it felt like to demonstrate. To me it seemed heroic and exciting. By the end of high school I started to think about becoming a politician, in case I failed in becoming a scientist. Because of my friends, Soe Hok Gie’s books, Mom’s and Dad’s stories, and also the films and novels that I read, my impression was that it must be great to be a politician.

Like Yodi, from an early age Sitha identified teachers with their deception as well as ABRI children with their violence, immorality, and immunity to the law as the ‘enemies’ that had to be opposed. But different from Yodi, who seemed to be a ‘rebel without a cause’, ‘just a cynical have-not’ from a ‘bureaucratic family’, Sitha’s rebellion was more directed, ‘heroic’ even in a child’s imagination, since it resonated with the oppositional stories – no matter how incomprehensible for a child – of her dissident parents. Like Vishnu, Sitha had the narrative of anti-New Order opposition implanted in her identity since childhood. In contrast with Vishnu’s traumatised parents, whose story only reached her in the form of confusing snippets of horror stories and shouts of ‘hating Suharto’, Sitha’s parents offered a more coherent story that was furthermore consistent with their tolerance and tacit encouragement of her personal rebellion; very few other parents would applaud and be amused by their child’s walking out of classes based on her disagreement with the teacher.

What Yodi and Vishnu also lacked until entering university, Sitha found at age sixteen: a politically-minded peer community. In this subculture of admirers of Soe Hok Gie, she felt she could finally be herself at school: not a bored, ill-mannered, typically trendy, middle-class, New Order teenager, but an individual among like-minded individuals, finding a fitting style for her oppositional identity, expressed in a drastic change of looks. In this community, she learned about oppositional politics, represented by Budiman’s dissidence, in a language that she could identify with even without quite understanding it yet. She learned that she liked the subject of politics, and even fantasised about ‘becoming a politician’, though for her, ‘being political’ stood for ‘being a demonstrator’ like Soe Hok Gie. Ironically, for Soe Hok Gie, ‘politics’ and ‘activism’ were opposites (see Chapter 6), but the fact that the two coalesced in a New Order teenagers’ mind indicated that ‘politics’ had acquired a different meaning for those growing up in the depoliticised climate of the New Order. In an era when politics was taboo, to say ‘yes’ to the dangerous concept of politics was an act of rebellion.

Thus, while Sitha seemed to be born to become an activist (though the only one among her siblings who actually did so), it was only at this stage, after being presented with the story of Soe Hok Gie and the political views of his older
brother Budiman, which resonated with the stories of her parents and the novels and films she liked (even with her taste for Metallica, whose concert in Jakarta led to the banning of rock concerts in the New Order), and which were sharpened through her interactions in her new peer group, Sitha’s intuitive, lonely rebellion since elementary school began to make sense. A story began to develop that made clear to her that she had a ‘destiny’: to become an activist, like Soe Hok Gie, like her parents. For her, participation in the 1998 student movement felt like a logical consequence of all her previous experiences. Furthermore, because of the (rare) coherence of her personal story, she felt particularly called upon to become more than just a participant, and she thus became an active organiser, recruiting Vishnu, among many others, to the UI student movement.

I have come across few cases in which future activists followed the footsteps of their parents; when this did occur the influence was never straightforward, since few parents spoke openly or extensively to their children about past political experiences, let alone gave direct encouragement for activism. An apparent exception is the story of Gusman (born 1974). Both his parents were radical GMNI activists at the time of the 1965–’66 turmoil (a challenging time for GMNI, see Chapter 6), and thereafter became active PNI members. As Gusman put it, their activism ‘just spread’ to their children and became ‘family tradition’; encouraged by their parents, Gusman and his three siblings became active in (formal) school and campus organisations. Furthermore, as in Vishnu’s upbringing, reading newspapers and books – including all the works of Sukarno – was ‘mandatory’ at home, and there was much political debate on current affairs, though mostly between Gusman’s father and older sister. Yet, for Gusman, politics remained a ‘mystery’ even as he was increasingly exposed to it, and it was this ‘mystery’ that strengthened his fascination with politics:

I didn’t really understand these discussions, or the Sukarno books my father gave me, like Manipol, Beneath the Flag of Revolution; I read them but they confused me. So sometimes I asked my father about it, but he was often away for work or organisation, and I could only speak with him on Sundays. Sometimes he answered my questions, sometimes not. Therefore my sister became my reference for my questions, but it was not ideologically directed. Or I’d ask some of my father’s friends who often came by the house, Om [‘uncle’] so and so, but they often couldn’t give answers either, I guess they also didn’t understand. But that’s how my curiosity grew. It was a mystery and I wanted to know.

Despite being raised in a political home with a distinctive ideological colour, he felt a lack of ‘ideological guidance’. Despite the continuity between his parents’ political past and his present orientation, he missed a coherent narrative fit
to explain confusing issues. This was because his parents, despite their strong encouragement for political engagement, did not narrate their own political experiences. The narrative ingredients were there, the stimulation was there, but not the story. Yet, the narrative gaps themselves compelled Gusman to engage with the story of politics, raising his interest and curiosity. Once at university, he created his own political story based on his experiences on campus, as discussed in Chapter 10, through a process of play. It was only then that he became politicised.

The Other World of Politically-Minded People

To further illustrate the patterns and variations in the upbringing of future student activists we can compare the childhood experiences of future activist and political prisoner Anto (born 1971), which included various elements of the stories cited above. Growing up in a rough area in Yogyakarta, Anto was raised by his grandfather, who was, again, an ABRI officer opposed to Suharto. But different from Sitha’s or Vishnu’s fathers, his grandfather was still in office, and thus could not afford to ‘shout’ anti-Suharto sentiments or discuss anti-Suharto political gossip; rather, he silenced Suharto and banished his image from his home. Anto recalled:

My grandfather was a marine officer, an ABRI man, but a good one, he was very anti-Suharto. I often watched TV with him, and each time Suharto was on I had to change the channel or turn off the TV. He never explained, but I recorded very well that he hated Suharto, although they were both military.

Perhaps it was because the anti-Suharto sentiment remained tacit that it was stamped all the clearer in Anto’s mind. He did not need to piece together bits of information from a confusing blur of stories. The only conclusion to draw from his grandfather’s silent actions was that Suharto, despite his image as ‘Father of Development’, could be rightfully detested, even by his own military kind, which meant that he was not that powerful. (In Anto’s later activist life, this knowledge, ingrained from childhood, that Suharto had opponents within the regime became convenient strategic knowledge.) For Anto, what left a much deeper impression was his grandfather’s disciplinary rearing methods, comparable to the upbringing Vishnu had, which formed a stark contrast to the ‘realm of disorder’ in his neighbourood environment. According to Anto, this upbringing formed his character in a way that would be of great value in his future life as political activist:

We lived in a very densely populated area, a harsh community with lots of thugs who got drunk every night. When I later returned I found that practically all of my friends had become thugs too; some had died in the Petrus killings. But while I lived in a harsh community, my family was very disciplined. It was contradictory. Outside, I faced a
situation where you learn bad habits at an early age. But at home I had to be totally disciplined. I was often punished when my grandfather caught me smoking or selling stuff. He once tied me up in the yard for a whole day. He also once took me on his motorcycle far from the city and just left me there in the middle of the road; I had to walk home by myself, without money; I was just a small kid!

My family is lower middle class, so I had to become someone in life, more than my parents. Especially as a first child many responsibilities came down on me, I had to be able to protect my family. The family values were a mix of Javanese and Catholic morals, so it was double strict; you had to show respect, you couldn’t do this or that. At noon I had to nap till three, sleepy or not. In the evening I had to be in by nine or eight; if not, he came looking for me with a broom. One day, I was about ten, I packed my clothes in a bag, ready to run away – I couldn’t take it anymore. Of course I hoped that he would stop me, but no, he encouraged me, ‘Suit yourself, go!’ He gave me Rp. 100 and said, ‘Be good.’ This had a real impact on me. If you want to undertake something you must be ready to take full responsibility and accept all the risks and consequences. Of course, I didn’t go. So that’s how I was raised. But I feel this upbringing really influenced me and contributed to how I have lived my life.

Yet, his character was also formed by the opposite experience of complete freedom, which befell him after his grandfather died and he had to live by himself and fend for himself for two years. Looking back, he recognised that the combined experience of disciplined upbringing and self-sufficient survival at a young age provided a solid basis for his initial encounter with politics, when he moved in with his uncle and discovered his political talents:

From second grade in junior high I lived on my own. I shared a boarding room with UGM students. I learned a lot in this period, especially how to survive on my own by imitating what they did. So when my monthly allowance was finished halfway through the month, I pawned my radio or sold some of my clothes at Pasar Sentir, a market where the students also sold their stuff to survive. Imagine, first I lived with my disciplined family, suddenly I lived by myself. The freedom felt amazing, so I learned all kinds of mischief, the usual teenage rebellion. I socialised more with the students, but there was no political touch to this. It was just everyday rebellion and survival. …

I started to become attracted to politics, to think about politics, after I moved in with my uncle in Palembang for high school. My uncle was a student pastor and also an advisor to PMKRI [the national Catholic student organisation], so I lived at the PMKRI dorm with students from Sriwijaya University. That’s where I got my hands on political books, about Suharto, the New Order, ABRI, and they greatly influenced my political attitude at school. My favourite class was PMP [the Pancasila morals course]. All kids hated it, but I liked it because my PMP teacher used the method of debating. We had to form groups and make a written analysis that was then debated. So I developed a real taste for debating. Years later, when I was released from prison [Anto was sentenced to three-and-a-half years in prison after the 27 July 1996 riots, see
Chapter 11]. I bumped into my PMP teacher and he said that ‘at school it was already clear that you had a potential to rebel’.

For all the potential to rebel, it took sustained contact with politically minded communities for the rebellions of Yodi, Vishnu, Sitha, Gusman, and Anto to take political direction. In that regard, some future activists enjoyed a head start from birth. Suliya (born 1973), for example, recalled her home environment, and her father being a prominent PDI politician:

It was logical that I got attracted to politics, because there were always many guests; students also often visited to debate with my dad, so I got used to hearing serious talk. As a kid I always listened and I thought it was great. All these people seemed to be really smart, so from early on I decided that I wanted to become a smart person too. I decided that when I got to university I had to join an organisation, to become smart, not in terms of study and high grades but to develop broad knowledge and awareness of my surroundings.

For Suliya, ‘to become smart’ by joining a student organisation echoed Sitha’s fantasy to become a politician-cum-demonstrator like Soe Hok Gie, or Anto’s wish to be a clever political debater. Through their unique childhood experiences, they became attracted to politics despite being subjected to systematic New Order depoliticisation efforts and stories of politics as dangerous and taboo. Their attraction to politics was not simply because it was taboo – therefore attractive for youthful transgression like any other taboo – nor was it necessarily the outcome of being born into political families, as most children of dissenting ABRI officers and opposition party leaders did not become activists. They became attracted to politics because it represented an exciting ‘other world’ of ‘smart individuals’, in which they felt they belonged. If indeed, as Keniston suggests, these would-be activists felt burdened by a sense of being different from peers, this ‘other world’ represented a community where being different was the norm.

This can be further illustrated by the story of Rio (born 1976), a future student leader who was from a ‘progress-minded’ business family in Medan. After his father’s early death, he led ‘the typical mischievous teenager life’ – especially after moving to Bandung, known as the capital for youth lifestyle (Sastramidjaja 2000). It was ‘a life of fun and fake freedom’, as Rio recalled – until he went to live with his brother in Jakarta, ten years older than Rio and a journalist active in the prodemocracy movement of the mid-1990s. Activists frequently came by the house, and, like Suliya, Rio enjoyed listening to their discussions as well as attending their demonstrations and later trials. But this did not make him an activist yet; first of all, it made him fond of the activist community:
I liked watching and listening to them, I liked their style. They were much freer compared to my former community of partygoers, compared to the rest of society, which was boring. Their life seemed to be far more interesting, more challenging, and I like challenges.

Once connected with a politically-minded community that appeared to be ‘far more interesting than the rest of society’, young would-be activists like Rio were often first socialised into this community’s social atmosphere and ‘style’ before engaging with political substance.

**Chance Encounters**

In the absence of such communities – which was likely the case for the majority of the future student movement, who grew up in smaller towns – chance encounters with dissident voices could have a more direct impact on political awareness. In the case of Wado (born 1975), who was raised in a ‘normal, apolitical family’ of small traders in a small town in West Sumatra, his interest in politics was first raised by an elderly gold hawker near his house, who was a former Masyumi activist. This old man was full of stories that deeply impressed Wado as a young child; not only did he tell about his experiences in the revolution, he also provided answers to the many questions Wado had, which his parents evaded, about issues he had heard about from the media, such as controversies around Golkar, and why some people hated Suharto. The political interest awakened by the former revolutionary then combined with Wado’s interest in history, which had been passed on by his father, who often took him on trips to historical sites. Already in junior high, then, Wado developed, he said, ‘clear political ideas’. These ideas were sharpened by his teachers in high school, who were actually university lecturers taking up teaching at the school as a side job; unlike most teachers, they stimulated critical debate in class. Wado began to publish his ideas in the local newspaper, on subjects such as the ‘true spirit of nationalism that must be based on solidarity and courage’. Full of expectations, he went to university, the first in his family, but was stunned to see the ‘intellectual poverty’ of his fellow students. He recalled thinking, it was ‘incredible – they still discussed Pancasila according to the New Order paradigm. How could their thinking be so behind?’ He realised only then that the political ideas he had developed as a schoolboy, based on all his ‘why’s’, with the help of an old gold hawker and stimulating teachers, could be considered ‘dissenting’.

But many other future activists did not have any dissident influences in their personal surroundings, and they still arrived at a resolute ‘no’, often by absorbing political ideas from the media and relating these to their own situation and frus-
trations. Despite tight control and self-censorship, the press still featured critical articles by ‘intellectual deviants’, as they were known, such as Budiman. Indeed, as one article wrote, the ‘regime seems not only to tolerate debate but also to welcome controlled debate, which lends it an air of enlightenment, diffuses tensions, and serves as an early warning system’ (FEER, 9 August 1984; quoted in Vatikiotis 1993: 109), apparently under the assumption that such debate would remain contained within intellectual circles. But it did not. By chance, such debates could reach young people who did not have an intellectual background and usually did not read intellectual newspapers. Such a person was Umin (born 1970), who grew up in a family of market vendors in Yogyakarta. He was a ‘mischievous kid’ in high school, which he explained as an expression of his frustration about failing to get accepted at his preferred school due to his lower socioeconomic status, or so he suspected since former schoolmates with lower grades but richer parents did get accepted at that school. One day he read an article by Budiman in a newspaper ‘that was just laying around’, in which Budiman expressed biting criticism of the regime. After reading this article, Umin became an avid newspaper reader and started to direct his rebellion at Suharto:

This article was so smart, it hit the nail on its head; it really made me think about the political situation. … Suddenly I grew an intense hate for Suharto. One day I smashed his portrait in class [each classroom had, and still has, a mandatory state portrait of the president and vice-president]. I just felt a strong urge to break it and so I threw a stone at it. Nobody was looking, so it wasn’t to act tough or anything like that. I’m not sure why I felt this hate for Suharto, or Pancasila, and it was just me; none of my friends were bothered by it. I guess it was just from looking at the situation around me that I began to sense that it wasn’t right. At that time there were many land dispute cases. … I read about them in local newspapers. There was the issue of kuningisasi [‘yellowisation’, Golkar’s habit to paint buildings in its party colour, yellow, during campaign periods], which made me question Golkar’s constant victory in elections. But I think I was especially influenced by Arief Budiman. He was my favourite intellectual deviant. I wouldn’t miss any of his articles in the local newspapers. I developed the idea that I had to become as smart as Arief Budiman. So I started reading a lot. Even before entering university I had decided that I wasn’t going to graduate, but I would only use the study to become as smart as Arief Budiman.

Umin’s rebellion began as mischief in response to an injustice befalling him. He had no dissident family, politically-minded community, revolutionary figures, or stimulating teachers around to give his frustrations direction, but he had the voice of Budiman. Reading one of his articles, encountered by chance, turned his life around, and with each further reading Umin’s ‘no’ took further shape, symbolised by smashing Suharto’s portrait, an act confirming his new sense of self.
However, this did not yet define his political identity. Umin had no image yet of becoming an activist, nor did he associate Budiman with activism (in the sense of demonstrating, as Sitha associated with Budiman’s brother Soe Hok Gie), since the student movement of the early 1970s, in which Budiman was a key actor, was silenced and unknown to schoolchildren. Budiman personified something more heroic for Umin, an ‘intellectual deviant’, who fought the system through smart criticism, and hence becoming smart became Umin’s mission in life.

Encounters with dissident voices could also give new direction to already-formed political identities. For example, Ani (born 1977), who grew up in a small village in East Java in a family of teachers, had adopted an Islamist identity since elementary school because of the influence of two older sisters who were active in the campus mosque association (see Chapter 10). This was much to their more traditionalist parents’ dismay, who considered politics to be ‘dirty and haram’, but for Ani, the meaning of politics was more related to the image of the exciting world of activism. She said: ‘I’ve always wanted to become a politician, because it forces you to think; to challenge repression, to take the difficult path, a life less ordinary, that’s what attracted me about politics’.

Activism seemed to be the logical path to this ‘life less ordinary’, and her sisters showed the way. At her junior high, Ani was the only one to wear an Islamic headscarf, or jilbab, and she joined protests against schools that banned it (the jilbab is now common among schoolgirls). In high school, however, she became friends with a girl from a different, ‘very political’ milieu; at home, her family had satellite television with CNN and a library with banned books of intellectual dissidents, such as George Aditjondro’s book about the secret business ventures and wealth of the Suharto family. Ani kept visiting there, to discuss politics with her friends’ father and older siblings and to read their books. She recalled: ‘These books gave me a real itch; I knew that the New Order was bad but not that bad! It made me feel like … this is real tyranny, this can’t be allowed!’

In the following year, the 1998 student movement broke out. Ani promptly organised schoolmates to join the local student protest, calling it ‘my first secular demo’. Her school threatened her with sanctions, but this only added to the thrill of engaging in ‘serious politics’: ‘I liked the idea of being watched by the school authorities, and I felt proud to pull this off. And the demo was great. I loved to hear the provocative speeches; too bad my father picked me up before it ended’. The experience brought out Ani’s taste for secular, radical politics, and, only a few years later, as a student at UI, she became a keen leftist activist, recruited by Vishnu, and had to hide her new political identity from her sisters.
The Moving Experience of ‘Youth Extremism’

These stories illustrate how young people’s everyday experiences of discrepancy, dissident family histories, and chance encounters with dissident voices prepared them for future activist roles, which they often assumed only at university. Even without connections to the radical Left, the regime’s association of ‘oppositionality’ and ‘extremism’ with the Left meant that criticism of the New Order was prone to take leftist directions. Some, however, such as Ani, became activists at a young school age, and many, such as Ani’s sisters, took the other, Islamist path, which was also branded as ‘extremism’. One such activist was Hassan (born 1974 in a town in East Java), who joined the underground Indonesian Islamic Pupils, or PII, when he was in junior high. In doing so, he seemed to ‘inherit’ the activism of his parents, who had also been PII activists in the 1970s, although they never told him stories about their past. Hassan learned from ‘outsiders’ that his parents were quite fanatic and influential in the organisation, and moreover that they had been imprisoned in connection with the 1970s ‘Komando Jihad’ plot (see Chapter 7), when Hassan was still a toddler. But he recalled that he was not shocked on learning of his parents’ activities:

They refused to tell their children about their experiences; we heard very little from them. I don’t know why. Maybe they were worried about bad things that could happen. Maybe the factor of political grudge played a role, because at that time there were many rivals, enemies even, so maybe they didn’t want us to worry about it. But outsiders had all kinds of awesome stories to tell about that time, about the danger and so on. But to me these stories were just normal. Of course I felt kind of proud, but I also felt that that’s part of the risk that can be expected when you make that choice.

The stories heard from ‘outsiders’ prepared him to accept risks even before making a choice for activism. To Hassan this choice felt ‘natural’, even though his parents did not encourage it. When a friend invited him to join a PII training and become a member, his parents initially refused to give permission:

I guess they were worried, because back then, in the 1980s, many of such trainings were political traps; the intelligence service devised them to provoke ekstremisasi and in the end the participants would all be arrested. It was the old Komando Jihad model.

But seeing their son’s serious interest, in the end they allowed him to go. Then it turned out that this PII training, held in a remote village, was indeed slated for repression; the pupils discovered the military presence just in time to disperse and seek cover among the villagers. From then on, Hassan learned the techniques of underground organising: creating cover-up events, communicating in codes, and
instantly recognising signs of threat, thus practicing and experiencing himself the stories about his parents heard from others. In his experience, the PII activities mostly resembled scouting. But the label of extremism attached to it by the state had a markedly politicising effect on the pupils, as it automatically put them in a position of resistance against Suharto. As Hassan recalled, he and his comrades felt more ‘heroic’ than ‘extremist’ for that, which was probably also how his parents felt in their activist youth. Still, they never broke their silence about their past experiences as activists, not even after Hassan became a student leader who helped to bring Suharto down.

In some cases, ‘extremism’ could be a real, deeply felt, personal experience. To illustrate, I provide a final example with the story of Ihwan (born 1975), who was raised in South Sulawesi in a Muhammadiyah family, but who followed his own path and calling:

My father was Muhammadiyah but he did not go too deep into it, he was more a businessman. But my mother was the chair of Muhammadiyah’s women’s branch and both my grandfathers were chairs of Muhammadiyah branches, so the culture I grew up in was Muhammadiyah for sure. I went to a Muhammadiyah kindergarten, and during my elementary school, after school hours, I went to a Muhammadiyah madrasah. In junior high I did the Muhammadiyah crash course, where you live at a pesantren for one month to study hadith [quotes of the Prophet], learn how to deliver a sermon, nothing special. It was nothing like my sisters who moved to Java to immerse in pesantren life. But somehow I wasn’t attracted to religion. I only knew the basics, how to pray. At home we could never skip prayer; when I was caught playing during prayer time my mother gave me a beating. Still, my upbringing was free: we could decide for ourselves what to do in life, as long as we discussed it and took the family values back home. I could stay out until two at night, as long as I didn’t bring in bad influences. My family was very open, the children were involved in discussion, we could even criticise our parents. But I was difficult to control. I wasn’t good in religion, I couldn’t even read the Koran, I was recalcitrant, started smoking, and none of my friends were from the mosque community. …

After junior high I moved to Bandung, because I wanted to become a technocrat, like Habibie [Suharto’s protégé and successor, born in Sulawesi]. He was the icon of progress in Sulawesi. … I was attracted to Bandung for the free lifestyle, too – I wanted to be free. First I lived with an uncle, but then I went to live on my own. This was rare for schoolchildren. That’s when I began to change. It’s human nature. If a person lives alone, in loneliness, he needs something to soothe the heart. Often we only find our true self in solitude, like the Ulamas who roamed the world for seven years, and from there we gain the courage to take a stance and make a choice in life. If you’re alone and have to make choices about the food you eat with only that much money in your pocket, then every small choice can become a major lesson. Still, I wasn’t aware that I was changing, until I was introduced to Aa Gym [Abdullah Gym-
nastiar, a popular Islamic leader. He had just founded his Daarut Tauhid pesantren, and I remember the poor condition of his house, leaking all over [DT later became a lucrative venture]. Getting to know Aa Gym changed my religious paradigm; I obtained a new colour. I used to think that you learn Islam through prayer, fasting, its laws, ideology, routine. Here I learned about the human side, about uniting thought and emotion and involving the self. I left my bad habits. I spent the night there, joined the nightly prayers, I even joined the Zulfikar troops [Aa Gym’s bodyguards]. I got a new zeal for religious practice, because it offered a solution to the burden of life. …

I experienced a transition phase. Call it a puberty phase in religious learning, when you’re still immature, emotional, and enthusiasm can turn into radicalism. To me it happened in the first year in DT. I got furious when people didn’t immediately react to the adzan [call for prayer] and rush to the mosque. I saw sin in everything, the whole society seemed haram. This turned into a spirit of its own, because Aa Gym wasn’t like that at all. That’s why I now say that we shouldn’t overreact to people who go through this phase, because at some point it can turn. With me this phase was very strong. Friends started calling me a weirdo, ustad, no fun to hang out with. I was alone in my transformation – from a guy, who used to smoke, be very free, with girls even. When I returned home after three years people were shocked to see this different person. They warned me to be careful, because I had signed up for Bosnia. You could enrol at any mosque back then. I was seventeen and getting ready to go to war. But the government called off the mission. This angered me, because to me it was jihad. I was surely fanatic. Maybe this phase is necessary to obtain God’s guidance, but it can easily go off track, because it’s a very thin line between thinking that you have received a sign and getting lost. Once the extreme side comes out a grey area emerges between right and wrong. The wrong friends can then take you to a misguided movement. I was approached by such a group, they wanted me to take an oath with an imam who labelled all others kafir. But I was saved, once I saw that they were all lost. Alhamdulillah they weren’t like that at Aa Gym. But the big fuss was on campus.

With such intense experiences of personal transformation – which could have ‘easily gone off track’ but did not, as he continued developing by encountering even more extremist groups, which made him reflect on his own development – Ihwan was ready to face the ‘big fuss on campus’, where various groups, Islamist or otherwise, vied for the students’ souls.

Entering university, all of the young people cited in this chapter were ready to face that ‘big political fuss’. Each in their own way, in unique circumstances and with unique histories, they had experienced a process of personal transformation that turned them from teenage rebels who never felt part of the New Order family into young individuals with a strong sense of political self. In a sense they were all ‘extremists’, since their opposition to Suharto, arising from rebellion against the everyday reality of the political climate he created, automatically positioned them as such.
It should be emphasised, though, that the childhood stories presented in this chapter were reconstructions in retrospect. As Keniston (1968: 76) notes about the life stories that he studied: ‘For all that childhood sets the stage for what happens later, it does not rigidly determine it. In retrospect, these young radicals often feel that there was a certain “necessity” in their becoming what they are today’, which, needless to say, ‘must be taken with caution’. However, almost none of the activists in my research spoke about their childhood experiences in terms of necessary pathways towards activism. In fact, many were reluctant to draw such connections, even if they were clearly present; as Vishnu asserted during her interview: ‘I don’t believe in genetics, but...’ Others began the interview by saying, ‘You won’t find any signs of activism in my childhood’ – although I never stated that I was looking for such ‘signs’, and indeed I was not. Many also noted that they were the only one among their siblings to become an activist. Perhaps Sitha is an exception, as she said to me more than once: ‘How could I not have become an activist?’, though she was also the only one of her siblings to become one. Sitha, however, was the only one of my respondents who recorded her life story for me on paper, rather than being interviewed by me in person. This might have coloured her sense of ‘destiny’, since taking the time to reflect on her past experiences, and being able to ‘cut and paste’ her multiple loose memories into a written life story, is bound to make the narrative more coherent than the jumble of anecdotes that I recorded in my interviews, and that I, for the purposes of this chapter, then reconstructed into a narrative.

But, more importantly, different from most other children growing up in the New Order, Sitha had an exceptionally open relationship with her dissident parents. In contrast with Vishnu and other children of anti-Suharto families, she did not grow up in a culture of silence in which the few snippets of muted truths that did reach a child were only confusing. Although she also benefitted from a politically minded peer group, and inspiration from Soe Hok Gie’s diary, in creating an imagination of herself as a political activist, and finally coming to understand what her parents were talking about, Sitha had a coherent oppositional story and identity from the start. The ‘triumph of the New Order’, as Vishnu said, was that most other young people growing up in this climate did not. But once they arrived at university, they, too, found coherent stories as the personal, often lonely ‘no’s’ came together in activist collectivities. The ‘big fuss’ was indeed on campus, where political identities and stories became ‘real’ through playful practice.
Campus Playgrounds: Rediscovering Politics

Space of Narrative and Play

In the ‘era of stability’ at the height of New Order power, campuses seemed to be devoid of political activity. This was the result of the 1978 ‘NKK/BKK’ policy of Education Minister Yusuf, by which various measures were implemented in order to ‘depoliticise’ the politicised atmosphere on campuses in the 1970s that had led to the rise of the 1978 student movement (see Chapter 7). After the suppression of this student movement, student activism seemed to have died out. Under Yusuf’s successor Notosusanto (1982–1985), students’ energies were redirected to proper activities of ‘professionalisation’, ‘institutionalisation’, and something he called ‘transpoliticisation’, referring to the transfer of national values through political education and properly channelled political participation through the national youth committee, or KNPI. Notosusanto contrasted this with ‘politicking’, which was disallowed for students and other academics, ‘except when conducted outside university and without involving the name of the institution or any of its units (and within the limits of the law)’ (quoted in Supriyanto 1998: 42). Thus, a strict separation was enforced between the professional institution of the university and the world of politics outside the campus, although political activity in this outside world was also strictly controlled.

After Notosusanto’s death in 1985, his successor Fuad Hassan introduced more liberal policies. In 1990 he allowed the establishment of central student senates, to make up for the loss of student councils in 1978. But since this still fell under the control of university rector s, many students criticised it as a form of domestication, meant to lock students on campus and undercut alliances with off-campus movements. According to UI lecturer Sanit (1999: 180), it was ‘a mannequin in the shop window of campus’, or a facade of campus democracy that was ‘simply NKK/BKK in disguise’, serving to direct the energies of students away from social issues and into the controlled realm of campus politics that engrosses them in rivalries for student leadership. Likewise, Keniston (1971: 90) argues that campus-based politics ‘acts as a subtle deterrent to true political activity’, as it ‘short-circuits energy from political activity on the broader scene’, and thereby
‘subtly convinces students that they are incapable of dealing with the major issues of national welfare and survival that ultimately affect them far more deeply than most campus issues’.

But campus politics was more complex and significant than simple distraction or domestication. It was on campus – in their interactions with campus administrators, faculty, and fellow students – that students rediscovered political practice in an era when this was taboo. In so doing, they learned about political distinctions in a political culture that veiled them under the cloak of Pancasila harmony, and developed political agency through a multifaceted process of play. Furthermore, campus activists also engaged in off-campus movements; in fact, they often initiated such movements. The experiences of on-campus politics and off-campus ‘true political activity’, as Keniston calls it, thus complemented and shaped one another, and were indeed part of the same process that started on campus. A close look at the student activism emerging on and from New Order campuses shows how this apparently depoliticised space still offered an important realm for the perpetuation of resistive narratives – narratives that had long been suppressed and silenced but were still furtively passed on from cohort to cohort, with each cohort adding its own playful twist.

To discuss how narratives can contribute to social movements, Couto invokes MacIntyre’s (1981, quoted in Couto 1993: 60) concept of ‘virtue’ as ‘the kind of capacity for judgement’ that ‘the agent possesses in knowing how to select among the relevant stack of maxims and how to apply them in particular situations’ – a capacity that is illustrated in, and sustained through, narratives. Couto (1993: 60) argues that ‘narratives shared within free spaces make two contributions to social movements’. The first is that ‘they transmit and continue a belief in the virtue of the oppressed’; the second is that ‘they assert a social life or at least better understanding of a group’s social condition than that which prevails in the dominant culture’; hence, their continuation is itself virtuous, since, as the US civil rights movement illustrates, it ‘preserved resistance among sets of oppressed people and prepared them for leadership in local social movements’ (1993: 60–61). Indeed, narratives preserved a potential for resistance by providing a ‘model of’ and a ‘model for’ the virtues of the oppressed (whether the suppressed student movement, or the actually oppressed masses), virtues that were denied in the New Order, and such narratives could only exist in ‘free spaces’. Campuses are not free spaces as such, and in Indonesia they became less so after the 1978 crackdown. Yet, they still provided small pockets of memory and sociability that allowed resistive communities to emerge and to create their own ‘free spaces’. As Couto (1993: 63) asserts: ‘Creation of free spaces … wherein narratives extol the virtues of community members is itself a political act’.
In the campuses of post-1978 New Order Indonesia, such ‘free spaces’ often took the form of informal ‘study clubs’ that mushroomed in all university cities; autonomous from formal organisations, usually based in student boardinghouses, and often small and transient in character, they were difficult to control. There, what Scott (1990) has called an ‘infrapolitics of dissent’ developed, in which the radical critique and rejection of the New Order, as expressed by the 1978 student movement, could be sustained as ‘hidden transcripts’ after this critique had been suppressed and silenced. According to Scott, the likelihood of severe repression causes ‘hidden transcripts’ to remain where and as they are: hidden off-stage. This entails that they can only be translated into overt protest if political conditions allow, as political opportunity theory also argues (see Chapter 2). Indeed, that is the common interpretation of what has happened in Indonesia since the late 1980s, when student protests returned onto the stage. However, as Polletta (1999: 15) argues, this type of reading overlooks the significance of the cultural framing and identity processes occurring within free spaces, which not only challenge but can also destabilise the institutional logics of dominant structures. Polletta (1999: 24–25) argues that free spaces are in fact linked to dominant structures through intricate ‘associational ties and multiple networks’, generating ‘distinct, often conflicting, interests and identities’, and affecting how ‘mobilising identities’ emerge and are played out.

Such intricate ties and networks indeed constituted the political life of the activists in my research, who were often involved in both the dominant structures and the free spaces of campus. Different categories combined in playful ways in their everyday political practices, which affected both their activist identities and the meaning and scope of campus politics. Transgression occurred not simply through a transition from ‘hidden transcript’ to ‘overt protest’, but through play. According to Bennett (1979: 336), in a repressive political climate ‘play politics’ is often the only possible form of political action, but ‘it is possible for the process of political regeneration to begin through play’. Bennett argues innovation can result from the delicate balance between imitation and improvisation inherent in ‘played politics’. While imitating the political order is inevitable, he argues, as ‘political situations are generally ritualised to the extent that imitation is practically the only possible response to them’, so is improvisation, as the participants bring in their own subjectivities and commitments, thus transgressing the rules and boundaries of the political ritual (Bennett 1979: 337). On the playgrounds of campus, the playful politics of student activists did result in innovative politics that also liberated them from the Angkatan narrative. Yet, on the face of it, this was not the impression conveyed by New Order campuses.
Dead Campus?

Indonesian intellectuals and foreign observers have noted that campuses in New Order Indonesia were void of ‘true politics’ and had become ‘intellectual ghost towns’, ‘where university lecturers eked out a bare existence on meagre government salaries unless they neglected their students and spent all their time working off-campus’ (Vatikiotis 1993: 109), and where students were only concerned with their consumerist lifestyles and their future careers. As Tempo editor Gunawan Mohammad wrote in 1990: ‘Universities are dead. Ideas are dead. The government’s obsession with security is like a black hole swallowing all independent thought’ (quoted in Schwartz 1999: 237). According to W.S. Rendra (quoted in Schwartz 1999: 236–237), the poet of the student movements of the 1970s, this had ‘catastrophic’ implications for the younger generations:

What should be the most productive members of society, the young, just float along in Indonesia. They have no culture of their own, no political force, no economic voice. What you’re left with is robots and zombies, unable to adapt, incapable of absorbing new influences. The campuses thwart intellectual activity, not promote it. … As a nation of thinkers, the vital signs have almost disappeared.

But a nation of thinkers was not what the New Order government was after. Rather, universities had to churn out the professionals needed in the New Order ‘technostructure’, as the next phase of national development was called. This orientation was not unique to New Order Indonesia. Habermas (1971: 4) points to a general drive in postindustrial societies for universities to be ‘rationalised as a factory’, designed to produce technologically exploitable knowledge, and that in such a scheme of institutional specialisation and separation from society, ‘politics does not belong at the university’. But the New Order added its own flavour to the transformation of universities into factories of the future technocracy. They also had to be transmitters of the New Order political culture, not only in their curriculum but also in their built design, which was made to represent the New Order Pancasila foundation of that future.

UI was the first state university to be revamped into the image of a Pancasila-based technocracy. In 1985, most faculties were relocated from the UI Salemba and Rawamangun campuses in Central Jakarta (only the Medicine and Dentistry Faculties remained at Salemba) to a new 320-hectare compound situated in the small town of Depok, south of Jakarta. This campus was designed as a modern haven of professionalism, but with strong marks of tradition, as an emblem of the ‘modern national style’ befitting the Pancasila nation of the future. As Kusno (2000: 89) notes: ‘Opened by the Head of State, with the Javanese spatial con-
ception behind the design of the campus’, it ‘represents a cultural inheritance central to the New Order ideology of “development” and “stability” grounded upon “traditional rituals”’. Furthermore, its physical isolation – on a vast, empty space, far removed from the city centre, and protected by surrounding walls, with cars entering through a gate guarded by security watches, resembling any suburban gated community – signified a separation from the massa and protection from the potential disturbances of the streets. In that regard, it might not be a coincidence that construction of this campus started in 1981, not long after the 1978 crackdown. The location precluded mobilisation in the tradition of long marches from the Salemba campus to the Rawamangun campus five kilometres down the road, or to other universities and sites of power in Jakarta. In this new campus, UI was no longer part of the bustling social and political life of the capital city, but constituted its own bounded, tranquil, and ordered sphere of academic professional dedication to development amidst the ‘underdeveloped’ village atmosphere of Depok. Further reinforcing the sense of seclusion, the campus offered all the amenities of a self-sufficient town, with its own internal means of transportation (the yellow UI bus), dormitories, computer labs, copy centres, food centres, sports facilities, recreation areas, and a grand mosque alongside a grand lake. For the duration of their study, the life of UI students could stay on campus – except, in the case of more affluent students, when being transported in air-conditioned cars to and from home, from one gated community to another – quite different from the life of students at the private universities that were lined up along the main roads of Jakarta.

However, even the most carefully designed compound cannot remain ‘sterile’, pure from the contaminating influences of the outside world. The UI ‘fortress’ soon started to show cracks that brought the ‘streets’ ‘inside’ and the students ‘outside’. Before long, alternative paths had formed to enter and leave the campus grounds, such as the improvised path to the shabby UI Depok train station, where the always packed, third-class (ekonomi) train passes, running from North Jakarta through the city centre to Bogor. (In 1998, this train would play a crucial role in taking UI students from Depok to the heart of the student protest at the Salemba campus). From the train station, another improvised path leads to the main road in Depok, Margonda Street. Over the years, these cramped pathways developed into bustling alleys with cheap food stalls and street hawkers selling anything a student might need or want, from trendy accessories, to illegal copies of CDs, to rare and sometimes banned books. Margonda Street also became increasingly busy with all kinds of public transportation connecting the previously isolated town with all areas in Jakarta, and along the road and in the adjacent streets shops and services began to mushroom that used to be only available on campus. This meant that UI student life constantly shifted between ‘order’ and ‘disorder’, between the
idealised space of campus and the social reality of its environment. Many students lived in nearby boarding houses outside the campus, usually modest shacks (though later more luxurious variants emerged), amidst the local community, and they had to survive on limited resources, which forced them to improvise and also made them dependent on their social environment. It was common, for example, for students to develop a trust relationship with food-stall owners, as they had to incur debts with them. Despite the campus seclusion and the New Order separation of classes, many students of different background thus came to be embedded in the off-campus local community.

Still, many students were absorbed in campus life, as there were plenty of activities to become immersed in, besides study, which few students cared about. Modern campus facilities could not compensate for the fact that ‘intellectual poverty’ did characterise study programs, with their outdated curricula, underpaid lecturers, and, as illustrated below, culture of corruption. But this left students all the more time to engage in other activities on campus, in which formal spheres and free spaces tended to interact. First, though, they had to survive (sometimes literally) initiation.

**Harsh Initiation into Brittle Discipline**

University life came with its own rituals that served to reinforce the social separation and to socialise students into the New Order culture of power. The rituals did not always have the intended effect, though, as they reproduced the same blurring of boundaries between ‘order’ and ‘disorder’ that the students were accustomed to from their school experience (see Chapter 9). This started with the initiation rituals (OS), which were often led by ABRI units. Like the drills in the army, its purpose was to solidify an esprit de corps and a sense of detachment from society, and often they served as recruitment grounds for the Student Regiments (campus-based defence units trained by military). But to many students it felt like senseless abuse, making them question the culture of power that the rituals were meant to sustain. Yodi, after ‘surviving’ his harsh school years (see Chapter 9), described the further ‘bullshit’ of his initiation at UI:

> When I started my study it was hell on earth. The study itself was routine, just a ready-to-wear factory preparing people for the job market. It started with the making of discipline through the OS. That’s how I learned about repression, discipline, all that police bullshit. For ten days we were taught military basics. But while we were taught discipline, our tutors had no discipline at all. All the talk about discipline was bullshit. So to me discipline became a big question mark: what does it mean anyway, by what standard is it measured? That time in the field just got me to hate the military even more. I
was trained by Brimob [mobile brigade]; before, it was Kopassus [special forces], but after a student died they turned it over to the police. It’s the same anyway. … I saw how they peeped at the girls; and their marching songs weren’t the patriotic kind you’d expect, no way! To raise the spirit you need to be macho, right? So the songs were full of sexual references. I remember one song, about a man who had an eye on two girls, sisters. The man can’t decide which to choose, so in the end it goes, ‘just go to the parents and claim them both’. How typically military, I thought, taking all they can.

Besides the disciplinary initiation of new students at the university, the formal student associations often had their own initiations meant to instil the proper spirit for participation in campus politics. Here, the disciplining was done by seniors rather than ABRI units, and different from the ‘Pancasila discipline’ instilled at the university-level initiation, these initiations instilled knowledge of the national and local traditions of student struggle, in order to ensure that novices were also properly socialised into the ‘semi-hidden scripts’ of student activism, in which the dominant Angkatan narrative blended with the stories of seniors. Thus, novices were often presented with conflicting stories. Yet, the seniors in these initiations often imitated ABRI techniques and, in ‘playing ABRI’, could be crueler than the real military. That was the experience of Agus, who enrolled at ITB in 1990 as a chemical science student, and was shocked not only by the large number of ‘rich kids’ at ITB, but also by the initiation rituals, which were among the most notorious in the country:

The OS at the campus level wasn’t too bad, but it was very cruel at the student associations. If you wanted to become a member you had to pass a transition year. First you did the political course; seniors talked about the romanticism of the past, the student movements of the past, and so on. Then you did the OS for twenty days. Finally you had to do social work, in my case build an irrigation canal in Garut, which had to be finished in one month. That was tough as it was the rainy season; it was like coolie labour. But it didn’t feel so heavy since it came after the OS, which was much worse. We were butchered day after day, from dusk till dawn. You had to do psychological and physical tests first to see if you could handle it; the weak ones were set apart. They really made us sweat; each morning we had to run for miles, then we were fed political material, then we had to run again. Direct physical punishment wasn’t allowed, but we had to roll sticks from newspapers, which they used to beat us. One day my friends and I decided that this was just a violation of human rights, so we reported it to the dean. The dean assembled the whole group, including the OS committee, and said: ‘The OS is too soft.’ I never complained again. It went on for twenty days. Each day we were assigned impossible tasks, like assembling materials that were hard to find, so at night we got punished for failing. There was also the blood trail tradition where you had to crawl through gravel trails on your bare knees. But the final program was most sadistic; we had to do a long march through the countryside for two days and nights with
only short periods of rest, until reaching the ‘slaying area’, where we were drilled until no one was left sane. By dawn we thought it was over, we fell in each other’s arms, glad that we survived, we went into our tents, and slept like babies. Suddenly there was a loud yell; the car lights were lit, the tents were knocked down, we were all assembled and ordered to run, to crawl, and we were beaten like hell. Finally it was over. In the end we developed a true corps spirit; you got to know your comrades well, because a repressive situation like that brings out one’s true character. But the tradition ended in the mid-1990s. It was considered too rough, because someone always died.

What stuck in Agus’ memory about the initiation was the corporeal aspect rather than the ‘political material’, although the corporeal disciplining served to ‘break’ the novices in order to make them more susceptible to their socialisation into the ‘romanticism of the past’. For Agus, the initiation had little effect on his political ideas, as he already had a clear image of student activism, as we will see below. It did forge a ‘true corps spirit’ within him, but this was oriented towards his peers, not his seniors, whose ‘human rights violations’ seemed to contradict their political lessons. Once it was his turn to discipline novices, Agus thus broke with the tradition and used a very different method of instilling a proper spirit, one more akin to the practice of school brawls rather than drills (see below).

Few students would go as far as protesting initiation methods or breaking with traditions, but most did not take the political lessons of initiations seriously anyway. Disciplinary socialisation on campus, whether by ABRI units or by seniors, was necessarily mediated by previously formed subjectivities, which for Yodi and Agus was decidedly antimilitaristic. Still, the militaristic initiation did not stop them from joining formal student bodies, where they then took the ‘corps spirit’ in different directions and formed new scripts of student struggle befitting the changing political circumstances in the ‘real world’ outside campus. Even within the controlled setting of campus, and although they were properly socialised into the scripts, rituals, and rules of the game of campus politics – a game modelled after the dominant political order – they still found room for improvisation, and for breaking the rules.

**Behind the Theatre of Campus Politics**

As in the ‘real world’, campus politics was an intricate game. To an outsider only the rituals of formal organisation were visible, and since these had all the appearances of a routine re-enactment of the familiar rituals of the world of adult politics, many dismissed the arena of formal campus politics as mere theatre. But to the participants campus politics could be an exciting game, teaching them not only the art of politics as such – including the backdoor intricacies of negotiating, bargaining, lobbying, building loyalty, tricking, and so on – but also the art of
political transgression, of breaking the rules by playing with them. The story of Irfan illustrates how playing the game of campus politics could be a matter of performing the rituals while also bending rules and crossing boundaries, including the boundary between ‘campus politics’ and ‘true political activity’.

Irfan was born in 1973 in Medan, North Sumatra, into a pious Islamic farming family. Like Hassan’s parents, Irfan’s father used to be active in the underground Islamic student organisation, PII, and kept silent about his past (see Chapter 9). In 1993 Irfan enrolled as a religious philosophy student at the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) in Medan, where he joined the student senate and learned all about the game of campus politics, in which national student organisations such as PPMI and HMI, though under KNPI control and formally barred from campus activity, were still major players. Irfan found he had a talent for playing this game, which came to dominate his student existence. But he also formed a study club outside campus, in which he and his comrades committed themselves to ideological study and social practice; from the way Irfan told me about it I could gather this was personally significant to him. However, in his story he stressed his experiences in campus politics; though much less ‘virtuous’ than his off-campus activities, quite the opposite in fact, these experiences taught him essential political skills that would come to good use in his life as a political activist. Above all, he learned to be politically enterprising. His story of how he won his election for the student senate is quite illuminating for the practices behind the theatre of campus politics:

In the second semester I became active in the faculty senate. That’s when I started to see that something was terribly wrong with the system on campus, from the educational system, to the facilities, everything. My seniors talked a lot about the problems. This motivated me to become more active. In the third semester I joined PMII and I became active in the campus press. By then I had risen to the university senate. I was close to the chair, an HMI guy, that’s why I was chosen to represent IAIN at national events for Islamic universities. I travelled to Bandung, Bogor, Jakarta. This pissed off the others [in the senate], all HMI guys, because to them I was a kid, and worse, PMII. You see, it was considered a huge achievement to represent the IAIN at these events. They were facilitated by the Religious Affairs Ministry, so from a financial perspective it was also attractive; you got one million in funds, which was a lot back then. Students used all kinds of methods to get in, even bribery. …

I also led a discussion group on campus. And I had a study club outside campus, called Atarnama, that’s Greek for ‘scent of roses’ or so. This study club consisted of mosque youth from various universities in North Sumatra, some weren’t even students. We organised village missions, pesantren courses, Ramadan tours, and so on. There were just twenty of us, but we were all very active. We met almost each night, like a gang of comrades; we studied politics and philosophy, the whole deal, though mostly from an Islamic perspective. The discussion group on campus was different. Sure we had discussions, but it was also a business, a petty campus business. You see, students
had to earn 16 credits per semester for extracurricular activities, which could be earned by participating in seminars; at the faculty level this got you one point, speaking there gained you two, participating at the provincial level got you three points, speaking four, at the national level you got five points, six for speaking. I traded in the first and second level by organising seminars for people who needed credits. Teachers needed them too to get promoted. So they came to me; I would register a person’s name, sign a letter declaring him a speaker. It sold like hot cakes, Rp. 5000 per credit. We weren’t the only ones. Seminars were always packed with people in pursuit of credits. …

In the third year I became the chair of the university senate. First there was a big election. That was crazy, three days of campaigning, two days to cool down, like a real political campaign. Posters with my picture were all over the campus, there was lobbying all around. Competition was stiff. First I had to win among my comrades, then I had to win within PMII, where a pre-election was held to select the PMII candidate. That was tricky. First, it was an ethnic issue. I’m Javanese while the PMII tradition in North Sumatra was Mandailing; my rival was Mandailing and so were the seniors. But in the end I won democratically with many Mandailing among my supporters. Well, I did cheat a bit. The election was at the secretariat where I was chair, so I was in charge of sending out the invitations. That’s how my supporters received the invitations three days ahead, while those of my rival got them only that morning, too late for many to show up. When my rival complained I just said, ‘Who’s fault is it that they don’t show up? You should’ve put more effort into mobilisation’. So I won the candidacy. But then I was pressured to retreat because of the grades issue. Candidates needed an IPK [grades index] of 2.8. My IPK was below that, while the HMI camp all had high IPKs. But I argued that I still had to collect three grades for the final score. I also threatened to run in the election anyhow, if not for PMII then in a coalition with HMI. The HMI chair was a childhood friend of mine, we were active together in the youth mosque and he was also in Atarnama [his study club]. Everyone knew we were close and that such a duo had a good chance to win, because many students were against either HMI or PMII domination and would rather vote blank; they would surely prefer a duo. That’s how I threatened them. Alright, they said, let’s await the final IPK score.

To reach the 2.8 threshold I needed two A’s. That was risky because one of the teachers was PMII but the other was HMI, and teachers too played politics in elections. The PMII teacher had given me a D, but he was easy to bribe. He even asked for it. He showed me the D, and I asked, ‘Can it be changed?’ ‘Yes’, he said, ‘if you buy me books’. He gave me five titles. I said I couldn’t afford that by myself, so he showed me who else had a D. There were ten others, each chipped in Rp 20,000; we all got A’s. But with the HMI teacher I wasn’t sure. I knew I would get a D since I hadn’t done the exams. My strategy was to use my discussion group. This teacher wanted to become dean, and for that he needed credits. So I organised a seminar for him to appear as the speaker. It was all last minute, but that’s how I won his sympathy. I got an A. People acted as if shocked, ‘How is this possible?’ Everyone knew. But what were they to protest? The bribery deal with grades was common. Still, the debate about my candidacy continued. They urged me to withdraw to guard PMII’s good name. I was terrorised to pull out, they even used black magic on me. When I announced my victory one
of my comrades suddenly had a fit like he was possessed, it lasted for a week. We went to a dukun to find out who was responsible, and the dukun said it was my rival; of course he denied it, but that’s the kind of stuff that happens during elections.

After that I had to compete with HMI. Both of us formed coalitions; Muhammadiyah was on my side, but there was also a big group of Malaysian students who had to be won over, and we went to great lengths to influence them. I won with a difference of twenty-seven votes. The result became an issue because there was a surplus of three votes, which meant that fraud had been committed. I had nothing to do with it, but HMI jumped on it and demanded a re-election. It almost came to a clash, just like a real election. But the result was declared legitimate, after I offered my HMI friend, the HMI chair, a division of power. I offered two of the five departments, the most strategic ones, giving HMI access to, first, education, which is good for recruitment, and two, funds. We agreed that he would become the deputy chair, the general secretary would go to PMII, the vice secretary to HMI, the treasurer to PMII, the vice treasurer to HMI, taking turns. But when I formed my cabinet I didn’t give them any. Sure, he was angry. ‘You betrayed me’, he said. But I calmed him by giving away the organisation of the arts and sports week. He was the one who got the cash. The issue was resolved and I became chair of the university senate for one semester. Then I got expelled.

Irfan was expelled not for his manipulative campus politics – as devious as it was, his way of playing was still common practice – but rather, as we will see in the next chapter, for his ‘true political activity’ as a member of the newly founded radical-populist national student organisation SMID (Indonesian Student Solidarity for Democracy, a precursor of the People’s Democratic Party), which truly transgressed the limits of the acceptable. Otherwise, Irfan’s story shows that there was no clear separation between campus politics and national student politics, nor between formal student bodies and informal study clubs, as activists were often involved in both, so that the various networks and the specific politics of each field bled into one another. From student senate, to national student organisation, to student press, to on-campus discussion group-cum-‘business venture’, to off-campus study club and mosque association, Irfan played all the fields, providing him a rich learning experience that prepared him for the ‘true political activity’ in which he then became seriously involved.

In the end, the manner in which students played the game of campus politics, and the directions they chose to take it, depended on previously formed subjectivities. Many student senate leaders were content with the role of kaderisasi that their position entailed, viewing it as a useful starting point for building their political capital and as a training ground for future political careers. But for those who entered university with strong ideas and ideals of political activism, campus politics became a route to realise this ideal in ‘impossible’ circumstances.
In Search of Action

After ‘surviving’ his initiation and transition period, Agus became chair of his departmental student association, HIMA, which he then turned into a campus ‘guerrilla’ group and a stepping stone to the ‘true political activity’ of community and labour organising – all because he was, as he put it, ‘Soe Hok Gie-minded’ before entering university. In fact, Agus purposely switched universities in search of action. His story illustrates how one act then flowed into the other, gradually contributing to the emergence of a larger student movement of a novel kind.

My first choice was UI. I had read Soe Hok Gie and everything he described was exactly what I wanted. I was thrilled when I was accepted! But when I entered UI in ‘89 I found no strong movement at all. I thought, ‘Is this it?’ It was nothing like Soe Hok Gie had described! Wrong campus, or what? Such a turn-off! It was depressing; there was no action at all for me in that first year, just study and go home; it was boring! I decided to move to ITB. I saw the student movement at ITB was budding. So I didn’t choose a university for its curriculum but for the movement activity, that’s why I went to Bandung. But when I got there, again the situation was different from what I had expected; after the repression of ’89 [see Chapter 11], student action in Bandung had also declined. Still, there was plenty of room to be active. …

In the second semester I became the HIMA chair. That’s when the action started. There was one incident that got us to clash with the rector. We felt we needed a central student body, because at ITB we didn’t have the central student senate [see note 2], so student activities were really scattered. … We held a student referendum proposing a revival of the student council, and the outcome was that all students agreed. It became a hot issue just as I was HIMA chair, so to me the situation fit perfectly. The conflict between the students and the rector was strong, there was real animosity. The rector made a counterproposal to establish the ITB Student Family that also included staff, and this became reality. Up till now a real central student body has never been realised at ITB. They’re scared of something like the old student councils, they know that it can easily turn into a revolutionary political movement. That’s what they fear most. …

After that I decided to create a new initiation method at the HIMA, because the OS method was just too cruel. Instead, we decided that new members had to live at the secretariat for one year, and they had to take turns executing small guerrilla acts each night. We assigned them special missions, such as taking campus property; we didn’t call it stealing, but ‘adding use value’ to an object. For example, at gym class we’d say, ‘Look at that judo mat, what a waste to leave it unused at night, and gosh we need a mattress’. So they took it at night. Then we’d say, ‘It’s cold sleeping on a mattress without a blanket, but we can’t afford one, what to do? Oh yeah, you guys can make it happen’. Outside there were many banners, at the town square and so on, just hanging there, worn-out – better untie and take them. Or we’d say: ‘You hate the Menwa [Student Regiment], right?’ ‘Yeah, we hate them’. ‘How about a little scheme to destroy their quarters?’ It turned out that one of the new kids was really provoked; the next day
the Menwa quarters was burned down by a Molotov cocktail. Just that kind of small action. Then there was the tradition of fights between departments. Each year after the graduation ceremony, there would be a procession passing by all the departments, and there would always be a big fight. The new kids were all instructed to fight. …

We did all kinds of things, most of it useful! Books, for example. The ITB library had a collection of books that were hard to find back then, leftist books, Marx even. You couldn’t just take them; it was a special collection, protected behind glass. So we had to figure out how to steal them and spread them outside. First we didn’t even know these books were there, but I’m a bookworm, so I explored all corners of the library where others didn’t go, so that’s how I found out. So how did we get them out? Well, we were chemistry students! We knew how to liquefy glass with acids. One afternoon I applied the chemicals, the next morning we could just take them out. It was simple. We snuck them to the toilet where we hid them in the water basin, the next morning we took them, and we made photocopies to distribute among friends. The books then became the material for our study clubs. Of course we never returned them, are you kidding? They would’ve just dusted away in those corners. No one ever found out. I was also amazed, for these books were banned and it was really hard to get them, but there they were. So, from there we started talking about a leftist movement. …

We were involved in several discussion clubs, like Ganesha. Ganesha had two kinds of jobs, a division of labour between the ‘night Ganesha’ and the ‘day Ganesha’. The ‘day Ganesha’ was based in the campus press. There was another press group at ITB, but they were more moderate, while Ganesha engaged with illegal labour unions from the start. Ganesha rose to the surface as a legal organisation, or maybe semi-legal since the rector once banned it, though there was nothing to ban; it didn’t have a licence anyway. That’s why there were two, the day one that published the journal, and the night one that consisted of troops. The night one was skilled in sabotage; they were becoming revolutionary, their line was more or less Blanquist, the idea of small group insurrection. They trained themselves in sabotage, starting on campus. Once, they cut off all electricity, that kind of stuff, it was just training. Including distributing leaflets to topple Suharto, antimilitarism, and so on; clearly they couldn’t use the name Ganesha on these leaflets. Ganesha took a very radical line. Each year they returned to the topic of toppling Suharto, as they were from groups who continued the ’78 tradition through study clubs. Yeah, the aspiration to topple Suharto was there all along. And Ganesha introduced all kinds of leftist discourse, Marxist, post-Marxist, New Left, even class struggle. I doubt that they were all Marxist, but they adopted post-Marxist theories. …

At Ganesha we started to think about what to do, you know, praxis. Eventually we discussed the possibility of building a movement. We talked a lot about a student movement, but then we asked ourselves, ‘Why should it be just a student movement? Why not also bring about a process of empowerment in other social sectors, so they can later support the student movement?’ So we established a public service workshop, where our main concern was the problems of farmers and workers, since they are the marginalised groups in society. We began to list methods that had to be applied in the process of organising farmers or workers. I started visiting other places, like Yogyakarta, to study the organisation of farmers there and learn from our comrades at UGM.
At that time there was the Kedung Ombo case [see the next chapter]. That was a really interesting experience. …

To compete with the ITB Student Family that the rector had created, we created the Indonesian Student Movement for Change. We couldn’t use campus facilities, and so we set up a tent in front of the campus gates as our secretariat, to consolidate the movement and stimulate interaction with society outside. It was an open tent; we held open discussions and other activities like film screenings, and we invited people to get involved. While trying to get other students not to focus on the campus movement only but also on off-campus movements, we started to form coalitions with other student groups. In ’93 there was a land eviction case in Cibeureum where the people resisted the court’s decision; I got involved in organising them. I got fifteen other campuses to join and we formed a coalition called Pupil and Student Solidarity Bandung. We rented a house and stayed there, interacted with the residents. This became our lab, where we trained students recruited by comrades in the various campuses, usually at the OS. We brought them there to live in and learn about society, involved them in the organisation of workers, or taught them at least how to educate the local youth, how to investigate cases, analyse land documents, and so on. They were trained by comrades who lived there, like me, I was in charge. It was a strategic spot since it was close to an industrial area, so from there we organised factory workers, which became our basis for organisation. Our attraction to the labour sector began when I got close to our comrades at LBH [Legal Aid Institute] Bandung, who invited me to learn labour organisation. They also got me involved in other advocacy cases, and I learned from them.

Agus’s story illustrates how a movement could develop despite the repressive conditions. Through personal determination, mischievous ‘guerrilla acts’ that trained students in radical action before shaping radical minds, chance encounters with banned books in hidden corners that provided crucial political material for themselves and others, the presence of an activist ‘tradition’ on campus that led them to defy the rector and make protest visible again, if only in the form of anonymous leaflets and a tent erected near the campus gates – one act led to another, until he found himself engaged in ‘true political activity’. The off-campus activity of community organising was something that previous student movements had only talked about, therefore Agus’s cohort had to discover and develop it through trial and error, although equipped with the expertise of activist NGOs that had emerged in the 1980s. Within leftist student activist circles, the combination of ‘theory and praxis’ then developed into what was called the ‘triple tradition’ (‘tri-tradisi’), referring to the three interrelated key elements of student activism: ideological education in study clubs, the student press as an ‘instrument of struggle’, and off-campus ‘live-in’ programs to learn labour and farmer organising.

Although this language of ‘tradition’ implies well-established practices, Agus was still part of a minority, whose activist development was far from probable. It
was, instead, a matter of agency, accelerated by his predisposition to activism; inspired by Soe Hok Gie, he went to university with the deliberate intent of action, even changing universities for it. As he found the political atmosphere at ITB still too calm to his liking, he and his comrades enlivened it themselves with the ‘day’ and ‘night’ versions of both the formal (HIMA) and the ‘semi-legal’ (Ganesha) campus organisations, which further illustrates the blurred boundaries between ‘open’ campus politics and ‘hidden’ activism.

**Seniors and Self**

But the presence of ‘groups who continued the 1978 tradition’ made a significant difference. Indeed, the 1978 crackdown had suppressed radical student resistance but could not eliminate its local memory and influence, which continued to shape local student political subjectivities as it was passed on from cohort to cohort: ‘Each year they returned to the topic of toppling Suharto’, as Agus noted. ‘They’ referred to senior activists on campus, usually a handful of upper-level students or recent graduates, who were not openly known as activists but played a key role in sustaining the potential for student resistance even in the ‘era of stability’. They not only kept suppressed narratives of radical student resistance alive, but also contributed intellectual and strategic knowledge, and – crucially, in this period of underground activism – access to broader activist networks that would otherwise remain invisible to younger students. Compare the story of Anto, who enrolled at UI in 1990, also searching for action:

> I chose UI because in the books I read as a teenager it was always mentioned as the university that’s most, let’s say, qualified [in terms of activism]. I went to UI looking for a world full of debate, something different, since that was the image I had in mind, the exciting world of students. But once I entered UI the situation was really calm and quiet! So what I’m saying is that I didn’t get involved [in the movement] because of anyone’s influence [on campus] but because I went looking for it myself. In the end I met some friends, mostly from the history department, and we created a discussion group, the ‘Free Learning Forum’ we called it; that was in 1991. It was there that I got to know the real meaning of politics and got to know the real movement. Because through this discussion group we met our seniors, who had earlier formed the same orientation and vision as ours. So we met and communicated, interacted, and they provided our theoretical education. That’s when I got to know Marxism, socialism, all the concepts and understandings. For me this was an entirely new spirit.

Though UI seemed to be void of activism, senior UI activists were always on the lookout for potential activists, like Anto. By actively searching for likeminded peers, whom he found at another faculty, and starting a critical discussion group
with them in order to create what he longed for but initially did not find, Anto was spotted by seniors who taught him the ‘real meaning of politics’, and soon also acquainted him with national activist networks. Following the ‘tri-tradisi’ of ‘real activism’, Anto and his friends then also began publishing a journal and organising student live-in programs among factory workers, thereby helping to strengthen the ground for activism at UI. Since this was still the era of repression, much of this activism remained invisible to the larger student population (and campus authorities), so that potential activists often found out about its existence only after being recruited. But due to this secrecy, some potential activists failed, or took a long time, to be spotted. Agus, for example, would not have moved to ITB if he had met senior activists in his first year at UI. Compare the story of Umin, the teenage rebel inspired by Budiman, who enrolled at the Solo National University (UNS) in 1990, also in search of action. The secrecy of the local activist community caused a long ‘delay’, he said, in his activist involvement:

As soon as I entered campus I began looking for activist groups. I knew about their existence in Yogyakarta, but in Solo the phenomenon wasn’t that big yet. So when I got there I was a bit disoriented; I had to look for over a year. Of course, I could’ve created my own group, but my friends in that first year weren’t the activist kind, they were just a community for having fun. So I searched by myself, I asked around, I also called on my seniors at the faculty; they were HMI, because in the second semester I had joined HMI, though that was just a formality. I asked my seniors what the deal was at UNS, why UNS stayed behind on other campuses that were mobilising at that time. Later I found out that there was a movement at UNS, I just didn’t see it. And I found out that my seniors didn’t point me in that direction, because they were rivals. I only found out in the third semester, and only by coincidence. My boarding house happened to be near the secretary of IMS [Solo Student Association; a constituent of the future People’s Democratic Party]. I knew these guys as they were from the same faculty, and I started to hang out there. As I got closer to them, I realised that this was what I was looking for. They pointed me to AD, the faculty student press, and I joined. It turned out that IMS controlled AD. It was their mouthpiece on campus, their legitimisation, as the student press had a legal status. I only realised all this when they started opening up to me. So, I was the one who searched; I wasn’t recruited, it was my own awareness that made me look for them. That’s why they opened up with me so quickly. So the process of entering the movement … it was really from my own anger about the injustice in society; and once I discussed this with the comrades at IMS it connected. IMS also had a study club that also engaged in praxis, through extra-parliamentary action groups. I was first directed to the study part – theory, reading. Then they came with a case, usually a land eviction case, and they’d say, ‘Come on, let’s defend the people’.

Thus, Agus, Anto, and Umin acknowledged the role of ‘seniors’ on campus (not the official seniors, such as Umin’s seniors in HMI, who rather kept him
away from activism) in pointing them in the direction of ‘real activism’. Yet, each of them also stressed, as Umin put it, that ‘I was the one who searched; I wasn’t recruited, it was my own awareness that made me look for them’. The agency of the autonomous self, then, was the key element in their plot trajectory of becoming an activist, not only in retrospect, but from the moment they entered university in search of the action they had read or heard about. The presence of seniors on campus who continued activist traditions provided an auspicious circumstance, but these seniors only ‘opened up’ from their secrecy in response to the young student’s demonstration of rebellious awareness. Hence, the students who arrived on campus in search of action became ‘real activists’ because their commitment was recognised as ‘real’.

The cohort they belonged to then became committed members of a budding movement of a novel kind, discussed in the next chapter, which eventually landed them in prison or in hiding. But before that happened, they became seniors themselves, and guided the next cohort of student activists who would form the core of the 1998 student movement. For this latter cohort, there was no ‘necessity’ in their activist development pointing in the direction of mass mobilisation, much less in the direction of becoming the ‘next Angkatan’. The notion of wilful agency, so strongly expressed by Umin, was much less present in their stories, which rather conveyed a sense of ‘rolling into it’, a sense of play.

‘It Was Playing’

Among this new cohort was Rio, who enrolled as a political science student at UI in 1995. He vividly recalled his early activist days as a process of play, with few political pretensions. In that regard, I noticed a difference in the tone and plot in how the activists of each cohort narrated their experiences as beginning activists. The sense of being ‘absolute beginners’, as Rio stressed, was absent in the stories sketched above, which rather stressed political cunning (Irfan), ingenuity (Agus), maturity (Anto), and determination (Umin). The difference was also evident in the political significance attached to study clubs. For the older cohort, it was a serious part of the ‘triple tradition’ of ‘real activism’. For Rio, it was fun:

I don’t remember when we started our study club, but it had to be the first semester, because at the end of that semester we had to write a paper; we got together to discuss it so it would turn out good. So, our first orientation [in starting a study club] was to help us in our study. Compare it to exact science kids who go to a lab to study together and discuss formulas; because we were social science kids we held discussions about society. We were just a bunch of kids fresh out of school; none of us was used to debating, but by discussing these papers we trained ourselves in talking; we became smart, and we got to dare to speak in public. That’s why study club kids are sharp debaters in
Playing Politics

class. It was cool, especially if you used to be shy like me. At first we just had lots of fun, just rattling on through the night, have a drink with it, and at the end of the night someone would pull out a guitar and we’d sing, just free. If the discussions then became more serious, to raise the quality, that was of later concern. First it was just about getting together, studying together, and don’t forget the fun, we were young!

Soon we became famous at the faculty, to the point that other students requested to join. We were famous because we looked smart in class. We didn’t just talk out of nowhere, if we had to make a presentation we first wrote a paper; sure this paper was unstructured but in the end we got trained and we stood out. So, we started a study club to expand our knowledge – actually not even that, it was to get high grades. Seriously, our aspirations were just that, to help us in our study. Many of us lived in the same boardinghouse, so we didn’t need to schedule; we met and held discussions all the time. About society, about God, about whatever is going on in society. Philosophy, yes, economy, yes, physics, yes, even love. The essence of love was one of our first topics, we used Erich Fromm [The Art of Loving], we discussed it as a serious topic, the psychological side of it, how it works in society, how people construct love and the body as beautiful or handsome, and so on. Then we got to the logic of capitalism. It just flowed. It was fun. But Marx struck a chord. We studied and discussed Marx intensely, not just in the study club but all the time. We also discussed Weber; whatever theory, its strengths, its weaknesses, how to apply it to the current context.

As the reference to the banned but ‘intensely studied’ work of Marx indicates, Rio’s study club was not ‘just fun’, since it was also connected to the patterns of thought and action established by seniors, which eventually led Rio and his friends to engage ‘more seriously’ in the praxis of ‘real activism’. But even then, the sheer sense of beginners’ playfulness – including spontaneity, improvisation, and blunder – remained central in his story.

Each generation has its study clubs, either related or not, having joint discussions or not, recruited or not; we were the same. My study club was linked to a senior tradition; the tradition was there and we just continued it. For us the discussions ripened as we took on bigger issues; we had to keep thinking and it became more, you know, serious. Later [after two years] our study club joined the student actions. We also developed; we got bored with just talking about theory. We wanted praxis. We had already done small actions on campus, but now we wanted the real thing, to stay among the people. So we did that. We went to the urban poor, workers, all over Jakarta. We would have a friend who had a link, we followed that link, entered [that community], and that’s it, we did the best we could. If we proved to be incapable it could end just like that. After all, it was playing. In the end we became more serious, because we really wanted to organise. Our steps were already political. We wanted to persuade workers to establish councils, because theoretically we had also matured.

Once we decided to get serious in the world of politics we focused on organising workers, as we felt this was the location of real life. The spirit of history is there, so we
went there to organise. We split to different places, to Tangerang, to Karawang. It was all far away, at least two hours travel; it felt like the end of the world. The method of organising we learned by ourselves, it was autodidactic; how to face people, thinking about a way out. For me it was about how to get workers to organise themselves. As I saw it, they have the awareness to build their own groups, and if that leads to a strike, well, good. As for the question of success or failure, for the most part we failed. But we learned. We learned how to assemble people, how to talk to people, how to understand people. We stayed in factory areas, in workers’ dormitories, lived and slept together with several others in tiny rooms. I stayed there for over a month, I was the last to go. Because the area I stayed in was vital at that time, there were lots of strikes.

But I failed, my plans were caught, the leaflets were confiscated – ah, I was still stupid. They asked me how to distribute leaflets; I said that the important thing is to get it multiplied. We made a few master copies, they photocopied it, and then handed it out inside. Ay, they also gave one to the guard. It was silly; immediately the military came. I was exposed. My luck was that they didn’t know my face, so I could escape – if not, who knows, I might already be dead. It was a very harsh time then, and it was the Kodim [District Military Command] area, there were soldiers at every corner. In general, in the Suharto era all factory areas were tightly guarded … centre of intelligence, an issue of production. So it was hard, meetings had to be secret, but you got used to that. If there was a meeting, all the shoes were put inside, we spoke softly, the material was limited. That’s how it was.

It was indeed, as Rio put it, ‘playing’, although with growing awareness and experience this play led them ‘to get serious in the world of politics’. This had to go further than staging ‘small actions on campus’, which was considered ‘playground action’, as Rio put it to me on a different occasion, compared to the ‘real thing’. In line with the ‘tradition’ established by his seniors, the ‘real thing’ meant serious organising in the real world of labour, or at least trying to do so, and more often than not failing in it, but in any case learning valuable skills that could not be obtained from study. Learning serious activism through play was a common thread in the stories of student activists of this cohort. But the distinction Rio drew between ‘playground action’ and ‘real action’ was usually not experienced as such, since actions on campus could also be a risky venture, in which only a handful of students engaged.

‘Campus Lunatics’

Compare the story of Gusman, who went to study economics at Airlangga University (Unair) in Surabaya in 1994. Consistent with his family’s political background, he ‘naturally’ joined the faculty student senate in the first semester, and a study club in the second semester, but he felt ‘it didn’t connect’ since he ‘didn’t understand any of it’, just as he did not understand any of the stories his father
talked about when Gusman was a schoolboy. By the third semester he thus left this study club and formed his own:

Well, at first it wasn’t a real study club; four of my friends and I just get together each Wednesday to practice English by inviting foreigners we met, but that didn’t work out. For some reason most of the foreigners we met were Belgian or German, with a strong accent, so we dropped that. But we still met and we began discussing social-economic issues, the macro-micro things in relation to society. Then we began to look for fitting theories, other than those we learned in class. In the end we chose Sukarno, and then Sjahrir, Tan Malaka, until we got to foreign theories. So most of my theoretical knowledge was obtained in that study club, but it was autodidactic, we just improvised. … My study club grew but we were never more than twenty-one, twenty-five; the core group consisted of nine people. … Sometimes we met at a member’s place, or someone’s parents’ place, sometimes on campus, depending on our mood. We also had a small newsletter, but that came out only twice, with three months in between. I don’t know why we created it or why it died, it just did.

As Gusman’s initial experiences in his study club show, ‘free spaces’ as such did not yet generate resistive awareness, when a coherent narrative of resistance was lacking. Unlike the young student activists at UI, ITB, or other universities where hidden groups ‘continued the 1978 tradition’, most students lacked ideological guidance from seniors and had to discover such theory themselves. Gusman and his friends thus took recourse to a repertoire of collective memory of politics that was known to them: national history, and from there flowed on to ‘foreign theories’, still without clear purpose and direction. By the mid-1990s, the study club was a well-established format for exhibiting political awareness; any self-respecting student, especially those with a political family background, should be part of a study club, and any serious study club should have its own publication. Thus, Gusman and his friends also published a small newsletter, but this soon died out, since they did not see the reason to publish it to begin with. ‘Free-space’ activity, in any form, was unsustainable without a narrative to sustain it, or without connection to real-life experience providing intrinsic motivation. For Gusman and his friends, the dedication to theory only started to make sense when they met the rare kind of uncompromising activist on campus, who did not so much give them a ready narrative but did provide them the necessary inspiration.

We started to feel that we were just masturbating among ourselves, theoretical masturbation. Our practical activity was too limited, to the senate, the student activity unit, the departmental student association, and so on, all just formal activities on campus. We hadn’t met the praxis in society yet. But in the end we found … what’s the word, inspiration. At that time there was one group on campus demonstrating all the time, we
watched them closely. We had read the literature about the student movement but we
didn’t understand what it was about, so we just watched. Eventually our groups met;
we started to interact. Most of them were from Social and Political Sciences, some
from Law. Maybe it’s because at their faculties they’re more concerned with social
problems. It also turned out that some of them were from SMID [Indonesian Student
Solidarity for Democracy]. They were active in advocacy cases, and we got attracted
too. We thought, ‘Wah, here’s the manifestation of what we’ve been talking about’.
After that I quit the senate and began to develop this study club more. …

I became a demonstrator with them, as they often invited me to demonstrate just
on impulse. The actions were ad hoc, improvised. For example, someone got the idea
to bring dozens of ducks on campus with necklaces on saying ‘DPR’ [Parliament]; it
started with just one person shouting in the campus parking lot by himself, then two
others joined, all nude with only shorts on, and with those ducks they paraded around
campus. It was funny, like a bunch of lunatics. Even I still found them crazy, so I can
imagine what other students thought of them. And don’t forget these were still repres-
tive times – the rector was repressive and actions couldn’t leave campus grounds. You
see, the Unair campus is a complex, the UI model. We were only allowed to demon-
strate in the multipurpose building on campus. But these guys went to the limits; they
had guts. The rector threatened them but they persisted. Some were expelled, some
suspended, and there was physical intimidation from students from Pemuda Pancasila
[Golkar-affiliated youth organisation] – they beat them up, or the police raided their
boardinghouses, that kind of stuff. Yeah, you could really feel the repression. For my
study club it was … we had discussed theories of repression, but now we witnessed it
and later experienced it ourselves, so for us it was a revelation: ‘Oh, it turns out to be
real’. Still, these demonstrators persisted no matter what, and we were very attracted
to this kind of courage, so we went along with them.

Rather than coming upon a ‘senior tradition’ to guide their way in theory and
praxis, Gusman and his friends ran into ‘campus lunatics’ who provided them the
inspiration they could not find anywhere else, including their activity of ‘theoretical
masturbation’, a common phrase for study club activity without praxis. Their
initial exposure to activism was thus limited to ‘silly’ actions on campus, but the
fact that these actions met with serious repression from campus authorities and
intimidation from government-affiliated youth groups and the police signalled
‘real politics’ to them, and made the theories they had read ‘real’. Moreover, the
‘campus lunatics’ turned out to be members of SMID, who were well known by
then for their radical opposition to the regime. Thus, even a tiny group of ‘crazy
guys’ parading around campus with ducks could acquaint students, who other-
wise felt at a loss, with ‘true political activity’ and inspire them to come along.
Soon, Gusman was also involved in off-campus advocacy cases with them.

Still, the campus demonstrators remained a marginal group, and only few stu-
dents felt compelled to join them. Moreover, at many universities – especially the
smaller private ones in the regions – there was neither a ‘senior tradition’ nor any ‘campus lunatics’, so that future activists had to find their inspiration elsewhere, and start from scratch. This was the experience of Suliya. She went to study at a small Catholic university in Semarang in 1992, and became one of those lonely ‘crazy’ demonstrators, but only after hearing stories of action from her younger sister who studied at a university where activism was strong, since Arief Budiman lectured there. Suliya explained:

When I entered campus it was really quiet in terms of organisational activity. I also had no clue. Since my father was from GMKI [Indonesian Christian Student Organisation], that was all I knew, but GMKI was absent there. So in the first years I just lived the hedonistic student life; going to the movies, cafés, that stuff. Only in 1994, when my younger sister went to UKSW [a Christian university in Salatiga], I learned there was a prodemocracy movement there. My sister joined that straightaway, and at home she told us all about it. I was impressed: my kid sister, just starting and already active like that! That raised my spirits, too. I decided to join the faculty student senate. First I had to campaign to get elected, going through the whole procedure. I enjoyed it, I liked speaking before an audience. So in this campaign I explained my program, what I would do if I were elected. Then a guy in the audience asked me, what if all peaceful paths have been tried and fail? I answered, then we have to demonstrate! It came out naturally. Our group won. I became the secretary general.

So I became active in the faculty, but that was frustrating, because all our plans were vetoed by the dean and the rectorate. We felt impotent; we could only organise discussions, criticise this or that, it seemed useless. After a year we decided to create an informal group, called Student Committee for Democracy, and we held demonstrations on campus. At our first action only ten people joined. We brought a banner saying: ‘End Dwifungsi ABRI’, and we toured the campus. We were laughed at! They all just watched and commented, ‘You must be crazy’, ‘ABRI is still strong’, and so on. Then we brought up NKK/BKK, then ‘revoke the five political laws’, then we did a silent action on National Education Day – all kinds of issues, with a group of only ten to twenty people at most. So the actions were really small but we brought banners. And they all continued to laugh at us.

Up until 1998, the handful of demonstrators on campus were the laughing-stock of fellow students, since it was unimaginable that people like Suliya, Rio, Gusman, and Yodi, would soon lead the mass demonstrations that contributed to Suharto’s fall. Their persistent, ‘crazy’ actions on campus did not contribute to a greater proneness to action among the larger student population – other factors and narratives contributed to that (see Chapter 12). Yet, they did contribute to sustaining a general awareness among students that something was ‘wrong’ about the New Order. The banners that Suliya and her group held bore slogans framing these wrongs in a succinct manner for everyone (on campus) to see – and showed
that repression could not destroy the courage of all students. Even though most students concluded that their demonstrating peers ‘must be crazy’ since ‘ABRI is still strong’, they did not dismiss their political views as such.

Heating Up the Campus Mosque

Besides the study clubs of leftist-oriented students, campus mosques provided an important space for creating counternarratives. Along with the rise of study clubs, since the late 1980s there had been a marked increase of Islamic proselytising (dakwah) organisations (LDK) on campuses. Many were dedicated to discussing theories from an Islamic perspective, which could become an entrée into more radical theories of liberation – from populist Islamic theology, which preached solidarity with the poor, to the books of liberation theologian Paolo Freire, which were also popular among leftist study clubs. In addition, at many universities the campus mosque associations gained a strong foothold in formal student bodies, and soon they began to develop a nationwide network. In 1986, a national federation of Campus Dakwah Institutions was founded, which in 1998 gave birth to the Indonesian Muslim Student Action Front (KAMMI) that contributed to Suharto’s fall. But the local campus mosque associations were not uniform; the character of each depended on the character of its activists, who all had their own motivations to join. As Vatikiotis (1993: 129–130) describes the Salman Mosque association at ITB, most students were attracted for practical reasons:

What motivated them most was the opportunity to be involved in an extracurricular activity, to belong to a group with ideals. Often their ends were purely career-oriented: the enhancement of skills. Some of the students also felt that with increasing pressures on the job market, and society’s headlong rush into the technological age in the latter part of the 1980s, life was moving too fast for them. They sought refuge in religion as a form of escapism. Religion was perceived as a respite from, if not a cure for, social and economic ills. While the hotheads and firebands preached Islam as a way of life, the youthful congregation craved relevancy to the problems they faced in society and the chance to learn an extra skill in order to compete for scarcer jobs. The mosque provided for them what the campus could not, and became a hive of activity, not all of it religiously connected. The program of religious instruction offered by Salman Mosque’s youth wing, Karisma, is accompanied by courses in English, computer programming and other vocational skills. Islam in this context acted as a shelter rather than an ideal.

However, when strong characters were involved, this ‘shelter’ could also feel restrictive, no less so than any other formal organisation. Some campus mosque activists sought to ‘heat up’ the atmosphere, to make it more critical. One of them was Ihwan, the erstwhile ‘extremist’ who enrolled as a technology student at a
private Islamic university in Bandung in 1994, where he found himself surrounded by even more extremist students on the one hand, and a ‘flat’ campus mosque community that could use some agitation, on the other:

On campus I met all sorts of Islamic strands, also NII [Indonesian Islamic State] supporters. They urged me to join them underground. These guys were pushy; they told me my Islam was wrong, that I had to take the Islamic oath with such and such imam. Many groups invited me, but I had a strong basis in the critical tradition of Muhammadiyah, so I debated them. They came to my room, not once but night after night, and they really threatened me, saying, ‘If you’re kafir, if you refuse to join our Islam, one day your blood will be halal’, that kind of language. But I debated them all. If someone like that threatened me I wasn’t scared, I threatened him back. You see, it was still my extremist days. I said, ‘Be my guest, threaten me all you like, I’m ready to die even today’. In the end they stopped coming. …

From the start I was active in the campus mosque, but I had no idea what it was like. I was just looking for comradeship like I knew from the earlier mosque days. In fact, I hated organisations, I’ve hated them all my life. I was really anti-organisation – they felt restrictive, I avoided them as much as I could. I didn’t like meetings, I hated being tied to bureaucratic conditions, to set times for meetings. I just liked the social part: getting together, sleeping over, and so on. That’s why I joined. But my style was different from the others. I had my hair long, over the shoulders. This was considered eccentric, but I didn’t feel I was doing anything wrong, I pointed them to the long-haired prophets. … I first joined a mosque activity called mentoring. It consisted of Islamic study groups where new students learn about religion with a mentor. That’s what I liked most, engaging in discussion. Before, I was very critical of the culture of the mosque kids; it seemed too closed, shallow-minded, like a toad in a coconut shell that doesn’t want to come out. But it didn’t feel right to criticise them from the outside. So I joined the campus mosque. And there, I heated up the discussions. To the point that others told me I had peculiar thoughts. As if I were too critical. But I was the most keen, always the first to arrive, curious about what the others would bring up next.

After one year, while I still wore my hair long, I was elected chair of the activity department, which is like a think tank department, a very strategic spot and the cadres had to be strategic too. I still don’t know why I was elected, but I accepted the position. There I started to organise discussion forums, seminars, and so on. I became very active; I was called a ‘mosque activist’ wherever I went. In ’97 I was elected general chair. Many were shocked as I still wore my hair long. I just hadn’t found a valid reason yet to cut it. ‘Oh, just cut it,’ friends said, and the ustad [Islamic teacher] said, ‘to look neat.’ It became awkward. As the chair I had to appear at all kinds of events, and this made the others uncomfortable, but I insisted that Islamic learning should not be based on outward appearances, or our impressions of others, sentiments about others, but on values. I wanted to make that clear to my friends, but it was hard. For a long time there was some friction in my interaction with the others. I found that the character of most students who join LDK was a bit flat, that they only started to be formed
there. I felt I had to do something and change the atmosphere, but it was hard. In the end I could only make a difference when we formed KAMMI.

Internal friction could spur reflection on one’s own ideological values, and engender a desire to influence the movement of which one was part. This was the same for activists on the left and those on the Islamic side. Any difference in how this played out was shaped by the characters involved, by their previous experiences – which in Ihwan’s case were quite intense – though it was always hard to ‘make a difference’. For Ihwan, despite his distaste for organisation, becoming part of one gave new purpose to his previously formed ideas, which he now tied to the organisation he would come to lead and help to transform. In 2002-2003, during my research, he would be the KAMMI chair that opened up alliances with the ‘Left’. Before 1998, however, he did not realise he was an activist. For him, and others cited in this chapter, to become a student activist – to discover and play politics in a ‘nonpolitical’ climate, to position oneself within a politicised community, and to help ‘fire up’ this community – was an essential learning stage in becoming a ‘real activist’ and doing ‘real activism’.

**When Play Becomes Real**

As Bennett (1979) states in his essay, ‘When Politics Becomes Play’, in combining imitation and improvisation, ‘played politics’ can result in political regeneration and, when performed in a sustained manner, political innovation. In the playgrounds of campus – from formal student bodies, to the ‘day’ and ‘night’ versions of campus organisations, to the ‘free space’ of study clubs – as well as in remote villages or factory areas, student activists in the early to mid-1990s redefined the meaning and practice of student activism through a playful process of discovery, trial-and-error, and improvisation. Thereby they continued the tradition of student protest established in the 1970s. And they added new elements, building on the ideological progress made by their seniors, who established the ‘triple tradition’ of ‘real activism’, as well as on their own experiences in giving shape to this.

Yet, they were often a tiny minority on campus, and being marginalised in an environment that used any means to repress, intimidate, and pressure them was not easy. For many students who made their first steps into ‘real activism’, it was more than they could bear, and many quit. Others saw themselves forced to ‘go all the way’, and quit their studies. One of them was Agus: he experienced some difficult conditions, including the pressures of a changing campus environment that increasingly resembled the New Order ideal of a professional, apolitical haven for the children of the (upper-) middle class ‘family’. It led Agus to leave the campus and become a full-time activist:
In time, many students experienced a process of demoralisation; they returned to campus and eventually left altogether. This was usually because they stumbled over their study. At that time there were many changes on campus that made it more difficult to be active outside. At ITB, curriculum requirements were raised to 144 credits. Also, the opening hours were shortened from 24/7 to 12 hours a day, so access to the lab or library was restricted, whereas before we could use it around the clock. Of course it’s because the rector knew that students used the facilities for activist purposes. Also, you could see the composition of the student population changing: from year to year there was a clear rise in higher classes. You could see it happening in the parking lot. In the old days it was mostly empty, but since ’93–’94 there’s not a single spot left. That was the situation at ITB; rules were tightened and students became richer. Once demoralisation set in at ITB, this affected all the campuses in Bandung, and at that time the centre of movement consolidation was Bandung.

All potential was gradually killed. Teachers were also selected for their compliance. Back then a friend applied for a teaching job, but although he met all criteria he was rejected, because his past student activities were, let’s say, too manifest. And students were pushed to finish quickly, while grading became stricter, so that studying took more time. Organising and studying came to interfere with each other, so we had to arrange a mechanism where those who had no time for studying could quickly be tutored before an exam by those who spent all their time studying. I was never in class. I spent all my time outside. In the end I decided to make a choice and quit my study. I had been fed up with it for a while, and I was also inspired by books that convinced me that school is useless. Like Ivan Illich’s Free from School, or Paolo Freire’s Education of the Oppressed and Education as a Liberating Practice. That was’94 – it was a long process. But when I submitted my letter of resignation it turned out the dean couldn’t sign it without my parents’ permission. So they called in my parents. Then I got into a huge conflict with my family: they didn’t agree with my activities. Thereafter, I didn’t have any contact with my family for three-and-a-half years. I had made my choice.

Many students of Agus’s cohort dropped out of university for similar reasons, or they were expelled for their activism, as happened to Irfan. In contrast, among the younger cohort, although they had to deal with the same repressive conditions on campus, the decision to quit their studies in order to become a full-time activist was rarely made. For some of the seniors, this indicated that they were not as seriously involved in ‘real activism’ as they were, but were ‘just playing along’ and ‘imitating previous generations’ without fully committing, as I heard seniors say more than once. But this overlooks the innovative potential of playing politics. In terms of narrative, practice, and identity, the young activists’ playfulness made them flexible, instilling improvisational skills that would come to good use in the symbolic battles of 1998 and in the subsequent era of reform. Overall, the difference between the ‘senior’ and ‘junior’ cohorts of the early and mid-1990s should not be overstated. In terms of age, they might differ only one or two years,
and they had similar experiences of the political climate of the New Order and its campuses. And in the stories of both cohorts, ‘playful politics’ and ‘real politics’ were closely intertwined.

In retrospect, the practices discussed in this chapter are often seen as a ‘warming up’ for the public ‘coming out’ of the student movements of the 1990s. But this invests the student movement with a historical necessity, which obscures the political significance of personal actualisation in the process. As McAdam (1988: 51) argues, the rise and character of high-profile movements cannot be properly understood without taking into account that most of the participants were already involved in various forms of activism and had gone through a longer process of committing themselves to activism: from meeting activists, to becoming part of an activist community, getting familiar with activist issues, ‘playing at’ being an activist, and growing ‘more comfortable with the role of activist’. As the stories in this chapter show, in the repressive context of New Order campuses even the first step of meeting activists could be a complicated process, and generally the phases of becoming an activist did not occur as neatly in that order. Yet, it was often through the process of ‘growing comfortable with the role of activist’ by ‘playing at’ being one, that students eventually realised they had chosen the path of activism to the point of no return, as it had become part of their identity. As McAdam (1988: 51) puts it, ‘it is precisely such tentative forays into new roles that pave the way for more thoroughgoing identity change. Playing at being an activist is usually the first step in becoming one’. In the course of this play new political subjectivities were formed that broke through the hegemony of New Order narratives, including the narrative of student struggle, which was a political act in itself, shaping the kinds of mobilisational identities that came on stage.
PART IV:

PERFORMING THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

Getting ready for a long march, June 2002 (Yatun Sastramidjaja)
Games and Ghosts: Reinventing Opposition

Discord and Discontent in a Time of ‘Openness’

Around the 1987 elections, expressed concerns about the ‘apathy’ of students suddenly grew louder. Quoting the religious affairs minister, who had urged students to speak out more on national issues, the headline of an article in Kompas read: ‘It’s time for a revival of student organisations’ – for ‘silence is not always gold, silence stinks’.¹ On 20 May 1987, National Awakening Day, ABRI Commander Benny Murdani also warned: ‘Discipline must not cause initiatives and creativity to disappear … the obligation to full obedience and loyalty might produce humans who are like robots that move only when commanded’ (quoted in Vatikiotis 1993: 104). Two-and-a-half years later, however, Murdani’s tone had shifted: ‘It’s not that youth organisations of a political character are not needed’, but ‘it’s no longer urgent; students should focus on their professional development, and only pursue political careers after their studies.’² Between these two statements by Murdani, student protest had not only returned to the stage, but was also developing into a more sustained and radical type of movement.

The common interpretation of what happened in that period is that a conflict between Murdani and Golkar chair Sudharmono (Suharto’s trusted ally) led Murdani to encourage antigovernment protest, at a time when the government also faced international and domestic pressures for reform. The conflict came to the surface when Murdani attempted to thwart the nomination of Sudharmono for vice president at the People’s Consultative Assembly (MPR) in March 1988. In response, Murdani was discharged as ABRI commander. He was then appointed defence and security minister, but his power base was further curbed when the ABRI organisation that he led, Kopkamtib, was replaced by one directly reporting to Suharto, Bakorstanas (Coordinating Agency for National Stability). But then Murdani’s ABRI faction found a new opportunity to assert itself in the discourse of ‘openness’. In May 1989, at the end of the Cold War, departing US Ambassador Paul Wolfowitz stated that Indonesia needed ‘political openness’ to complement its policy of economic deregulation. Promptly, the ABRI faction adopted a line of ‘openness’, which also meant allowing more room for opposition. Left
with a fait accompli, Suharto saw himself forced to endorse ‘openness’ – though he framed it in terms of Pancasila being an ‘open ideology’ (Aspinall 2005: 37).

Consistent with political opportunity theory (see Chapter 2), the intra-regime conflict seemed to expand opportunities for opposition. Yet, as Aspinall (2005: 42) argues, the ‘openness’ policy was also ‘a response to early signs of societal discontent’ – even though this was initially a tame type of discontent. For most of the 1980s, such discontent was expressed by the self-proclaimed ‘civil society’, which mainly consisted of middle-class intellectuals and dissatisfied members of the elite, whose criticism was tolerated as it did not threaten the dominant order. While calling for a strengthening of civil society, for them this was ‘not automatically synonymous with democracy, because that would imply a sharing of power with the outside massa’ (Schulte Nordholt 2003: 559). Indeed, these critics were still ‘inside’ the New Order. This was also reflected in their ‘petitionary style’ and ‘moral’, even ‘nostalgic’ tone, calling ‘for a return to the regime’s own foundational ideals and for the “proper” implementation of its ideology’ (Aspinall 2005: 50). As a legacy of the Angkatan 66, this discourse could still be accommodated within Suharto’s Pancasila democracy.

By the late 1980s, however, the support these critics were expressing for the growing and radicalising student protests was making Suharto nervous. While getting ABRI ranks back in line through strategic appointments, he made clear that national stability still had priority over ‘openness’. In October 1989, newspapers were instructed to stop publishing articles by Arief Budiman, after he had criticised the recent repression of student protests; other public figures known to be close to the students were censored as well. ABRI also became more hostile towards NGOs that allied with the students, distinguishing ‘constructive’ NGOs, identified as ‘partners in development’, from ‘destructive’ NGOs, identified as the ‘extreme centre’ – as ‘dangerous’ as the ‘extreme left’ and the ‘extreme right’ (Aspinall 2005: 113). Once the regime faced more radical opposition, the ‘openness’ policy thus proved to be an empty shell, though prodemocracy actors still attempted to exploit its promise.

Around the 1992 elections and the 1993 MPR session some prominent prodemocracy coalitions emerged, but each failed to increase their political leverage and grow into a broadly supported movement as they miscalculated the opportunities provided by ‘openness’ (Aspinall 2005: 85). Moreover, opposition ahead of elections and MPR sessions could easily be framed by the regime in terms of the periodic New Order ‘ritual’ of ‘dangerous politics’ (see Chapter 8), thus Suharto, whose main concern was to ‘survive’ these periods, was not impressed. After his reappointment in March 1993, ‘openness’ received a second chance, as Suharto felt sufficiently secure to loosen controls. This time, opponents wasted no time to
push the limits: there were many press reports on controversial issues implicating the regime, and students boldly called for regime change. Thus, ‘openness’ began to have political effect, not as a result of intra-regime conflict but by galvanising an increasingly assertive opposition. This left Suharto with the choice of concession or repression; he chose the latter option.

In June 1994, the magazines Tempo, Editor, and Detik were banned for their reports on a controversial government purchase, which also exposed intra-regime conflict: Research and Technology Minister Habibie (Suharto’s protégé) had purchased the naval fleet of the former East Germany, despite the finance minister’s and ABRI’s objections. Press censorship was reimposed, which ‘had the effect of radicalising what had previously been moderate, inside-the-establishment critics’, who lost any hope that political change could be achieved from within (Schwartz 1999: 320). But as Aspinall (2005: 115) states, these critics were ‘ill suited’ anyway ‘to become a vehicle to overthrow the regime’, since they lacked ‘the skills, resources, or risk-taking propensity necessary to perform such a function’; hence, they were bound to ‘be superseded politically by bodies which are more openly political in nature, more oriented to mobilisation, and more open about wishing to replace’ the regime. In view of Indonesia’s political history and the narration of this past, that political body had to be the student movement.

After receiving an initial boost from ABRI’s strategic tolerance of opposition, the end of ‘openness’ thus signalled a new beginning for the more radical parts of the student movement. They became the engine behind an unprecedented kind of opposition, combining pro-democracy coalitions, learned in the ‘openness’ period, with grassroots mobilisation learned from the community advocacy programs that had become student activist tradition. In the process, they worked to shed the dominant myth of student struggle. This was difficult, though, and they found that discarding it further exposed them to the regime’s counterattacks, which culminated in the crackdown of 1996. On top of the repression, the regime used various methods to stem this student movement, from bargaining to reviving the ghost of communism. In dealing with these pressures, students learned valuable political skills and lessons, yet remained divided over the new meaning of their struggle, and did not foresee the demoralisation or ‘drop in spirit’ that could occur under excessive pressure. But first, there was the story of ‘revival’.

**Revival of Student Struggle and Symbolic Battle**

In the late 1980s, after the first signs of elite encouragement for students to ‘end the silence’, student protests around multiple issues accelerated. This started in November 1987 in Ujung Pandang, South Sulawesi, where thousands of students joined popular protests against a bill requiring motorcyclists to wear helmets,
which ended in riots. Though this was an isolated incident regarding a local issue, the mass participation of students triggered the imagination. The ‘revival of the student movement’, as the national press called it, took off one year later. On 29 October 1988 in Yogyakarta, after a seminar on the Youth Pledge at UGM, students marched to the seat of provincial government in an anti-NKK/BKK protest. This ‘long march’, though small with barely 130 participants, struck a familiar chord with the public, as the students sang familiar struggle songs and yelled familiar slogans: ‘Long live campus, long live students, end NKK/BKK!’ The acceleration of student protest that followed was so great that the press spoke of a ‘new wave’, ‘pouring out as if the floodgates of a dam had just been opened’.4 To dodge the ban on using formal student organisations for action, students created informal action committees for specific campaigns. They especially focused on land disputes, which were many, as the government stimulated prestigious construction projects that often entailed the forceful mass eviction of villagers from their land without adequate compensation. For the students, the victims in these land disputes represented not the New Order category of massa but the forgotten rakyat – a fitting subject for the liberation consciousness the students had developed in their study clubs.

The most prominent case was the dispute around the Kedung Ombo dam construction in Sidoardjo, Central Java, where more than ten thousand families were forced to sell their land for very little compensation and relocate to a resettlement site in Sumatra. The land acquisitions started in 1982, but in the following years many villagers put up stiff resistance, assisted by NGOs, despite intimidation. Officials warned that resisting villagers would be ‘mysteriously shot’, just like criminals in the ‘Petrus’ affair, a threat all the more menacing as one local mayor was known to be in charge of Petrus operations in the region (Goodfellow 1995: 50). The local resistance became a national issue in 1989, when students involved themselves in the dispute5 – staging rallies at the site, in the provincial capital, and in Jakarta, with all the attributes of the tradition of student struggle. In March 1989, after their request to provide aid to villagers was rejected, students tried to breach into a restricted area, yelling slogans against Central Java Governor Ismail and Suharto. A few days later, students rallied at the Parliament in Jakarta to protest the case, declaring their lost faith in the government; several were arrested. It was the first time since 1978 that students publicly renounced the government. Hence, they again came face to face with the state in a war of representation.

As Aditjondro (1993: 93) shows, the state used various framing tactics in this battle; one was to label the villagers and their advocates a ‘development obstruction group’, which gave them ‘a sinister quality’, since such labels were ‘mainly reserved for the underground communist movement’.6 Another tactic was to de-
pict the villagers as ‘ignorant’ of the benefits of development, which made them susceptible to ‘provocation by outsiders’. These ‘outsiders’ allegedly sought to ‘disturb the peace of the villagers’ or ‘play guardian angels’, as Governor Ismail said; or as Suharto stated, they were ‘like the Javanese saying, welas tanpa asih, pretending to help, but actually wanting to push the people into misery’ (Aditjondro 1993: 96–97). Echoing Suharto’s Javanese discourse, Ismail labelled them with the saying ‘waton suloyo’, or only out for a quarrel, which he abbreviated as ‘WTS’: the abbreviation for wanita tuna susila, or prostitute. Finally, he depicted them as standing ‘beyond the Pancasila system’, implying they were subversive. This tactic of alternating ‘serious, highly politicised labels’ with ‘humorous labels guaranteed continuous media spotlights for Ismail’ (Aditjondro 1993: 98).

The authorities thus played the symbolic battle cleverly. The students could refute the ‘subversive’ label, but they had no response to the ‘Javanisation’ of the conflict – yet, as Aditjondro (1993: 113) notes, they ‘could have easily attacked that symbolism by using the figure of Semar’, the god-clown with the license to criticise kings, once linked to the student movement by Budiman, who was also involved in the protest. Activists further had no response to the environmentalist argument put forward by the dam advocates, who called the reservoir rim a ‘green belt’, turning the political debate on land appropriation ‘into a much less participatory “quasi-scientific” debate’ (Aditjondro 1993: 282–283). The battle was also lost by the legal aid NGOs, whose charges of unlawfulness overlooked the fact that the ‘rule of law’ had little meaning in the New Order. Their intent to ‘use the court as a public education forum’ failed due to the ban on press coverage of the court sessions; only the government’s legal victory was publicised in the press (Aditjondro 1993: 149–150). The activists realised, too late, that a more playful tactic was needed.

In early 1991, a coalition of students and NGOs published a satirical calendar, entitled ‘Land for the People’, which portrayed several land disputes and lampooned the rulers held responsible. As one observer describes the main cartoon:

> vicious gargoyle-headed soldiers hound scores of farmers off their land at gunpoint, trampling them underfoot as they go. Insulated from this rabble by barbed wire and more gun-toting military, we observe the presidential couple, Suharto relaxing with a scantily clad floozy on his knee and his wife enjoying a round of golf in an over-taxed bikini. Towering above all these characters is a huge figure sitting in an armchair, one hand on a swollen bag marked ‘foreign debt’, the other topping up the Kedung Ombo reservoir from his champagne glass.7

Thousands of copies were distributed through activist networks, until in March two students were arrested and tried for violating the haatzaaï (‘sowing hate’)
articles of the penal code, which prohibited dissemination of materials that discredited the government or head of state. The case was dropped after the groups behind the calendar publicly claimed responsibility. But by then, the controversy around the calendar and the trial had diverted attention from the Kedung Ombo case. In May 1991, Suharto inaugurated the Kedung Ombo dam, unobstructed.

From ‘Encouragement’ to Repression

Despite the aggressive symbolic battle and occasional arrests around the Kedung Ombo case, most of the student protests could proceed without repression. And while Suharto dismissed the protests as anti-Pancasila, not all government officials adopted this stance. In April 1989, while Coordinating Minister of Defence and Security Sudomo, a Suharto loyalist, stated that the protests were ‘no longer pure as a student movement’ but were being manipulated by ‘extremists’, other officials expressed a more favourable stance, stating that the protests were ‘still within bounds’ and that engaging in them was ‘the right of the youth’ (Lane 1989: 12). ABRI also stated that they could be allowed as long as they did not turn ‘chaotic’, as an ‘indicator of a healthy societal dynamic within a stable state’ (Stanley 1994: 236). Such statements raised speculations about ABRI’s interests in the student protests, which were further fuelled as the students responded with shouts of ‘long live ABRI!’ at demonstrations.

ABRI’s tolerance for student protest became more apparent in another major issue that students took up in 1991: protesting the state lottery, a campaign that quickly grew into mass protests involving leftist student groups, Islamic groups, and the ‘moderate’ student senates. Umin recalled it was ‘super-easy to mobilise for’, as it concerned a ‘moral’ cause that simultaneously played into the myth of students as a ‘moral force’ and Islamic sentiments. Soon, the sale of state lottery coupons was drastically reduced. This victory surprised many of the experienced activists, as did the army’s cooperation, as they sometimes even offered protesters a lift aboard their trucks (Aspinall 1994: 38). Considering that the Suharto family had a major stake in the state lottery foundation, this again raised speculations about ABRI’s interests. According to Vatikiotis (1993: 162), ABRI officers out to pressure Suharto had clearly ‘persuaded’ the students to protest. While ABRI did try to do so, this overlooks the interests held by the students.

Many students were indeed approached by ABRI officers opposed to Suharto, who played the ‘common enemy’ card to offer some form of collaboration. As Aspinall (1994: 35) illustrates, in early 1989 one group was visited by an ABRI officer (initially disguised as a journalist but already known to activists as Murdani’s right-hand man), who enquired about the students’ aims, and urged them to contact him ‘if you need anything, if you wish to criticise Suharto, if you need
funds, if you need posters or anything like that’; he then handed over an envelope with a large amount of cash. Perplexed, the students rejected the money and did not follow up on his offers. But as such approaches became more common, the students learned to play their cards right – generally still rejecting the offers, but not before using such contacts to elicit useful information about intra-regime conflicts and other weaknesses. ABRI had similar purposes, but both sides remained on guard: ‘neither the military nor the students would openly discuss their own political views or plans’ – rather, ‘each side was trying to make use of and manipulate the other’ (Aspinall 1994: 35).

But such contacts largely ceased after strong criticism from students who were more averse to secretive bargaining games with ABRI or other members of the ruling elite. Once ‘openness’ came to an end, ABRI also had less interest in students, though in some cases contacts were maintained, providing a strategic political resource for both sides. The more sporadic they became, though, the more they became shady affairs, feeding into a culture of distrust among students. This explains the unease with which students have since responded to allegations of manipulation; for all they knew, some among them did close secret deals. But those who did, at least in my experience of the student movement twelve years later, were usually quickly exposed and shunned by other student activists.

In any case, many other student protests clearly did not enjoy ABRI’s support, as they were brutally repressed. One prominent case was a land dispute in the village of Badega, West-Java, which was to be cleared for a plantation. In March 1989, hundreds of students staged a sixty-kilometre ‘antiviolence long march’ from ITB in Bandung to Badega, where they were met by troops who dispersed them with rubber bullets. Another prominent case was the clearing of a slum area in Kacapiring, Bandung, for a prestigious construction, for which the Bandung mayor had allegedly received bribes. In April 1989, thousands of students in Bandung staged a rally against the mayor in the city centre, where they were violently dispersed and dozens were arrested. Despite the press coverage ban, word of the incident spread rapidly, and in several cities solidarity actions were held. These incidents placed the students in Bandung at the centre of the protest movement, and even repression on campus could not stem their radicalisation.

On 5 August 1989, ITB students disrupted a visit by Interior Affairs Minister Rudini, interrupting his speech, burning tires outside the building, carrying banners, and yelling anti-Rudini slogans, accusing him of playing political games, as Rudini was among the officials who initially displayed a tolerant attitude towards student protest. The protest was put down and six students were arrested; dozens of others were suspended or expelled. Six days later, army troops raided the ITB Student Centre, seizing documents and sealing the building, which for many students raised sore memories of the military raids on campus in 1978. This repres-
sion led to the founding of Ganesha on campus, whose ‘day’ and ‘night’ activities had a radicalising influence thereafter (see Chapter 10). In December 1989 the arrested students were sentenced to around three years in prison, but not before reviving the tradition of using their trials for political speeches; when the judge forbade them to read these, they handed out copies to the audience and walked out. The speeches reinforced the impression of a student movement revival, as the language used indicated indebtedness to the ‘1978 tradition’: branding the state ‘totalitarian’, accusing it of forcing the people into ‘silence’ and ‘subservience’, and noting that this trial showed that the ‘authoritarian rulers who cling to power’ were ‘panicking, fearful at the prospect of democratisation in Indonesia’; the attorney general replied that they were being tried ‘to give them a lesson and make sure that their actions would not spread’ (Goodfellow 1995: 31).

This ‘lesson’ was applied frequently in this period, and targeted students consistently responded according to the traditions of the student movement. One student in Jakarta was sentenced to four-and-a-half years for distributing anti-regime pamphlets; in his two-hundred-page defence speech, he went into detail about cases of state violence, including the 1965–’66 massacres, the repression in East Timor and Irian Jaya, the Petrus murders, and the repression of villagers in land disputes (Lane 1990: 7). The regime indeed seemed to be panicking in response to such attacks, and the ‘lessons’ became harsher. In Yogyakarta, three students were tried for subversion, a weighty charge. The prosecutor based this charge on the concept of ‘being communist influenced’, accusing the students of ‘an attitude that resembled and assisted PKI strategy’ by possessing and selling banned books (by Pramoedya Ananta Toer), ‘holding improper views’ about the 1965 foiled coup (that it was an ‘internal ABRI affair’), having an ‘unclean environment’ due to ‘PKI relatives’, and holding discussions that ‘smacked of communist thought’ (Goodfellow 1995: 34). In September 1989, they received prison terms of up to eight-and-a-half years. This led to a large student protest in Yogyakarta, which was violently put down, and students were arrested. The repression of this protest spurred more protests; these were also violently repressed, inciting new solidarity actions across the country – creating an ongoing spiral of student protest.

The ‘lesson’ the regime meant to impart thus had the opposite effect. For students, the lesson learned was the ‘true face’ of the regime. ‘Violence, brutality, and sadism are the characteristics of a fascist regime’, so one leaflet stated, illustrated with a cartoon of a student lying on the ground and bleeding from his head, surrounded by soldiers (Gunawan 2009: 75). For all the speculations about ABRI encouragement, then, it was repression that sped up the student movement’s ‘revival’. By 1990, activist groups had emerged not only at campuses with a ‘senior tradition’ but also at smaller universities, and antiregime calls grew louder, with
demands for the abolition of the regime’s key instruments of repression – ABRI’s *dwifungsi*, Bakorstanas, the antisubversion law, and the ‘package of five political laws’ – and even Suharto’s resignation.

**Between the ‘Mask’ and Populism**

The students’ hardening attitude was also expressed in a new repertoire of activist rhetoric, songs, and slogans, such as the popular motto, ‘Prison doesn’t daunt us, bullets don’t make us hesitate’. The most prominent addition to the repertoire was the Student Pledge – a playful twist on one of the key symbols of the dominant political culture – which students frequently declared at protests:

*We, students of Indonesia, acknowledge one country: a country free from oppression.*

*We, students of Indonesia, acknowledge one nation: a nation devoted to justice.*

*We, students of Indonesia, acknowledge one language: the language of truth.*

Recalling the legendary 1928 Youth Pledge, this new resolution against the ‘oppression, injustice, and lies’ of the authoritarian regime indicated the historical awareness with which the students entered the public stage. Yet, they declined to identify themselves as a ‘new Angkatan’, as they tried to avoid getting trapped in the myths of the past, as previous student movements had been. As former KAMI and 1970s activist Sjahrir (1987: 8) had warned, even before the ‘student movement revival’, if students were ‘only immersed in their “historical burden” which is based in myth rather than reality’, they would not be able to achieve lasting change towards democracy and social justice. Hence, ‘the key to success for the young generation lies precisely in its ability to eliminate the “myth of continuity,” which all this time has drowned them in immobility and impotence while making them suspicious of all groups outside their own’ (Sjahrir 1987: 10). The students were well aware of that risk, and ‘demythologisation’ became a key concern in activist circles.

As one contemporary student activist, Bonar Naipospos (1996), puts it, they no longer mythologised themselves as the sole oppositional force that could trigger change, realising that they needed the people as much as the people needed them. Drawing inspiration from recent movements in the Philippines and South Korea, many students were convinced that, without a base of popular support and alliances with the people, they could never achieve real change. Their siding with the people, as evinced in their involvement in land disputes, formed the basis for their new self-image as a populist movement. The students also emphasised that this approach distinguished them from previous student movements, which had mainly focused on ‘elite’ issues and were separated from the people. Yet, this
identification with the rakyat remained ambivalent. It was not easy for students to shake off their privileged status and identity, nor to shed the old myths and orientations of student struggle.

According to Aditjondro (1993: 21), the pitfalls of student protest were evident in the way students involved themselves in high-profile land disputes: while stealing the limelight from the villagers and less prominent cases, it indicated that students continued to favour ‘dramatic cases which will bring them wide national publicity’, thus making themselves dependent on media exposure, and that they were easily ‘seduced by “mass action” which has only a limited life span’, while continuing to construct themselves as ‘the student movement’. Or, as Heryanto (1989: 17) puts it, they remained tied to the ‘mask’ of student struggle, which was a double-edged sword: while it provided students with ‘an effective weapon and shield[ed] them as they [took] to the streets for an otherwise illegal act’, it also enfolded them in the trappings of student movement identity, including a separation from politics and from the people they claimed to defend:

The danger of wearing that mask is that it can be only one step away from being seduced to trying to become like the mask. There is a danger the adoption of this tactic will become an end in itself. … Indeed, students’ special political status that currently becomes a justifiable and effective strategy can be counter-productive for their long-term struggle. Their demonstrations are charity-like action. It reproduces and reinforces the class division between the students as ‘superior patrons’ and those ‘underneath’ whom they try to protect and defend.

Even when students tried to take off this ‘mask’ and to ‘become one with the people’ – as was the purpose of the ‘live-in’ programs – they could not help still acting as ‘patrons’ and also being identified as such by the people. While living in village communities served strategic purposes – from documenting and analysing the problem, to gaining the residents’ trust, assisting them in developing public campaigns, and escorting them to and from protest sites – the notion of people’s ‘awareness raising’, as an integral part of the programs, had a patronising ring to it. And while residents were often very welcoming of the students’ assistance, the class difference could create uncomfortable situations. As student activists told Aspinall (2005: 140) and also told me: ‘They viewed us as gods’. Residents often offered them the best beds, food, and other supplies available, while refusing to accept any payment for drinks or cigarettes bought at local shops. Agus recalled: ‘There I was, a middle-class kid being fed and taken care of by the poor; sometimes I felt like stealing from them, while all I tried was to become one of them’.

‘Becoming one of them’ was limited, and required a great deal of personal adaptation and sacrifice, including shedding their middle-class disposition – or, as
activists say: ‘committing class suicide’. To that end, some activists went as far as leaving their student life altogether, which also entailed sacrificing future career prospects. Moreover, it meant sacrificing the relative security that the ‘mask’ of student identity offered against state violence, which was generally much harsher against nonstudent rebels. Only few students were willing and able to commit to such a high-risk existence. But the fact that some were, and that many others did get a taste of it for some period of time (if only a few weeks), added to their collective self-image as populist radicals. The real challenge in shedding the ‘mask’ was to create new organisations that fit this self-image.

**Eksistensi: Differentiations in Radical**

The action committees of the late 1980s provided a suitable basis for these new organisations. As Gunawan (2009: 29) puts it, they ‘formed a crucial arena for training and selection in the nurturing of revolutionary awareness and militant practice’, so that, for recruitment purposes, committed students quickly stood out. Since they were built on personal solidarity ties they provided a solid foundation for activist networks. For the same reason, though, these networks could easily break up due to personal conflicts, which could harden into permanent rivalries. As one well-known activist joke went: ‘If five activists get together and agree to set up an action, afterwards there will be six groups’. Indeed, the student movement of the early 1990s was marked by conflicts and cleavages. This caused bitter sentiments, but it also helped students to define their own specific political identities, which had earlier remained an indistinct leftism. As Aspinall (2005: 127) notes, the growing protest movement was ‘accompanied by greater differentiation’, as it prompted each group to ‘define their political outlook beyond a broad visi kerakyatan [populist vision]’. This crystallised into two poles, which Aspinall identifies as ‘liberal populism’ and ‘radical populism’.

The story of ‘polarisation’, as activists called it, started with the Yogyakarta Student Communication Forum, or FKMY, which emerged in 1990 as one of the first intercampus organisations (Gunawan 2009). Its organisational model soon spread to other cities, forming a nascent national network. But a few months after its first congress in 1991, FKMY split into two factions, ‘radical’ and ‘liberal’ (to use Aspinall’s categorisation), which divided the intercity network. The radicals formed Yogyakarta Student Solidarity, or SMY, which would form the basis for SMID–PRD (see below). The liberals regrouped into the Yogyakarta Student and Youth Council, or DMPY, whose network encompassed the student communication forums in Central and East Java as well as, through its Jakarta ally Pijar, the FAMI network (see below). Both factions went on to expand their respective networks, but this proved to be a challenge, especially for the radicals, due to strong
local sentiments, called ‘eksistensi’: a purportedly ‘arrogant’ sense of independent political existence, or as Umin called it: ‘feeling big’. As an IMS member in Solo, Umin was part of the radical network. He recalled it was hard to persuade existing groups to join them due to eksistensi:

Bandung was the hardest because of the ITB eksistensi; ITB felt big compared to other regions. In other cities we also had to compete first, there was always heavy competition, and then there would be a split; we started to break off from seniors. Our argument was that we wanted to build a serious, systematic movement with a clear program. So if you’re also serious, let’s work together. If not, suit yourself. Those who didn’t agree argued that they had to maintain the independence of the student movement; that the student movement was a moral movement and all that; they went in the other direction.

What distinguished this ‘other direction’ was less a matter of different ideology – both factions emerged from the same ideological tradition nurtured in study clubs – but rather was often framed in terms of different ‘degrees’ of ideology. According to the radicals, as one of them told me, their rivals ‘lacked ideology’; according to the liberals, as one of them told me, their rivals were ‘dogmatic’. But to their common enemies they were one and the same: leftist and ‘radical’. Both groups targeted the regime, hence both were targets for repression. The main difference was in their self-image and identity, which affected their strategy, style, and rhetoric. In that regard, the liberals most faithfully played the role of student movement. Despite lacking the masses for this role, they built on the movement’s repertoires gleaned from historical experience.

A prominent actor in this network was Pijar, or the Centre of Information and Action Network for Democratic Reforms, founded by students of the National University in Jakarta in 1989. Their strategy was to stage risky demonstrations that directly targeted Suharto. Even among rivals who criticised this strategy, it gained Pijar respect for ‘foolhardy guts’, as one of them put it to me. For Pijar, guts formed the core of their identity; as a sign on its office door read: ‘If you’re hesitant, no need to come in’ (Aspinall 2005: 128). Ahead of the 1993 MPR session, Pijar and allied groups formed the Indonesian Student Action Front, FAMI, which embarked on a ‘framing guerrilla war’, using the tactic of counterframing the regime’s discourse (see Widjojo 2005: 137–140). For example, they twisted the meaning of the New Order term ‘security approach’ – a legitimating term for repression, by which state violence was framed as ‘restoring order’ for the sake of national stability – by reframing it as a human rights violation and a violation of the core national values of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. In thus attacking the regime by twisting its own language, they challenged the regime’s legitimacy
as the defender of these emblems of the nation-state, a tactic that befitted the role of students as a ‘moral force’. FAMI’s discourse of anti-authoritarianism also befitted the ‘openness’ period, hence they found an ally in opposition figures who had earlier remained ‘inside’ the New Order, especially Sri Bintang Pamungkas, a member of parliament for the Islamic party PPP, who openly supported and even joined FAMI’s protests. For FAMI, their association with Pamungkas guaranteed much media attention, and bolstered their identity not only as a student movement but as part of civil society. However, these strategies did not anticipate the end of ‘openness’.

Around the March 1993 MPR session, FAMI staged a series of anti-Suharto rallies at the Parliament. The fact that they could do so and that the press could report it raised suspicions about ABRI interests behind the protests, but the tolerance was not to last. In November, Pijar leader Nuku Suleiman was sentenced to five years in prison for distributing a sticker with the text: ‘Suharto: Dalang of All Disasters’, then listing cases of state violence. While protesting Suleiman’s sentence at the Parliament in December, FAMI staged a frontal attack against both Suharto and ABRI, carrying banners with the texts: ‘Drag the President to a Special Session of the MPR’ and ‘Security Approach = Slaughter’, as well as calling for the abolition of Bakorstanas, and yelling: ‘Hang Suharto!’ ABRI intervened; twenty-one students were arrested and later tried and sentenced to prison. A few months later, the Pijar office was raided and more students were put behind bars. In April 1994, Pamungkas was expelled from the parliament and from PPP, after he and FAMI activist Yeni Rossa had joined a human rights demonstration of Indonesian students in Germany, where he had also called Suharto a ‘dictator’ at a guest lecture. FAMI’s dual strategy of ‘playing student movement’ and ‘playing elite opposition’ thus proved to be premature. Eko, an activist from an affiliated group, recalled that after the repression ‘the student movement dropped just like that, and for a long time it left a national vacuum’. Affiliated groups continued to exist, but since their national network was broken they could no longer perform headline-grabbing actions.

**Being Revolutionary**

Meanwhile, despite difficulties in overcoming local sentiments, the radical network had also expanded to various cities, and in 1993 founded a national organisation, called Indonesian Student Solidarity for Democracy, or SMID, which was promptly tested. For their maiden action they chose a land dispute case in East Java, where villagers were evicted for an ABRI training field. After staging this action with the villagers, thirteen SMID members were abducted and reportedly tortured by Bakorstanas; before their release they had to sign a letter denying the
abuse, and they were warned: ‘Our agents will continue to watch you wherever you go, so don’t try anything’ (Gunawan 2009: 47). They realised that they had to remain a semi-underground organisation. Their first congress, held in Yogyakarta in August 1993, was thus held in all secrecy. ‘Like playing a role in a spy movie, à la James Bond’, as Gunawan (2009: 48) puts it, the students were picked up at the train station by an unknown courier, identifiable by the Tempo magazine in his hands, who drove them to a remote site from where they walked a long distance through the woods to the undisclosed location, which turned out to be near the station. At the congress they decided to expand to different sectors, with a strategic focus on labour, and to join them together in a central political organisation. This organisation was proclaimed in Jakarta on 2 May 1994, as the People’s Democratic Union, or PRD.

PRD then staged a series of labour actions in several cities, which were noted for their striking demands, combining labour issues with political issues. PRD was openly intent on politicising labour, stating that labour welfare could only be achieved through structural political change. This combination of economic and political demands made PRD all the more dangerous in the eyes of the regime. Yet PRD became most famous for its actions with controversial political demands that were not related to labour. Besides targeting the same instruments of New Order power as DMPY–FAMI did, PRD took up the more sensitive cases of East Timor, Aceh, and Irian Jaya, where the state waged bloody military operations against local rebels. SMID actions further drew public attention for their militancy, frequently ending in clashes with security forces. Thus, in their revolutionary strategy and militant tactics, and the multisectoral scope of their struggle, these students self-identified as a revolutionary force for systemic change, which by far transgressed the boundaries of student movement identity.

But PRD experienced several difficulties due to that choice. For one thing, in contrast to FAMI, they were not easily accepted in the larger field of opposition, in which class and territorial issues remained taboo. As for other radical student groups, many were put off by its national leadership structure that required organisational discipline, which impinged on sentiments of eksistensi. Due to ‘ITB-eksistensi’, PRD failed to gain a foothold in Bandung, where only one member could be recruited: Agus. He recalled:

There was strong antipathy towards movements from outside that tried to enter Bandung. When I brought the PRD concept to Bandung my former comrades at ITB reacted with hostility – or, actually, they just ignored it. Whenever I organised actions on campus they ignored it; it was a politics of isolation. For me the work became really isolated. But eventually my Bandung comrades also saw the merit of my approach, and they began assisting me. Still, PRD was accepted in Bandung only in 1998.
In Medan, as SMID-member Irfan recalled, they faced similar problems: ‘It was an issue of eksistensi, similar to Bandung; Medan had its own movement tradition that rejected any single command’. While this problem could be overcome through personal persuasion (a skill that Irfan commanded like no other), the fact that SMID–PRD was specifically targeted by the regime – ABRI’s National Defence Institute had a special course for security officers and university staff on how to deal with SMID–PRD – was more problematic for recruitment and sustained participation. Known SMID–PRD activists were bound to be pressured by campus authorities, using a ‘carrot-and-stick’ method. Irfan, as chair of the student senate, received offers intended to pull him away from politics:

We organised many actions back then, with labourers and students; some were really big. But our group soon became smaller. We started with sixty-five, but one by one we were pressured by the dean. He had done the [ABRI course] about SMID, so one by one we were terrorised to retreat. In the end there were just twenty of us left, and after 27 July [1996, see below] just five. But my senate position opened opportunities; I could facilitate political discussions on campus. When the dean found out, I was terrorised in the form of offers instead of threats. It was tradition; all former senate chairs were guaranteed a position as assistant lecturer after graduation, on the condition that their final grade index was 3.0. They offered me a contract, and lowered the threshold to 2.7. But I declined. I was idealistic, still heroic. I replied, ‘I’m in the fifth semester, graduation is still far away and I might not even finish’. The dean said, ‘Indeed, you probably won’t finish if you go on like this, but let’s see what happens’.

Irfan was left alone, but the dean was right; in 1996 he was still expelled. Outside campus, there was less room for negotiation. Those involved in labour organisation, in which much could go wrong, often faced brutal intimidation. This led many to abandon the movement for their own safety. Agus persisted but regularly had to go into hiding, where he developed a special instinct and skills:

I did the labour organisation in Bandung with a comrade. But he experienced demoralisation, because something went wrong. We organised a large factory strike. Actually we didn’t really organise it, the initiative came from the workers. In my analysis the time wasn’t ripe for this factory to go on strike, as the situation didn’t fulfil the conditions we set for a strike. But we got involved anyway. It was a miscalculation; wrong geopolitical mapping. I didn’t consider that most of the workers were migrants, while the supervisors were from the local community. So the action wasn’t locally supported and it ended in chaos; cars were burned, and so on. Since it wasn’t ripe, once beaten down this movement was destroyed. Then our names came up as provocateurs. The military went looking for us, but at our place they only found my comrade’s wife; they dragged her out, poured gasoline all over her, and threatened to burn her alive. That’s when my comrade quit. I continued on my own but it was difficult for me to organise
as I was hunted down. Since I was the one PRD representative in Bandung, whenever there was a labour action it was blamed on me, even if I had nothing to do with it.

But I developed a special instinct in that period, though often I was just lucky. One night I gave a visiting friend my sweater because it was cold; it was a bright purple sweater, I always wore it, so it was my trademark. When this friend left my house he was caught at the end of the alley, abducted by military; they thought he was me. I think the agents on watch had just changed shifts, and the new agents were only told to look for a guy in purple sweater. In the end my friend was released and his friends called me, warning me to go into hiding again. Things like that happened all the time, but I was never caught. Yeah, I was lucky, but I also trained myself to be alert. I slept lightly, if there’s even the slightest sound, like a door opening, I would surely wake up and instantly be on alert. It’s about discipline. If you’re not disciplined you can easily get caught. You have to know there’s a right and wrong time and place for everything, whether in labour organisation or spreading pamphlets, you have to be efficient and disciplined. That’s what I taught myself from these experiences.

The ‘bigger’ PRD became, in the sense of being treated as a serious threat to the regime, the more its membership dwindled due to the pressure. Yet, for those who persisted, this also reinforced the sense that they had made a serious personal choice to engage in ‘real politics’. Umin, after moving to the PRD office in Jakarta (where many activists also lived), said that he felt: ‘This is the real thing’. Before, he had become a ‘real student activist’ when ‘theory met praxis’ on campus. Now, he became a ‘real political activist’ when ‘ideology met organisation’, as he put it. Although they could not call themselves a Marxist organisation – PRD’s stated ideology was ‘populist social democratic’ – Marxist theory formed the core of their collective identity.

But since this ideology was outlawed and seen as the most ‘dangerous’ of all, in their public performances they needed to express it in more acceptable forms. Hence, despite rejecting the ‘mask’ of student struggle, they still depended on its familiar repertoire, with all its spectacular attributes. For all their transgressions, their public performances still resonated with the political culture in which they were staged. According to Umin, this was also necessary to ‘gain fame’, ‘so that the name of SMID–PRD would always come up in the mass media, so that people would see this student group [my emphasis] and see that they’re really serious … so that people see this small group as a big thing. Our tactic was first to become famous, as grassroots organising is easier when people know your name’. ‘Fame’ required familiarity. For strategic ends, then, they needed to play up the familiar symbols of student struggle, such as cheeky songs and slogans, headbands, ludic happenings, poetry performances, and generally youthful playfulness. Yet, these symbols were also part of their identity; they were themselves students, and these symbols also signalled to themselves that they were a ‘big thing’.
In order to ‘gain fame’, though, it also helped to transgress the limits of the acceptable. Thus, while drawing on the repertoire of student struggle, they also played with the aura of danger. Flags with the PRD emblem – a yellow star with a black half-cogwheel against a red background, familiar symbols of communism – were conspicuously waved in public actions. Further, their rhetoric was peppered with Marxist discourse, speaking of the ‘oppressed classes’ and the ‘bourgeois, capitalist ruling class’. The more such images and language entered the public sphere through the mass media, the more it raised the public’s curiosity, rather than anxiety. The impact of PRD in this period, then, was that it dulled the sharp edges of the New Order paranoia against ‘leftism’. This also affected mainstream student organisations, which felt emboldened to take a more daring stance, since, surely, they would never be treated as harshly as the ‘dangerous’ PRD.

**Histories and Current Battles ‘Drenched in Blood’**

By the mid-1990s, the formal student representative bodies on campus also began involving themselves in political issues, although the central student senates remained hesitant and stuck to the ‘moral’ role; more radical actions were initiated at the faculties, typically the faculties of social and political sciences and letters. In 1995 at UGM, for example, students from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences defected from the central student senate after their proposal to ‘politicise’ the senate was outvoted. Then they symbolically proclaimed a new UGM Student Council, recalling the student councils of the 1970s, and pledged that ‘the role of students will again grow bigger and more critical in the struggle for political rights’.12 The word ‘again’ made all the difference; once more, as in the days of the student councils, students would fulfil their national duty of challenging the regime. Soon, similar initiatives emerged at other universities.

By 1996, even the central student senate of the ‘big’ UI began to ‘reawaken from its deep slumber’, as one UI student put it to me. Yet, as formal representatives of the ‘campus of New Order struggle’, they remained tied to the dominant myth of the 1966 student movement. This proved to be their strength as well as their weakness. The strength lay in the power of public historical memory, in which ‘student struggle’ was closely associated with UI. To the UI students’ own surprise, the sight of ‘yellow jackets in action’ could still create a public spectacle, and provoke commensurate security measures. As UI’s student journal *Suara Mahasiswa* (1996: 22) described the first ‘extra-campus action’ of the UI Student Senate, on 19 July 1996, protesting collusion at the Supreme Court:

> The UI action received extra ‘attention’ from security forces. The group, which left the Depok campus in two buses, was tailed by motor patrols from Thamrin Road and then
stopped at Gambir [train station]. … The demonstrators in yellow jackets – visibly still beginners – did not expect their peaceful action to be this tightly guarded by riot police. Agents dressed incognito as hoodlums could also be seen on guard. … The security forces allowed a delegation of only ten students to proceed to the Supreme Court, but the students rejected this offer. ‘We all want to go the Supreme Court, as we represent 30,000 UI students’. … After waiting for a response for one-and-a-half hours, the students decided to continue the journey whatever the risk. When they left off, a clash with security forces occurred in front of the station. Bystanders stopped to watch. Concerned that the students would be ‘infiltrated’ by nonstudents, the security forces stopped an air-conditioned express bus to take the students to their destination. The students at first rejected this ‘facility’, but in the end they accepted it so as to reach their target. Accompanied by troops, the students arrived at the Supreme Court, but the judge refused to meet them. [The students then read out their statement outside the building.] The action ended with Friday prayers at the site, thereafter the students returned to Depok in two buses supplied by the security forces.

This minor event sent important signals. The regime, which owed its rise to power to UI students, could not allow the sight of ‘yellow jackets in action’ to enter the public space of Jakarta. Although few in numbers and ‘visibly still beginners’, the action was considered potentially ‘dangerous’ because of the historical memories it evoked. Yet, it was the security forces’ treatment of this ‘danger’ that activated these memories. The attempt to contain the action by overwhelming security presence, and by transporting the UI students in police vehicles and air-conditioned express buses – which have tinted windows, blocking the view from outside – rather than allowing them to march on the streets, made the UI students ‘remember’ their potential impact. The sense of historicity was also reflected in a poem printed in the same issue of *Suara Mahasiswa*, ‘Morality and Action’:

If the time has come … / yellow jackets will wave in the streets / putting the credibility of a history drenched in blood on the line. / For a moment he leaves / the arena of study, the seminar room, and bureaucratic speech / the elegant campus. / Demanding change and [an end to] all injustice and / discrepancy. / Morality becomes a mission and action for those who refuse / to compromise / for the sake of essential truth. If the time has come … / yellow jackets will wave in the streets. / Intellectual rationality heads at the front / flying the red haze of the ideal of justice / sharpening the mind’s eye that has been obfuscated by tyranny; And into the skin penetrates the dimension of populism / Throwing out criticism, demanding accountability. / Yellow jackets offer a solution, not promises or fantasy!

The drama of the 1966 student struggle, a ‘history drenched in blood’, was manifest in this poem, with the striking addition of the recent ‘penetration of populism’ and ‘red haze of the ideal of justice’ (‘red’ presumably referring to leftism)
into student consciousness, even at UI. Given the ‘solution’ of ‘yellow jackets’ in the past – to topple ‘tyranny’ – this poem was not just nostalgic but could be read as a warning: ‘yellow jackets’ would not hesitate to ‘leave the elegant campus’ and take up their ‘moral duty’ – if the time had come. The fact that the poem was printed in UI’s official student journal, rather than an underground activist publication, suggested that the ‘right time’ might well be approaching. But, in 1996, the time to shine for ‘yellow jackets’, ‘visibly still beginners’, had yet to arrive. It was still the time of radical actions rather than moral missions.

Apart from SMID–PRD, student radicalism expanded and diversified with the emergence of new centres of student activism, including in regions far removed from the centre of power. Most active were the students in Ujung Pandang, South Sulawesi, who experienced their own process of radicalisation, formed their own activist network, and thus developed a unique style: blending the human rights and democracy discourse and the radical populism seen in Java with older student movement rhetoric in the tradition of 1966, focused on local issues. In December 1992, the student senates of all universities in Ujung Pandang formed the Pro-Democracy Student Alliance, or AMPD. The group was tolerated as long as their statements remained within the bounds of voicing ‘student aspirations’. But they turned more radical in 1995, as the students began staging mass street protests to protest various local issues. The local authorities soon branded AMPD a ‘wild organisation’ of ‘students who only hide behind their student attributes to conduct acts for their own benefit’. In September 1995 AMPD was banned on grounds of ‘vigilance against the extreme left’, as a local ABRI officer stated. But the students continued their actions.

Few of these local actions made headlines due to censorship and the Java-centrism of the national press. But in April 1996, the violent ending of a protest in Ujung Pandang drew national attention. Students at the Indonesian Muslim University (UMI) held a mass rally against a planned tariff hike on public transport; hundreds of soldiers were sent in to disperse them, but the students fought back with stones and Molotov cocktails, and a battle erupted. Shots were fired, the troops entered the campus with tanks – indiscriminately beating students inside campus buildings and on the streets – and dozens of students were deported in army trucks. The next day, thousands of students from various campuses returned to the streets; again, campuses were raided and battles erupted. At least two hundred students were arrested, many were injured, and four students died in hospital from their injuries. Furious protests continued the next day. The protests subsided after the announcement that the price hike was revoked. Yet this did not end the unrest, as three students were found dead in the river behind the UMI campus. An investigation by the UMI Student Senate found the cause of death to be military violence, and journalists who saw the bodies confirmed that they bore marks of
assault. But the military commander denied this, alleging that they had drowned after being chased by other students for refusing to join the protests.

These were the first deaths of student protesters since 1966. Yet, they did not provoke public outrage and mourning as the death of one UI student did in 1966. This was due to press censorship, but also because it was viewed as an ‘isolated incident’ in a ‘remote’ region. As long as the students in Ujung Pandang were not identified as being ‘one’ with the centres of student activism in Java, struggling for the same national cause, in the public imagination their deaths did not qualify as student martyrdom. But in the following weeks, students across the country staged solidarity actions, in which they related the incident to other cases of state violence. In so doing, they refrained from framing the death of students in terms of student martyrdom, since that would contradict their populist sense of self as being equal to, and not more heroic than, the people: they were equally victims of structural state violence. However, by thus removing the ‘mask’ of student identity, they also relinquished the ‘special license’ of students to protest, albeit within limits, not provided to others. Without the mask, the students were exposed to harsher attacks from the state, both physical and symbolic.

**Hunting and Playing with Ghosts**

In 1988, Murdani had launched a new anticommunism campaign, in which the focus shifted from the ‘G30S/PKI’ narrative of the past to the concept of being ‘clean of PKI influence’, called ‘clean self, clean environment’. This concept was soon to be used against activists, but initially it was meant to corner elite rivals; rumours appeared that Sudharmono had ties with PKI during the 1948 Madiun revolt. The rumours subsided after the 1988 MPR session, but the concept of PKI influence was adopted by Suharto. In 1990, it was redefined as ‘acting, speaking, writing, or showing any attitude in a way that resembles or assists PKI strategy’; thereby, the ‘narrow direct link between the events of 1965 and political crime had been formally broken’ (Goodfellow 1995: 26). It meant that Suharto could target anyone by using this label, including radical students.

The spectre of communism had hovered over the student movement from the moment of its revival. In a 1988 article in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, one government official called the student protesters ‘red-diaper babies’, or the ‘offspring’ of communists killed in 1965–’66, who were ‘propelled, not by concern for social justice, but by outside forces intent on revenge’; yet, in the same article, another official criticised this allegation as a ‘predictable response from the generals’, using ‘the same old scenario again and again’ (quoted in Goodfellow 1995: 29). This indicated that students were not only engaged in symbolic battle, but were also the main subject of such among the ruling elite, which raised the stakes
even higher. In both cases, the scenario of ‘communist danger’ was continually thrown on them, acquiring a life of its own.

The proliferation of the communist spectre also reflected deep insecurities within ABRI (Honna 2001). The end of the Cold War and pressures for democratisation posed an unprecedented challenge to the legitimacy of ABRI’s ‘dual function’, which was based on the need for ‘vigilance against latent communist danger’. To sustain its legitimacy, ABRI had to ‘discover’ new manifestations of such danger, hence signs of ‘PKI influence’ were suddenly found everywhere. As Goodfellow (1995: 20) illustrates: ‘Fires that destroyed high-rise buildings and floods were blamed on the G30S/PKI remnants; pick-pockets and chicken thieves were linked to the Communist Party; natural disasters were attributed to Marxism; even pornographic film and comic merchants were slated for “propagating communism”’. Children seemed to be especially at risk. Heryanto (1999) notes that a schoolbook had to be revised for showing images of a hammer and a sickle on the same page, toys were taken out of retail for being shaped like a hammer and making a peeping sound that sounded like the word ‘sickle’ (arit), and the computer game *Street Fighter* was marked as suspect as some of the characters (fighters from Russia and China) sported ‘communist outfits’. ABRI’s campaign of vigilance thus became ritualised to the extent that it ‘no longer required “real” threats, since the maintenance of the ritual itself became the end’ (Honna 2001: 60). As Heryanto (1999: 151) argues, since the ‘key signifier “Communism” … can refer to anything and anyone’, it became ‘a floating empty signifier, purged of any fixed historical referent’ – a ‘simulacral spectre’. Yet this spectre was also ‘hyperreal’, for it had real political ramifications (Heryanto 1999: 160). A former chief of the state intelligence agency admitted that much:

> The funny thing about the world of intelligence is the technique of psywar. As intelligence officers, we make up issues, and we disseminate them in the press, radio or television. We treat them as if they are real. When they are already widespread, usually people will talk about them and they tend to add to and exaggerate the issues. Finally the issues will come back [to the intelligence bodies] in reports. What is so funny is that these reports incline us to believe that these issues are real, ha-ha… In fact, we get terrified and begin to think, ‘what if these issues are real?’ Ha-ha! (Quoted in Heryanto 1999: 155–156)

One fabrication that was treated as a real threat was the story of ‘organisations without form’, or ‘OTB’, which sought ‘to topple the government, split ABRI and set ABRI against the people, and destroy this nation’. 14 The term was first used in 1988 when a book by Pramoedya Ananta Toer was banned (after he was awarded the PEN Freedom-to-Write Award); the attorney general branded it a ‘communist code book’, indicating ‘unnoticed infiltration of society’ by ‘communists’ who
had decided that ‘organisations without form are best’ (Siegel 1999: 215). The story reappeared in 1995 around the banning of the memoirs of three Sukarnoist figures, most prominently that of the former political prisoner, and state minister under Sukarno, Oei Tjoe Tat, which included an alternative reading of events in 1965. According to ABRI, these memoirs indicated systematic efforts by OTB to distort history. Heightened vigilance was needed, although OTB were admittedly hard to detect as they used the strategy of infiltration: ‘This OTB is like a ghost; it can infiltrate anywhere and can enter any institution. Whether we lock it up or fence it, OTB will still be able to infiltrate as it has no form; they exploit any opportunity, play one against the other, instigate unrest, spread issues, etcetera’. Suharto further warned that students were likely targets, as their boardinghouses offered an ideal setting for door-to-door recruitment (Soewarsono 1999: 134).

Yet, the story was contested from within the regime, again indicating discord. One cabinet minister called it a ‘rehashed cliché’, revived ‘to put fear into people’, while ‘the real fear is in our own inability to improve the situation’ (quoted in McBeth 1996: 26). This view was broadly shared. As one reporter noted, the OTB story raised ‘many question marks in society’, for if ‘OTB were spreading like a raging epidemic, the security forces would be taking concrete action’, yet ‘the government seems to be ambivalent; while society is reminded to be vigilant for OTB, there is no action’, and ‘who would the action be taken against?’ – ‘who knows, it might just be political bluff’. In response to such doubts, ABRI named fifteen ‘OTB suspects’, including one PRD activist, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Oei Tjoek Tat, Arief Budiman, George Aditjondro, Sri Bintang Pamungkas, labour activist Mochtar Pakpahan, and other opposition figures. But this only added fuel to the criticism. The justice minister stated that naming without clear evidence was unethical and legally untenable, and he wondered how ‘invisible OTB’ could be that easily identified.

Initially PRD rejected the OTB label, but considering the controversy it raised within the regime, they soon recognised the opportunity it offered in the war of representation. On 28 October 1995, Youth Pledge Day, PRD launched an ‘OTB coalition’ with other opposition groups that had been branded as such, but here ‘OTB’ referred to the ‘opposition has arisen’ (oposisi telah berdiri). Thus ABRI’s narrative attack was reframed as a battle of ‘OTB vs. OTB’: real opposition vs. ABRI’s game of ghosts. This discursive counterplay then helped to galvanise and unite the opposition movement, bringing together actors of different stripes and factions who were equally branded ‘enemy of the state’. Moreover, ABRI’s failed fabrication was widely seen as a desperate attempt to halt what now seemed to be an unstoppable process of democratisation. It bolstered the confidence of opposition groups, who now joined forces in a strategy of broad coalitions.
Momentum and Crackdown

For the relatively small PRD, which had a membership of just several hundreds of students, it was essential to ally with other opposition groups. As Aspinall (2005: 187) notes, for them the objective of building coalitions ‘in the short term was to radicalise and broaden the scope of opposition to the regime; the longer-term aim was to pave the way for the kind of “popular democratic coalition” government they envisaged one day replacing the New Order’. In 1996, this joint effort led to the founding of the Independent Election Watch Committee (KPU) and the Indonesian People’s Council (MARI), prefiguring the democracy they wished to see in place. Clearly, the opposition movement was growing more confident, and in June 1996 it received another boost as a result of a conflict surrounding the chair of the democratic party PDI, Megawati Sukarnoputri.

Since becoming PDI chair in 1993, Megawati quickly grew into a symbolic leader figure for the opposition movement at large, mainly owing to the charisma of her illustrious father, Sukarno. Recognising her potential mobilising power, in particular among the urban poor, PRD decided to use her popularity for coalition building and mobilisation. But Suharto, too, recognised the threat of her popular appeal. On 20 June 1996, at a PDI congress orchestrated by the regime, Megawati was dethroned and replaced by the party’s previous chair, Suryadi. Refusing to accept this ‘coup’, PDI supporters promptly staged massive ‘pro-Mega’ rallies in Jakarta and other cities. The rallies were violently dispersed by security forces or by unidentified militia, but they brought together local PDI leaders with PRD and other activist groups that ‘were more accustomed to oppositional street politics’ (Aspinall 2005: 185). As one SMID–PRD activist told Aspinall (2005: 186):

The PDI activists and masses had no experience in organising actions. If students were not involved, their actions tended to be smaller and also less political … there wouldn’t be any political slogans, like abolish dwifungsi or repeal the five political laws. When we introduced these elements, the PDI masses greeted them very enthusiastically. Our strategy was for a radicalisation of the PDI masses in order to push Megawati forward, so that she wouldn’t be left behind by the masses. We fully understood that many opportunists surrounded Megawati, but we saw her masses as a great potential, although we knew that they would not move forward without their leaders.

The ‘pro-Megawati’ campaign thus came to symbolise the larger struggle for political change, bringing together virtually all student groups. Even the national student organisations participated (except for HMI) – most keenly GMNI, once Sukarno’s ‘true defenders’. In its congress earlier that year, GMNI had recovered its ‘true self as radical nationalists’, defying the state’s ‘sole ideology’ doctrine by returning to its ideology as ‘progressive revolutionary’ (Suhawi 2009: 344). The
re-radicalisation of GMNI had a radicalising effect on the other national student organisations as well. Across the spectrum, students and other opposition actors thus ‘began to believe that they might be seeing the long-awaited “momentum,” the moment for a decisive struggle against the regime’ (Aspinall 2005: 188).

On 22 July, amidst the Megawati campaign, PRD proclaimed itself a political party. In a ceremony, PRD presented its manifesto and conferred a PRD Award to eight opposition figures: Megawati, Sri Bintang Pamungkas, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, George Aditjondro, NU chair Abdurrahman Wahid, Tempo editor Gunawan Mohammad, Free Papua leader Wanggai, and East Timor rebel Xanana Gusmao. Megawati and Wahid declined to appear, but the presence of the other controversial figures on one stage created a striking political spectacle. But the main spectacle was the Megawati campaign. Beginning on 20 July, supporters occupied the PDI office in Jakarta, where a free-speech platform was erected in the front yard; hundreds of supporters gathered there each day to listen to political speeches. On 22 July, ABRI declared this free-speech platform ‘unconstitutional’, stating that ‘the speakers planned to overthrow the government’, as indicated by the ‘PKI-jargon’ used in their speeches (Eklöf 2003: 264). This sinister characterisation was a portent of what was to come.

In the morning of 27 July, the PDI office was raided by military troops, aided by militias posing as PDI–Suryadi supporters who attacked Megawati’s supporters. Bystanders then began throwing stones at the attackers, and riots broke out in front of the PDI office, soon spreading to other parts of Jakarta. These were the worst riots in Jakarta since the 1974 Malari incident. Promptly, Coordinating Minister of Political and Security Affairs Feisal Tanjung appeared on television to condemn ‘subversive groups associated with PDI’ who were ‘behind’ the riots, naming PRD as the ‘mastermind’. Soon after, ABRI Chief of Staff of Social and Political Affairs Syarwan Hamid identified PRD as a ‘PKI reincarnation’, branding PRD no longer by the nebulous term ‘OTB’ but explicitly as ‘communist’. PRD activists instantly understood what was coming down on them. They went into hiding, but PRD leader Budiman Sudjatmiko and many other members were soon arrested and detained; others had to remain underground. In the following, I recount the stories of three of them – Anto, Irfan, and Umin – which provide unique insights into the final struggles, at the end of an era, of young activists and the state in trying to control a situation that was, in fact, out of both their hands.

‘We Were Ready’

Anto was one of PRD’s central leaders. In the morning of 27 July, as soon as the PDI office was raided, they were called in for assistance, ‘to lead the masses since no one else did’, but as soon as the riots broke out they knew they were ‘in a real
political mess’. They quickly evacuated the PRD office, split into groups (Anto, PRD leader Budiman Sudjatmiko, and other leaders were in one group), and went into hiding. A befriended pastor who was also active in the opposition, Father Sandyawan, arranged for the leaders to stay with his brother in East Jakarta, until they could be transported to the remote island of Flores, where a church would give them shelter. But after one week they were arrested. Anto recalled the circumstances of their arrest and subsequent detainment and interrogation:

Our courier got caught. What happened was, we had good relations with the guards at PDI, but their boss, the one closest to us, turned out to be an informer for BIA [ABRI’s intelligence agency]. All along he was the one keeping us informed of what happened at PDI, using a pager. On 10 August we got another pager call from him, saying he had new information, so we sent our courier. But when the courier arrived at the agreed place, Kalibata Mall, he was caught by agents and threatened, and he couldn’t take it. Our hideout was exposed. We didn’t suspect a thing, but my instincts were sharp. That day would be our last; the next night we would move to Flores, so we had a farewell party. We had become close to this family; they were sympathetic to us. First they didn’t realise we were wanted, but then they saw us on TV; they were shocked. But it was no problem. During this party a small fire broke out and the kid got burned. This made me feel uneasy. It really felt like the last day, so that afternoon I took a bath to be neat for this party. So when we got arrested, I was the neatest. You can see it on the photo in Tempo: I wore trousers and a white shirt; the others only wore shorts.

It was nine pm. I was watching the English football league, when someone knocked on the door. Our courier used a code, but this one didn’t, so we hurried to our room. ‘Open!’ [they shouted]. Pak Benny, the father in the house, opened the door and this person asked for Budiman. Pak Benny said: ‘There is no Budiman, Budiman who? I don’t know him’. But the troops entered, there was a debate, and they began searching the rooms one by one. We heard it all, and we quickly destroyed all documents; we ripped them, ate them. There were many documents with instructions for the regions. Then they got to our room; we heard them asking: ‘Whose room is this?’ Pak Benny replied: ‘My child’s room, but it hasn’t been used for a long time’. ‘Can it be opened?’ ‘No, sir, I don’t have the key’. ‘Open it!’ ‘I can’t, sir!’ They threatened to shoot him, so Pak Benny shouted, ‘Bud, open’. That was it. For a second I thought of escape. I had checked out the situation at the house, and there was a bathroom with open roof. When I bathed that afternoon I checked it out, how to get out from there. That’s how my instinct worked. So I snuck to this bathroom but I was caught. Later I chatted with one of the agents, and he said it was no use; the house was surrounded by agents.

There were twenty agents, in eight cars, they wore plainclothes but they all had guns. Our heads were covered with black cloth and we were handcuffed. I felt like going mad, I really thought we were done with, that they would kill us and dump us in the ocean. But they brought us to a place; later we found out it was the BIA headquarters. We spent eight days there, but it felt much longer than the three years we later spent in prison. We were separated, each in one cell. Then we were interrogated. It was
a nonstop marathon interrogation, from midnight to eight in the morning, then there was a two-hour break, then we were interrogated again. It was tiring. The interrogators weren’t just from BIA; they were also from BAKIN, Bakorstanas, the police, and the attorney general. The questions were similar; mostly they were after information about our ideology, especially BIA aimed to dig into the inside of our heads. So they shoved the PRD manifesto in our face: ‘Here, communist!’

For eight days I hardly slept, because during resting time we had to compare and construct our lies; it had to match. We were exhausted but we had to stay alert; if we would be woken for the next interrogation in a half-conscious state everything might come out. To guard my concentration I never really slept. It was hard to fall asleep in that situation anyway. When I did, I saw the faces of family pass by; that was the psychological condition, it truly declined. Still, our priority was to save the organisation. So all we brought out was the legal stuff. The hidden stuff we never disclosed. Once, they showed me a statement that PRD kept weapons, ammunition, bombs, signed by one of our comrades who was also arrested. That was their trick, to play us against each other. But since I trusted him I didn’t confess to that. They also showed photos, of us with the PDI people, it was all there. But I never felt like breaking, never. I managed to knit together one lie after another. It was easy. I had often been detained – for one day, two days – so I got trained in that. But I was really down, lonely. We didn’t meet anyone, we were pressured, terrorised, and we didn’t know where it was going. Some of our comrades [detained elsewhere] were badly tortured. But the people knew about us, as Pak Benny’s wife had called Father Sandyawan and he reported it everywhere. At five the next morning it was already on BBC that we were arrested, or ‘abducted’, it said. Because everyone knew they couldn’t do anything to us. But the place was hidden. The attorney general claimed that he kept us in his office, but we were at BIA. We were moved to the attorney general only after eight days, at night. We were handcuffed again, black cloth over our heads, transported, and there we were all placed in one cell. We stayed there for four months for investigation. That was easy. Sure, there was still some fear, but the attorney general was a legal institution. So as soon as we were moved there it felt really free, though we were still detained. It was nice, we got a mattress, I slept like a baby.

Since the prosecutors failed to submit evidence for either charges of ‘masterminding the 27 July riots’ or ‘communism’, the PRD leaders were charged with subversion. Evidence was found in the PRD manifesto, which violated the ‘sole ideology’ doctrine, and in statements made in speeches at the PDI free-speech forum. The trials started in December 1996 and went on for seven months. More than previous trials of student activists, they became a political spectacle – ‘a big campaign’, Anto called it – mainly because of the media coverage allowed by the state with the intent of ‘setting an example’ for youth. But this intent backfired. The PRD leaders became popular icons, appearing frequently on national and international television. Anto recalled: ‘We were brought to court by car and we
would bring our flags – waving from that police car – and we made pamphlets to distribute on our route; everywhere we passed the people watched us and knew what was going on; we were a phenomenon’. The phenomenon left a strong impression on youth. Future activist Niko, who was fifteen, recalled how PRD made him ‘obsessed’ with the idea of activism:

I first read about it in the magazines in 1995. Wow, suddenly there’s a ‘leftist’ phenomenon! These young people seemed to be heroic, and their leader, Budiman, looked really smart, and handsome, too! All I could think of in those days was to meet Budiman; he was my hero. I collected all the news clippings I could find about him, and I fantasised about becoming like Budiman. Later, I watched satellite TV at home, and there it was: PRD became a political party. Budiman looked really cool with his sunglasses. He was young and all over the news. Syarwan Hamid called him ‘communist’. But to me that made him a tough guy. … Later, there he was on CNN again. He was on trial in a state court; this trial seemed like a real thriller to me. And I wondered, ‘What’s up with all the red T-shirts in the audience?’ They also wore a headband with the slogan: ‘Democracy or death’. This struck me, for at school I had learned it was ‘Freedom or death’ [the pemuda slogan in the national revolution]. For all I knew, we already had a democracy, since we had elections – so why ‘democracy or death’? I saw it on CNN and that was it, I was inspired. He delivered his political speech, and everything he said sounded strange: ‘disband Golkar, repeal the five political laws, form a people’s government’. Those words were alien to me, but this guy touched me with his charisma, so different from [Information Minister] Harmoko or Suharto who were always boring. He had guts! And then the audience went wild cheering; that stuck in my mind.

Niko’s story points to the role of international media. By the mid-1990s, many middle-class families had access to satellite television, and were thus exposed to more critical (and sensationalist) reports from CNN, which helped to turn the trial into a ‘thriller’ and its young actors into ‘cool’ icons. This also affected spectators’ sensibilities about political drama, preparing them for the greater spectacle of 1998. But in 1996, the spectacle had no political effect. Fourteen PRD activists were sentenced to prison terms between eighteen months and thirteen years; the heaviest sentence was for Budiman Sudjatmiko, while Anto received eight years. They would be released on 10 December 1999, Human Rights Day, in the era of reform. Until then, they made the best of their prison time. As Anto recalled, they were ‘ready’ for it:

It didn’t feel like a burden. We knew the risk. At each PRD congress, before the leadership election, we stressed several preconditions: the first is to be ready to be hunted down, arrested, and imprisoned. If you’re not ready, you can’t take up the leadership. In prison there was no more anxiety; it didn’t feel like three-and-half years. It was
comfortable; if we needed anything we got it. We used our time to learn, and the orga-
nising continued. At the prison library we held discussions with inmates, on political-
economic reasons for people to engage in crime, that stuff. So once they got out many became PRD, they campaigned for us. But they’re no longer active; after all, they’re hoodlums. … And we still held leadership. We had meetings twice a week to discuss letters and decide what instructions to give out. We had a courier, a guard, we paid him Rp. 15,000 each time. Letters or secret documents always passed, [they were] slipped into the rice or whatever. We also designed new courses, and we translated books that never got to be translated because our comrades outside were too busy. And we gave interviews to the press. There were so much to do, it was a once-in-a-lifetime experi-
ence. What impressed me most was all the free time to catch up on reading. Active comrades didn’t have time to read; days were filled with work, work, work. But there we could contemplate again, how far we had gotten into the direction we wanted.

Slipping Hegemony

While the PRD leaders stuck to their well-rehearsed script, the state also stuck to
its script, and – despite the nuisance of CNN – the vast majority of the media was still under its control. Journalists who reported on the riots in other terms than the state’s, or interviewed PRD activists for their side of the story, were intimi-
dated or lost their job, while foreign reporters had trouble getting their license renewed and could be deported (Sudjatmiko 2000). The story dominating the (domestic) news was thus the official one of ‘communism’. To raise this story’s credibility, the vigilance campaign was intensified. In his 1996 Independence Day address, a few weeks after the riots, Suharto reminded the public to beware of ‘the newest and different form of PKI’, and that the lapsing of time ‘should not make us less vigilant against this danger’. To ‘refresh memory’, especially of those born after 1965, he went on to detail the ‘PKI mode of thought and action’: ‘In their prepa-
rations to seize power, the PKI, in a premeditated manner, allowed the “revolu-
tionary situation” to ripen, penetrating here and there, spreading slander and rumours, playing one side off against the other, exacerbating conflict amongst the people, whilst acting in the name of justice for the people’, and this ‘PKI method’ had now reappeared (quoted in Langston 2001: 12–13). According to Langston (2001: 14), Suharto’s strong tone was significant; he was speaking not as Father of Development but as the General, who once crushed this ‘enemy’ and would do so again. But since Suharto the statesman stood above politics, he left it to others to make the link with PRD explicit. On 10 August, Abdul Gafur, then chair of the Golkar head office, stated that PRD used ‘PKI tactics’. Meanwhile at the Sports Palace, government-affiliated youth organisation staged a mass rally, calling for the banning of PRD because it thinks and acts like PKI. HMI and other Islamic organisations also joined the ‘PRD = PKI’ chorus. Thus, Suharto did not need to
name names, and once the ‘enemy’ was locked away, his tone also returned to his New Order statesmanship language of ‘national harmony’.

Yet, the New Order was losing its hegemony. On 31 July 1996, the national student organisations (except for HMI) issued a statement rejecting the official story, instead blaming the regime: ‘We condemn the 27 July tragedy as a manifestation of the arrogance of rulers who use the approach of power abuse and violence, which violates the principles of people’s sovereignty, human rights, democracy, and Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution’ (Suhawi 2009: 349). This statement reflected a broadly shared public sentiment. Despite the censorship, the press found ways to reflect this by using opinion polls. One poll showed that only 13 percent of the respondents agreed that PRD was behind the riots; the majority blamed the security forces, Suryadi, or the government (Aspinall 2005: 192). Of course, the latter three were commonly seen as representing one and the same, the New Order regime, and the fact that respondents were given alternative options to choose from indicated that the one option given by the state, PRD as culprit, was seen as just that, one among other possibilities, and not the most convincing.

Yet the crackdown was a blow to the entire opposition movement. Opposition actors across the spectrum were interrogated, detained, or put under surveillance. The impact was also felt on campus, though campus-based student groups had not played a significant role in the campaign. Solidarity actions after the riots were repressed. Military presence and state intelligence on campus were stepped up, so that action plans would often leak out. Small student actions still occurred, but the general impression was that the opposition movement was opting for a ‘cooling-down’ strategy and taking a ‘pause’. Some feared that the suspension would be indefinite, that the regime had won the battle. But there was also hope. As one activist wrote on Pijar’s website: ‘The people’s political awareness has grown so high, especially after the 27 July incident, that, despite the government’s efforts to intimidate and divert attention with its threat of communism, the demands for democracy can no longer be stemmed. Soon, the prodemocracy movement will surely rise up again’ (Kabar dari Pijar, 4 October 1996).

To activists, the absurdity of the regime’s response demonstrated its inability to adapt to the demands of a changing society. The sense that the New Order was on its last legs led to a brief upsurge of opposition around the May 1997 elections. Students launched a ‘no-vote’ (Golput) campaign, flooding cities with pamphlets, stickers, and graffiti calling on the public to cast an invalid vote. A mock campaign was also launched championing Megawati and Sri Bintang Pamungkas as alternative candidates for the presidency and vice presidency, with large rallies under the slogan ‘Mega–Bintang–Rakyat’. Golkar still won the elections, with a record 74.5 percent of the votes, but this seemed too incredible to most of the public, further undermining the regime’s legitimacy.
Underground Efforts at the End of an Era

Meanwhile, PRD activists who had escaped arrest or were released early tried to rebuild the movement underground. In mid-1997, PRD decided to use the March 1998 MPR Session to organise a people’s power movement to overthrow Suharto. Members were pulled to Jakarta to start organising for this effort. However, by December little had yet been accomplished, so that they ‘came to be possessed by a sense of pessimism’ (Miftahuddin 2004: 86). The stories of Irfan (in Medan) and Umin (in Solo and Jakarta) illustrate that it was hard to keep the spirit up in such conditions. Irfan, to start with, was repeatedly arrested and put under surveillance. Yet, using his improvisational skills, he not only persisted but also learned valuable lessons about the mechanisms of state intelligence and the unreliable field of opposition in times of severe repression:

In the first four days after the riots I still went to campus to fulfil my senate duties. The rector knew we were wanted, but he didn’t allow arrests on campus yet. He wanted to talk to us, first; maybe he felt foolish for allowing this to happen right under his nose. He wanted to hear from us personally whether we were ideologically serious or just tagging along. If he could get us to say that we were just tagging along, didn’t understand anything, and apologise for our mistakes – actually, he had already said so in the newspaper – it would save him the humiliation. But we refused to meet. So that was that. On the fifth day, on my way home, a friend warned me that my house was surrounded by agents. The houses of three others were raided; they didn’t dare to do that at my place since it was next to an army complex where my father was the Koranic teacher, so out of respect for my father they didn’t touch my house. We fled to Jakarta, where they didn’t know us. But it wasn’t safe there either, and our communication with the organisation was broken when our messenger was arrested. After one month we returned to Medan. We were arrested on 30 September. Actually, we were tricked at the LBH [Legal Aid Institute] office. They said we could meet a contact person from Bakorstanas to talk, they said all was safe, and after that we could resume our activities with LBH’s guarantee. But when we got there the place was filled with police, military, the whole lot.

It was our first arrest and we were scared to death, as we were taken to a place where GAM [Aceh Freedom Movement] activists were held. We knew that if anyone entered there he would be crippled if he survived; torture was insane. But it was fine. We weren’t tortured because of two things. First, the issue of stability, they didn’t need another scandal; second, our situation was known to LBH and journalists. It turned out this was part of LBH’s deal with Bakorstanas, to hand us over on the condition that we wouldn’t be tortured. I heard that only later. It was different for comrades who were caught earlier, especially in East Java; they were tortured, forced to beat up each other, eat frogs, and some were maimed; one pregnant girl had a miscarriage. Our luck was that the heat had passed; we were caught two months after. So there was no physical pressure, just the mental terror of interrogation, especially in the first five days. Only
one of us was interrogated longer, because he debated them, the rest of us just under-
went it, the scolding. ‘Yes, sir. No, sir’. But nobody could visit us. And for the two
weeks that we were detained, we had to do a P4 [Pancasila] upgrading course. …

Interestingly, we again received offers instead of threats. The military command-
er gave us four options. First, they would finance our study at any university. Second,
they would get us a job at any state company, like Pertamina. Third, if we wanted to
start a business, it would be facilitated; they would fund it and open the market. And
fourth, we could continue our political activities and all our political needs would be
fulfilled, but it had to be in the central leadership in Jakarta, and we would be working
as their agents. We were all given these options separately, but we all declined with the
same response. ‘Sir, we’re young, there is still much for us to do. Let us be for now.
Let us first express our desires, and give us some time; maybe in one year, two years,
we will get back to your kind offer, if that is indeed the best for us’. After that we were
released but for six months we couldn’t leave the city, we had to report twice a week.
They would stop by our house unannounced to check. Whenever there was an action in
Medan, I had to report, and I was interrogated to see if I was involved. Some of us
fled. I couldn’t, because of my family. But I began doubting whether to continue this. I
couldn’t make a move, I was watched, and I had to patch things up with my family.

I became active again around the ’97 elections, with the Mega–Bintang–Rakyat
thing. We organised a closed discussion, ‘Reflection on the student movement after 27
July’, but there was a leak, and everyone was arrested. I was lucky; when I was on my
way to that discussion I noticed I wasn’t carrying enough money to get there. I heard
about it the next day, actually, from an agent who came to my house: ‘Aren’t you sup-
posed to be arrested?’ Then we did a pamphlet action, ‘Boycott the elections’. Other
organisations had pulled out from that – the arrests had scared them – but we placed
pamphlets everywhere, in buses, mosques, campuses, malls; pretending to check out
clothes and sticking them in the pockets, pretending to go to the toilet and leaving
them there. We also sent stacks to all the other organisations to get them implicated; to
pester them, really, as they refused to get involved. It became a big thing, journalists
were all over the issue, and it was detected that the pamphlet was from PRD. So we
were on the run again. …

There were just a few of us left; there was no organisational structure anymore. We
met at a secret place behind a bus terminal. We didn’t have anything, no food,
nothing. We didn’t get any financial support. NGOs were too scared to get involved. In
order to survive I gambled; if I didn’t win I took debts with the food stall. But we re-
mained active. During the elections we contacted PDI and PPP to get them involved,
get them to defend the people, to teach them. But again we were caught, because the
broker who brought us into contact with them turned out to be an agent. So again we
were arrested. We were arrested many times after that, but always just for one day, as
we were always arrested by Bakorstanas, and they didn’t want to detain us. If it was
the police we could be charged, but Bakorstanas was the law of the jungle, they just
needed information, so we were interrogated, scolded this and that. We were used to it
now, we were prepared. Oh yes, I learned a lot then, stuff that the activist kids today
don’t learn anymore.
Consistent with his campus experiences (see Chapter 10), Irfan learned, above all, to be entrepreneurial even while underground, learning new skills and gaining new insights. For him, such learning experiences kept him motivated. In the case of Umin, who escaped arrest and spent most of this period attempting to continue organisational work in Jakarta, the challenge lay in the difficult conditions of the underground existence itself, in which feelings of ideological conviction and deep insecurity about personal and strategic choices began to alternate:

Once I heard that PRD was framed I went into hiding. First I stayed with my grandmother in Yogyakarta; of course she had no idea what was going on. Then I stayed with a campus friend in Solo; he knew I was wanted but we were close. I had to be in Solo to re-register for study, as I still needed the formal status of student. After three days, returning from campus, I saw that my friend’s place was surrounded by agents; they were just sitting there, in food stalls, cars. I knew their faces. I sat on the back of my friend’s motorbike, so I quickly told him to turn. I went into hiding at his friend’s place. During that time I was always scared to go out. After a few days I went to my parents, to prepare them for the possibility that I go to prison. They cried, they gave me medicines; what else could they do? But once Budiman and the others were arrested I was safe, because they were the ones they were after. …

In one month, the machines of the organisation were running again. The strategy was to form fronts, back to the spontaneities of the old days. After one year we could already mobilise on a national scale, uniting the PDI and PRD masses for the 27 July commemoration, but many were arrested over a leaflet issue. Then we had a congress; all cadres were called to Jakarta. The decision was to topple Suharto. In our analysis the objective conditions called for his fall; it was just a matter of time. We needed to prepare an effective political pool, and we decided to focus on organising workers and urban poor. We spread out: I went to West Jakarta, the grimy areas; that’s how I got to know nightlife. We had to survive on our own, so many combined work and organisation; the idea was to raise issues while working. I became a sweeper at the place where I lived – old offices-turned-boardinghouses for nightlife girls. But my boss there was suspicious; from my looks he could tell I wouldn’t last long. So first he rejected me, but I kept returning until I was hired. I was determined to succeed there, because this was my designated site to organise the people. So between work hours I gathered with the people there, hanging out in a food stall. That part was easy, it was just matter of using the right language: ‘Damn, this crisis, whose fault is that?’ It was just preparation. Anti-Suharto attitudes were already growing, but without proper organisation this could easily turn into anarchism.

But things didn’t go well. It was mostly a human resources issue. Many deserted; they weren’t strong enough, couldn’t deal with sleeping at sleazy places and living on limited supplies. This also affected our mood, among those who persisted. Yes, demoralisation struck us in the underground. But I stayed; what else was I to do? I had made my choice. I had just quit my study. My parents complained, and I couldn’t go back. My convictions were different from theirs, and I couldn’t rationally explain myself to
them. So for one year I didn’t contact them at all. But I was still romantic about this family issue. For the first time in my life, I didn’t return home for Lebaran [feast after the fasting month], but I sent them this romantic-heroic letter: ‘Leave your child be and let him find his destiny’. I got a reply letter via my neighbour in Jakarta who happened to be from my village; my parents had slipped money into it, for a ticket home, ha-ha! I only visited them after Suharto fell, so that they understood the real result of their child’s efforts. Still, they didn’t say so, but they were disappointed by my choice. So, me and my younger brother, who was also in PRD but not as active as I was, we decided on a division of labour to ease my parents’ mind. He would lead a decent life, and I would continue the political activity. But that was after Suharto fell, when things were clearer. In the underground, it wasn’t clear at all where things were going.

Back then, with the demoralisation, we also became insecure about our strategy. Why couldn’t we effectively mobilise while the objective conditions were conducive? Society was demanding change, so why couldn’t we get the mobilisation going, where was the fault? Then the debates started. At that time we held coordination meetings at Trisakti [an elite university]; we were dirty, clearly no Trisakti students, but we took whatever place available for coordination. Here we started to debate on where to focus our energies. It turned out the students were the quickest to mobilise, and that movement also needed leadership. So, is the priority with the people at the base, or with the students? Those anxieties. For me it was a matter of conviction, that our strategic agenda of organising the people had to be consistently operated no matter what. But several comrades ran to the students.

Indeed, while PRD activists were toiling underground and the mainstream opposition was taking a ‘pause’ pending new political developments, the student movement was getting organised. Eko, an activist from a FAMI-affiliated group in Malang, East Java, recalled:

The situation for us changed after 27 July. This event triggered consolidation and all elements of the student movement joined. Before, there were all these factions doing their own thing, with a lot of mutual arrogance and misunderstanding. But cooperation improved. With the ’97 elections we built an intercity coalition, called Golput student movement. Then we built other coalitions, like the Student Play Group, because that’s what we did, we played – practising for the big event. Communication between cities was intense. We cooperated also in our training programs; since we didn’t yet have a standard syllabus this developed along the way: [shall we] include capitalism, okay, developmentalism, okay, history of socialism in Indonesia, okay. We also held joint discussions. These groups already had pretty progressive views from the FAMI tradition that survived in them, so this was socialised from one city to another. We learned about the reasoning in Yogyakarta – okay, accepted; they learned about our reasoning – okay, accepted. So our views became one because we knew that the conditions called for unity.
Thus, student activists who had formerly led a marginal existence as ‘campus lunatics’ came to engage in a process of collective play in the sense of joint practice – anticipating the ‘big event’, as PRD was not the only one who had analysed the political situation and concluded that the March 1998 MPR session could be the ‘big moment’ of Suharto’s fall. For Eko and his friends in the former FAMI-network – which, unlike PRD, never was a solid structure – this was a vital process of learning to ‘play unity’, if only by learning to say ‘okay, accepted’ to each other’s visions and programs. Sentiments of eksistensi were put aside in order to smooth the process of cooperation, which they knew would be needed once they would return onto the stage to topple Suharto. Without this process of ‘playing unity’, in a period that nothing politically significant seemed to be happening, this student movement could not have been as phenomenally staged as it was.

Although the 1998 student movement would take observers by surprise (see Chapter 1), the experiences recounted in this chapter show that it was actually a long and complex process. This started with ‘playing revival’ in the late 1980s, ‘playing populism’ and ‘playing elite opposition’ in the early 1990s, and ‘playing revolutionaries’ thereafter, until the revolutionaries were eliminated – as much as they tried, in prison or in the underground, their role had become marginal, as they also felt themselves – so that the relevant play returned to the familiar story of ‘student unity’. In this process, opportunities provided by intra-regime discord proved never to be as favourable as the opportunities created by students themselves – often in response to violent or absurd measures of repression, by which the students understood that the regime was indeed ‘panicking’ and destined to be removed. The notion of ‘destiny’, which had been so prominent in previous student movements, was in fact largely absent in the student movements of 1988–1996, which were determined to shed the myths and masks of the past. Yet, by 1998, these myths and masks would once again dominate the student struggle, not only as an outcome of the ‘play of unity’ performed since 1997, but especially as a result of public recognition.
12

Crisis Calling: The Making of the 1998 Student Movement

Story and Social Drama

The 1998 student saga opens with a devastating economic crisis. The people are suffering, but are powerless by themselves. Politicians won’t help them; they are preoccupied with the game of politics. Other leaders won’t help them either; they are co-opted by the regime. To whom, then, can the people turn? Then they remember the one group that has always defended them, and they call out: ‘Students, where are you?’ The students now awaken from their political slumber and middle-class dreams. Promptly, they descend from the ivory tower – following their conscience, following their destiny. They arise in a nationwide revolt – a determined, united struggle with one goal: reformasi! The struggle is hard; blood is sacrificed, and student martyrs fall. Up until the grand finale – the spectacular occupation of Parliament – each day is a cliff-hanger. Will the student movement triumph, as it did in 1966; or will it be crushed, as in 1974 and 1978? Can it grow into a people power revolution, as in the Philippines; or will there be a massacre, as at Tiananmen Square? Is this a historic moment, or another black chapter in Indonesia’s history? Nobody knows, few dare to bet, but everyone keeps watching. It turns out that history is on the side of the students. The old ruler is ousted. Students have again determined the course of history – an Angkatan is born. So the story goes.

In reality, the student movement and its outcome resulted from a complex interplay of political processes, mass-mediated performances, off-stage negotiations, activist efforts, a web of narratives, and the energy of a spirit of struggle. To make sense of this complex event, we may start with Turner’s (1974: 17) concept of ‘social drama’, defined as a ‘disharmonic process, arising in conflict situations’, in which the paradigmatic rules of the dominant order are not only contested, but are also breached on a wider scale, thus threatening that order. Turner distinguishes four phases in this process. The first is a public breach of the norm, which usually involves a ‘star group’, as Turner (1980: 149) calls it, or a category of highly regarded actors. Once they take the public stage, they will likely dominate the political process. This sets in the second phase of escalation, in which the
scope of the breach widens until the norm breach becomes the norm, so that society is thrown into a ‘liminal’ state. Once that occurs, the norm breaching can no longer be ‘hedged around by taboos and thrust away from the centres of public life’ – it ‘cannot be ignored or wished away’ – necessitating an official response (Turner 1974: 39). This occurs in the third phase of redress, in which the leading representatives of the disturbed order swiftly apply institutionalised and ad hoc mechanisms of control in an attempt to restore order, whereby ‘pragmatic techniques and symbolic action reach their fullest expression’ (1974: 40). Finally, a ‘temporary climax, solution, or outcome’ is reached, resulting in either ‘reintegration’ of the transgressors or ‘recognition of social schism’ (1974: 41). This phase provides observers ‘an opportunity for taking stock’, to identify ‘continuity and change’ in the social order after the drama (1974: 42).

But observers are not the only ones who take stock; the public and the actors involved also try to identify ‘continuity and change’ through narrative interpretation. As Turner (1980: 157) argues, this requires the drama’s closure: ‘Meaning is apprehended by looking back’, in which the ‘meaning of every part of the process is assessed by its contribution to the total result’. In that regard, the closing part of the drama, which produces this result, is especially significant for being recognised as ‘The End’, which allows for retrospective assessment. ‘The End’ is thus a social decision, a consensual proclamation of the drama’s ‘total result’. But what if this result is known before the drama ends – in story, fantasy, memory, plotting, and intrigue? What if the ‘total result’ is not the result of the drama but of this prior knowledge, providing a script for how the drama ought to unfold and ought to end? Then the drama does not just happen; it is made to happen, by all actors sharing in the knowledge of the script, and meaning is apprehended by looking forward rather than back. ‘The End’, then, is not an arbitrary decision that simply follows upon the occurrence of the ‘total result’. It is there in the very opening scenes of the drama, defining the play and its players, putting up parameters for action that are difficult to evade, especially for the star group of actors.

This reimagining of the process of social drama implies that, as long as the star group does not exceed the drama’s script, which is necessarily part of the political culture, no actual norm breach occurs in the drama. This raises the question whether a breach is possible at all as long as the drama revolves around the recognised star group. In the case of the student movement, its long history of performing as a star group has not only produced an elaborate script and rich repertoire for dramatic action, but also turned it into a script itself. In historical narrative, this script is tied to iconic events, especially the drama of 1966, which set a paradigm for the student movement’s performance, a kind of dramatic ‘mask’ that was hard to remove. In the drama of 1998 this mask was worn again, and
according to students’ own interpretation after taking stock, after ‘The End’ of the drama, this paradigm prevented them from pushing through in breaching the New Order paradigm.

Yet, the students did transgress the rules of the game, both on stage and within their own field of off-stage interactions. It was within this field that the scripts for public performance were renegotiated. And it was in the interplay between off-stage negotiation and on-stage performance that real social dramas occurred – dramas that challenged and expanded not only the script of student struggle but also the sense of self and agency of the students involved. While ‘The End’ of the drama was not determined by the star group, without their agency there would have been no drama to begin with. Still, the story had to start with crisis.

**Crisis and the Rumour Mill**

Since its inception, the New Order managed to survive crises of legitimacy on the promise of stability and development. This promise was undermined by the financial crisis that hit the country in July 1997, following the Asian currency crisis, and that soon developed into a deep economic recession. In addition, ahead of the MPR session in March 1998, a succession crisis was looming, since Suharto’s age (76) raised doubts about whether he was capable of guiding the nation in such critical times. In October 1997, Suharto himself suggested being ready to ‘slide down the throne’ (‘lengser keprabon’; a Javanese phrase alluding to succession scenes in wayang theatre), if such were the wish of the people. Government officials promptly praised Suharto’s words as a sign of great statesmanship and wisdom, and stressed that such a wish did not exist. Reassured of a smooth reappointment, in January 1998 Suharto confirmed his candidacy for the presidency. However, his earlier hint had set the prelude to the story of the ‘king sliding down his throne’ in motion, and each subsequent event was read in line with this story, including the crisis.

In October 1997, the government saw itself forced to request assistance from the IMF. As part of the reforms attached to such assistance, sixteen banks were closed in November, including banks owned by two of Suharto’s sons. One of them then filed a lawsuit against the finance minister, claiming that he had closed the banks to discredit the Suharto family; it was a rare public dispute that damaged Suharto’s prestige, since he seemed to be losing control of the economy, the government, and his own family. ABRI began speaking of ‘political and economic sabotage’, and soon an anonymous booklet circulated in Jakarta exposing a conspiracy against Suharto, implicating PRD, other student groups, the retired General Murdani, two Chinese-Indonesian business tycoons, and the CIA. This story found little public resonance, but the anti-Suharto ‘plot’ it identified fed into
the larger storyline of the ‘end of Suharto’. Rumours began running wild, with real ramifications. When Suharto took an unscheduled ten-day rest in December, rumours of his ill health, or even his silenced death, caused another sharp drop in the rupiah. Upon his return, Suharto stated that the rumours were being spread by ‘certain persons’ out to destabilise the economy and undermine faith in the government. After a bomb explosion on 18 January in Jakarta, ABRI identified those ‘certain persons’ as PRD. Yet, it was rumours of a pending army coup that further pushed down the market. Suharto still tried to reassure the public that ‘the storm would surely pass’, but public confidence had now dropped beyond repair.

Following a remark by an IMF official (quoted in the Washington Post on 8 January) doubting Suharto’s commitment to economic reform, the rupiah fell below a symbolic line of Rp. 10,000 to the dollar. Middle-class Jakartans promptly panicked: they exchanged their rupiah savings for dollars and stockpiled basic commodities, which caused acute shortages in shops. Suharto’s eldest daughter then launched the ‘I Love Rupiah’ campaign to restore faith in the currency, but this had the opposite effect, spurring more currency exchanges and bank runs. The government was forced to accept a second IMF deal. In a televised ceremony on 15 January, the public witnessed Suharto signing this deal, with the IMF director standing over him with folded arms (considered a disrespectful posture). This image symbolised how the ‘Father of Development’ had become a ‘child of the IMF’, and fed into another type of rumour (also linked to rumours of his ill health): that Suharto’s wahyu, or cosmic Power, was dissipating (see Chapter 2). Tabloids and television shows began featuring mystics who saw signs of cosmological imbalance, especially in the recent natural disasters (resulting in crop failures, further pushing up food prices), and they predicted doom. In this atmosphere the rupiah plummeted further, GDP fell to -5 percent, per capita income dropped by almost 80 percent, interest rates soared, inflation sky-rocketed, and mass layoffs occurred across the private sector. Nobody born after 1965 had experienced anything like this crisis before.

People began blaming Suharto, viewing his corrupt regime as the main obstacle to a solution to the crisis, if not its cause. To convince the public that this was indeed so, activists used various tactics to delegitimise Suharto further. They distributed leaflets juxtaposing the people’s hardship with Suharto’s immense personal wealth. Polls were organised and the results published, showing that up to 90 percent rejected Suharto’s renomination for the presidency. Moreover, good use was made of the Internet as a channel for framing public opinion. For example, in the January–February ‘Transition Issue’ of Pijar’s online journal, Kabar dari Pijar, one article likened the country to the Titanic, and another suggested a mass evacuation plan, thus framing ‘Indonesia as a ship that was sinking because of its
captain’s mistakes’ (Menayang, Nugroho, and Listiorini 2002: 150). In this context, leaflets, polls, Internet buzz, and other ‘small media’ became key media for the ‘collective construction of reality’, as Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohommadi (1994: 131) also found for the case of the Iranian revolution, providing a sceptical public that was waiting in suspense with alternative sources of information considered to be more trustworthy than official news; though the official channels still ‘provided a baseline from which to make judgments and draw conclusions’, if only by informing the public what not to believe and marking the topics around which to construct alternative realities. In a public culture in which people had grown accustomed to reading between the lines and making their own inferences from official truths, activists’ alternative stories found broad public resonance.

Yet, the rumours and unrest this caused could still be seen as falling ‘within the normal scenario’ of periodic crises ahead of MPR sessions (Van Dijk 2001: 126). So could the small riots that started to occur across the country; while ABRI blamed the riots on PRD, and the public rumour became that ABRI incited social unrest to divert attention from the government’s failures, both versions upheld the New Order tropes of manipulation by ‘hidden actors’ and violence as the means of expression of the ‘ignorant, dangerous massa’. Another part of the normal scenario was elite dissent. The most outspoken was Muhammadiyah chair Amien Rais, but he and the other opposition leaders continued to speak ‘the language of euphemistic criticism’, indicating that they were ‘used to operating within regime parameters’ (Aspinall 2005: 220), and neither the regime nor the public were impressed. The sense of breaching the norm was only raised when students came on stage, presenting a transgressive scenario.

**Crisis Calling: Towards a New Scenario**

One of the first transgressive protests was staged by Pijar at the ‘Angkatan 66’ monument in Jakarta on 9 January, the day before the anniversary of Tritura (‘the people’s three demands’, the slogan of the 1966 KAMI movement). They hung a large banner on the monument that read: ‘[With a] New President, the storm will surely pass’, in response to Suharto’s statement that the ‘storm’ of crisis would surely pass. They also announced a ‘Tritura 1998’: lower the prices of the basic commodities and stabilise the rupiah, reorganise the cabinet, and elect a new president. While the first two demands were similar to the original Tritura, the third demand for a new president, replacing the original ‘disband PKI’, insinuated that the president now was just as destructive for the nation as PKI was then. Historical memories of crisis were linked to a diagnosis of, and solution to, the current crisis: Suharto was the cause of the ‘storm’ and had to go, or else there would be a ‘repeat of 1966’: the rise of a mass student movement capable of ousting a long-
seated ruler. Though previous student movements had also threatened a ‘repeat of 1966’, this time there was a historical match in terms of the larger crisis, a narrative match hitherto lacking.

The new scenario set the frame for, and was reinforced by, a series of protests staged in the following weeks at the Parliament, making the site ‘resemble a busy fair’, each calling for Suharto’s retreat and political reforms. This started on 12 January with a joint protest by Pijar, the national student organisations, and religious youth organisations. Student and youth groups of all stripes followed; HMI joined in at a protest of the national student organisations on 19 January, and on 22 January, at a protest of the Jakarta Communication Forum of Student Senates (FKSMJ), the central student senate of the ‘big’ UI. The significant participation of the UI student senate, HMI, and other KNPI-affiliated student and youth organisations that had not openly criticised Suharto before, was a clear indication that the New Order corporate structure was crumbling. To halt this growing snowball, on 23 January the parliamentary complex was closed off to further demonstrations. But by then the star group had made its entrance onto the stage.

Students in other cities had also started to mobilise. On 13 January in Solo, a student coalition called the People’s Voice performed a long march through the city. On 16 January in Bandung, thousands of students staged a rally at ITB, with fiery speeches, political poetry, and theatre, raising memories of the 1970s – and similar protests were staged in other cities. In contrast to previous years, these actions were tolerated – as long as they remained on campus. The consequence of taking the protest outside was first demonstrated on 11 February in Palu, central Sulawesi; when students at Tadulako University tried to leave campus to march to the provincial government, security forces beat them back, leaving dozens of students injured. A symbolic boundary was thus erected around campus gates, which the authorities justified by invoking the spectre of anarchy associated with street protest since the 1974 Malari riots.

This scenario of potential violence was repeatedly played up in official statements and through rumour, and the public reacted accordingly. For example, on 19 February in Padang, West Sumatra, as students staged a rally at the provincial government, shops and offices were closed and soldiers guarded the streets, following rumours that the students planned to stage a riot. In other cities, too, such as Bandung, where I stayed at that time, shops and offices frequently closed following rumours of a ‘student riot’, while soldiers with tanks stood guard across the city, heightening the sense that the threat was real. Indeed, providing justification for the security precautions, on 23 February small riots occurred in Bandung, shops were wrecked, and the city was immobilised, after students clashed with security forces as they forced their way out of the Padjajaran University campus.
The fact that the authorities kept the protests not only inside campus but also out of the news, thus hiding the students’ intentions from public view, further heightened the public’s susceptibility to rumours of potential ‘student riots’.

Yet, the public also sensed that the normal scenario of violence was only part of the story, since the crisis spurred an unprecedented phenomenon that could not be framed in such terms: street protests by ordinary middle-class citizens, which marked a first real break with the norm. One striking protest was a small rally at the Parliament on 14 January by a group of young professionals, including entrepreneurs and graphic designers, who came fully equipped with banners, slogans, and other attributes associated with student protest, including calls for political and economic reforms. ‘Imagine, the middle class is protesting’, so one reporter noted, ‘They are starting to realise that there are errors in the development strategy, now that this crisis threatens their future’.8 Indeed, the sense of a real crisis hit home once a different kind of protest began filling the news: demonstrations, even strikes, by white-collar employees, such as pilots and other airline staff, who faced layoffs or had not been paid for months. The backbone of the New Order ‘family’ was rumbling, which greatly impressed the middle-class audiences themselves.

The greatest impact was made by a group called Voice of Concerned Mothers, led by astronomer Karlina Leksono. On 19 February, at the busy Hotel Indonesia roundabout in central Jakarta, they demonstrated against the skyrocketing price of milk powder and other basic commodities. The fact that the action was broken up by the police, and that Leksono and two other women were arrested for interrogation, gave cause for public indignation, and jokes: ‘Suharto is scared of mothers!’ Moreover, it had an acute psychological effect on many ordinary students. After this action, which Leksono had staged in order to ‘knock on the conscience of the middle and upper classes’, students began to feel the impact of the public’s impatience, as it was their ‘conscience’ on which people started to ‘knock’. Jokes soon circulated about students being ‘left behind’ and ‘beaten to it’ by ‘their mothers’, who had proven to be more courageous in defending the people’s interests.

Up till then, most students were preoccupied with their own difficulties in coping with the crisis. They, too, were hit hard by the soaring prices of daily necessities, including books, photocopies, rent and boarding fees, and living expenses, while allowances from their crisis-affected parents dried up. One leaflet noted, announcing a rally at UGM on 25 February: ‘The price of paper has risen to such a level that many theses remain unfinished (perhaps one day students will have to carve their theses on stone), diskettes are three times as expensive’, and ‘instant noodles’, the staple food of students, ‘are now 700 Rupiah’ (quoted in McRae 2001: 9). As this leaflet suggests, the economic difficulties experienced by students should have been a key incentive for them to spring into action. Yet, the
assumption that students thus acted out of self-interest cannot explain the scope and nature of the mass mobilisation that followed. Crisis was calling them, but not from their empty pockets alone. It was calling from derisive jokes about students being ‘cowardly chickens’ and ‘slow turtles’, jokes circulated by activists trying to mobilise their peers. It was also calling them from the criticism of their professors who often reproached students for their inaction. Above all, it was calling them from the people, the rakyat. As one student recalled, he and his friends were once eating at their favourite food stall, when the vendor, an elderly woman, interrupted their chatting and cried out: ‘What’s wrong with you students? You see rakyat suffer, but then why do you keep still?’ The student felt ‘deeply embarrassed’, and realised – indeed, ‘remembered’ – that it was their ‘duty’ to mobilise.

While this story was told to me in 2002, a strikingly similar recollection by a different student can be found in Rambadeta’s 1999 documentary on the student movement. It might be that such confrontations with food stall vendors – the most regular contact with ‘rakyat’ for any student – occurred more than once in this period. It is also possible that this story became an ‘urban legend’ type of story that students came to collectively adopt, though this does not make the experience of feeling confronted by the ‘call of rakyat’ less real. Students needed this sort of story to make sense of the unease they felt about their own inaction, and to overcome the psychological hurdle of transforming from ordinary students into strugglers against the regime. They needed to be reminded – not just by the jokes of activist peers, or the criticism of professors – but especially by the honest call of rakyat that it was their ‘duty’ to defend the people in times of crisis – a duty well recorded in collective memory. Thus, the people’s voice, real or imagined, reactivated the narrative of students’ national calling. Yet, not all students were equally called upon. Historical memory singled out one group within the star group who had played a particularly illustrious role in the history of student struggle: the ‘yellow jackets’ of UI.

The UI Effect: Breaking with Suharto

As illustrated by the poem printed in the UI student journal following the UI student senate’s first hesitant action in 1996 (see Chapter 11), UI students themselves certainly remembered their role as ‘vanguard’ of student struggle: ‘If the time has come, yellow jackets will wave in the streets, putting the credibility of a history drenched in blood on the line’. In 1996 the time had not yet arrived, but it also took some time for UI students to mobilise in 1998. Once they did, UI did not become the centre of the student movement as before – not nationally, since other universities across the country played an equally vital part in the mobilisa-
tion, nor in Jakarta, where mobilisation at smaller universities was no less significant and certainly more militant. Still, with its historical aura, UI’s participation was necessary to interrupt the normal scenario, as UI alumni also realised. Thus, more than students elsewhere, UI students were called upon by the people as well as their seniors and professors. On 10 February, students from KB-UI, the rival of the central student senate (see below), organised a rally, inviting UI lecturer Arbi Sanit and UI alumni Sulistyo to speak; both were former student activists and known to ‘incite’ students to become more active. Sulistyo (2002: 63–64) recalls:

When Arbi began his speech just 30–40 students were around. He looked disappointed, but went on; attacking Suharto’s leadership. Basically he urged the students to hit the streets. He also criticised [them] for not caring about the people’s fate. By the time he finished, the audience had more than doubled. … On my turn, the audience had grown further. In the back, former activists from the 1970s can be seen ‘incognito’, wearing hats and sunglasses. I simply repeated the themes raised by Arbi, adding that sooner or later the crisis will also affect student life. So they had an obligation to mobilise. … I reminded them that ITB students were already mobilising and preparing for a martyr of struggle: ‘I don’t want ITB students to become martyrs. Why? Because their campus jacket is blue. If they’re shot by the military, their blood will not be visible! I want UI students to die, because our jacket is yellow. If we are shot, the blood will be visible!’ Finally, I swore that if UI students failed to mobilise within one week, I would remove the name UI from my CV. … Suddenly some students yelled: ‘Hang Suharto! Hang Suharto!’ Arbi whispered to me, ‘Our task so far is done’. Before leaving the stage, the committee wrapped yellow jackets around our shoulders, the symbol of UI struggle.

On 19 February, the long-awaited first UI action was staged. At the Depok campus, one thousand students in yellow jackets marched around the campus from faculty to faculty, singing the ‘UI March’ and patriotic songs, and carrying banners and posters demanding a change in national leadership, price cuts, political reform, an end to corruption, freedom of political expression, a return of the student councils, a student-rakyat alliance, and so on. The action ended with an art happening and free-speech platform. Press coverage was still limited – due to press censorship and the lack of public visibility of any event at the remote Depok campus – yet the action started a buzz about UI’s ‘reawakening’. Six days later, the expectant buzz became a burst of public recognition, when the first action was staged at the historic Salemba campus in central Jakarta, the ‘Campus of New Order Struggle’.

On 25 February, the national and international press gathered at the Salemba campus, following the news that ‘UI is about to mobilise’. Thousands of UI students in yellow jackets had also arrived from Depok to attend the event: a press
conference by the alumni association Iluni UI, to declare the ‘statement of concern of the civitas academica UI’. In a language that explicitly raised memories of 1966, the statement condemned, among others, the ‘deviations in the direction, strategy, and implementation’ of the development policy, which was moving ‘ever further away from the ideals of the Tritura 66 struggle and Ampera that had formed the original basis and intent of the New Order’. It was further stated that a movement was arising from UI: ‘Because we are UI, we have a moral and intellectual responsibility, and naturally the government wants to hear the view of UI’. Yet, it was also stressed that this was a moral movement without political objectives; they did not intend to ‘revolt’, but merely to ‘carry out UI’s duty to struggle for Ampera’.9 Reading between the lines, the unequivocal link with the Angkatan 66 could be seen as a warning to Suharto that history might repeat itself. Yet, by using the co-opted language of the Angkatan 66, which indeed required reading between the lines, these elite alumni still positioned themselves inside the New Order.

However, the event instantly turned into a drama when students intervened. Interrupting the press conference, one student stood up and stated that the time for statements had passed: ‘We need concrete action!’ To loud cheers from his fellow students, he proposed to tear down the sign by the entrance that read: ‘Welcome to the Campus of New Order Struggle’ – as ‘it is of no use to us and only makes us feel embarrassed’.10 But the older alumni persuaded the students to use less violent tactics, lest they provoke the curious massa, who had gathered outside the gate. While singing the ‘UI March’ and ‘To You, My Country’, the students then covered the entrance plaque with white cloth, and painted a similar one at the Dentistry Faculty black, in a symbolic gesture to distance themselves from the New Order and break UI’s umbilical cord with the regime. The event never left campus, yet it caused a major traffic jam on Salemba as people stopped their cars to watch it happen on the front campus grounds, where students now held fiery speeches, taking over the stage from Iluni UI. People stopped not just to witness the remarkable sight of ‘yellow jackets in action’, but because they could place this event in the sequence of events known from the familiar narrative of student struggle: once UI jumps into action, all campuses will mobilise, and a new student movement will be born.

This narrative was substantiated the next day at the Depok campus. After the Salemba event, its distant location was no longer an obstacle for public exposure, as the press now found its way there as well. Thus it was widely reported how ten thousand students in yellow jackets, accompanied by lecturers, marched around campus, distributing yellow flowers, singing familiar struggle songs, and yelling: ‘Long live UI! Long live rakyat! Succession! Reformasi!’ They carried banners
and posters with more explicit texts than before: ‘We want national leadership succession’, ‘MPR session = comedy’, ‘Orde Reformasi’, and ‘Reform or Death!’ A free-speech platform was again held on the improvised stage of a pick-up truck in a parking lot, which became a ‘sea of yellow’. Speeches were held by lecturers, alumni, opposition figures, and an elderly food vendor from the campus canteen, who spoke about the burden of the crisis and stated, to loud cheers: ‘I entrust my aspirations to my student friends’. The students then marched to the big UI Depok welcome sign (nicknamed the UI ‘Hollywood’ sign for its big letters) on the road outside the campus entrance, where they hung a giant banner proclaiming their divorce from the New Order: ‘Campus of the People’s Struggle’. Returning to campus, they found hundreds of security forces gathered near the gate to prevent any further breaches of the containment of protest on campus. However, with the UI actions, the student movement had irrevocably entered the public sphere. The headlines read: ‘Crisis Pushes UI Back in Action’; ‘Yellow Jackets Return to the Streets’; ‘UI Cries Out: We Are Not the Campus of New Order Struggle’; ‘UI Changes Dress: Now It’s Campus of the People’s Struggle’; ‘Yellow Jackets Start to Squirm’; ‘When Yellow Jackets Awaken’; and ‘Students Descend from the Mountain’.11

Significantly, these actions were not organised by the UI student senate (SM-UI), but by a coalition of five faculty student senates that had recently been won by the ‘leftist, secular camp’, who formed the UI Greater Family, KB-UI. While KB-UI attacked Suharto, SM-UI continued to favour dialogue with the government. SM-UI chair Rama Pratama stated, ‘We do not attack the person, since that would make it practical politics’, and stressed that they were a moral force whose task was to monitor and advise the government.12 It should be noted that he was one of the few student leaders featured in the press, because of his formal position and because journalists had trouble identifying other student leaders in an ostensibly leaderless movement (see below). Yet, the moral image he presented made much less impact than the audacious image presented by KB-UI, whose radical twisting of the familiar ‘moral movement’ story captured public interest. The KB-UI story held sway since they presented themselves not as ‘loyal critics’ but as ‘righteous cowboys’, who had returned to fight the villain in town, in an echo of Soe Hok Gié’s story (see Chapter 6) – and both the larger student population and the public could sense this narrative shift. Hence, even SM-UI could not stay behind for too long; nor could any student.

The UI actions were not the only ones kick-starting the mass mobilisation of students nationwide. At the same time that UI students were breaking the spell of Suharto’s power in Jakarta, equally striking actions were being staged in Bandung and Yogyakarta. On 25 February at UGM, thousands of students marched around campus, their mouths covered with black scarfs signifying their silencing by the
regime, and carrying a banner, ‘Silently demanding change’, before clashing with security forces as they tried to take to the streets. Several students were arrested, and a few days later, security forces assisted by militia raided the UGM campus to break up a hunger strike. These protests also marked a break with the euphemistic language of the earlier protests, which still focused on the economic crisis and Suharto’s nomination. Now, explicit yells could be heard at student protests across the country – ‘Replace Suharto!’, indicating a broad readiness to take this course of action. Indeed, student activists had been preparing for this moment since 1997, as described in Chapter 11. But the ‘UI precedent’, which at that time was the only student protest widely reported in the press, certainly boosted student confidence.

Public exposure furthermore spurred a logic of competition, as anti-Suharto protests on one campus were felt as a challenge to students at others to stage similarly spectacular actions. As McRae (2001: 24) notes: ‘When students at various campuses succeeded in openly criticising Suharto, they created opportunities for others to do so, while the cost of inaction to their peers increasingly became the loss of identity as a real student. Indeed, activists at active campuses emphasised this point and in several cases sent packages of female undergarments to less active campuses’. With this competitive logic, the act of attacking Suharto suddenly became the norm for student protest, marking the escalation of the social drama.

Roaring Tigers: Construction of the Star Group

With the drama entering the phase of escalation, the defenders of the New Order rose up swiftly to guard it. As the parliament’s deputy chair, Syarwan Hamid, put it: ‘Recently, the sleeping tiger has not only stretched its back, but, like it or not, the king of the jungle has begun showing its teeth and roaring. No wonder people jump on guard. … This should not be underestimated’.13 Like a wild animal entering a village, the ‘roaring’ student movement could not be ignored or wished away, but must be guarded against. But this statement had the effect of aggrandising rather than taming the force of students, increasing their sense of power, for who could be more powerful than the ‘king of the jungle’, especially once it had escaped from its New Order cage?

The MPR session between 1 and 11 March provided a timely moment for the students to ‘show their teeth’. Initially, public attention focused on the opposition leaders, as Megawati and Rais rejected Suharto’s accountability speech.14 But as their language remained predictable, attention soon shifted to the student protests, though some of these protests also still stuck to euphemistic language; SM-UI, for example, called for a special agenda point ‘to end the national crisis as soon as possible’, and visited the MPR session to request a dialogue and advise rejection
of Suharto’s accountability speech. Clearly, the greater spectacle was the transgressive student protests that were staged throughout the MPR session, all across the country. The large security presence at campus gates contributed to the spectacle, as did the occasional clashes that occurred when students attempted to take their actions to the streets.

On 11 March, Suharto was reappointed for his seventh presidential term. His protégé Habibie became the vice president, and the new cabinet was composed of Suharto’s personal cronies, including his eldest daughter. In his inaugural speech, Suharto stated that he ‘sincerely valued’ the ‘discussions among various circles in society’ as a ‘dynamic part of our democracy’, yet he urged the nation ‘not to magnify our differences in opinion, even more so for those who instead seek to confuse the common people’, since ‘we need as strong a unity as possible among us so that together we can come out of this current crisis safely’ (quoted in Langston 2001: 23). But the social drama had reached the point that students and other critics no longer even responded to Suharto’s New Order rhetoric.

While Suharto was being inaugurated, the student protest reached an initial climax. In Bandung, students succeeded in taking their long march to the streets, though the route to the provincial government remained blocked. In Yogyakarta, fifty thousand students from several campuses rallied at UGM, yelling ‘Long live reformasi!’, ‘Replace Suharto!’, and ‘Trash him, drag him to court!’, while pelting a three-metre long effigy of Suharto with sticks and stones before setting it on fire. Desecration of Suharto’s image became increasingly common, with students burning or trampling on his portrait. But students’ hardening attitude also met with harsh response. In Surabaya and Solo, student protesters trying to continue on the streets were violently beaten back; for the first time tear gas and rubber bullets were used on students, leaving many injured.

A less violent but no less dramatic scene took place at the UI Depok campus, where twenty thousand students attended an all-night protest event, with speeches by Rais, lecturers, alumni, and the poet of the 1970s student movement, Rendra. At the event some tension arose, though, as the action committee was so intent on preventing ‘outside provocation’ – rumours of such possibility abounded – that students who failed to show their UI card were barred from the protest site. Journalists were treated with suspicion, too. This led to a rebuke in the newly founded UI action journal Bergerak!: ‘The student struggle is long and needs the support of many parties; not just students but also outside parties, including the press who are helping to boost the student movement’. It was a crucial reminder. The star group was ready and waiting in the wings, but without the press there would be no stage. As press reports long remained limited, student action journals such as Bergerak! and UGM’s Gugat emerged and began publishing daily in February, filling the information gap left by the regular media and the official student jour-
nals that published only once every three months. They became a crucial driving
force in the mobilisation, taking inspiration from the journal *Veritas* in the Philip-
pines that had helped to galvanise the 1986 movement against Marcos. However,
their audience was limited to campus, while the student movement needed public
exposure; indeed, they needed the press.

Although journalists remained careful, fearing repercussions if they were to
report on the student protests too directly, the increasing support for the students
from university staff provided them a safe means to expose the students’ demands
through the respectable voice of their professors. By April, ‘scores of faculty’ –
including the ‘very officials charged … with curtailing student political activity’
– ‘expressed support for the students in commentaries and interviews in leading
media’ (Saunders 1998: 42). This had the immediate effect of boosting confiden-
ce not only among students who had mobilised since January, but also among
those who had been reluctant to join. As one activist from the philosophy college
STF Driyakarya in Jakarta told me, initially it was difficult to mobilise his fellow
students as they feared the closure of their school, the only ‘pastor school’ in the
country, as a repercussion, which seemed too high a cost. The fears disappeared,
though, once the faculty encouraged and facilitated protest at this formerly silent
campus. Moreover, some faculty contributed to the construction of this student
movement as more than a moral force – attributing them real political power. For
example, the recently installed UGM rector, Ichlasul Amal declared his support in
an interview with *D&R* magazine:

> I want the students to keep going and be able to give results. These results cannot be
formulated by intellectuals who only have moral force. In contrast, students don’t only
have moral force but also political power. Let’s admit it, why do the security forces
make such a fuss? It is because the students now have become a real political force. It
is no longer about parties, parties are no longer heard. I’m just being realistic, because
it is the students who now have power, so let us all deal with this more effectively.16

Even among the students, few thought of themselves as having real power, but
the more this notion circulated in the press, the more it convinced them and the
public. Thus, while academics themselves lacked political influence, their ‘moral’
authority lent weight to the student movement’s image as a real force for political
change, further boosting public support. Support now also came from representa-
tives of the great Angkatan, including former New Order government ministers,
which led to careful comments about the rise of an ‘Angkatan 98’.17 Though this
title was only granted after the students’ ‘victory’ in May – after ‘The End’ of the
drama – its early circulation in the public sphere entailed political forecasts that
foreshadowed this victory. Forecasts of a potential student victory, even though
they remained explicit, added further weight and urgency to the student struggle, which in turn emboldened the press in its reporting of the protests. By early May, ‘daily scenes of angry student demonstrations’, including the students’ demands, appeared in print media and on (private) television, while public awareness and support for ‘reformasi total’ was heightened by the new phenomenon of ‘spirited talk shows, with live call-ins from viewers’; the mass media were now decidedly helping to ‘corrode Suharto’s legitimacy’ (Cohen 1998b: 19).

Yet despite the growing media attention, no one seemed to know who this star group really was and how they were organised. From its ‘sudden rise’ – which only seemed ‘sudden’ due to the underexposure of the smaller, more sporadic protests of earlier phases – up to the grand finale of ‘student victory’, the student movement remained an enigmatic phenomenon to outsiders, as well as, in fact, to most participants. Hence, both the public and the students began constructing myths about the movement’s origin and nature, the most prominent of which was that it was a spontaneous and leaderless movement.

**The Story and Spirit of Spontaneity**

Public stardom and the focus on Suharto as the common enemy created the impression of one massive movement mobilising on the waves of history, which had ‘spontaneously’ arisen in response to crisis. This was not only the public impression; students, too, deployed the notion of spontaneity as the anchoring theme in narratives about themselves, providing their movement with much of its mobilising power. As Polletta (2002b: 39–40) notes in regard to the 1960s student sit-ins in the United States, spontaneity denoted vital aspects of their action and sense of self; it suggested the ‘sheer power’ of the kind of protest that was ‘motivated by an imperative to act now that brooked no compromise’, one that required putting ‘one’s body on the line without debating its ideological potential or waiting for instruction from higher-ups’; thereby, it also denoted a break with the hesitancy of ‘adult forms of protest’ and the related ‘emotional experience’ of protest, from the pride felt in exhibiting ‘discipline, calm, courage, and determination’, to the sheer excitement and ‘sense of fun’. By highlighting what they were not, spontaneity denoted who they were and what they stood for.

The sense of spontaneity was also expressed in their mode of organisation on campus, which was often centred in makeshift coordination spots, or *posko*, usually a tent on a campus parking lot. Such *posko* served as a centre for meetings, events, and information, symbolising the movement’s presence on that campus. Even when campus administrators made offices available, students still favoured *posko* for the sense of urgency and autonomy it conveyed, and to signal that the movement belonged to all students, since *posko* were open to all on campus. The
informal nature and loose structure of the student movement in general ‘helped to constitute “student activist” as a new collective identity’ (Polletta 1998: 137), one that made ‘high-risk activism attractive’ to students due to its ‘failure to specify the mechanics of mobilisation’ and ‘ambiguity about agents and agency’ (Polletta 2002b: 32). Indeed, it helped to get a large majority of students involved who would be reluctant to attach themselves to specific groups. Spontaneity and posko helped them overcome their suspicion of politics, as it made them feel that they were responding to their own spirit of agency, rather than being recruited by their activist peers. This feeling of spirit became the crux of their collective identity as ‘student activist’ – it was the one thing they all had in common. Furthermore, it signified that participation was fun, which for many students was the main attraction. Therefore, many posko also became lively entertainment centres. Rio, who was part of the KB-UI posko team, recalled:

The posko was run by us, social kids, so we created a fun, social atmosphere; we organised film screenings, live music bands, an arts night, whatever – just to make it lively and spirited so that many people would gather there. We knew how to make a party as we also liked to party; so we knew how to make a vibrant atmosphere. That’s how it all started, with fun.

The organisers knew that fun was needed to attract participants from among a student population known to be largely apolitical, especially at UI. KB-UI activist Yodi explained: ‘I used to be a typical happy-go-lucky UI kid myself, and I also wouldn’t have appreciated being directly confronted with political agitation’. Yet playing up mobilising as fun was not merely a deliberate strategy, it also spoke to the organisers’ sense of self as ‘fun-loving’ students, which is why this approach worked so well. For many of the organisers, this student movement was their first venture into activism, and they could closely relate to non-activist students. The organisers who had been active since the mid-1990s also had a distinctively playful approach to activism; while they followed the footsteps of the activist tradition set by their seniors, for them, as Rio said, ‘it was playing’ (see Chapter 10). It was this resonance with playful selves among both organisers and casual participants that lent the narrative and practice of ‘spontaneity’ its mobilising power, spurring tens of thousands of students, who used to laugh at demonstrating peers, to join them in this high-risk yet urgent movement. In turn, their massive participation reinforced the image of a single, spontaneous force.

But there were also ‘good strategic reasons’ to play up this image, as Polletta (1998: 138) notes about the US student sit-ins, as it ‘deflected charges of communist influence’ or other ‘outside influence’. Indeed, since February 1998, allegations of ‘PKI influence’ suddenly disappeared, marking the end of the New Order
spectre of communist threat (Heryanto 1999: 170); although the spectre would reappear after Suharto’s fall, at this point it was eclipsed by the image of a spontaneous student uprising. In a way, this image represented the mirror image of ABRI’s erstwhile story of ‘organisations without form’, or ‘OTB’ (see Chapter 11); while OTB supposedly operated in the shadowy underground, the student movement appeared in the public spotlight as a ‘form without organisation’. As the star group, the student movement was no less elusive than OTB, and like OTB it attacked the regime. But while OTB allegedly used the stealthy tactic of ‘infiltration’, all the students needed to do was ‘awaken’ en masse to be instantly dangerous. They were not ‘treacherous’, like OTB threatening the nation, but ‘powerful’, like ‘the king of the jungle’, threatening ‘King’ Suharto. In other respects, these two images could also converge, as in the images of the leaderless guerrilla.

The Guerrilla Force of ‘Leaderlessness’

The image of spontaneity was reinforced by the student movement’s ‘leaderlessness’. The sheer scope and heterogeneity of a movement scattered across regions, state and private universities, and formal and informal organisations of all stripes, precluded central leadership of the types seen in previous student movements; there was no central organisation like the 1970s student councils or KAMI in 1966, and there were no prominent leaders like Siregar in 1974. Most of the organisations that emerged in 1998 rather took up some form of collective leadership, and refused to put forward leading representatives. As noted, this complicated the work of journalists, who had trouble identifying clear spokespersons, other than the student senate chairs, who clearly did not represent the larger student movement. Yet, from a media perspective, ‘leaderlessness’ was also this movement’s charm. Indeed, students took pride in it, presenting it as an expression of a generational sentiment called ‘anti-tokohisme’, or an aversion to prominent leader figures (tokoh). They also cited strategic reasons for the absence of leaders, arguing that this prevented the movement from collapsing if leading activists were arrested or co-opted. Above all, leaderlessness was an expression of their radical self-image.

The epitome of the leaderless culture was the Student Community of Greater Jakarta, better known as City Forum, or Forkot. Forkot was founded on 7 March by activists from sixteen campuses in Jakarta ‘to create a truly militant student movement’, as co-founder Sami told me. One of the campuses was UI, but as the UI contingent became inactive in Forkot in April (for reasons discussed below), and their role in Forkot was eclipsed by the more militant students from smaller universities, UI’s involvement was soon ‘forgotten’, to the extent that Forkot and UI came to be seen as opposites. As Sami explained, ‘different from UI, we had
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no historical name to rely on, so we had to build from zero’. He described this process as a spontaneous, ‘organic’ one:

It developed organically, simply by moving from campus to campus, having meetings at each campus and supporting each other’s actions. If there was an action at IKIP we all went there; if we had an action they all came to us. It was all joined so that the actions grew ever larger. Our aim was simply to build solidarity, but as we grew bigger in the end everyone knew us. Once we became really big, simply because more students joined, the meetings were restricted to three representatives per campus, because a meeting with more than one hundred people was just undoable. But everyone had a say, so the meetings often went on all night, sometimes twenty-four hours, round the clock. And we continued to expand, just by going to all these campuses.

True to its origin as an action front created for purposes of building solidarity, Forkot took leaderlessness to its extreme. They rejected even a presidium-type of leadership, rather sharing decision making among campus representatives: one vote per campus, irrespective of campus size. Even this arrangement was said to have ‘developed organically’, implying that leaderlessness itself resulted from a spontaneous process. Likewise, Forkot’s rapid expansion (claiming representation on seventy campuses at its peak) was explained in terms of spontaneous growth – ‘simply because more students joined’ – rather than the result of recruitment or organisation efforts.

Yet Forkot did not emerge from nowhere. Many of its strongholds had a tradition of activism since the early 1990s; members had cooperated before and had frequently clashed with security forces, thus their style was very much shaped by previous experiences with state violence.18 Hence, Forkot became known for its militancy and readiness for physical confrontation, gaining a reputation for fierce urban guerrilla fighting. In their demeanour and looks, many members seemed to identify as modern incarnations of revolution-era pemuda, wearing ragged jeans and t-shirts, and if they did wear their formal campus jackets these were given a militant twist by adding buttons and bandanas.19 Reinforcing the guerrilla image, the members operated in semi-autonomous, semi-underground campus ‘cells’, so that it was never entirely clear to outsiders where Forkot was active. This seemed to contradict the open nature of a spontaneous student movement, rather resembling ‘OTB’-style operations. But it was precisely in the playful mixing of these mirror images that Forkot found its strength and appeal to many students, since it doubled the thrill of high-risk action in fun ways. Even in dealing with security issues, Forkot emphasised a sense of playfulness; as they told a reporter: ‘When asked [by a security agent] who the general is, we all raise our hands’.20 There was a great deal of fun to playing leaderlessness this way – the pleasure of fool-
ing security agents and by extension the state. In that regard, it was also a playful revenge for the repression and intimidation they experienced in previous years. This time, the students controlled the game.

In the context of historic drama, this strategy helped to galvanise the spirit of struggle on which this student movement thrived, and enhanced its enigmatic, spectacular image. But this image obscured the contradictory identity politics at work within the movement. For one thing, the growing media attention kindled new sentiments of eksistensi – or feelings of being more accomplished or more capable than other groups. While this had been an issue since the early 1990s (see Chapter 11), in 1998, as the students became the star group, the issue became that ‘each group wanted to be at the vanguard’, as student activists said, which fuelled a politics of distinction based on identity markers of ‘vanguardism’. Forkot, for one, for all its emphasis on ‘leaderlessness’, presented itself as the movement’s leading actor, whose ‘truly militant’ strategy was indispensable for bringing down the regime. And so did other groups with other strategies, which in turn caused tensions around the issue of representation of the larger student movement. Such issues of eksistensi were especially evident at the campus with the ‘biggest name’ and largest media coverage: UI.

Politics of Distinction: The Trouble with UI Eksistensi

As noted, UI students were divided between the central student senate, SM-UI, and the KB-UI coalition that had been founded by five faculty senates. Initially, both were part of Forum UI, a university-broad platform founded in late 1997 in response to the economic crisis, but already in January this forum split over disagreement about the formulation of its first public statement. As KB-UI activist Yodi recalled, they felt it was urgent to issue a UI statement: ‘UGM had already made its political stance public in 1997, so we had to keep up’. For UI students, the sense of being left behind by other big universities – as Sulistyo had stressed in his speech at UI, noting ITB’s quick mobilisation – touched a sensitive chord. Since this statement had to represent all UI students, KB-UI initially intended to publish it as a joint statement with SM-UI, but that plan failed:

To make the statement acceptable to SM-UI, we had decided, ‘Okay, let’s not attack Suharto yet but slam the New Order first through the issue of the economic crisis’. We wanted to do this with the senate, as we still held hopes of walking together. Despite all the differences in political line, in culture, and so on, I felt it had to be possible to cooperate. But when we discussed this plan with them it came to a deadlock. It turned out that they, and those above them [political patrons], had their own political calculations, so they didn’t want to go along with it, though they used the typical New Order excuse, saying that formal student bodies couldn’t engage in politics, let alone express
political demands, blah-blah. The day before our final meeting with them we held a meeting among ourselves, discussing why the senate always refused to compromise. But there was a senate spy at this meeting, so the next day it almost came to a fight. The joint statement was off. In the end, we held our press conference without them on 26 January, calling on all students and society to unite for reformasi. It was the first time we at UI used this term ‘reformasi’. We probably weren’t the first to use it – that would probably be the IMF – but after that press conference it was all over the news and it became commonly used in demonstrations. Nobody, including us, even understood what it meant! After that we prepared our own actions, and UI was polarised.

Ironically, then, the call on ‘all students and society to unite’ under this new banner of reformasi was first made at this moment of ‘polarisation’, although that did not dilute its effect. The call was made, and while UI was admittedly not the first to use the magic word, once UI had proclaimed it everyone seemed to follow. Thereafter, SM-UI and KB-UI organised their actions separately on different days. This had the unintended benefit of doubling the ‘UI effect’, since the public only saw one undifferentiated ‘sea of yellow’ at UI rallies. As these were mostly organised by KB-UI, it thus took control of the iconic image of ‘yellow jackets’ from SM-UI, winning the battle on campus for student support and also the media battle for public representation. According to Rio, this success was owing to their keen sense of the ‘spirit of the times’. Indeed, their style and strategy be fitted the spirit of spontaneity. In contrast to the ‘New Order hierarchy’ of SM-UI, as Yodi put it, they chose an informal presidium-type of leadership, with three representatives from each allied faculty, and furthermore rejected senior guidance or patronage. This was not only for ideological or strategic reasons but was also informed by a sense of self that ‘just didn’t match’ with the politics and style of the older generations. Yodi said:

We knew they were there; even before the reform movement there was plenty of input, all sorts of unsolicited advice coming from them, but it was always in some encrypted language. For us it felt like unnatural messages coming from outsider to insider, so we couldn’t accept it just like that. We were clearly from different generations, with a very different culture and mind-set, so we just didn’t connect with them like HMI did with [Finance Minister] Mar’ie Mohammad or so.

Autonomy was thus an intrinsic part of their self-image, as was expressed in their use of posko tents as centre of operations. Yet, the sense of autonomy was so strong that each faculty allied in KB-UI initially had its own posko, and eksistensi also arose among them. Though, according to Yodi, this was a positive competition with productive results:
We understood that people at each faculty had their own experiences, their own politics, their own consciousness, so we each created our own posko. … But there was also competition. I didn’t want my faculty to be outshone by other faculties … such sentiments surely played. But on the positive side we all made a contribution to the whole in our own way, doing our own thing. At my posko we had a successful event on Valentine’s Day on Che Guevara’s philosophy of joining love and revolution. This attracted lots of students, and we collected lots of money. This got the economics students piqued as we also collected money from students of their faculty. After that, we negotiated and began planning our events together.

Realising that greater impact could be achieved by working together, at the start of the MPR session KB-UI set up a joint ‘posko’ for the people’s struggle for reformasi, which then became the symbol of the ‘UI movement’ and the ‘student struggle’ at large. Its opening was attended by student delegates from other universities, and it was there that the press and other ‘outsiders’ began turning to them for contact and information. Hence, although the UI movement was not the first, the largest, or the most militant, at this point it still symbolised the student movement’s centre. Yodi recalled that they were not prepared for that, and that it sometimes led to awkward situations:

_Eksistensi_ was a big problem, especially once we got attention from the mass media, because that’s when we started to matter. One instance that really stuck with me was when masses of students from ITI [Indonesian Technology Institute in north Jakarta] travelled all the way to Depok to join forces with us. There were so many of them, it seemed their whole campus had come. Here they were, amassing at our campus, ready for a big alliance. So on their part there was no eksistensi at all, no sentiments about UI this or that. They just wanted to pool forces. It was a good initiative; they were sincere. So I applauded it, but then we at UI screwed it up. First, the mosque kids objected to their presence, with rumours like: ‘They’re co-opted’, or excuses like: ‘We can’t guarantee their safety’, and we from KB-UI weren’t ready to cover this situation. We were still hesitant on how to relate to the outside, to other campuses; we weren’t prepared to embrace other masses. Yeah, UI eksistensi was strong; it bred all sorts of pointless heroic slogans, like: ‘Yellow jackets must be defended to life and death’, while we couldn’t even deal with these ITI students. We weren’t ready to shed that.

Yodi did not expect this ‘UI eksistensi’ to become such an obstacle and ‘stick like a curse’, as he put it, which ‘caused lots of tensions with other campuses’ as word of this incident – ‘UI doesn’t want to join forces!’ – spread rapidly among students in Jakarta. Yet, apparently the image of ‘UI arrogance’ only developed in the course of interactions; if it had been prominent beforehand, the ‘whole ITI campus’ would not have bothered to travel all the way to Depok for an alliance. Moreover, although relations with other campuses in Jakarta remained tense after
this incident, KB-UI still became part of Forkot, and it was for reasons other than eksistensi that it would freeze its role in this militant alliance in mid-April.

Within UI, though, sentiments of eksistensi remained a ‘huge obstacle to unification’, according to Sitha. Identifying as an ‘independent activist’, though she joined KB-UI, Sitha considered all politics of division at UI equally ‘stupid’ and ‘unnecessary’. Whether between SM-UI and KB-UI, between ‘right-wing’ and ‘left-wing’ activists, between ‘activist’ and ‘apolitical’ students, or between the students of bachelor or ‘S1’ programs and students of diploma or ‘D3’ programs, known as the ‘rich kids’ (D3 had a lower academic status but a higher entrance fee), according to Sitha these divisions weakened UI’s political potential, which was ‘so historically present’. Hence, she followed her own path:

I learned from the methods of student movements of the past, that’s why I began organising asrama [student dormitories; inspired by their role during the Japanese occupation; see Chapter 2] since 1997, while monitoring the political situation and watching the steps taken by others on campus. So when UI suddenly erupted it wasn’t from nowhere, I guess 80 percent of the students who joined the closing of the Salemba entrance board [on 25 February] was from asrama. We also organised our first big discussion on the student movement in an asrama; we had SM-UI and KB-UI sit on one table, so that the asrama students could freely express their criticism of both; question why they didn’t unite to become one big force at UI. … Then I chose to join KB-UI; not the senate because their response to the national situation was too slow and they had a bigger eksistensi problem. But KB-UI had its own eksistensi problem. …

I focused on uniting S1 and D3 students. There was a huge cultural gap between them, which to me seemed stupid in this critical situation. For me it wasn’t difficult to organise D3 students since I used to be one myself, and I could relate to the elite kids as I also used to be a ‘hedonistic kid’ in high school. But other activists underestimated them, saying nothing could be expected from rich kids, that they were apolitical anyway. But I understood that for them it was also difficult to understand the reality outside their own beautiful world, so they had to be made aware gradually. In the end, few joined the actions, but at least I could get them to care so they would give financial support. Many were also reluctant to join due to the disdainful attitude of the other activists; of course they felt uncomfortable and unwelcome.

For Sitha, eksistensi was not just an issue between organisations but one of the activist community at large, causing activists to belittle ‘apolitical’ students, all the more if they were from the upper classes, who were made to feel unwanted in the movement. Despite the open image of a ‘spontaneous’ movement, separations of politics and class established in the New Order thus remained intact; not only within the student movement, but also, as we will see, with the ‘people’. In that regard, no paradigm breach was made with the New Order political culture.
Stammering and Star Alliance

The image of a spontaneous, leaderless student movement, as painted in the liberal press, took no account of one organisation founded in this period that followed more traditional structures yet made no less of an impact. This organisation was the Indonesian Muslim Students Action Front, or KAMMI, which was founded on 29 March in Malang at a congress of campus mosque associations (LDK). Since LDK had not involved themselves in national political issues before, there was heated debate during the congress on how to respond to the national crisis without dragging the LDK institution into the ‘whirl of practical politics’ (Sidiq 2003: 97). KAMMI was then formed as separate organisation to ‘spearhead the reform movement’, so one member told me. As the founding declaration stated, it was from ‘deep concern about the national crisis’, and ‘driven by a sense of moral responsibility towards the people’s ongoing suffering, and by good intentions to play an active role in the process of change’, that ‘we, all Indonesian Muslim students’, declared the birth of KAMMI, urging the government to carry out reforms in all fields, ‘not just the economy but also the political, legal, cultural, and moral fields’, which were interrelated (Sidiq 2003: 98).

Building on the existing LDK structure, KAMMI was instantly an impressive force in terms of size and representation in cities across the country, which it then flaunted with massive rallies that were instantly recognisable for the characteristic use of Islamic symbols – including the green KAMMI jackets, jilbab of female students, and shouts of ‘Allahuakbar’. Furthermore, KAMMI succeeded in taking its demonstrations off campus by using the Friday prayers at public mosques as rallying points for action. But the fact that these demonstrations were not repressed, that KAMMI maintained a ‘moral’ tone, and that its organisation and actions appeared to be so well structured, compared to the other student organisations and actions, raised suspicions of being backed by powerful actors. Such suspicions, though, overlooked the fact that KAMMI was not as solid as it appeared to be, and ignored the sense of self of these former campus mosque activists in entering the field of politics. Ihwan, who became the chair of KAMMI–Bandung, recalled the experience of entering this new field as one of ‘stammering’ but also ‘spirit’:

From the moment KAMMI was born, a new atmosphere arose of political enlightenment. What used to be campus mosque activists – social players on campus, teaching religion, from mentor to mentor – suddenly turned into an organisation engaged in political action, in taking a stance about changing the president! It was a totally new spirit. But we still stammered, since we had never dabbled in politics. We faltered in our political interactions; we didn’t have a story yet about political action. We had never done that before; taking to the streets, planning and managing a political action, it was all new. So we just tried out whatever we could think up, just grabbing in the dark. And to
outsiders it came as a surprise that KAMMI called for reform; they didn’t know where it came from. But we already had a sense and structure of thinking about change; that became our basic asset. We had talked about how Islam can bring change, which steps need to be taken. So we had that; the ability to be critical was built there – the understanding about the rottenness of the government and its mechanisms, the methodology of change. So when we were confronted with ’98 it was easy to throw into the open a concept of change. The other asset was our community that was already, well, a community. Even where there were differences with other LDK, we still had friends in the senate; this was also an asset. Playing in the senate was our only political experience, so we just kept the senate in mind. From the LDK we knew how to build an argument, how to give sermons, which could be translated into political speeches. And our enthusiasm was overflowing, it was the enthusiasm of pemuda.

While activists from the student movement’s ‘radical’ pole viewed KAMMI as their opposite in ideology, structure, strategy, and style as an expression of their sense of self, in terms of experience the stories I gathered from both poles were not far apart. For each, the ‘spirit of 1998’ was about entering the new field of mass mobilisation in a context of historic drama, which surely came with the ‘overflowing enthusiasm of pemuda’, as this fit their role in the drama. But it was also about negotiating the role of the starring group with previous identities and practices. Each group still ‘stammered’ at that, still ‘faltered’ in their political interactions; hence they ‘just tried out whatever they could think of’, which was necessarily informed by previous experience. For KAMMI, it meant preaching Islamic models of change to combat a corrupt state, and doing so in the spirited mode of student struggle, no different from the other groups that emerged in this period. For each, the immediate target was the same: ‘changing the president!’ Yet how they would accomplish that was still a matter of ‘grabbing in the dark’, even if in this ‘darkness’ they were also blinded by public spotlights. The accelerated process of trial-and-error left little time for contemplating strategy, and little room for failure since the public, by now, expected no less than victory from the students.

In this context KAMMI leaders approached their political champion Amien Rais for a star alliance. Rais reportedly responded: ‘If KAMMI demands anything less than to topple Suharto, there is no need to invite me along’ (Rahmat and Najib 2001: 126). The alliance was thus quickly established, providing Rais with the necessary masses and public credibility in his opposition to Suharto, and the students with the necessary political capital in the new field of high-risk political opposition. Without explicitly siding with KAMMI, Rais now supported the student movement more conspicuously than before, and thereby presented himself as the leader of the reformasi movement and the public representative of the student
movement. But this annoyed other student groups, who found his pushiness to be opportunist. They recalled how he had advocated ‘one last, last, last chance’ for Suharto in February, and deemed his ‘deadline’ of ‘six more months’ for Suharto in March an inexcusable political move that threatened to dilute the momentum for mobilisation. Thus, as Rais tirelessly toured the campuses to give speeches at demonstrations, students both cheered and booed or shunned him. In any case, his role no longer seemed to matter, since the political process was out of his hands. What mattered now, as the social drama moved deeper into the escalation phase, were the battles between students and the regime.

Transgression, Escalation, and Heat

In the first weeks after the MPR session, the regime still sounded a conciliatory tone. ABRI Commander Wiranto stated that he supported reforms, yet he urged students to express their views in a constructive manner, through dialogue rather than demonstrations. He announced ABRI would facilitate such a dialogue between the government and students, scheduled for 4 April. In the meantime, protests on campus would be allowed, but the security blockades at campus gates would be maintained so as to protect the students, it was argued, from outside provocation and infiltration. Yet, student protesters were intent to turn to the streets, and the resulting scuffles with security forces turned increasingly violent. A major clash occurred on 2 April at UGM, where thousands of students mobilised by the PRD-affiliated Committee of People’s Struggle for Change planned to march to the provincial government. Overwhelming the police officers on guard at the gates, they began marching and were joined by students from other campuses, school youth, and local residents, before the military garrison arrived to disperse them with tear gas. The students fought back; the battle lasted all afternoon and left at least eighty protesters injured. Another clash occurred at UGM the next day; now riot police entered the campus and made several arrests. The violence prompted solidarity actions in other cities, which were also violently repressed.

In this context, Wiranto’s offer for a dialogue seemed farcical and was rejected, which also marked the hardening attitude of the hitherto cautious student senates; on 3 April, SM-UI staged a mass rally at UI Salemba, with a giant banner: ‘We reject dialogue: [which is only a] symbolic, ceremonial, temporary satisfier’. Similar rallies rejecting the dialogue were held in other cities. Wiranto was forced to cancel the event; he rescheduled for 18 April, but many of the student senates now rejected the invitation outright. Hence, while the student senates were not involved in the clashes and focused their protests on the dialogue, a parallel process of radicalisation set in on both ‘radical’ and ‘moderate’ sides of the student movement. Further fuelling this radicalisation, on 4 April Education Minister
Arismunandar instructed university rectors to restore order, and he declared a vague ban on ‘practical politics’ on campus. But the rectors came to the students’ defence, responding that ‘practical politics’ was not what the students engaged in. Rais agreed, adding that the students rather engaged in ‘high politics’. Students of all stripes, often joined by faculty, promptly staged protests against the minister. Thereafter the student protests accelerated.

On 15 April in Jakarta, thirty-eight campuses allied through Forkot staged a concerted chain of action in which the campus containment was broken. For the first time, masses of students could be seen marching through the streets of Jakarta, going from campus to campus. Similar actions were staged in other cities, thus demonstrating the students’ capacity for coordinated action nation-wide. That day marked the revival of the long march, but also a new phase in the cat-and-mouse game between students and security forces, as both sides tried to push the limits of street action and repression. At some campuses students were blocked in the middle of the road at a ten- to fifty-metre distance from campus, after which they were pushed back, only to return to the streets a bit later taking a different route, where they either found a free passage or found themselves blocked again at a further distance; then the ritual would start all over again. This could also get out of hand; in Bandung and Solo the protests were violently repressed.

But for KB-UI this day marked an awkward phase, as they found themselves caught between UI’s aura of student heroism and the new demand for militancy pushed for by their militant peers in Forkot. The atmosphere at UI Salemba on 15 April reflected this awkward position. While hundreds of security forces lined up along the road in front of the campus, hundreds of UI students in yellow jackets formed a human chain holding hands in front of the gates to secure the action. An odd exchange occurred between UI students, who rallied inside the campus, and students arriving there from UKI; as they approached they called on the UI students to join the long march outside: ‘Come out, come out!’ At the same time, UI students beckoned them to join the rally inside: ‘Get in, get in!’ This went on for a while, and for a moment tensions were rising. Yodi recalled:

They must’ve thought we were trying to make it an UI event, to prolong the mystique of UI as the most important of all. It turned out that our representative at Forkot had said we’d trash the UI sign at this action, so that’s what they expected but this wasn’t communicated to the [KB-UI] presidium, and now the presidium was accused of moderating the action: ‘It was agreed; now it must be executed!’ Sure, we could’ve done it, as a symbol of political resistance, but some of us weren’t ready yet to go this fast, as it might have consequences, there could be academic sanctions. So I negotiated with the Forkot people, I explained it couldn’t happen but let’s still do this action together.
A compromise was reached in which UI’s historic aura and Forkot’s militancy came to blend in a striking performance on the campus yard, witnessed by masses of people gathered near the gates. The UKI students went inside, greeted by UI students with a patriotic battle song: ‘Welcome, young hero, we have longed for you for so long’. Speeches were held and statements made, theatre was performed and poetry read out, and in unison the thousands of students sang songs ridiculing the government, and yelled slogans calling for a people’s trial of Suharto. In his speech one Forkot student shouted: ‘Here is holy blood for the people!’ and then cut his hand with a knife, proving that ‘we, students, are not afraid to die for the people’. Another orator urged all students present to take off their blue (UKI) and yellow (UI) campus jackets, ‘to show that there are no fences between us and that we, too, come from the people’; he took off his jacket, all students followed. Then they declared the ‘Student Pledge’ – for ‘one country: a country free from oppression’, ‘one nation: a nation devoted to justice’, and ‘one language: the language of truth’; this pledge, originating from the 1989 student movement (see Chapter 11), became a hallmark of Forkot actions. The UKI students then marched back to their campus, while hundreds of UI students still decided to take to the streets for a march in the area and back to campus; along the route bystanders cheered them, and joined them in their shouted chants: ‘Long live the students! Long live the people! Students and people united cannot be defeated. May the oppressive regime fall!’ This day of action was a success, and detailed reports appeared in the newspapers. The public did not notice the small misunderstanding going on at the UI gates. But it led KB-UI to freeze its participation in Forkot.

Ignoring the students’ radicalising stance, Wiranto persisted in organising the 18 April dialogue; it was attended by ABRI, high government officials, university rectors, national youth and student organisations, and student senates of thirty-nine universities. But less than 30 percent of the invited students turned up. The student senates of the largest universities active in the student protest boycotted the event, and instead held a counter-dialogue at IPB. KAMMI also rejected the dialogue, calling it an attempt to buy time and tame the student movement. GMNI and several other organisations that did attend the event soon walked out, calling it a ploy to divide the student movement. Still, the participating students presented the demand of Suharto’s resignation; it was the first time that this demand was heard in a formal setting and hence could be read in the next day’s newspapers.

Meanwhile, the ABRI chief-of-staff for social and political affairs (and future president), Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, was sent to tour campuses for local dialogues. Wherever he arrived, he met with a barrage of critical questions and was frequently interrupted, or students walked out. The students were clearly suspicious of ABRI’s intents; as one of them put it to me, the dialogues were ‘just a false PR stunt to mend ABRI’s tarnished image’. Indeed, in this period, the news
came out that several activists from PRD and other opposition groups had been ab ducted in February and March. ABRI denied any involvement, but the public testimony of one of the abducted activists released in April showed otherwise.23

After the failed dialogues, students became more confrontational in claiming their right to the streets, and security forces became more repressive in denying it to them. By the end of April, clashes were so common that the press began using such headlines as ‘campus intifada’ (D&R, 2 May 1998), an ‘intifada’ in which groups like Forkot gained fame for their urban guerrilla tactics – fighting batons, water cannons, tear gas, and rubber bullets with rocks, slingshots, Molotov cocktails, and any other weapon inherited from previous experiences in street brawls. As McRae (2001: 37) notes, two myths emerged from the intense media reporting of the clashes: the first held that the violence was ‘an unintended incident’ of students trying to make their way off campus and security forces trying to preserve order; the second held that provocateurs from some ‘third party’ were responsible for the violence – both of which depicted ‘students as a naïve party, to whom the possibility that demonstrations could result in clashes had not occurred’. Yet, students were very concerned with the possibility of violence in protest and its wider political implications, and they had various considerations for either condoning or rejecting it. Those condoning it ‘depicted violence as a tool, both to increase mass radicalisation and political education, and to create political acceleration’; those condemning it stressed that it tarnished the moral character of their movement, or feared that ‘violence would become a vicious circle, feeling that the only product of violence would be more violence’ (McRae 2001: 38). But while strategic arguments for either avoiding or pushing for clashes with security forces presumed that it was possible to control the battle field, in practice no one could, neither the students nor the security forces, and accidents easily happened.

In any case, the issue of violence was not only a matter of strategy; the deeper implications related to identity. For the ‘militant’ Forkot and the ‘moral’ KAMMI their respective stances on violence were clear, but within KB-UI there was much debate on the issue, and the controversy remained unresolved as it forced students to take a strategic stance in a manner that deeply implicated their sense of self. For Yodi, his stance was informed by his past as a cynical schoolboy embroiled in street brawls (see Chapter 9), which led him to the practical consideration that UI was not ready for street actions bound to end in clashes:

Since the start there was disagreement between people like me, who then came to be joined in a sort of alliance of practical and moderate people, and those who wanted to move fast and hit the streets despite the risks. We all started the same, but along the way they headed towards a more vulgar kind of violent movement. I rejected that. Not that I was opposed to moving fast, but in my view it had to proceed in phases, because
you can't turn sweet UI kids into radicals just like that. If anything would happen the majority would lack a reference on how to act in a situation like that. I argued them:

'So you say that clashing is human, but what will be your move when you plunge in? You'll find that you can't swim; you only know the theory of swimming, you don't know that when you dive in you'll first be covered in darkness'.

What made me cynical was that they wanted to move fast but failed to spell out how to achieve it. It wasn't conceptual. A victim is a concept, but there is a huge operational difference between victims as factor and victims as excess. It was all agitation. I didn't agree with their logic, but it was also because I had my fair share of fights, so I knew. I knew that agitation is also part of fights, words like 'have no fear', but those who say those words are usually the ones who stay in the back. Not that there's anything wrong with that, you need people in the back; in gang fights there's always someone in the back to oversee the situation, to do the counting, to decide when to retreat. If you're not familiar with that it's risky.

It was a huge debate, and the arguments used were sophisticated. Maybe my mistake was that I allowed them to portray me as someone who was after moderating the spirit. It became a direct confrontation that turned into a nasty psychological situation, and some engaged in intrigues. Stories were made up, gossip was spread that I had contacts with the military. Things like that happened a lot then. It's understandable, in a period where you lack the experience to face a situation like that, it's first-treat. If you're not familiar with that it's risky.

In the heat of the moment, debates on line of action were no longer strictly about strategy; they represented a rift in collective identity. Students who started the same were forced into categorising themselves as they were being categorised by others. Yodi, against his sense of self, found himself categorised as 'moderate' for opposing violence for 'practical' reasons, as he knew what plunging into violence meant and felt that most UI students didn't know how to swim in a violent situation. For him, most painful about this controversy was that he was thereby denied part of the 'spirit of struggle', and was even pitched against the controversy was no less frustrating for those on the other side of the debate, who also cited practical reasons to clash. Rio recalled:

Our considerations were practical. It's time to clash, we must clash, if not then not. We felt the time had come to fight. The evidence was there. After the decision to keep UI actions on campus, the UI masses objected, even the new kids came to complain. UI actions on campus the UI masses objected, even the new kids came to complain, we could only string our shoulders, we had no answer, we were just workers. We felt the time had come to fight. The evidence was there. After the decision to keep UI actions on campus, the UI masses objected, even the new kids came to complain.
harto era so they knew the risks. …

On 2 May, we had an action inside campus, when we heard about a street demo nearby that was getting tense; all the students then wanted to take the action outside. They knew the consequence would be to clash, still they insisted. But the gates were locked; the leadership had ordered us to lock the gates, so we had to abide. But then the masses came complaining to us; it was such a pain. For us it was a simple, practical matter; if they wanted it, who were we to stop them, it’s their right. … So, many then joined the street actions with the other campuses, no longer under the UI banner. That happened a lot, since they wanted to feel it, too. But it should’ve been evaluated by the leadership why they wanted to do this. … We wanted it, too, but we were disciplined, we abided by the leadership. Sometimes I still regret not having taken over the leadership then. But that’s an issue of learning politics. We were still naïve, idealist. But we voiced our criticism; we often argued and sometimes it almost came to a fight. It was a heated situation, so we dared them, ‘Come on, let’s fight’, but that never happened.

Comrades came head to head and tensions reached a boiling point. Both sides cited ‘practical’ considerations based on different assessments of timing – ‘it had to proceed in phases’ and ‘the time had come to fight’ – but underlying this strategic difference was the deeper disagreement on what it meant to be an UI student engaged in historic battle; whether they could handle the heat or not; whether they could stay behind or not. Rio’s trouble was that his position (as part of the posko team, but not the presidium) forced him to act against his conviction that UI students were ‘ready’ and should not be withheld their ‘right’ to fight. Despite the frustration and headaches this caused him, Rio abided by the decision to keep the gates closed – not because he was ‘naïve, idealist’, but because he was part of an organisation that worked. Despite the conflicts and ugly situations it caused, KB-UI did not split over this issue. Those militant UI students who still went out to feel the heat by joining the street actions of other campuses, also understood that they could not do so under the name of UI. Despite the heat of the moment, everyone knew and stuck to their role. This indicated their profound awareness of the gravity and historicity of the situation. There was no room for splits in the midst of a historic struggle that was clearly moving forward.

From ‘People Power’ to ‘Trisakti Tragedy’ and Mayhem

The direction of the drama became clear in the first week of May, as the situation escalated further, the students became more determined and coordinated, and the norm breaching widened. The tensions were fuelled by the announcement on 2 May that Suharto would allow reform after 2003, the end of his presidential term, which the information minister rectified the next day as it met with strong public criticism and student protests. This issue had hardly passed, when on 4 May the
government announced a sharp price hike for fuel and electricity, to be effective the next day. This triggered a strong reaction, and not only from students: public transport drivers went on strike, riots broke out in Medan, and in the following days, violent battles erupted between students and security forces in many cities, leaving scores of students hospitalised. On 8 May, one student in Yogyakarta died from his injuries.

Wiranto insinuated that ‘certain parties’ were trying to create anarchy, and he warned that ABRI would act firmly. Suharto, meanwhile, seemed to ignore the tension; on 9 May he travelled to Egypt for a G15 summit. But the public was outraged by the violence and impressed by the students, whom the press began depicting as heroes. One reporter noted: ‘Their determination appears to be multiplying; they are without the least bit of fear, as if driven by a mysterious force’ – illustrated by stories of courage: ‘When chaos broke out at UNS, two female students wearing jilbab prevented a tank from entering the campus by lying down in front of it’; and in Jakarta, a ‘student halted a tank by standing in front of it, he then jumped on it and tied himself to the bumper’. Stories of heroism abounded in this period, and they spurred bold actions by other citizens in support of the students. In Surabaya, support came from a hospital where many students injured in the clashes were treated free of charge; on 9 May, two thousand doctors, paramedics, and patients (one taking his infusion with him) broke through the security at the hospital gates to stage a long march through the city, wearing their hospital uniform and headbands with the text ‘proreformasi’, loudly cheered by bystanders. School youth, local residents, street vendors, and other groups increasingly joined the street protests, although they still rarely numbered more than several thousands, as they frequently met with violent repression.

On 8 May, university rectors issued a joint statement calling on ‘the whole intellectual and professional community’ and all social organisations to support the student movement and contribute to giving shape to the students’ demand for reforms. In the media there was growing talk of a people power movement possibly developing from the student movement; comparisons were made with other countries, the possibility of mass violence was discussed, and sociologists added their expertise on social movement theory, explaining the conditions and strategies needed for the student actions to grow into a mass movement. Indeed, the students were preparing to broaden their movement. Many groups began leaving their campus jackets and other attributes of student identity behind, and began coordinating nationwide a next phase of mobilisation with broader alliances. But this development was abruptly halted on 12 May, when students were killed at the elite Trisakti University in Jakarta, which was followed by days of riots.

At Trisakti, the protests had developed slowly and had remained on campus. O’Rourke (2002: 90) observes: ‘Rather than waving banners on the side of the
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road in the midday sun, Trisakti students liked to joke that they could better indu-
ce change by going home and talking to their parents – many of whom were mil-
itary officers, civil servants or parliamentarians’. On 8 May, though, a few hun-
dred students ventured out on the street in front of the campus, but as it began
raining they dispersed. Yet it sparked plans for a five-kilometre long march to the
Parliament a few days later. On 12 May at noon, six thousand students began
marching out of campus, but after five hundred metres a police cordon blocked
their way. There was a lengthy standoff; the students stood their ground, this time
undeterred by the rain – holding speeches and singing patriotic songs – while the
student leaders tried to broker free passage. In the late afternoon a compromise
was reached: to avoid a clash, the police and the students would simultaneously
retreat ten metres a time. This seemed to work, but then, the dreaded ‘provoca-
teur’ scenario set in: a man identifying himself as ‘Trisakti alumnus’ arrived on
the scene making trouble. As students chased him back to the police lines, hun-
dreds of troops suddenly arrived on roaring motorbikes; the police charged, using
tear gas and rubber bullets, and a battle erupted. The attacks continued until the
evening, then the police began sweeping the area for students; those caught were
beaten, the female students were harassed. Among the injured four dead students
were found; they had been shot on campus with live rounds, as it turned out later,
by snipers posted on a nearby toll road. At three in the morning their bodies were
returned from hospital to campus and laid bare in the auditorium, before being
brought home, while students sang ‘Fallen Flower’.

These were not the first deaths of the student protest. But more than other
incidents in the previous months, the Trisakti shootings were felt as a dramatic
turning point. The victims were not radical activists but ordinary students from
respectable, devout, middle-class families (a point highlighted in the press), and
the incident was recorded on press cameras and aired on national (as well as inter-
national) television; it was the first time that images of violence against students
entered homes, showing not only the brutal attacks and the panic, but also drama-
tic scenes of students wailing over the blood-spattered sheets covering the bodies.
The press named the incident the ‘Trisakti Tragedy’ – a national tragedy in which
student martyrs had fallen. The day after, in a spontaneous show of mourning
reminiscent of the death of KAMI student Arief Rahman Hakim in 1966 – indeed
the parallel was immediately drawn – citizens flew the national flag at half-mast,
flower wreaths were brought to Trisakti, and opposition figures gathered there to
express their sympathy. In a brief ceremony the rector granted the four fallen stu-
dents the title ‘Heroes of Reformasi’. They were buried in an atmosphere no less
dramatic and patriotic than the burial of Arief Rahman Hakim, accompanied by
masses of sad and infuriated students from Trisakti and other universities, yelling
‘Allahuakbar’, and singing ‘Fallen Flower’. Across the country solidarity actions were staged, but these mostly remained on campus, as severe riots began erupting in Jakarta and other cities.

According to observers, the Trisakti incident was the necessary incentive to galvanise students to ‘push Suharto from power’ (Schwartz 1999: 355). This view is in line with the notion of a student movement riding the waves of history; the death of four students was the final shock wave that pushed them into the occupation of Parliament one week later. Yet, to many students, the Trisakti incident was an interruption of a longer-term process that they had set into motion much earlier, and the biggest shock was the realisation that this incident was meant to halt that process. Yodi recalled:

We had an action plan ready for May, it was also announced, that if we didn’t get a response before a certain date, we would occupy the Parliament. We had sent a letter to the parliament, it must still be in their files. So, yeah, we were confident. But we never calculated something like Trisakti happening, and that affected everything. In that phase we were all taking a pause; you can check it in the news archives, no one was mobilising at that time, except for Trisakti – and that made me suspicious, but I didn’t want to make a fuss out of it. Anyway, we didn’t consider a situation like that happening, because that phase was meant for coordination, to see what we could agree on for 20 May. All groups were getting ready for that day. That’s why I was in Bandung at that time, to coordinate with the Bandung and Yogyakarta groups. There was a small but nice action then at ITB; in front of the campus students walked backwards towards the troops, so the troops didn’t want to hit them in the back and got confused. I was amused, and I thought, we should do something like that in Jakarta, when I got a call saying that two girls at Trisakti were badly beaten. I thought it was a joke, I mean, Trisakti! A very bad joke. But then I got another call and it turned out to be true. We all rushed to Trisakti to follow the developments. It was a critical moment before Suharto’s fall, because that’s when it became clear that the student movement didn’t have the capacity to face a real situation like that. If it were David and Goliath, we could see David was no match for Goliath. But then, why the shooting? In my analysis the 12 May shooting wasn’t directed at students at all, just to create a situation that made it logical for the riots to occur.

Rather than galvanising the spirit of struggle for the grand finale, for activists the Trisakti incident felt like the ‘worst-case scenario’ – not only for the death of students as such, but for exposing the weakness of a student movement that was clearly not ready or equipped to lead a ‘people power’ type of mass mobilisation. The regime must have known that, too – but then why the shooting? And why the Trisakti action in a period meant for consolidation? There were many early suspicions that they were entangled in a much more dangerous power game. But Yodi and others with such misgivings ‘didn’t want to make a fuss out of it’, since that
would interrupt the scenario of the historic drama, which the drama of student martyrs did galvanise. All that Yodi could do is make unpopular decisions:

On 13 May, after the funeral [of the Trisakti students], we started planning an action for the next day at UI Salemba; this was the first time that KB-UI and SM-UI cooperated. That night there was a long and heavy debate on whether or not to proceed with that action. Preparations were minimal, the riots were getting worse, and from Yogyakarta we heard that several campuses were surrounded by tanks and all that. Then, between eleven and twelve that night, the provocation began; people were pushing the UI gates, baiting us. … SM-UI backed out, and KB-UI, well, I don’t know about the others but I felt we weren’t ready, so I left the meeting. When I returned there the next morning the situation [outside] was already chaos. That’s when I took an unpopular decision [to cancel the action]. I agreed that students shouldn’t be scared of the people, but in a situation like that we needed to prepare well. Those who felt prepared could go ahead and go out on the streets, but the rest we pushed back into campus, we gathered in the big auditorium there. There was a heated debate, and I had to intervene as no one else was taking a decision. But that made me very unpopular; [the image of] students hiding inside, chickening out [didn’t sit well]. But what were we to do? That day there turned out to be chaos in the [nearby] Matraman area, there was provocation of riots.

A few hours after the students’ funeral, massive riots broke out in Jakarta that lasted for three days, soon spreading to other cities. In Jakarta alone, dozens of shopping centres were looted and burned down; thousands of shops, offices, and cars were wrecked; one thousand to fifteen hundred people were killed; and many women of Chinese descent were gang raped. The riots were said to follow a fixed pattern; unknown men on motorbikes would stop by, throw stones at shops, and incite bystanders to join in, disappearing again once the people began looting. The looks and methods of the provocateurs raised strong suspicions of ABRI involvement, and the fact that the Jakarta police (headed by Suharto’s former bodyguard and Prabowo’s ally) did little to control the riots, ignoring Wiranto’s orders, raised suspicions that Prabowo had incited the riots to tarnish Wiranto’s credibility and prompt Suharto to grant him authority to control the situation. But after the Trisakti killings, the mayhem, which was also reported live on the world news, prompted a strong domestic and international reaction; world leaders began putting pressure on Suharto, making it impossible for him or ABRI to make any more rash moves.

In that regard, the redress had failed; the guardians of the New Order did not succeed in taking back control. In another respect, though, the riots proved to be deeply detrimental to the student movement. As Yodi’s story illustrates, against their will, it forced the students to distance themselves from the people running amok, and the riots gave credence to ABRI’s warnings about the dangers of mass
action. Concerned about being held responsible for the riots, some students publicly stated, or urged public figures to state, that the rioters were not students but ‘massa’. As Kusno (2000: 99–100) notes, opposite categories of ‘student protesters’ and ‘underclass rioters’ were re-established, which ‘immediately appeared as the unspoken framework of events in the Indonesian media, thereby reinforcing the categories of violence that were already in place’. The violent severance of ‘students’ and ‘the people’, who were just starting to unite in public fantasies of ‘people power’, greatly affected the grand finale of the historic drama, precipitating ‘The End’.

The Iconic Event at ‘The End’ of the Drama

As noted in Yodi’s story, the period between 10 and 20 May was actually meant for national consolidation within the student movement, to decide on a concerted action plan for National Awakening Day (20 May) and a longer-term strategy thereafter. The Trisakti incident and the ensuing riots interrupted that process, forcing the students to act fast, with little preparation. In the morning of 18 May, a delegation of students from forty-five campuses in Jakarta joined in FKSJM (Jakarta Communication Forum of Student Senates) arrived at the Parliament; in a meeting with house representatives they demanded a special MPR session to unseat Suharto, adding that they would not leave the complex before a date was set for this session. Outside the building, PMII held a prayer for national recovery, while an anonymous group of youth dressed in white held a banner reading, ‘Ready to die for Suharto’. Police were lined up inside and outside the compound, and Kostrad troops guarded the gates with tanks. Yet, they allowed thousands of students who arrived there around noon to enter the compound, after which the youths supporting Suharto rolled up their banner and left. Rais then arrived to meet with the parliament, and soon after, parliament chair Harmoko made a statement advising Suharto to resign before 22 May for the sake of national unity. But that night Wiranto countered that statement, calling it a personal opinion; this exposed a rift between ABRI and the parliament, but also between Wiranto and the ABRI faction in the parliament that had supported Harmoko’s statement. In addition, Syarwan Hamid from the ABRI faction offered the students a guarantee of safety in the compound. Hence the students spent the night there. But outside, ABRI added layers of security forces.

The next morning, the political parties PPP and PDI declared their agreement with a special MPR session. Realising that the students might get what they want, ABRI opened the gates to the twenty-five thousand students waiting outside, and to the masses of students of all groups arriving throughout the day. To manage the masses, the compound was divided into lots for each campus, while students
also began climbing the iconic turtle-shaped rooftop of the main building with big banners. To ward off provocation by Suharto supporters – a large group of militia had arrived, many wearing daggers, with a banner reading: ‘We support reforms with Suharto as president’ – hundreds of students began forming living shields, one near the entrance and three more near the main building. Facing this overwhelming mass of students, the Suharto supporters retreated. Students also began guarding the gates to bar non-students from the complex. However, with the idea of ‘people power’ still in mind, other students objected to this ‘exclusivism’, as Sitha put it. She recalled: ‘It broke my heart to see students distance themselves from the people; this was supposed to be the first step towards a real people’s movement – I became angry, I cried, but it was no use’. Yodi explained:

It wasn’t like we had planned at the posko; the idea was to push social groups like labourers to set up their own ranks, and let them enter in small groups because that’s the essence of the occupation; the idea was taken from Tiananmen, to have a concentration of masses, where joint activities would be organised and then we could get out more directed statements. But that didn’t happen; instead the political elites took the stage. Intervention from elite groups was strong. But we still tried to smuggle the people in, using yellow buses to get them in, but that leaked to other campuses and it was about to lead to a fight.

Barring of ‘rakyat’ from the compound was the final termination of the people power scenario for which the students had been preparing. Yet this had no consequence for the drama’s main scenario, which continued to focus on the student saga – even though, as Yodi said, political elites took over the stage. Rais, for one, had added to the suspense in previous days by announcing a ‘one million man march’ at Independence Square around the national monument, to be held on 20 May. But seeing that ABRI had put up heavy security blockades on each road towards the site, and following rumours that the march would end in massacre, at four in the morning, at the last minute, Rais appeared on radio to cancel it. That day, he made his appearance at the Parliament instead, giving his speech at the main speakers’ platform before a mass that had swollen to over fifty thousand. He was not the only one. By now, control of the speakers’ platform had shifted from the student coalition FKSMJ to a new coalition of NGOs called National Front, who allowed a stream of elite opposition figures (called ‘reformasi figures’) to climb the stage and voice their political standpoints.

Yet, the spectacle of the occupation, as recorded by the scores of journalists from the national and international press present at the site, still revolved around the spirited student struggle. Media images focused on the colourful masses of students – looking determined yet laughing, staging theatrical performances, and
holding up banners, many in English, such as: ‘Suharto, Go To Hell With Your Plan – Step Down Now!’ and ‘Suharto, The Whole World Wants You To Go – Now!’ (Forrester 1998: 42–43). The spirit was further raised by a music stage called ‘Musik Reformasi’, and everywhere students could be seen having fun, confident in their role as the star in a historic drama that had now become a world event. Behind all this, the occupation was a huge logistical operation and exercise in mass control, managed by students like Rio, who had no time to share in the excitement:

We had to look after thousands and thousands of people – how to feed them, where to put them to sleep. We were responsible for the logistics, for registration of whomever came or left, and so on. But we didn’t have to worry about [resources] since there was plenty, coming from all directions. Now and then there were rumours [of impending security sweeps]: ‘Sweeping! Sweeping!’ There was nothing, yet they all panicked; they all had Tiananmen in mind, and after Trisakti, who knew what could happen, it was really creepy. So we had to keep that in check. Plus, people like me were always busy with the meetings inside. There was always a meeting, either at the UI level, the Jakarta level. Yeah, we differed in opinion, some were radical some were not. So we debated and disagreed all the while, typical students.

Indeed, while the public spectacle showed the image of student unity – with frequent cries of: ‘One command, one resistance!’ – behind the scenes tensions were rising. There was a brief attempt to unite FKSMJ, Forkot, and the National Front into one organisation, but this almost instantly collapsed due to mutual suspicion. Meanwhile, the situation appeared to be getting out of control, as some students began wreaking havoc on the building, and it was not always clear which group to hold accountable (one student who was caught appeared to be a member of one of the counter-reformasi organisations present earlier). In this situation, which they no longer controlled, FKSMJ decided to evacuate its members. Yodi explained:

It was chaos; there wasn’t anything resembling something that could become the ranks from which to build a democracy, nothing like that could be practiced there. Security only seemed to be tight, with students having to show their IDs, but it was really like a night fair. … It was too risky to stay. … So, in that situation, with heavy hearts, we decided we had to get out of there, because we had enough forces to coordinate, to continue the reformasi struggle outside the Parliament.

After FKSMJ’s departure on 20 May, the masses at the Parliament declined to ten thousand students and NGO activists. But more important than numbers by now was the presence of national and international mass media, which caught the chants and speeches calling for Suharto’s resignation. Thus, it was broadcast live
not only how Suharto, on the morning of 21 May, announced his resignation and handed over the presidency to Habibie at the State Palace, but also how the scores of students still present at the Parliament cried out in victory, ran up the rooftop of the main building to celebrate, and jumped into the pond on the compound, dancing, singing, and waving the national flag. The students had won. The drama had reached ‘The End’.

Yet, for the students the battle was not over yet. Forkot immediately rejected Habibie and continued to demonstrate at the site. But after the Friday prayers, a few thousand students and youth from Islamic organisations supporting Habibie arrived and took over the speakers’ platform, and the two groups almost clashed. Security guards now began ousting students from the buildings. At ten that night, the remaining students were warned that their safety could no longer be guaranteed; Kostrad troops entered the building, and the situation turned tense. It was only after the arrival at midnight of the Indonesian Marines, which were known to be more sympathetic to the students, that the students were persuaded to evacuate. With the Parliament cleared of the students, Suharto no longer in office, and calm restored, attention began shifting to the narrative of the Angkatan 98.

After Suharto’s resignation, motorcades drove through cities expressing the sense of victory for the student movement. For weeks and months to come, many students continued to revel in the glory of victory. They felt they had been part of something monumental, not as witnesses, but as agents of history. Students who had not taken part in earlier protests but joined the occupation of Parliament took this experience with them as a life-long badge of honour. As Hidayat (1999: 358–359) notes, there was a strong ‘urge to be part of the history in the making’, and being there fulfilled that urge:

For example, this statement by a student to his friend when they were watching pictures of student action in a weekly, ‘What will you tell your child later when he asks: Father did you take part in overthrowing the dictator Suharto back in 1998?’ And one nephew showing his uncle an English magazine showing pictures of the occupation of Parliament, saying ‘Look at this Oom... I stood at the rooftop of that building’.

Zooming in on the occupation of Parliament as the key, iconic event of the 1998 student saga – representing both the climax and the closure of the historic drama, and the end of an era – made it easy for myths of spontaneity to displace the months of mobilisation. The myth of an Angkatan 98 – a new student movement seemingly coming from nowhere and united in action, again forcing a long-seated ruler to resign – further obscured the political dynamics of mobilisation, as it was embellished with all sorts of references to heroism, from Soe Hok Gie’s ‘righteous cowboy’ to contemporary icons, such as ‘Superman’, ‘Rambo’, and
even Arnold Schwarzenegger’s Terminator. Others stayed closer to the messianic conception of the student movement: KAMMI referred to its movement as the ‘new Moses’. The stories and comparisons have one peculiarity in common: each represents a heroic yet essentially solitary and passing character, who will only reveal his existence and power in critical times. Not political actors.

But many student activists felt that ‘The End’ had come too soon. Their plans to consolidate and expand their movement were interrupted. Some had scheduled the climax of Suharto’s fall for Independence Day, on 17 August; others had 10 November, Heroes Day, in mind, which would give them more time to develop broad alliances and long-term strategies. Yodi recalled that Suharto’s resignation was not their main goal since they had a bigger transition in mind: ‘The plan was there, a blueprint for a transition government after the fall of Suharto, designed to separate the reformists from the non-reformists, to block the non-reformists, that was important.’ They concluded that Suharto’s resignation was a quasi-victory that allowed the political elite to remain in power without having to account for their crimes. As Sitha put it: ‘Those people responsible for the New Order all got away, they had all the time to change masks’, which made her and many others suspect that Suharto’s sudden resignation was a tactic to block the possibility of ‘the forces of students, opposition, and the people truly uniting into an immense force’. Suharto’s resignation, which still came unexpected to observers, also led to another type of speculation: that the student movement had served as ABRI’s pawns. As one *Newsweek* (1 June 1998) headline read: ‘A Bloodless Coup by Manipulating Indonesia’s Student Protesters, the Military Ousted Suharto’.

In most accounts, then, the seemingly ‘spontaneous’, ‘leaderless’, and ‘united’ student movement was the indisputable star group of the drama, but the students were not seen as actors in their own right. Whether as ‘pawns’ of the ‘real actors’ at the top, or as ‘heroes’ riding the waves of history, the public narratives of the 1998 student saga essentially decoupled the student movement from activism – as was generally the effect of the Angkatan title, seen also for the Angkatan 66. Yet, beyond the public narratives, in the course of their political experiences and interactions in the intense months before Suharto’s resignation, the students had developed new narratives about themselves that spawned a strong sense of political agency and identity. It was with this sense of political agency and identity that the students entered the new social drama of the *reformasi* era, intent to push through what they failed to accomplish in May 1998. For them, this period of ‘stammering’ as the star group on the public stage was mainly important for teaching them valuable political lessons. This was only the beginning.
13

Transition as Practice: Learning Politics in the Era of Reform

Politics of a New Era

After the long Suharto era of political restrictions, the era of reform saw a burst of political opinion and participation, revved up by several liberalisation measures. Free elections were announced for June 1999 and the ban on political organising was lifted, which led to the founding of around 150 new parties; forty-eight were admitted to the elections. Moreover, press censorship laws were revoked, which led to a surge of new media outlets – from magazines catering to Islamic groups that had been underrepresented in the New Order mediascape, to sensationalist tabloids filled with political commentary and gossip in a tone unthinkable during the New Order – each exposing and sharpening political opinions that had previously been suppressed. Political debate was further spurred by the burgeoning of public seminars and talk shows in which students were prominent participants. A notable example was the weekly television show Student Debate that aired on the former state channel TVRI. Hosted by a former 1980s student activist, Fadjroel Rachman, the show featured a student debating contest on political topics, which frequently led to provocative statements made by participants and students in the audience. This vibrant public sphere created a sense of great expectancy; reformasi was in the air, and everyone could be part of it. As Habibie declared in his Independence Day address on 17 August 1998, this was the new ‘era of the rise of democracy’. Yet, the New Order was not completely gone.

The name of Habibie’s cabinet, the Development and Reform Cabinet, indicated not only the government’s concession to reform but also its lasting loyalty to New Order political culture. Hence, despite the promise of liberalisation, the era of reform – which spanned three rapidly succeeding presidents: B.J. Habibie (until October 1999), Abdurrahman Wahid (until August 2001), and Megawati Sukarnoputri (until October 2004) – resulted in what Caldeira and Holston (1999: 692) call a ‘disjunctive democracy’, in which the democratisation of political institutions was not accompanied by the structural improvement of civil rights; in such ‘uncivil political democracies, violence, injustice, and impunity are often the norms’. If anything, the demise of the New Order state entailed a decentralisation
and privatisation of corruption and violence, in which political ‘gangsterism’ ('premanisme'), or the deployment of organised thugs (preman) for intimidation, took flight. This also dampened the new freedom of press; news agencies that exposed names behind corruption cases continued to receive phone threats, and now also found their offices or personnel attacked by hired thugs.\(^1\) In the era of reform violence was rampant, including bloody ethnic and religious conflicts, military war against separatists, terror attacks, a rise in organised crime and vigilante justice, and the worst violent repression of student protest seen in Indonesian history. The army not only framed the violence in the familiar language of ‘infiltration’, but also as the result of the power vacuum left by the fall of the strong-arm state – which they had always warned against. The state, though, was ‘implicated by providing the political circumstances’ in which the New Order culture of violence, with its ‘preman as paradigm’, was sustained (Lindsey 2001: 284).

But this culture of violence was now related to a fractured political field that was characterised by a ‘politics of cow bartering’, as it was called, or opportunist negotiations and deals that were never stable. The game of politics became more muddled. The spectrum of political forces ranged from what Bourchier (2000: 16) calls the ‘status quo forces’ (Golkar and the army), to ‘moderate reformists’ (including the main political party leaders), to the ‘radicals’ (the students and other prodemocracy activists calling for ‘total reform’) – and none controlled the rules of the game. Moreover, these positions were now fluid and uncertain: ‘moderate reformists’ could turn out to be ‘status quo forces’, or could be pulled to the ‘radical’ side by the students, and the student movement was also beset by conflicting stances and claims. As the removal of Suharto provided an opportunity for other groups to join the political game, the student movement became just one among many pressure groups – albeit the only one carrying the label ‘agent of change’, which added certain expectations, and limits, to their role.

While the students seized the new opportunities granted to them as legitimate political actors who others must reckon with, old myths of student struggle continued to obscure their respective political positions. Even in the atmosphere of political liberalisation, ‘politics’ thus remained taboo as the opposite of student ‘autonomy’ and ‘unity’ in struggle. This resulted in a tension that Mische (2008: 184) also notes among student activists in mid-1990s Brazil: as ‘partisan actors’, they were deeply entangled in political battles ‘over the shape, style, and direction of student politics’, yet they waged these battles ‘in the name of civic non-partisanship’ – as ‘the kiss of death for any would-be slate of [student] leaders would be to admit association with any kind of political party’ – hence perpetuating an ‘enforced climate of civic non-partisanship’ that complicated ‘constructive cross-partisan dialogue’. Caldeira and Holston (1999) cite Brazil as a prime example of
a ‘disjunctive democracy’, which suggests that the tension between political partisanship and the taboo on participating in it was not simply an internal issue of youth movements in Brazil, as was also said of the Indonesian student movement, but was a response to an ‘uncivil’ political culture in which politics, corruption, and violence went hand in hand.

In Indonesia, the tension was further sustained by contradictory public expectations: students should involve themselves in politics yet also remain a ‘moral force’. Student activists, including those ‘radicals’ who dismissed the students-as-moral-force myth, therefore tended to keep up an ‘anti-politics’ persona. During my research, I had many exchanges like the following:

Me: ‘Wow, you’re really good in politics!’
Student: ‘Ouch, how can you say that, I’m not a politician!’
Me: ‘Are you sure?’
Student: ‘Damn sure, I stay far away from politics’.

In contrast to the New Order era, when rebellious teenagers fantasised about ‘becoming a politician’ due to the taboo surrounding all things political (see Chapter 9), in the reform era – when all things political were not only magnified but also surrounded with scandal – the term ‘politician’ was a slur. A common joke was that the word ‘politikus’ (politician) contained the word ‘tikus’, or rat. Due to the negative connotations of opportunism, gangsterism, and corruption, it was logical for students to distance themselves from that image, especially as they began to face allegations of engaging in ‘dirty politics’ and ‘money politics’ themselves.

However, in the highly politicised and antagonistic era of reform – in which students were no longer the star group yet remained a prominent special category of public actors – they inevitably became political players, who further helped to redefine the post-New Order game of politics. But this also meant that they had to redefine themselves and the very meaning of student struggle. Given the violence, the new opportunities and demands, and the undecided direction of the political change that was underway, the student movement also found itself in a period of uncertain transition in which students had to improvise and instantly bring into practice new ways of political action and being. In this process, new rules were set and rituals created on the spot, conventional codes contested, repertoires re-adjusted, old stories revived, and new stories spun – all in an ongoing battle for political agency and identity, one that evaded the label ‘political’. The story of the student movement’s development in the era of reform is often reduced to simple tales about its goals and failures. But this overlooks the significance of experience in the political process – the experience of transition as practice – and, in the end, this experience was all that lasted.
Taking Stock and Getting Organised

After Suharto’s resignation, ‘The End’ of the drama that gave birth to reforms and the Angkatan 98, the final phase of ‘taking stock’ should have set in, according to Turner’s (1974) concept of social drama (see Chapter 12). But taking stock of the drama was difficult, when it was succeeded by one new drama after another. Still, many observers as well as actors felt compelled to take stock, and were quick to conclude that the 1998 student movement was flawed. Sociologists and human rights activists Prasetyantoko and Indriyo (2001: 80–82) sum up the ‘weaknesses of the 1998 student movement’:

The students seem to mobilise for heroism, not for the material needs of the common people. This allows political elites to construct the student movement as a moral and magical movement. [Because some] students are motivated by egotistic actualisation and fulfilment of temporary heroism, [they] neglect recruitment and cadre building, [so that the student movement only] grows as an empty bubble, not supported by a strong organisation. [Their] choice of strategic issues is weak; this indicates a bias in their interests, or lack of understanding of the situation and the field. Since the students are a product of the New Order, their way of thinking and ideology is superficial. Their choice of issues that are not based in people’s interests indicates their distance from the people. The student movement further lacks strong roots in community organisation. Splits are caused by eksistensi, style of mobilisation, and difference of opinion. The students are too arrogant, and thus neglect key principles in mass organisation [and fail to advocate] a clear direction in the reform process.

Although many student activists would agree with some of this criticism, it generalises a highly heterogeneous movement, treating it as a unified entity. Further, it evaluates the movement as if it were fully formed, yet it was only after the ‘heroism’ of 1998, in the subsequent process of learning and playing politics, that this student movement truly took shape. After Suharto’s fall, while continuing the protests for ‘total reform’, student activists resumed the process of consolidation that the events in May had interrupted: forging inter-city alliances and determining common strategies and agendas. Concepts that had emerged during the anti-Suharto mobilisation were developed further, and ‘spontaneity’ and ‘leaderlessness’ gradually made way for solid organisations. Yet, this process continued to be hampered by sentiments of frustration and distrust, indicating deeper disagreements on what it meant to be a student activist in a context of political transition. Therefore there was much organisational volatility, marked by expansion, consolidation, and painful splits.

Forkot, to start with, continued the struggle in its own way. Following a meeting with students from other cities on 25 May, they launched a concept for a tran-
sitional government called Indonesian People’s Committee, or KRI, which would replace the parliament, draft new political laws, organise elections, and then dissolve itself when the new parliament appointed a new president, whose first task should be to put Suharto and his cronies to trial (Abdullah 1998: 45). The role of students in this process would be limited to pushing the KRI’s formation and not to become part of it, since the student movement should remain an autonomous pressure group, using ‘a moral modus operandi’ (Abdullah 1998: 51). In June, to promote this concept, Forkot paraded through Jakarta in dozens of buses – with students waving flags and banners from atop the vehicles, which became its signature style of action – strategically selecting its routes through middle-class and lower-class areas.

But Forkot was also the first organisation to be marred by splits. Considering Forkot’s strategy to be ‘too sectoral’ (i.e., limited to students), in July one group of students formed the Student and People’s Committee for Democracy, Komrad, which focused on the rakyat’s economic interests and began organising among urban poor (Miftahuddin 2004: 172). Different from Forkot, it also adopted clear leadership structures and an ideology of ‘populist democratic socialism’, which revealed its ties with PRD. It adopted PRD’s concept for a transitional government, called People’s Council, which would be composed of councils representing each sector in society, including students, but otherwise had similar targets as Forkot’s KRI.

The largest splinter group from Forkot was the Student Action Front for Reforms and Democracy, Famred, which ostensibly split over disagreements about the use of violence. Distinguishing itself from Forkot’s violent tactics, Famred adopted a strategy of ‘active nonviolence’, rejecting action schemes that promised a clash yet not eschewing violence when attacked. But, as co-founder Sammi told me, the real reason was the occurrence of ‘money politics’ among his comrades. For him this was a painful affair, especially once it also became an issue in Famred, but it taught him valuable lessons about the need for clear rules of the game:

I knew this could happen. I had often imagined bad things like this might happen. My reading in cultural studies, social movement literature, and history had prepared me for that, so when it happened I wasn’t surprised. I knew that in each struggle there would be traitors, conspirators. But I was very disappointed. So, we started Famred because we suspected some of our friends were no longer independent. Our principle was to be nonpartisan, but then some took the debate in certain directions; suddenly ideas entered the discussion that didn’t make sense. We had also agreed not to accept money, but then some did, and they’d just say, ‘We got it not in Forkot’s name, but for our campus’, and their campus cliques would defend them out of solidarity. It was hard to keep in check since we were a fluid organisation; no one was a formal member so it was difficult. Our rules for the game were unclear. But it didn’t feel right, and others felt it
Playing Politics

As we split, my suspicions proved to be correct; the people I suspected turned out to be bastards, they soon had luxury houses, a Mercedes Benz.

And then [one year later], the same thing happened in Famred, an abuse of trust. That was more difficult for me since this guy was my friend; we were close from the start. But I heard again and again that he had gone wrong, and others urged me to evaluate this. So we confronted him, put him on trial. But he denied, he said it was character assassination, and it came to a fight. So that hurt. He was honest when we entered [the movement], but that’s how it starts, with honest intentions, and then they get a small compensation for this or that, and in the end a demonstration is ordered. There were too many practices like that; in those days it was easy to get rich as an activist – one hundred, five hundred million, or three billion rupiah was easy. But I was infuriated by those who succumbed to that, because those in power were also committing character assassination towards us in the movement, so these rumours hit the whole movement, and that was really bad. People would stop trusting the student movement, and it would take years to clear a name. It’s unforgivable because of that.

Before this incident, Sammi recalled, Famred ‘developed pretty well; in those days it was the most solid organisation’. After ‘things got messed up because of that crisis of trust’, they still decided to continue using the ‘solid name’ of Famred in public, while joining an emerging national organisation: FPPI (see below). But this required some scheming:

Those who sold out the organisation said they wanted Famred to stay autonomous. It’s about clans, they didn’t want to obey the national FPPI leadership; they had their own interests. So in the end, those of us who were frustrated made a scheme. We turned Famred into FPPI Jakarta, but in public it was still Famred. Only when our name got smeared in public did we split into FPPI Jakarta. That’s when the other regions were also formalised as FPPI [in 2000–2001].

KB-UI, meanwhile, had to reinvent itself, as the five faculty student senates of which it was composed withdrew after Suharto’s resignation. The more informal organisation it evolved into rather strengthened its internal and external relations. ‘Once the senate elites were out’, Rio recalled, ‘our network became stronger, it was much more solid without them; there was no more infighting, only debate on technical issues’. The new KB-UI consisted of ten informal groups at UI, and no longer had a presidium, ‘just plenary meetings that united it all’, with teams for the posko, logistics, security, and ‘external relations’ tasked with setting up national alliances. Rio, who was part of the latter team, recalled the ‘intimate’ atmosphere of reaching out to activists in other cities:

People from other cities visited us to check out the situation in Jakarta, but since they didn’t know where to reach us, sometimes they went to the senate by mistake, ha-ha;
wrong address! When we went to other cities it was also on a hunch; for example, we heard there would be an action in Yogya but we didn’t know whose it was, so we just went there. Luckily, when we arrived, we didn’t have to search for long; the flags were visible from afar. So we stumbled upon that action, and started chatting, ‘Hey, we’re from Jakarta’. It was all on visible signs that we found each other. Yeah, that was our pre-technology prehistory. It was much more intimate then. We were always warmly welcomed, and it clicked, as if we had known each other for ages; we got acquainted, shared experiences. It was fun, being on the road.

Many groups began working towards a national organisation. The first such initiative emerged right after Suharto’s departure, called National Front for Total Reform; it included eleven groups from ten cities, but it collapsed after barely one month. The groups involved then tried another organisation, called Democratic Alliance, which staged a national action on 14 September against ABRI’s *dwifungsi*, but this alliance, too, collapsed. Yet the national contacts were established, and in 1999 they would meet again in a series of national platforms, which eventually became LMND (see below).

The only organisation that had a national structure from its inception was the Islamic KAMMI. After its first congress in October 1998, it was also the first student action group that transformed into a societal ‘mass organisation’ (similar to NGO), so as to expand its activities beyond mere demonstrations, such as social service programs. Yet, they remained known for their mass demonstrations, in which they mainly targeted corruption. In September, for example, they targeted corruption at the National Logistics Agency, or Bulog, the agency responsible for the distribution of basic commodities, which would remain a target of student protests in the following years. By then, KAMMI’s unequivocal support for Amien Rais had somewhat abated, as the students found their political aspirations channelled in the new Justice Party (PK), which had the same basis in campus mosque associations, and many KAMMI members soon joined this party. Yet this made KAMMI all the more suspect in the eyes of their ‘radical’ peers, and relations between them worsened in the following years.

Indeed, existing divisions within the student movement – between an ‘Islamic right-wing’, ‘radical left-wing’, and an ‘opportunistic middle’ – hardened after 1998. Still, the students commonly agreed on six demands that became known as the student movement’s ‘vision for reform’. These were: constitutional amendment; revocation of ABRI’s *dwifungsi*; supremacy of law; far-reaching regional autonomy; development of a rational and egalitarian democratic culture; an end to corruption, and putting Suharto and his cronies to trial. But the students did not agree on which stance to take towards the People’s Consultative Assembly’s Special Session (SI MPR), which would be held between 10 and 13 November to
ratify Habibie’s government, prepare for elections, and set the general agenda for reforms. While KAMMI took a wait-and-see approach, the ‘radicals’ rejected the MPR session as a farce, since it involved the same New Order officials and thus provided an opportunity for them to reconsolidate their power. It was a difference that the regime keenly exploited.

**Resuming Action, Reviving Ghosts**

While the students were getting organised, the status quo forces fell back on old scenarios. In August, rumours of looming unrest were heard, and soon mysterious killings occurred in Banyuwangi, East Java, where dozens of Islamic clerics and *dukun* were murdered by men allegedly wearing ninja outfits. ABRI Commander Wiranto insinuated that this was an act of revenge by PKI descendants, as Banyuwangi used to be a PKI stronghold, and the murdered clerics were reportedly former members of NU’s youth wing Ansor who took part in the anti-PKI massacre in 1965. Few believed the story, which rather raised suspicions of an ABRI plot ahead of the MPR session. As O’Rourke (2002: 172) suggests, it might have been meant to keep moderate reformists from supporting the radical students, since it ‘drove [the NU chair] Wahid into the arms of Wiranto’s military, whose help he pleaded to stop the killings’. But Wiranto stuck to the story, making several statements ‘to remind the nation that the latent threat of communism still exists and must be countered’; he further insinuated that those who doubted that communists were behind the killings were communist sympathisers seeking to perpetuate the national crisis.² Whom he had in mind became clear in September.

On 7 September, Forkot staged a rally at the Parliament, demanding Habibie’s resignation, and after a scuffle with security forces they tore down the gate and forced their way into the compound. Thereafter, all roads to the Parliament were closed for twenty-four hours, causing the capital to come to a standstill. Forkot’s action was not the only one held in Jakarta or other cities, but it marked a turn in public reactions. Media reports highlighted the nuisance of traffic jams caused by student protests, and officials warned that they impeded economic recovery and weakened the Rupiah, which dropped from Rp. 10,000 to Rp. 12,300 to the dollar right after Forkot’s action, or rather, after the authorities’ response. The students were thus reframed from heroes to scapegoats for the continuing economic slump. ABRI warned that the student actions threatened national stability, and rumours (partly correct, yet still misleading) circulated that Forkot was funded by opposition actors who were part of the National Front (Barisan Nasional).³

Habibie’s supporters, mostly from Islamic organisations, began mobilising in his defence. On 14 September, one group rallied at the Parliament, and banners appeared across Jakarta: ‘Beware of the communist danger’, ‘[Beware of a] third
PKI uprising in September 1998’, ‘Riots, looting, terror, instability, sabotage PKI style’, and ‘Communists, NASAKOM, PRD, Forkot, all the same: creators of riots and anarchy’ (Van Dijk 2001: 334). On 24 September, Habibie stated that (student) demonstrations had turned anarchistic, and he instructed ABRI to take firm action against groups seeking to destabilise the country. The Islamic newspaper Republika then came out with a front-page headline stating ABRI would be on its guard against the ‘30-S Forkot movement’, a phrase also used by the information minister, and leaflets were spread in mosques and campuses calling Forkot ‘Front Operasi Rakyat Komunis Total’, or ‘people’s operation front for total communism’ (Van Dijk 2001: 333–34). On 30 September, the anniversary of the 1965 coup attempt, an anticommunist mass rally was held at the Istiqlal Mosque. Finally, in his ABRI Day address on 5 October, Habibie also named names, warning against a ‘revolutionary radical movement’ consisting of the National Front, the National Coalition for Democracy, and Forkot.

Yet this movement was larger than that and not as solid as the regime depicted it to be. In Jakarta it took the form of an alliance called United People’s Action, or Akrab (which translates as ‘intimate’), involving Forkot, Famred, FKSMJ, KB-UI, Komrad, various smaller groups, the National Coalition for Democracy, and PRD. The intent was to use this alliance for joint mobilisation during the MPR session. On 28 October, Youth Pledge Day, as demonstrations were staged across the country, Akrab staged the largest rally since May with ten thousand students at the Parliament. Thereafter, though, the alliance no longer properly functioned due to tactical disagreements and mutual distrust. Hence, their common demands remained poorly worked out, which allowed the state to reframe their call to ‘reject the MPR session’ into the ‘much more provocative language of “disrupt” or “cause (the session) to fail”’, creating the impression that they were ‘forcing their own will upon others through unilateral action’ (McRae 2001: 49). Still, the students pushed on with their action plans.

Performing Mass Power

Tensions rose in the weeks before the MPR session, with ominous headlines suggesting the likelihood of mass violence. Such concerns were exacerbated by the formation of a civil defence group, Pam Swakarsa (Voluntary Security Guards), which in early November arrived in Jakarta by the thousands to defend Habibie and the MPR session. Wiranto denied any part in its formation, yet he welcomed it as a manifestation of the people’s concern for the success of the MPR. Clearly recognisable by their koranic headbands and the bamboo spears and daggers they carried, Pam Swakarsa were prominently present at military security blockades and pro-Habibie Islamic rallies. Two days before the MPR session, they began
patrolling the city in open trucks, yelling slogans in support of Habibie and the MPR, and: ‘Kill Forkot! Kill students! Allahuakbar!’ When they passed the Atma Jaya University, known as a Forkot stronghold, the militia assaulted the campus with rocks.

Forkot retorted with a pamphlet that cleverly inverted the allegations it had been facing: ‘When Pam Swakarsa are formed and when they are then also armed we are shocked. What is wrong with the state? Pam Swakarsa is clearly similar to what PKI did in the 1960s with its formation of the fifth force (arming civilians). It is truly the same pattern as PKI used in the past’ (quoted in Hoed, Widjojo, and Noorsalim 2005: 151). This sarcastic response from a group that had been under severe attack reflected the students’ confidence. Indeed, the deployment of Pam Swakarsa had returned public sympathy to the students, raising the public support that they would need in the battles to come. On 7 November, 159 university rectors issued a statement urging ABRI to protect the students ‘who, they hastened to emphasise, acted as a moral and intellectual force in striving for reforms’ (Van Dijk 2001: 345). Others also came to the students’ defence; however, this did not include the elite opposition leaders.

Initially, the students hoped that they could get the most influential opposition leaders – Rais, Wahid, Megawati, and Yogyakarta Governor Sultan Hamengkubuwono X (who played an important role in May in pushing for reform) – to take a seat in the presidium of a transitional government. In early November, FKSMJ and student organisations from ITB and Siliwangi University (Tasikmalaya) began preparing a meeting with these leaders; they drafted a joint statement and had it approved by the deputy chairs of Rais’s party PAN, Wahid’s party PKB, and Megawati’s party PDI-P (with the added ‘P’ for ‘perjuangan’, or struggle). But there was no response from the leaders. Losing patience, on 7 and 8 November the students went to Wahid’s and then Megawati’s residences to persuade them, but both were absent. On 9 November, reportedly inspired by the 1945 Sukarno–Hatta kidnapping by pemuda (see Chapter 4), they ‘kidnapped’ Rais at the Jakarta airport on his return from a work visit, took him to Wahid’s residence and then Megawati’s, yet again found both absent. On 10 November, the four leaders finally met at Wahid’s residence in Ciganjur, South Jakarta, while the students stood guard. But the students were to be disappointed. The ‘Ciganjur Agreement’ that the four leaders produced fully endorsed the MPR session; although it included some of the issues on the students’ agenda – free and fair elections and an end to corruption – it proposed only a gradual reduction of ABRI’s dwifungsi over a period of six years, and was filled with New Order rhetoric on the need to uphold Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, and the unitary state. Reluctantly, the students involved still accepted the agreement, but the more radical students viewed it as a
sign of elite betrayal. Indeed, its effect was that it marginalised the struggle for ‘total reform’, leaving the students vulnerable to harsh attacks.

During the MPR session, Jakarta became a military bastion. Many offices, shops, and schools were closed, and Jakarta residents who could afford it escaped to Singapore. Yet, the students persisted with their plans of staging massive long marches across the city, undeterred by intimidation by Pam Swakarsa, with whom they frequently clashed. In facing the militia, students found unexpected support from local residents, who took offense at Pam Swakarsa’s presence in their neighbourhoods and often jumped to the students’ defence. This also happened at the Proclamation Monument – a park in Central Jakarta with the statues of Sukarno and Hatta reading the Proclamation of Independence – which the students had declared to be their main demonstration site. On 9 November, residents prevented Pam Swakarsa from occupying the site, chasing them away with rocks, so that, the next day, the thousands of students from KB-UI, Famred, and other groups arriving from Salemba could use the park as planned for a mock ‘People’s MPR’. But the sense of threat remained, and as predicted, the following days saw frequent bouts of violence.

The next day, feeling that the park ‘was no longer sterile’, as KB-UI activist Dani put it, since ‘all sorts of groups came in who also used the term People’s MPR but were out to mess it up’, the students decided to vacate the site and head for the Parliament. They began marching, joined by many residents, but a few streets further they were blocked by an army barricade. Then, a UI student (who according to Dani was ‘messed up’) drove a car into the barricade, injuring seven soldiers. In the ensuing clash students and journalists were severely beaten. If this incident tarnished the students’ image, the opposite happened later in Jakarta, when a car crashed into a group of student protesters; the students prevented by-standers from burning the car, where they found a police officer’s identity card. On 12 November, the students again marched to the Parliament from their base camps in Salemba, taking a detour through densely populated areas. Along the route numerous people joined them, swelling the masses to some 100,000 demonstrators. Half-way through the march, they strategically split into two, taking different routes. But as they approached the target, the one group clashed with security forces at Atma Jaya, while the other was attacked near the police headquarters by Kostrad forces using rubber bullets. One police officer and a high school student were killed; over one hundred students were hospitalised. Other groups were attacked by Pam Swakarsa.

The violence was a setback but not a deterrent, as the students came prepared. ‘We had a sophisticated infrastructure with clear field roles’, so several told me. Each action had field coordinators or korlap (koordinator lapangan) with a team of assistants, tasked with directing the masses and overseeing the situation, as
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well as a negotiation team, logistics team, medical team, and security team. Dani explained that korlap also had bodyguards, which was no unnecessary luxury:

I was korlap, so when they began shooting near [the police headquarters] I was on top of the command car. I still tried to keep everyone in control: ‘calm, calm’. Luckily I had a bodyguard, so when a soldier took hold of me as I jumped off the car, my bodyguard saved me, and we ran together. I still got hit by a stick, but I survived. It was like a movie, heroic. So yes, each korlap had a bodyguard; wherever you went he would be around to protect you; whenever you stopped to talk with someone, he would check the situation – look left, right. It felt like being a VIP. We called them paspampres.

The use of the term ‘paspampres’, the official designation of the presidential security troops (pasukan pengamanan presiden), indicated the students’ mimicry as well as mockery of the official military structure in action; mimicry, as these field roles proved to be effective, and mockery, given the students’ staunch antimilitarism. As Yodi noted (see Chapter 9), the experience many students had in school brawls had prepared them for these roles on the battle field. But Yodi also mentioned the significance of the earlier discussions within KB-UI, in April and May, on whether to prevent or condone violence (see Chapter 12). Back then, this led to heated debates, but thereafter ‘dialectical progress’ was made on the issue, so that ‘we [KB-UI students] were now among the most organised in facing the military’. Besides assigning field roles and tasks, they prepared specific tactics to deal with any possible situation in the field, including worst-case scenarios. Considering his previous hesitancy over sending ‘sweet UI kids’ out on the streets, Yodi was impressed:

Of course, things didn’t go exactly as planned. Especially when communication between korlap broke down, because mobile phones and pagers got lost in the scuffle; and we also lost some korlap, some got separated, and one was hit – he fainted – but then someone else instantly took over. Yeah, it was impressive. Of course, people first panicked and cried or prayed when there was escalation – many prayed, perhaps to regain strength and faith – but that was only for a moment. Then everyone went back in line, stayed put as planned, moved forward as planned. That’s why there was no demoralisation when we were attacked; we were prepared.

Yet, what most impressed Yodi and other students was the people’s participation. As Yodi said, this had the crucial effect of removing the ‘trauma’ of the May riots: ‘In May we didn’t have a reference yet for dealing with the people, so we still used exclusive symbols of student identity to separate ourselves’. Now, they ‘experimented with destroying the myth’; the rallies and marches were open for people to join, and an unexpected number did. This meant that the students had to
set new rules on the spot ‘for controlling the situation’, but this proved to be less complicated than expected: ‘So, just like that, we had real collective action, with mass ranks in demonstrations; we proved that it’s possible to have one demonstration, one mass protest action with students and people united – despite all the provocation, and all the rumours that there would be anarchy and riots’.

Indeed, while there was plenty of violence, it was nothing like the chaos of the 1974 Malari riots as many people had feared, which had since served as a trope of danger to keep students and the people apart (see Chapter 7). The sense of mass power generated by this successful union in collective action was unparalleled in the students’ experience; in fact, it was unparalleled in the entire history of preceding postcolonial student movements. Hence, many students invoked the stories of the pemuda revolution in 1945, when educated youth and the people had also fought side by side (see Chapter 4). Because of this spirit of mass power, these days of street protest in Jakarta lodged in the students’ memories more than the iconic student occupation of Parliament in May. This was their key event, since it demonstrated that the promise of ‘people power’ was not a mere fantasy.

The people seemed to sense it, too, considering the outpouring of mass support. Years later, participants still vividly remembered how people cheered them as they passed by, offering snacks, drinks, and other supplies; some food vendors suspended their business for the day to donate food to the students. Emotionally, Sitha recalled how, when she took a brief rest during a march, she was offered a ramshackle bike by an elderly, destitute man: ‘This is all I have’, he said, ‘please take it for your struggle for the people’. After this day’s clashes, residents near the Parliament offered shelter to hundreds of exhausted students, spontaneously setting up traditional neighbourhood watches (siskamling) to guard the students as they were resting. Statements of support also fired up the spirit, such as that given by the father of one of the victims of the Trisakti shootings in May: ‘I’m proud to see the students continue the struggle and not forsake the sacrifice of their fallen comrades’. But the euphoria of mass collective action was not to last.

**Showdown: Bloody Semanggi**

On Friday, 13 November, the final day of the MPR session, ABRI warned Jakartans to stay indoors. In the morning, UI and other students began marching from Salemba, while twenty thousand protesters, mostly from Famred, had reached the final rallying point: the Atma Jaya campus at the end of Sudirman Road and the entry of the Semanggi cloverleaf bridge, which leads into the road to the Parliament at a distance of less than three kilometres. For days, this route had been cut off by heavily armed troops, tanks, and high-voltage electrified barbed wire. As the students stood no chance of breaking through this barricade, they attempted to
Sammi, who led the negotiating team, recalled: ‘I told them that, if they let us through, we’d disperse from the Parliament at five pm; the idea was to cheat them till six, and then take it from there’.

While Sammi was negotiating, after the Friday prayers hundreds of Pam Swakarsa suddenly marched in, but bystanders attacked them, beating one of them to death, and the rest ran off. Students quickly moved to calm the crowd, which then came to blend with the student masses. Just as the students tried to organise them into orderly rows, with students forming a living shield at the front, tanks pulled in at the back, infuriating people who threw themselves in front of them. Tensions rose as ‘men in black’, presumably snipers, were seen on rooftops nearby; people began drumming on iron fences and throwing things at the troops. Suddenly, shots were fired, tear gas canisters thrown, and water cannons used, as the troops charged into the crowd. Sammi recalled:

I was still negotiating with that police officer, Sukarman. Then suddenly they began shooting: dor-dor-dor! That was it, everyone ran all over the place, and I – somehow I wasn’t scared but also not courageous or so, I just lost it, all feeling, last feeling, you know. I wasn’t hit, because I was negotiating at the front when it started, and the shots were directed at the masses. But I was chased – and we fled into campus at about four thirty. I felt at a loss. But after the evening prayer [at dawn] I went out again, I had to, and they just kept shooting.

While students fled into the campus, tensions rose further with the arrival of truckloads of Kostrad troops. There was a moment of relief when a Marines unit stopped by, whom the students greeted as allies. But at dawn, the Kostrad troops began charging, firing straight into the crowd. For over an hour the sound of rifles and screams filled the air. When the shooting subsided, the news reached the students that at least two of their comrades were killed. Students I spoke to recalled a ‘sinking feeling’ upon hearing the news. The students who had clashed since the start were also exhausted, but the spirit returned when thousands of UI students arrived from their long march. Moments after, the shooting resumed; troops took battle positions, crouching in between the trees in front of the campus and taking aim; shots and tear gas were also fired into the campus. Many students and residents fought back, with stones, signposts, and hastily crafted Molotov cocktails. The knowledge that fellow students had died came as a shock to many, but they had taken that risk into account, and after the first shock, as Yodi also mentioned, most students resumed their tasks. Sitha recalled:

With the shooting I was hysterical for a moment because of the shock. I was beaten, I had a rifle pointed at me, and they wanted to take me. I survived as I was pulled away
by journalists who helped me to climb over the Plaza Sentra gate. I was the last of my group to go as I wanted to make sure my group had taken cover. But I got hysterical when I saw a victim who looked like my kid sister. I was shocked, how could I help my friends but let my own sister become a victim? I cried and moaned it all out, but my seniors calmed me, telling me to stay strong as I still had to lead my group. I only calmed down when I heard that both my sisters and my group were safe. Instantly, I began recording data and helping the students from my faculty, though my back really hurt after the beating – I wanted to throw up the whole time. But I recalled Dad’s message that a good leader must always be willing to sacrifice oneself for the safety of his pupils. The only thing that relieved me was that I had taken care of my life insurance, so if anything happened to me, my parents wouldn’t have to worry about the costs.

At midnight, the Kostrad troops were replaced by riot police (Brimob). A war of nerves ensued between protesters, who yelled: ‘ABRI murderers!’ and Brimob troops, who responded with military battle songs; earlier, Kostrad troops had also sang patriotic battle songs to celebrate their victory over the students. Then the troops began attacking again, and the battle continued until the morning.

Different sources put the death toll between thirteen (the official figure) and twenty people, including at least six university students; hundreds of students and civilians were wounded. The next day, the funeral of the fallen students showed similar scenes as did the one six months earlier following the Trisakti incident. Right after the funeral, thousands of students marched to the Parliament to protest the excessive violence. They were blocked by Kostrad troops, until the Marines arrived and negotiated free passage; escorted by Marines, the students marched on to the Parliament, where the crowd swelled to thirty thousand. Sri Bintang Pamungkas and other opposition figures held speeches (but the ‘Ciganjur four’ were conspicuously absent), and again ‘Fallen Flower’ was sung.8 Again, there was a mass outpouring of public sympathy. However, unlike the ‘Trisakti Tragedy’, the ‘Semanggi Tragedy’, as it was called, did not become a political turning point, as the main political leaders remained silent.

The evening after the shootings, in a speech aired on all of the television channels each hour, Habibie stated that certain groups had acted ‘unconstitutionally’ by attempting to overthrow the government. The next day, National Front figures were arrested on charges of planning a conspiracy to overthrow the government, based on their declaration issued on 12 November (in response to the Ciganjur Agreement), which called for a ‘Reform MPR’ with the authority to form a transitional government. The arrests also intimidated other prodemocracy groups, who feared that ‘they would be accused of masterminding student demonstrations’ (McRae 2001: 52). Meanwhile, ABRI refused to take responsibility. According to Wiranto, ‘radical elements’ among the students had started the violence, to which some soldiers had reacted ‘overdefensively’; he vowed they would be punished.9
But the shady circumstances of the incident led to all sorts of rumours; some held that the violence was incited by ‘green army factions’ to discredit Wiranto, while others held Suharto responsible, since he and his family were named in the MPR decree to investigate corruption. In any case, Suharto rubbed salt in the wound by responding to the incident with the following statement: ‘[It] happened because the students’ aspirations were not heard and appreciated. If the government had respected them, the problem could have been overcome. I stepped down in May to avoid bloodshed – but unfortunately, it happens now’ (quoted in O’Rourke 2002: 185).

The MPR adopted the recommendations of the Ciganjur Agreement, including the decree to investigate corruption and a reduction of allocated parliament seats for the military. For HMI, KAMMI, Forum Salemba (a creation of the UI student senate), and other Islamic student organisations this result was satisfactory. But the student protesters were left empty-handed, and they had lost more than the battle, more than lives. As Sitha explained, they lost their trust in political leaders, opposition figures, and each other:

I was really sad; of course, about the loss of lives, but also because, again, I saw the lack of commitment to act together. All the groups walked by themselves, with the excuse that they had different action schemes. That’s the defeat of the prodemocracy groups. Each wanted to stand out, each wanted their scheme to be used, so it was easy for status quo groups to divide them; even Gus Dur [Wahid’s nickname] said that the Semanggi action was paid for by the CIA. It was so disappointing. The middle group didn’t want to act, saying wait and see. The right-wing didn’t want to act since this was a left-wing setting. How hard could it be to unite while we had the same goal? I was most angry with [FKSMJ]. I’m fine with them kidnapping elites, but they should’ve taken them straight to Semanggi as a test case, to see their capacity to lead the people. Now, they were removed from the people and given a mandate of power without conditions. Terrible! When I heard about it, I was in Semanggi. I was so upset, I threw my food and scolded them: ‘Bastards!’ Most annoying was that the elites who claimed to be pro-reform were scared to turn to the streets, while hundreds of thousands of people were ready to be led. Only Faisal Basri and Sri Bintang Pamungkas came to Semanggi, and not for long as they also got a beating. Imagine if the leaders had joined and led the people to the Parliament. We could’ve had a revolution. We would’ve had a people power movement.

Semanggi was the closing of a phase. Due to the instant disillusionment, after days of a spirited high, the emotional cuts incurred from small conflicts left deep scars, which turned into permanent sentiments, as many contradictory claims and mutual accusations were made after the event. Students accused each other of betrayal, cowardice, irresponsibility, naivety, unreliability, arrogance, egotism, and
so on; even in my interviews with them four years later, the emotions remained intense. As Yodi said: ‘It all dropped after Semanggi; with all the deep divisions, we had to start from zero again’.

**Marginalisation and Disorientation**

Still, student protests continued until the start of Ramadan one month later, and they became more aggressive, with the battle cry: ‘revolution until death’. Groups like Forkot radicalised further. ‘They force us to be violent’ – so read the opening text of a documentary on the 1998 student movement (mostly Forkot): *We Want Justice* (Saroengallo 2002). According to the documentary, after the Semanggi shootings the students were after revenge, and in the final scenes of the film – to the tune of heroic music – revenge is what they got. On 17 December, students again faced off with security forces at Semanggi, who blocked the way to Parliament, but this time the students managed to break through the barricade. As they faced a second barricade of security troops in front of the Parliament, again they breached the security lines – while singing the army’s war song, ‘Halo-Halo Bandung’ – ‘and forced the once-invincible security forces into retreat’, as the voice-over puts it. Despite firing warning shots, the troops had to run as students chased them and attacked them in their tents. Students had finally won a battle. This was an important psychological victory soon after the Semanggi incident. But it came at the cost of public sympathy.

The heightened aggression caused the public to question the students’ ‘moral’ nature. It further sparked public debates on what went ‘wrong’ with the student movement and which way it should turn next. A poll conducted in late December showed that the common opinion was that the student movement had lost focus. The respondents wished for the students to continue putting political pressure on the government, but in doing so to focus on the economic issues that people faced in their daily lives. Opinions were divided, though, on whether the students’ role should be limited to enforcing a political breakthrough, thereafter steering clear from politics in order to guard their ‘purity’ as a ‘moral force’, or whether they should start thinking about ‘political technicalities’ and forming strategic coalitions with other political forces, or even form a student party, in order to become more effective in reaching their goals. In any case, heavy expectations continued to be placed on the students’ shoulders.

Yet, while expectations of continued student action remained high, the room to do so was shrinking. For one thing, campus administrators became less tolerant. The rector of Atma Jaya set the tone by publishing a ‘white book’ on the Semanggi incident discrediting the student movement and PRD; its launch met with student protest, but outside the circle of activists at Atma Jaya, their protest found
little resonance or support. More detrimental to the student movement was that campus administrators began prohibiting the posko tents that had formed the heart of the student struggle, occasionally removing them by force. Further, academic lenience for student activists who had neglected their studies for the struggle was evaporating; students were warned they had better focus on the end-of-semester exams. Clearly, the political climate was shifting. This also affected campus politics, as the results of the student senate elections at the end of the year showed. At UI, the faculty student senates that had been previously won by the ‘radicals’ of KB-UI now fell back into the hands of HMI. Dani recalled:

So it was proven, once the ’98 rush was over, the same old faces again ruled campus. Their loss of influence spanned only those two terms, ’97 and ’98. After that they were back in the seat. So we lost, we weren’t ready to be in power. Yeah, that’s the biggest challenge, how to retain power, not how to win power. From the start, we weren’t prepared. Back then, the only reason we joined the election was to give them some competition, and we were shocked when we won. We won on the wind of change, and then we just went with the flow. And since we lacked the experience, we couldn’t defend that position. We weren’t trained in that. So for the opposition it was easy to attack us: ‘Where’s the work?’ Yeah, we weren’t experienced like them; they were champs in making proposals and reports – though that also included taking the money, losing it and putting it in their own pockets. We weren’t good at any of that.

The loss of senate positions indeed implied a loss of access to resources and facilities that the students had used for the struggle. Finally, apart from the loss of momentum and the changing campus climate, protests rapidly dwindled due to the implementation of a new law (No. 9/1998) that required official permission for demonstrations; protesters without such a license could be arrested and put on trial. The demonstrations that continued to be staged also lost the public’s attention, which now focused on the upcoming elections on 7 June 1999.

Students responded differently to the elections. Some groups, such as Forkot, rejected them and continued to focus on their own key issues; others, such as Famred, launched a ‘no-vote’ campaign. But most students accepted the first free elections, and many joined one of the various election watches set up with funds from domestic and international NGOs. Several students, especially those with established student senate positions, joined a political party. Moreover, as a token sign that students were taken seriously as political actors, UI student senate chair Rama Pratama and HMI chair Anas Urbaningrum were appointed to the official preparatory committee that also determined which parties could participate, while the General Elections Commission offered to allot five parliamentary seats to students. But this caused a controversy, as it raised memories of the student leaders
of 1966 who were lured into seats of power and thus ‘betrayed’ the struggle by accepting political rewards (see Chapter 6).

The uneasy relationship between ‘struggle’ and ‘politics’ was exemplified by PRD’s ambivalent stance, entering the elections with the slogan: ‘Boycott the elections, or choose PRD’. PRD reasoned that the elections would not solve anything, yet it joined as a legal party to use the momentum for campaigning. But many members disagreed with this stance. Agus, for example, decided to leave the party when it joined the elections:

For me, the line had to be clear. If you don’t like the system, don’t enter the system. If you get involved in the system, by joining the elections and so on, you’re just the same, a hypocrite. If you want to be an opposition movement, then be an opposition movement, no need to join the system. But it was an intense debate within PRD. And I felt that. I was also debated then. For me it wasn’t pure anymore, all sorts of interests played there, to be in power and so on.

Agus was not the only one; two branches withdrew from PRD over the issue, and it had ramifications for the radicals across the student movement, who also became divided over the elections. For many, it was not merely a strategy issue, but one that impinged on their sense of self. For Agus, to ‘join the system’ would contradict all he had lived through as a radical activist in the 1990s, when he made the decision to devote himself to grassroots organisation, and then to PRD as an extension of that, accepting the consequences of that choice (see Chapters 10 and 11). For him, the very idea of ‘getting involved’ in the violent system he had always opposed was not just strategically mistaken – it was wrong. But for the student activists one generation behind him taking a principled stance was not that simple, as they were burdened with many more contradictory expectations and interests, many more opportunities and myths, so much so that any political choice they made could be marked as ‘wrong’.

According to the younger PRD activist Tyo, it was not only ‘short-sighted’ but also ‘self-centred’ to reject making the next step into politics: ‘The disorientation in the student movement after Semanggi was profound, and it stagnated because they lacked a long-term vision, like sprinters who burn out before reaching the finish, so we had to intervene’. They did so by trying to join the student movement’s ‘progressive elements’ into a national organisation. However, Tyo noted: ‘Of course I didn’t play that by the name of PRD, no way, that could be an obstacle in relating to other groups; so the name we left out, the most important thing was the political program’.
Meeting and Breaking Up

One important arena for propagating political programs was the series of ‘national dialogues’ organised in the first half of 1999, which were meant to create a common platform to resolve the impasse and ‘reunite’ the student movement. Yet, in the climate of political competition and furtive interventions before the elections, they rather turned into political battle arenas, further exacerbating mutual distrust. As some activists recalled, this battle was accompanied by ‘dirty psychological warfare’. I heard stories of activists arriving at such meetings with ‘an army of bodyguards’ and armed with guns or swords, and how, at one point, all the doors were locked to force a breakthrough in the decision making, creating a situation of panic. To those involved, it was clear that this was ‘serious politics’, though still experienced as play.

One key meeting on the left side was the National Conference of Indonesian Students, or RNMI, held between 28 March and 5 April in Denpasar, Bali. Fifty-three organisations from across the country took part, including nineteen that had formed a coalition in an earlier meeting in Bandung in February, called National Front for Democracy, or Fondasi. Bali was chosen as a location to be far removed from the game of politics in Jakarta, yet the political battles at the conference were not much different from real politics. Rio recalled:

The debates were hot; there was a lot of friction. We debated about national issues – already acting like ministers! We had state management in mind. But there were differences; some viewed the state like this, others like that, and that was hotly debated. We proposed to form a transitional government; the form and concept we had all worked out. So we tried to convince them that this concept was right, like selling an idea, it was like marketing, persuading people, we lobbied. [Me: So you were really doing politics?] Well, something like that, maybe it was like playing politics, I don’t know. I don’t understand politics, Yatun! It could’ve been that.

While some participants, such as Tyo who couldn’t go by the name of PRD, quite deliberately did play politics, others arrived there with less conviction of the need for a national organisation, and they needed to be swayed over. For some, politics and spontaneity intermingled in the process. As Suliya from Semarang experienced the event:

We didn’t plan to build this, it just happened. We already agreed that we needed a national organisation because it’s no use to act in one place if nothing happens in another. So we were looking for contacts in the region, when we got the invitation to the RNMI. ‘Wah, that’s great’, we thought, now we could communicate the importance of a national organisation! I went there to represent my organisation; I went all by myself.
I always travelled alone, a girl by herself and one who drank [alcohol], that’s why people always remember me while I usually don’t remember them. In Bali I met so many people. It was a typical congress, but for me it was all new. So there were sessions; first to discuss the house rules, as usual this took a long time; then we read the national situation, which was the objective condition; then we read the subjective condition of the student movement; then we discussed strategy; then the program. We also gave a chance for our comrades from Aceh and Papua to speak, but even that became an issue; everything was an issue. You see, many didn’t feel the need yet for a national organisation; they only went as far as common issues and joint actions. So there was this whole theoretical warfare; some might have been given instructions – I wouldn’t know, I came there clueless from the regions. There was a lot of pulling, I was pulled from all sides, they whispered I shouldn’t be with them or them, because of this and that – from all sides! But although I was naïve I too had brains, I could decide for myself. They should just prove themselves in the forum, and if their ideas were good, well, okay, I’d join.

A second RNMI was held between 8 and 11 May in Surabaya. After the fierce debates at the first, there were thirty-two organisations left, which then also split over the issue of whether or not to focus on the elections, though deeper divisions and cliques lay underneath the disagreement. ‘After that ended in a deadlock’, so Rio said, ‘my gut feeling told me this wasn’t right anymore to continue; it was too fluid, too large, it was a mess – A stuck to this, B stuck to that, it could no longer be reconciled’. The Fondasi coalition then decided to move ahead with plans to build a national organisation, ‘hoping that others would also build their own and in the end we could work together’, Rio said. In a congress held between 9 and 13 July in Bogor, they founded the National Student League for Democracy, LMND. But not all members of the organisations involved agreed with this; many viewed LMND as a ‘PRD onderbouw’ due to its similar program, or felt that ‘the priority should be to build a strong basis first’, as Yodi felt. KB-UI split over this, but according to Rio the political choice had to be made:

That process was painful. We all first had to split into factions. And as soon as we left [KB-UI, to build LMND] it was all over for KB-UI. But we felt there was no other choice. We felt we had to save the larger group; not just KB-UI, but also other groups outside UI, outside Jakarta, which began showing signs of dying. They could never grow strong unless they were all brought together. Many said it was wrong. I got all kinds of accusations thrown at me – that I was irresponsible, PRD onderbouw – all those things. But I’m still convinced it was right. It’s a matter of political choice.

Indeed, for Rio and others involved in this conflict, it was a matter of political choice, which is a matter of conviction. In that regard, the disagreements that had occurred in KB-UI from the start proved to have profoundly shaped their sense of
political self, both for Rio and Yodi, who often came head to head. Nevertheless, because they split over political convictions rather than personal distrust, they could still look each other in the eye and remain on friendly terms; this differed, for example, from Sammi’s experience with his former comrade who had betrayed him by betraying the organisation. For Yodi, rather, as painful as it was, it was simply the consequence of engaging in activism:

Yeah, me and Rio often disagreed, but the wisdom I take from that experience at KB-UI, is that, although we had our differences and fell apart in all these groups, we never fought over money, as in other groups; there was never any betrayal, no corruption involved. It’s just a shame that none of it lasted. After all that has happened. It was traumatic, we all had deeply internalised our beliefs, and I strongly believed in KB-UI, you know, like you would always believe in Ajax Amsterdam no matter their performance. But at some point nothing could be rationally explained anymore. That’s the hard thing about joining activism.

The negative developments after the Semanggi incident – from the marginalisation on campus and the decline of public support, to the waning of PRD, to the dashed hopes for a united student movement or even a common platform, and to the splits that led organisations that students strongly believed in to collapse – would be followed by more traumatic experiences. This started, again, with violence at Semanggi, which became the scene of another deadly clash.

Semanggi, Again

The elections were won by Megawati’s party, PDI-P, which claimed 34 percent of the vote; Wahid’s party, PKB, came in third at 13 percent, and though Golkar ended up in second place, with 23 percent, its major loss of seats made the army nervous. The army had by now been split from the police as ABRI was dissolved, and its allocated seats in the new parliament would also be significantly reduced. To offset this loss of political influence, in September the army pushed through an emergency bill, which would provide it with far-reaching powers if a state of emergency was declared. The bill was widely condemned as draconian, and immediately led to massive student protests in Jakarta and other cities.

Many of these protests met with broad support not only from the public but also from government officials, at least outside Jakarta. In Surabaya, student protests accompanied by a hunger strike led the entire city council to sign a petition rejecting the bill. In Yogyakarta the city council even joined the student protest, and while orating in front of the police office, the students were warmly greeted by the police commander. In other cities, too, the police took a strikingly ‘soft’ approach, which led to speculations about a growing rivalry between the police
and the army. Yet, in Jakarta the security forces remained repressive as ever; a protest on 15 September was beaten apart, and twenty protesters, *Tempo* editor Goenawan Mohammad being one of them, were arrested. The situation escalated when the bill was passed on the morning of 23 September. Within hours, some ten thousand students in Jakarta were on the streets, heading for the Parliament. They were blocked by heavily armed troops, and after a standoff of a few hours a battle erupted that would last for thirty-six hours. With rubber bullets and tear gas, the students were forced back to the Semanggi–Sudirman junction in front of Atma Jaya campus, which troops also raided late that night. The next day, the battle expanded to all of Sudirman Road, where the students were joined by thousands of residents. Predictably, Wiranto stated that the actions were masterminded, and that the protesters did not represent the student movement, but certain groups collaborating with *preman* to create anarchy.

To calm the unrest, on the evening of 24 September Habibie announced that the bill was suspended. The students instantly celebrated their victory, but less than one hour later the crowd in front of Atma Jaya was shot at from army trucks driving by at high speed. One citizen was killed, and later that night, the students heard that one UI student, Yun Hap, had also been shot and died in hospital. A few hours later, the UI Salemba campus was raided and police troops attacked the students inside; one UI student went into a coma after the beating. In total, six people were killed in what was promptly called ‘Semanggi Two’; hundreds were wounded and dozens were arrested. Over the next few days, students also died during solidarity actions in Lampung and Palembang (Sumatra).

Again, live ammunition was found in the bodies, but the police chief denied that the troops were equipped with that, rather blaming a ‘dark shooter’. Again, hundreds of citizens and politicians paid their respects at the two campuses hit by tragedy: UI Salemba and Atma Jaya. A candlelight antiviolence vigil was held on the Hotel Indonesia roundabout, and forty-one student organisations and NGOs issued a joint statement condemning the violence and denying allegations that the students had been manipulated. Yet, the authorities stuck to the story of a hidden ‘mastermind’ out to disturb the upcoming MPR session. Party leaders Rais and Wahid agreed with that story. As Bourchier (2000: 32) stresses, ‘it was students, rather than the moderate reformist parties, who managed to hold back the political ambitions of the military’, which ‘underscored the continuing relevance of extra-parliamentary politics’. Though public reactions were mixed, the public generally agreed that it was time to stop the violent repression of student protests and take their demands seriously. As one newspaper heading read: ‘Citizens [Say]: Listen to the Students!’

Many expected that the incident would trigger renewed mass mobilisation. This did not happen, though, due to the student movement’s overall decline. Yodi was deeply disappointed:
I was most sad when Yun Hap died. We had different views, a different style, even a different ideology, but if a friend dies, that’s irrelevant; the point is, he’s dead. What saddened me most was the lack of response at UI. It got bogged down in squabbles. …

I had entered Semanggi in one group with Yun Hap; our task was to coordinate the field to prevent a riot. When it was announced that the bill was suspended the instruction was to retreat. I insisted that we should use the moment to set up a new *posko* at Salemba, but nobody took it seriously, they were all in the victory mood. Then I went to Atma Jaya to wait for Yun Hap. Suddenly an ambulance entered campus; it turned out to be for Yun Hap. I rushed to the hospital, but then I was held back there because someone had tipped the military that I was on my way there, and so the hospital was raided; they must’ve been waiting in the mortuary. Once the raid was over I got out of there, I called Depok asking them to *cover* Salemba because Yun Hap had died, but no one came; maybe they were tired, but that shouldn’t be an excuse, a friend had died. Then I contacted Salemba to prepare a reaction, but when I got there, ah, it was chaos; the police were going berserk there. The next day there was a fight over who should organise the Yun Hap tribute, whether it should be this organisation or that faculty or department, and in the end nothing happened. It was like someone’s regular death; he was escorted to the funeral, and that was it. The day after was also just – normal.

Seeing that urgent matters – the need to establish a new *posko* or to organise a worthy response to Yun Hap’s death – ‘got bogged down in squabbles’, Yodi still tried to initiate a fusion of existing factions, but that also failed amidst high emotions: ‘Tensions were high – in the meetings I got into fights; I know I should’ve been calmer, but I also didn’t have the strength anymore to push this further, to take that kind of responsibility. So we all went our separate ways’. Yet, while the ‘Angkatan 98’ at UI and elsewhere was falling apart, the ‘Semanggi Two’ incident also brought forth a brash new generation of student activists, who were not part of the political squabbles and not yet traumatised by such.

**Re-Generation: A Fresh New Spirit**

The student protests against the emergency act happened at the start of a new academic year, and many freshman students were eager to take part in them. Notable newcomers to Jakarta were the students from the new Bung Karno University (UBK), which was opened on 25 June 1999 by Megawati’s younger, more radical sister Rachmawati, with a curriculum based on Sukarno’s teachings. These students were thus instant radicals, and in the heated political climate they became even more radical than they were educated to be. They provided radical organisations that had been marred by splits and conflicts with fresh blood and spirit. With their unique political education, moreover, they developed a particular sense of political self that made them not easily co-opted in the existing political constellation or activist cliques. Even when joining existing groups – many,
for example, joined LMND – these young radicals took pride in their sovereign, indeed pemuda-like selfhood, and tended to play with their political identities; as one of them said to me: ‘I’m not an activist, I’m a rebel!’ Thereby, they brought a playfulness back into the field of student activism in Jakarta, which otherwise was becoming ever more serious as the political stakes were raised.

The conditions were different for newcomers at UI and other established universities, who arrived at a time when the political field on campus was shifting. While radical groups were being marginalised and had lost control of the formal student bodies, the year 1999 also saw the rise of the student executive bodies, or BEM, which replaced the central student senates. BEM were likewise controlled by HMI, but were much more action-oriented, and hence attracted many students who would earlier have flocked to the action groups. The new students, however, only had a rough idea, if any, of the political forces on campus; at UI, they only knew about a right-wing, represented by BEM-UI, and a left-wing, represented by KB-UI, whose name was still used in the protests – and they did not yet grasp the complicated political constellation behind these organisations. Meanwhile, most seniors were too wrapped up in political conflicts to concern themselves with the juniors. Only in some cases were juniors recruited and linked up with established activist traditions on campus through people like Sitha, who continued to focus on organising juniors at her faculty. Most newcomers were left at a loss – yet this also allowed them to form their own political selves. At UI, a group of freshman students thus created their own organisation, the UI Student Action Front, or FAM-UI, which developed a character of its own. As co-founder Meji told me, it was their disappointment in seniors that led them to organise themselves, and their political awareness grew along the way, based on their own experiences:

We heard a UI student was shot and we feared it might be one of our friends, so we went there from Depok; first to UI Salemba, then we heard the shooting was at Atma Jaya, but we didn’t get any information. We wanted to go to the funeral, but the seniors just sat there and we didn’t know which group or organisation to join. We were at a loss, we didn’t know the mapping. So in the end I just went there by myself, with a friend, and there at the funeral we met more friends from our generation, from the same faculty. With all the confusion, we thought, okay, why should we adapt to existing groups, with people we don’t know yet; better struggle with comrades we already know. There were many of us from that 1999 generation, not just my faculty. Many of us first tagged along with KB-UI. Others, like me, first joined with BEM-UI for an action; they put all the new kids in one bus, a regular city bus, while they had air-conditioned buses; and when the police came they just left us behind. So we were all really disappointed with the seniors, with their elitist attitude.

With the Semanggi action one of us had brought a flag: ‘MPR-UI’, Mahasiswa Peduli Rakyat [Students Care about the People], so that’s how we initially named our-
Playing Politics

selves. It was nothing political yet. Our first focus was street children; we often hung out near the UI Depok train station and many street kids lived there; they were often high from sniffing glue. In all of Jakarta, between the luxury high-rise buildings, the luxury cars, there were street children and nobody seemed to care. So our first program was to create a shelter. We made a bamboo hut at the station, each of us chipped in Rp. 10,000 for bamboo. We didn’t have a permit, so after a few months we were ordered to pull it down, but we refused. They offered a place on campus so we could make it formal, but we refused as we wanted it to be open and to stay independent. Then they sent guards to demolish it, so we quickly called journalists – not that we knew that many, we weren’t well connected yet – but we just told them: ‘We’re from MPR-UI and the rector wants to raze our street children shelter’. It worked, the rector was embarrassed. They still tried other methods, but we persisted. In the end a professor offered us a house; we wanted to stay at the station, but thinking about the kids, a house seemed much healthier and safer, so we took the offer. Thereafter we focused on other social services, but we also did actions, anti-militarism issues. At some point we made a strategic alliance with other groups like us at UI, that’s when we became FAM-UI.

But there were many challenges; competition on campus was stiff. And people asked why there was a BEM-UI and FAM-UI; well, as I said, it started as a response to their elitism, but we found we really are different. We are a struggle organisation; this means our struggle program continues regardless of the leadership. And our focus isn’t just on students, because our status is temporary and one day we will return to society, that’s where the real struggle is; this is just an exercise. That’s why we interact with our comrades among the urban poor, fishermen, farmers, and labourers. We went to places hit by natural disasters, and we saw that none of the aid reached the villagers; that’s how we learned that something was really wrong with the system. For me, that’s when I became seriously involved. So my awareness was born in the field. You can’t get that from books or theory; that’s just fantasising, we wouldn’t know what we’re talking about. Of course, we studied theory, but not with a mentor or so. Seniors did approach us, ‘Let’s do a discussion together’, just that. It’s not out of arrogance that we walk alone; we do value the experience of those who came before us. It’s just that – you see, FAM is based on mutual trust, and trust must be built through work, not sentiments. I may not like someone at first but if they prove themselves through the work they do, together with us, we set aside our ego and accept them. It can’t be about the person, so we try to consider people objectively, without prior judgment. It was like that from the start, and that’s also what makes us different. Our purpose is not to make FAM big, as in name or organisation; it’s about how to make ourselves socially aware. The real test is when we return to society.

Amidst the political conflicts and bitter sentiments in a field dominated by ambiguous ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ relations, FAM-UI offered a fresh alternative and a different story. With their unpretentious attitude, based on the principle that ‘this is just an exercise’, they offered an antidote to the prevailing problems of eksistensi within the student movement. Still, they were quite visible with their
yellow UI jackets worn in action, as were their rivals in BEM-UI. Thus, like their predecessors in SM-UI and KB-UI, the two UI organisations came to rival over the public persona of ‘yellow jackets’. This time, though, the public was aware that it was not a homogenous ‘sea of yellow’ seen marching on the streets, as the differences between student organisations – commonly viewed as a reflection of antagonisms in the political field at large – came to be greatly magnified in the media, especially during Wahid’s presidency.

**Growing Pains and Spirit**

The MPR session in early October 1999, which would elect a new president, was marked by demonstrations and clashes. Islamic supporters of Habibie were again mobilised against radical students, but Jakarta was now also filled with thousands of Megawati and Wahid supporters. Clashes with security forces at Semanggi, following Habibie’s accountability speech on 14 October and his nomination by Golkar, led some to use the term ‘Semanggi Three’, but this did not stick since no students died. To many people’s relief, the MPR rejected Habibie’s accountability speech on 19 October, but then infuriated Megawati supporters on 20 October by electing Wahid for president. But Wahid quickly moved to appease all parties, at least for the moment. He had won the presidency through a deal with Habibie-loyal factions and his own rivals in modernist Islamic parties that sought to block Megawati’s presidency – known as the ‘Middle Axis’, led by Rais, who was then given the MPR chair position, while Golkar chair Akbar Tanjung was appointed chair of parliament – but then he also offered Megawati the vice presidency. Thus composed of all factions, Wahid’s ‘National Unity Cabinet’ seemed to preclude opposition. Yet, Wahid’s presidency was marred by conflicts, cabinet reshuffles, and political scandals and rumours. He alienated the army by allowing Wiranto to be investigated for atrocities in East Timor and removing Wiranto-loyal officials, which then led to rumours of a pending military coup. He also alienated ‘Middle Axis’ parties by making controversial proposals, including entering into cultural and commercial relations with Israel, and most provocatively, revoking the 1966 decree that banned Marxism. Rais was among the first to warn that this would lead to a revival of PKI. One year after Wahid came to power, Rais began lobbying party leaders to get him deposed.

Meanwhile, in that first year of Wahid’s presidency, according to the media, the student movement was taking a ‘pause’, although many smaller actions were still staged around various issues, especially the trial of Suharto, which began on 31 August 2000, with a second session on 14 September and a third on 28 September. Suharto failed to attend any of the sessions, citing health reasons, and in the end corruption charges were dismissed. Yet, even the student protests around
this case, which often ended in clashes, did not convey the sense of urgency of previous mobilisations. After the elections and MPR session, those organisations that had placed their bets on a transitional government were left without a clearly recognisable ultimate target. This led to a fragmentation of the issues targeted – a phenomenon known as ‘isuisasi’, or creating a big issue out of minor ones – so that the student movement seemed to be losing grip on the larger struggle, at least in public action. In this context, there was also the emergence of public reunions of the ‘Angkatan 98’ – typically in the form of seminars in hotels, evaluating the achievements and mistakes – which continued throughout the era of reform.

Away from public view, though, student activists were busy trying to expand and strengthen their organisations, thereby learning how to develop and manage a political organisation, and simply survive, on few resources. Suliya, who says she was ‘tricked’ into becoming part of the LMND central leadership, recalled her experience in the organisation’s early days, when she moved from Semarang to the Jakarta office:

I was stammering. I had no idea how this would work. And I didn’t know the guys in Jakarta, only one whom I had met in Bali. But we just followed the correct mechanism, the presidium meetings went okay, despite all the limitations. You know, in ’98 it was easy to collect money since everyone was sympathetic to the student movement, but after that the funds dried up. Funding was also difficult because people often viewed us as PRD onderbouw, whatever. It was hard. But we found ways, selling t-shirts, our journal; somehow we survived. For me personally, I still don’t know how I survived. I wasn’t financially supported by my parents, but there was always someone who’d help me out. For instance, I’d sell our journal, which is Rp. 2,500 but then get Rp. 50,000. That’s the kind of stuff I lived on. I didn’t rent a room, where would I get the money from, Hong Kong? I just lived at the secretariat, and I had family living in Cibinong, probably they suspected my activities as they suddenly were very generous in giving me ‘transportation money’; every time I visited I got Rp. 10,000, while transportation was still cheap, from Cibinong to our secretariat it was only Rp. 200. And I walked, rather than taking an ojek for Rp 1,000 – I walked no matter how dark the road, in the middle of the night. Crazy, the old days, it must’ve been the spirit.

But the first year was really tough, it was hard to get everyone in line; all these different people from different organisations, each with its own mechanisms. Especially on matters of work mechanism we had to make a huge effort to tidy things up – things like reporting, relations between village and city, relations between individuals, coordination of political response and action, and, not to forget, education, publication, recruitment. It was so much and until this day it’s never been fully sorted. It’s very, very difficult. And our first chair was weird; he was elected because nobody else was willing to take the position, it was risky. When I then became chair [after he resigned] the structure became tidier. We were preparing to become a mass organisation; that’s when, administratively, the organisation started to run. All branches changed their
name into LMND; we began regulating the mechanism; how to take care of education from year to year. Well, it was still hard, the age of growing pains I guess. It was hard because of the magnitude of the body, a big, bureaucratic body, especially when we grew to twenty-six organs. For us there was less to gain than to lose. Well, if in the end we lost maybe it’s because we were not up to it, leading a body that big.

‘Us’ and ‘we’ in the last two sentences referred to their faction in the organisation, for as the organisation grew, different factions emerged, which eventually, in 2003, led those who founded the organisation to lose the leadership. Yet, despite the ‘growing pains’, there was also the spirit Suliya mentioned, which made the young activists determined to continue, to succeed in their plans, despite the hardships. The two aspects of growing pains and spirit – or ‘ecstasy’ – also featured in Eko’s recollection of the early days of the Struggle Front of Indonesian Youth, or FPPI, the organisation that Famred joined and other such organisations with an informal basis, which initially were hard to consolidate:

After Semanggi Two we continued to consolidate. We felt the need to become more tightly organised, not just be a working network of comrades. So we met more often, and finally the name FPPI came up, after some time to cook. But the process wasn’t smooth. After a few months we found that there were two kinds of organisations using the name FPPI: those that already used it as a single front and those that still used it as a working network. The point of a front is that it is established for the long run and membership should be tight. We had to get that in line, so we toured the cities again, but that didn’t result in significant agreement. It was hard, as it was all based on personal meetings, from city to city. I was delegated to circulate the idea; so I left from Yogya at 7 am, took the bus to Solo; I got there at 9 but met only a few of our friends there, then I went to Salatiga, from there to Semarang – we stayed there far too long because we couldn’t find anyone and the campus was far away, so I decided to move on to Surabaya, got there at 9 pm. It was really tiring. But it was also sort of ecstasy, an ecstasy of its own, to do something that was worth the time and effort.

In 2000 we had our first congress, in March I think, we elected a national council and a secretary general. We were ready for the declaration, we had decided on the location, near the Proclamation Monument. Our next concern was how to get money; we needed five to seven million, for accommodation, consumption, decoration, and transportation for those coming from outside Jakarta. There were some friends who claimed to have friends that could help out. We held a meeting about this, to make sure the sources were clean; so, for instance, I recommend someone who can help out, and then we check his track record, good or not? So, I must be able to vouch for him, and so on. But then someone started to complain about this method, and he and his organisation left FPPI. Well, that was his official reason, but I think he just wasn’t ready to meet the longer-term perspective of a national front; their needs were still on the short-term, tactical level. Other organisations quit us as well because of that, they couldn’t picture the long-term – what had to be done – they weren’t ready for it. And that was before
the official declaration! So, it wasn’t easy, while all we asked for was commitment. The problem was also that we rejected seniority [i.e., patronage], but many city organisations were totally dependent on those seniors above; whatever A says becomes A, if B says ‘quit’ then they quit, like that, and that’s what happened. Some would even say: ‘I agree with FPPI but I’m not a member of FPPI’. That’s funny, contradictive.

After these initial struggles in convincing member organisations and consolidating them – indeed, ‘making solid’ – into a single, sustained front, FPPI developed into a fully-fledged organisation with branches in various provinces, though mostly Java. At their next congress, attended by some 450 members, statutes with a vision and mission statement and departments were set up, and their ideological basis was formulated: ‘populist national democracy’. In 2003, Eko told me:

We’re still young and practically free from any association with whatever political forces we have now; we practically don’t have seniors like that. We’re based on our own funds, all costs we take on ourselves, which is possible because we use our money smartly; while others use tens to hundreds of millions of Rupiah for a congress we only had nine million at our disposal for our last congress – imagine feeding over 400 people for three days with only nine million. So we’re not doing too badly for an organisation of our level.

As Eko’s account indicates, financial independence was a major concern and source of pride for these new organisations. This followed from previous experiences with comrades ‘selling out’ the organisation to patrons or ‘dark manipulators’, as Sammi had experienced, and also served to distinguish themselves from the established national student organisations such as HMI, PMII, or GMNI, of which Eko and many others used to be active members. Above all, though, it was a manifestation of their activist spirit – the ‘ecstasy of its own’ of travelling by cheap transportation to four cities on one day, walking in the middle of the night to save Rp. 1,000, or, as I also experienced during my fieldwork, getting a lift on the back of pick-up trucks to travel to and from remote congress locations, sharing one mattress with five comrades, and doing all this together with others making the same sacrifices for the same cause. However, Eko’s emphasis on political independence also related to another aspect of ‘growing pains’ in the sense of learning from political mistakes; in their case, the ‘historical mistake’ they made, as Eko put it, was coming to defend Wahid as he came under attack.

From ‘Moral’ to ‘Political’ in the Battle around Wahid

29 January 2001. In my hotel room in Central Jakarta, I had been glued to the television since the early morning – as I had been for the past days, since arriving
in Jakarta to conduct a pilot study for this research, still oblivious of the processes described above. I switched between channels, between live reports, talk shows with students, and interviews with experts commenting on today’s action. On my screen I saw thousands of students wearing colourful jackets – mostly yellow and green – rallying at the closed gates of the Parliament, carrying banners and yelling slogans through the sound system carried along: ‘Gus Dur, Mundur!’ – ‘Gus Dur’ was Wahid’s nickname, and ‘mundur’ meant ‘step down’. I heard commentators saying that riots might erupt (hospitals had been put on alert), perhaps even a civil war, and as I flipped back to the live report of the action at the Parliament I saw how the masses had forced down the gates and were entering the compound. ‘Inside, Gus Dur’s supporters stand ready to defend their president’, a reporter said, ‘a clash might erupt’, and she also pointed to the hundreds of security forces on guard. I hesitated for a moment – as I was also watching a fascinating debate on ‘the polarisation of the student movement’ showing that moment on television – but then I grabbed my camera and notebook and went outside.

The taxi driver was not eager to take me to the Parliament, he even refused to drop me off at the gates; I was taken to the opposite side of Gatot Subroto Road. As I walked over the pedestrian bridge towards the Parliament my eyes and nose began prickling from the traces of tear gas that had apparently been used, but I walked on. Overseeing the area from the bridge, I could no longer see the colourful jackets. Instead, I saw dozens of ‘Metro Mini’ buses driving in, with anarcho-punk-looking students on top waving banners and flags: PRD, LMND, Famred, FAM-UI, Forbes, Karat, and more. I walked around, listened to the slogans and speeches condemning Golkar, not Gus Dur. I did not know who was who in this crowd, some of the activists looked suspiciously at me, and bystanders – perhaps they were protesters, or undercover agents, how would I know? – asked me if I was a journalist. ‘Oh no’, I replied, ‘I’m just watching’; they laughed. The atmosphere was tense; many of the protesters looked irritated rather than excited. I felt completely lost.

12 March 2001 – Six weeks later, another massive anti-Wahid demonstration, at the State Palace this time, much more crowded than the other rallies I had attended in the past weeks. I was more informed by now about the political issues and mapping. The concern was with ‘Buloggate’, referring to Wahid’s alleged involvement in a corruption case at the state logistics agency, Bulog, which led to a parliamentary investigation, pushed for by the Middle Axis parties. Student organisations known to be close to these parties – especially KAMMI and those BEM groups controlled by right-wing organisations – had staged vehement protests against Wahid since early January, demanding his resignation, while FPII and the NU-affiliated PMII staunchly came to his defence, supported by anti-New Order groups such as PRD, LMND, and FAM-UI, who were thereby also mistak-
enly categorised as in the ‘pro-Gus Dur’ camp. In the past six weeks, I had seen
the two camps engage in a rather ugly war of representation, using mass media
channels to construct each other as being dangerously misguided if not outright
manipulated, while also using all sorts of small media – from signed and anony-
mous leaflets plastered on walls across the city and handed through the windows
of cars stuck in traffic, to graffiti painted across the city, especially near campuses
(with the ubiquitous ‘Gus Dur, Mundur!’ but also ‘BEM-UI, Mati!’, or ‘BEM-UI,
Die!’) – accusing each other of being communists, fundamentalists, and neo-New
Order dogs and pigs. There had been physical confrontations as well.

The tension at the 12 March protest was palpable. When I arrived there in the
morning – wriggling my way through the many thousands of students in ‘green
jackets’ from KAMMI and ‘yellow jackets’ from BEM-UI (and some other col-
ours I had yet to identify) to position myself closer to the command car where the
speeches were made – there had already been a near-clash with a group of Wahid
supporters, who had thrown stones at the protesters, but had been chased away.

While I was listening to one of the speeches, the Wahid supporters suddenly re-
turned in greater numbers, attacking the students on one side with sticks. I did not
see it happening as I stood on the other side, but I heard screams and saw some
panic as the attackers broke through the fences; all heads went in that direction,
some students rushed to the attacked side, while the orator from BEM-UI called
on the masses to stay calm. A clash was avoided as the police intervened to keep
the masses apart, while the students promptly formed a human shield around
the mass of demonstrators. Finding myself trapped, I went on watching the students
continue their speeches, ostensibly ignoring the Wahid supporters who menac-
ingly drummed their sticks on fences until they finally left. Moments later, ex-
citement went through the crowd as a VIP bus arrived on the scene. From a dis-
tance, I saw Rais climb atop that bus, which carried more government officials
(students had ‘kidnapped’ them from the Parliament, though Rais’s wife had ear-
lier given a speech at the rally); I could not hear his statement given to the press,
but the message was clear: Wahid had to resign.

As I was about to leave the rally, which would continue until the evening, I
noticed another ruckus behind me; again I heard agitated screams, and I saw stu-
dents throwing water bottles at a passing bus, carrying other students. Later I
learned they were from the ‘anti-anti-Gus Dur’ camp (called ‘pro-Gus Dur’ in the
press), who were passing on their way to their own demonstration at the Parlia-
ment. Confusingly, this group consisted of another BEM coalition; not the anti-
Wahid BEM-SI (Seluruh Indonesia), or ‘BEM of All Indonesia’, which was led
by BEM-UI, but ‘BEM Indonesia’ or BEM-I, which had been formed to oppose
BEM-SI’s focus on toppling Wahid.15 That evening, a massive clash erupted at
Semanggi between these two camps, when the anti-Wahid protesters, on their way to the Parliament to continue their protest there, passed the Atma Jaya campus, where BEM-I was resting; stones were thrown to and fro, the campus was entered, cars and motorcycles were wrecked, and students and one journalist were assaulted.\(^\text{16}\) After the clash the anti-Wahid masses continued on to Parliament, where they pushed down the gate, without being stopped by the security guards, and then met with Rais who guaranteed their safety as they would spend the night there. It was another eventful day, just before my return to Amsterdam.

Between those first and final protests that I attended in this period, there had been many more mass rallies and occasional clashes. Demonstrations were often announced days ahead, putting Jakarta on edge. Protests were so many that it became hard for each one to stand out. Creative action helped, such as the ‘reversed long march’ staged by KAMMI on 9 February, marching backwards from the Al-Azhar Mosque in South Jakarta to the Parliament ‘to show Gus Dur how easy it is to step back’.\(^\text{17}\) Violence was also sure to make headlines, especially clashes between opposing camps in the student movement, which was a novelty compared to clashes with security forces that also still frequently occurred.

One incident that was magnified in the press was a fight on the evening of 2 February between BEM-UI and FAM-UI. FAM-UI was putting up a posko on the UI Salemba campus, called ‘Joint Secretariat for Total Reform’, to compete with BEM-UI’s posko on the other side of the campus, called ‘Saviours of Reform’. BEM-UI then called FAM-UI to account for leaflets found near the campus that bore FAM-UI’s name and accused BEM-UI of conspiring with New Order forces. They ended up fighting in front of the campus and throwing stones at each other, attracting a crowd that turned against BEM-UI – all reported live on the Jakarta television station. They instantly regretted the incident; the next day, looking perturbed, the student leaders of both groups stated on television that ‘third parties’ had provoked the fight to play students against one another, as part of ‘a systematic plot to deflate the force of the student movement’.\(^\text{18}\) But the damage was done; the image that the ‘yellow jackets’ had fallen apart and were wrestling as ordinary street fighters became emblematic of the image of the student movement’s ‘polarisation’ that was painted in the press.\(^\text{19}\)

This was further illustrated by another clash, reported live on television on the evening of 8 February, in which BEM-UI students rallying at the Hotel Indonesia roundabout were reportedly attacked by students from the opposing camp who had just left a dialogue with Wahid in Hotel Indonesia. Again, it was suspected that ‘third parties’ had incited the clash, as unidentified ‘men in black’ were seen during the incident attacking students of both sides. In the following weeks, unidentified men also attacked the LMND office in Jakarta – trashing the place, destroying the computer, and seizing the hard drive and documents – and LMND
activists in Yogyakarta were assaulted, while KAMMI received death threats and had offices in East Java attacked. More physical confrontations also occurred between the two camps, and each time there were signs that they were provoked by non-student actors dressing up as students, though this could never be proven. Yet, while blaming unidentified ‘third parties’, students on both sides directed their sentiments towards each other, holding the other responsible for creating and sustaining the conditions for conflict to occur.

By the end of March, however, the students in Jakarta on all sides had had enough of the escalation. A cooling down period was announced, accompanied by intense reflection, as well as regrets. One person with regrets was Eko:

I’m ashamed to admit it, but with the Gus Dur controversy we also got caught in – let’s say an accident of history, as we supported the person in power, Gus Dur. The thing is, we saw in him someone who could be relied on to build third world solidarity; he had that program. At that time I went to Central Java to meet with all the kyai (clerics), and we agreed to support Gus Dur, even creating ‘ready to die troops’. For three months we focused on that, and for me it was a new experience; I lived in a pesantren, for food we also depended on the pesantren. We succeeded in getting representatives from all the large pesantren together, convincing these kyai that Gus Dur had to be defended with masses. And with those Gus Dur actions we used the FPPI flag, so people began saying we had become like PRD; then the masses [from FPPI] all came to me with that complaint, so I felt the brunt directly. … Looking back, when we evaluated, we really feel this was an accident of history, a big mistake, that’s why we have since stayed far away from that, we no longer play in that field. We realised that if we were going to continue that we’d have a short life. We needed to think for the long term, build patiently. But up till now we’re branded Gus Dur supporters, they call us Gus Durian.

Critics also noted that the students had made a ‘political blunder’ by getting trapped in the ‘game of politics’. Indeed, both the public and the students began wondering whether the political battles waged in the past period were proper to the student movement’s play. An invisible boundary of the student movement’s realm seemed to have been crossed, once students began engaging in the devious and dangerous realm of elite power struggles. Three intense months of playing the game for high political stakes had left the students with another traumatic experience of violence and conflict; yet, this also became another valuable political lesson. At the same time, their political experiences of the past years precluded a return to the old ‘moral force’ story, which by now appeared naïve. Hence, the students began reconsidering the student movement’s play frame – that is, they begin rethinking the parameters of their political identity and agency.

Among the first occasions to do so was a panel discussion held in Jakarta on 2 March, called ‘The 2001 Student Movement: Between Moral and Political’, faci-
litated by the newspaper *Kompas*. Student activists from across the spectrum participated in the event, and they all agreed that it was a thin line between the ‘moral’ and the ‘political’. None of the participants held the view that the student movement was or should be a ‘pure’ moral force by steering clear from anything political. In fact, they recognised that the ‘success of the New Order regime’ was that it had ‘reduced the term “political” into something dirty, haram, and taboo’, something necessarily related to devious and dangerous power struggles, which was ‘what makes people allergic to politics’. ‘Moral’ and ‘political’ should not be a contradiction, though, since real politics should be based on high moral values. Therefore, so the students stressed, they should ‘dare to acknowledge that [their] movement, the student movement, [was] a political movement’. Ironically, then, the very experience of burning themselves on politics also allowed the students to shed a core New Order myth about the danger of politics, which in turn allowed them to shed the moral force myth about the student movement.

This further allowed them to bridge ideological divides that had also been a legacy of New Order political culture. In an interview with the chairs of PRD and KAMMI, seen as the opposites of the spectrum, they acknowledged that the ‘left-right’ division that had hitherto obstructed dialogue between them was an inheritance of the past, perpetuated by inheriting the conflicts of their ‘seniors’. Now, so the KAMMI chair stated, in order to make real progress, the time had come for an ‘open mind for a different view’ (he took this phrase from the Metallica song ‘Nothing Else Matters’, ‘although’, he said, ‘KAMMI members can’t really listen to that kind of music’), and both expressed the conviction that they would soon be able to struggle shoulder to shoulder, with respect for each other’s ideological views. Considering the harsh conflicts experienced both recently and in the past, this discursive shift in the student movement was groundbreaking. The challenge was in putting it into practice.

**The ‘Revolution of the Young’**

On 23 July 2001, the MPR forced Wahid to resign. Three days later Megawati and Hamzah Haz (from the Islamic party, PPP) were inaugurated as president and vice president. No ‘pro’ or ‘contra’ student protests accompanied this event, since the students had indeed resolved to avoid the political games of the elites, in order to focus on building a new political movement to bring them all down. During the earlier battles of that year, many student activists had already called for a renewed focus on ‘total reform’, which meant a break with all the political elites who were a product of the New Order, including Wahid, Rais, and Megawati. This call was made not only by leftist organisations, but also, for example, by HMI-MPO, the splinter group from HMI, which since its founding in 1985 had operated under-
ground (see Chapter 8, note 2) but began taking part in the student actions in 2001, precisely with this call. Once the ‘polarisation’ over Wahid had subsided, even BEM-UI stated that a common goal could now be identified: to ‘change the system’, including the ‘New Order faces’, and all elements of the student movement would surely unite and mobilise in solidarity to ‘destroy the old system’. But a total break with the New Order implied more than ‘total reform’; it implied no less than ‘revolution’. This would only be possible if they truly shed the old myths and exclusivism of student struggle, which were indeed a product of the ‘old system’, and which had led to all the ‘political blunders’ made in previous years and all the ‘mistakes’ made by previous student movements. Hence, it had to be a ‘revolution of the young’, one that united all forces of struggle against the old regime. Such, at least, was the new narrative of struggle that gradually took shape as Megawati took office.

It was not hard to identify Megawati, once a symbol of the opposition movement, as not only a product of the old regime but also a symbol of its resurgence. From the start of her presidency, it became clear that she sided with Golkar and the army, as she did little to tackle corruption, gradually provided the army with increased powers, and proved to be intolerant to opposition, especially in the form of student protest. After she took office, the infamous *haatzaai* articles of the penal code were used against student protesters more frequently than ever. Moreover, Megawati made herself unpopular by adopting neoliberal economic policies that fully abided by IMF stipulations – including the privatisation of state-owned corporations and implementing subsidy cuts at rapid speed – at the expense of her own electorate among the urban poor, and in sharp contrast to the legacy of her father Sukarno and his famous exclamation: ‘Go to hell with your aid!’ Hence, in the protest movement that would soon emerge, activists painted her as a lackey of both the New Order and the IMF.

The first protests confronting Megawati were provoked by a different issue: the ‘9/11’ terrorist attacks in the United States, and especially ‘the global war on terror’ that followed. As soon as President Bush announced this war, Islamic organisations began staging massive protests, typically marching from the Al-Azhar mosque, via the United Nations office, to the US Embassy in Central Jakarta, where effigies of Bush and American flags were burned, and protesters called on Megawati’s government to break off diplomatic ties with the United States. As it became clear that Megawati not only fully supported the war on terror, but also used it to push through a series of controversial bills that strengthened domestic intelligence services, expanded military powers, curbed public rights to information, and protected state secrets, she became a target not only of Islamic groups, but also leftist groups and middle-class intellectuals and journalists concerned
about the impact on domestic rights. Following the Bali bombing on 12 October 2002, the proposed bills culminated in the Terror Act, which became another target of protest as critics feared it would work as a double-edged sword and be used against political opposition.

But it was a corruption scandal known as ‘Buloggate Two’, implicating Golkar chair Akbar Tandjung, which sparked the resurgence of student protest. In September it became known that Rp. 40 billion had been embezzled from Bulog funds, allegedly used for Golkar’s 1999 election campaign, which led to calls for a parliamentary investigation. KAMMI, BEM groups, and other organisations jumped on the case to stage protests, in which they happily made use of an image that had appeared on the front cover of an issue of Tempo, depicting Tandjung with a Pinocchio nose and money bills taped on his mouth. Students reproduced the image in the form of masks worn at the protests, which guaranteed much media attention. The protests were not as massive as those triggered by ‘Buloggate One’, and a parliamentary investigation was repeatedly blocked and eventually (in July 2002) called off. But the case was effectively made to epitomise a deeply corrupt system – indeed, the parliament’s failure to realise an investigative committee was further proof of that – and thus provided a useful entry point for a movement seeking to ‘destroy this old system’.

Activists of different stripes used the occasion of Megawati’s hundred days in office in late November to come together and discuss the formation of a united front. The first result was a joint rally on 27 February 2002 at the State Palace, which was organised by the former enemies BEM-UI and LMND, together with the labour organisation FNPBI (National Front for the Struggle of Indonesian Workers), and joined by BEM from other universities, PRD, and affiliated student organisations. Considering last year’s conflicts, this was a remarkable collaboration – and as I walked through the crowd, observed the interactions, and spoke with activists, I felt a completely different atmosphere than what prevailed at the rallies I attended one year earlier; although most activists still stuck to their own groups, there was no trace of tension. As one of the orators put it: ‘It’s time to remove the partitions between us, to remove all differences that have made us fall apart; comrades, we have to remind the people that we have to unite, that if our nation wants to progress, all elements in society must unite!’ He then invited all to raise their fists – which led to a hilarious situation as leftist activists raised their left fist and those from BEM raised their right, until some decided to just raise them both – and then in unison they declared a pledge of solidarity: ‘We are one, there are no differences between us, we do not recognise flags and colours’. The banner of unity was thus raised once more for struggle, but this time, in contrast to the past, it now included the rakyat. Indeed, it was stressed that the time had come for students to unite with the rakyat in struggle – not just struggle for the
rakyat but with the rakyat, because ‘we are the rakyat’. This reorientation of the student struggle was made clear at the start of the rally with the declaration of the ‘People’s Pledge’, which was the same as the ‘Student Pledge’ of the student movements of the late 1980s and 1998, but the word ‘student’ was now replaced:

We, the rakyat of Indonesia, acknowledge one country: a country free from oppression.
We, the rakyat of Indonesia, acknowledge one nation: a nation devoted to justice.
We, the rakyat of Indonesia, acknowledge one language: the language of truth.

To demonstrate the rakyat’s involvement the students had invited urban poor and street children to join the rally. Although at this rally they were only a handful, their participation became common in protests in the following year. While this did not remove the students’ privilege in ‘leading the people’, let alone the deeply institutionalised separation of classes, it symbolised the students’ intent to follow through on the discourse of uniting with the people. As one orator at the rally stated, they would not repeat the mistake of the 1998 student movement that had separated itself from the people. Finally, the protesters announced the ‘death of reform’ and the ‘birth of revolution’, reminding Megawati that, ‘if she does not side with the people but chooses to side with New Order forces and the IMF, we will be forced to call for her resignation and to launch a revolution, to take over power and return it to the people! Revolution for all and the people’s freedom!’ Although small in size, this rally set the tone for the many joint actions staged in the following months. The aim was to turn public opinion regarding the idea of revolution, which had yet to be purged from its connotations of bloodshed, anarchy, and communism.

The mission of building an allied front initially appeared promising. A joint rally at the Parliament on 18 March around the ‘Bulaggate Two’ scandal brought together thousands of protesters from a greater number of organisations; besides those involved in the previous rally, these included KAMMI, FPPI, HMI-MPO, and labour organisations. In April, twenty-three ‘progressive youth organisations’ formed an alliance, called Front for the 2002 Revolution (Front Revolusi 2002), with a working group called Demand: Lower the Prices (Posko Turunkan Harga), involving PRD, LMND, FPPI, KAMMI, FAM-UI, PMII, HMI-MPO, and various other student organisations, as well as groups formed by activists from the student movements of the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s. Joint rallies were staged, among others, on International Labour Day (1 May), with over ten thousand students and labourers taking to the streets in Jakarta alone; on 13 May to commemorate the Trisakti incident and the riots, and demand the ‘Trisakti, Semanggi One, and Semanggi Two’ incidents (‘TSS’) be investigated; on National Awakening Day (20 May), demanding the price hikes be revoked; and on 21 May, commemorating
four years of reforms and calling for Megawati’s resignation for failing to carry out reforms; banners stated: ‘Condolences on the Death of Reforms’ and ‘Revolution, Now!’ But the alliance was not merely an action front; the idea was to set out on a ‘dialectic of action and reflection’ to build strength as a movement and gather momentum for pushing through political change; possibly in August 2002 at the annual MPR session.

Hence, there were many public and closed meetings in this period; several were held in the historic building Gedung Joang ’45, at Menteng 31, the former asrama of the revolutionary pemuda (see Chapter 4), a significant choice of location symbolising the revolutionary orientations of the movement. As one PRD speaker stated at a meeting on 26 March (held at a mid-range hotel, another favourite meeting location), the front should be more than a tactical alliance to get rid of Megawati and other status quo forces; it should become an embryo for a new system of governance – indeed a ‘new Indonesia’. While the closed meetings served to determine a strategy and timeline for the movement needed to get there, the public meetings served to construct a discourse of revolution that agreed with the ideas of all groups involved. These were no easy tasks. The different perspectives as well as styles of the various participants from different generations, each bringing in their own experiences and pet topics, was evident at each of the many meetings I participated in. The participants also realised that many obstacles had to be overcome to make the front work – above all, mutual distrust and scepticism – but at this stage, with the excitement of getting together at all, the doubts did not yet dampen the mood of anticipation; as they said, the ‘spirit of young souls shall overcome’. The use of the term ‘young souls’, of course, served to accommodate participants of older generations, such as Sri Bintang Pamungkas (now party leader of PUDI), or Hariman Siregar, the frontman of the 1973–’74 student movement. Playing up a ‘young soul’ persona, Siregar’s message was simple; as he exclaimed at one of the meetings on 4 May in Gedung Joang ’45: ‘Just do it!’ But the question was how to do it – and what to do?

Much of the discussion focused on this ‘what’ and ‘how’. With frequent reference to historical experience – in Indonesia as well as abroad (e.g., Russia, Cuba, and the Philippines were mentioned) – subjects discussed included, for example, learning from precedents of revolution in world history, defining the role of the military in revolutions, the legal implications of revolution, prevention of post-revolution chaos and a return to autocracy, determining the right momentum, as well as the need to eradicate the New Order culture of corruption and violence by ‘cutting one generation’. Yet, underlying the discussions, the essential question – which remained implicit but determined the dynamic of the debate – effectively came down to identifying the convergence, or divergence, between the multitude of actors, strategies, and identities: the concerns, attitudes, and styles of activists.
from the younger and older generations, the Islamic and leftist groups, the ‘doer’ and the ‘thinker’ types of activists, those favouring a ‘procedural’ route to revolution (through participation in the elections, constitutional reforms) and those arguing for an ‘extra-procedural’ route (by toppling the government, taking over power), those who did and did not condone violent means, those who would or would not collaborate with parts of the ruling elite, and so on.

Thus, it seemed that all the differences and dilemmas that had ever existed in the student movement across generations were now coming together. While this could provide an opportunity to resolve these issues once and for all, it could also get them trapped in what they all had heard before. As PRD chair Harris Motty Rusly already warned at one of the early meetings, too much of the same debate could become counterproductive. Indeed, as the discussions kept repeating the same issues, the alliance began to decline in June, until it died out after the annual MPR session in August, when the various organisations each staged their own actions. The revolution never did get off the ground. Quite the contrary, as briefly discussed in the next chapter, the status quo forces were reconsolidating.

**From Burning Tyres to Playing Politics**

By then, most of the student organisations involved had long lost interest in the alliance, and had instead forged their own tactical alliances for specific actions. One such action was the Public Youth Assembly, staged on 31 July at Salemba Road, which, as the name suggests, explicitly excluded older generations, who had proven to have little to offer. Against the spectacular backdrop of the ruins of a tall building that had been burned down during the May 1998 riots, speakers from fifteen, mainly leftist, student organisations (including FAM-UI, LMND, FPPI, and Forkot) climbed the platform to deliver speeches, aided by a powerful sound system that made their shrill voices echo far down the road, and accompanied by a live rock band sounding protest songs in between the speeches. While the students had agreed not to present a single program but to allow each group to present their own, in their speeches a common message was evident: a vow to the public, stuck in the traffic jam below, that the student movement was still unified and would continue to fight for revolution until all New Order remnants were gone. Offering something new from the predictable long march, this was a stirring and fun event, at least to the five hundred students and few dozen street vendors and *ojek* (motorbike taxi) drivers watching the spectacle and cheering the orators and rock band from the street. As I looked down on this crowd – seeing the students having fun, with dozens of FAM-UI students dancing arm in arm to protest chants, and *ojek* drivers loudly applauding and raising fists in the air – I caught myself thinking: ‘Revolution might be a worthy fantasy, and as a driving
force it comes and goes – but play is real, and here to stay’. As I returned to the street, I noticed the graffiti text that the students had just painted on the building’s wall: ‘nekad’ – ‘determined’.

But thereafter, the student protests became increasingly smaller. Some of the protests I attended in the following months had barely a few dozen participants; sometimes an action was cancelled due to lack of participants; one action, staged by a small group at a private university, had only ten participants, including my assistant and me. It was still interesting, though, as the lack of masses made the ritualisation of protest all the more apparent. After walking down the road for a while, with the korlap shouting through a megaphone, and tailed by a police car, the group stopped to burn a few tyres; a police officer then stepped out of the car, taking his time, and smothered the fire with a fire extinguisher, then walked back to his car; the students then poured gasoline back on the tyres and set them alight again, and the police officer returned to put out the fire. This ritual was repeated a few times, as it amused the students, the police officer, and bystanders, until both sides lost interest; the eight young radicals had fulfilled their exercise in militancy. But as I watched the tyres burn, I could not help but seeing a metaphor for the student movement; it was burning, flashing, and producing lots of smoke that was visible from afar – which made the fire appear bigger than it actually was – until it was extinguished, and then fired up again. Like rubber, the student movement was strong due to its flexibility and resilience – but how long could this go on? Would the tyres ever be fully consumed?

The obvious analogy to the ‘fire extinguisher’ was repression. In that respect, although no Semanggi-like incidents occurred under Megawati’s presidency, her intolerance towards student protest proved to be a challenge. As noted, the haatzaai articles were frequently used against student activists, especially as they began making a habit out of desecrating her official portrait – and those of the vice president and Akbar Tandjung. During the protests, students would paint a red ‘X’ on the pictures, stomp on them, trample them, set them on fire, and run over them with a car. Megawati responded furiously, and not only had students who committed such acts arrested and charged using the haatzaai articles, but also threatened the same for reporters who spread pictures of it. After such arrests were made, student activists were often preoccupied for months with protesting the case and trying to get their comrades released.

Further, Megawati frequently chided student protesters for violating national values. In a spiteful comment made in July 2002, she stated that such unethical, unpatriotic students might as well renounce their Indonesian citizenship and leave the country (she threw similar accusations at Arief Budiman – who criticised her policies from his place of residence in Australia – stating that ‘such people’ need not bother returning to Indonesia). In September, Megawati stated that demon-
strations in the past were ‘better’ – ‘because in the past’, so the populist newspaper *Rakyat Merdeka* commented, ‘she was not yet the ruler’, ‘not yet the person most responsible for the implementation and protection of civil rights’, and not yet the president ‘who deserved to be controlled by the public’. As part of the war of representation, the image Megawati painted of student protesters served to disconnect them from the national narrative, isolate them from the general public, and strip them of their license to act. However, as the *Rakyat Merdeka* comment shows, at this point public opinion was largely against her government rather than against the students, who had little difficulty in exposing the preposterousness of this statement.

Public support for the students was also evident in the next flash of protest. After a lull in public action (since students were busy with organisational affairs), the fire of student protest flared up again in early January 2003 in response to a sharp hike in fuel prices and electricity and telephone tariffs, coming into effect on 2 January, which coincided with a presidential decree to release and discharge conglomerate debtors to the state. Mass protests erupted in all major cities nationwide, continuing for two weeks, with thousands of protesters from virtually all student organisations, as well as NGOs, labourers, farmers, public transport and truck drivers, and even businessmen joining in rallies at the State Palace and the Parliament. The protests were consistent and aggressive enough – introducing the quickly copied tactic of occupying gas stations and fuel wagons, in addition to burning numerous piles of tyres, and desecrating Megawati’s portrait – provoked enough police brutality, and attracted enough media attention to be considered a threat to the government, especially as legislators, in the second week of protest, also began opposing the contested policies. Indeed, PRD and other groups stated that the protests would be an entry point for bringing down the government (PRD published a ‘five-step strategy’ to that end), and there was some speculation that they might succeed. Then, on 15 January, it was announced that the hike in telephone tariffs was postponed and a government team would be formed to reassess the price hike in electricity and fuel. Many considered this an impressive victory for the student movement, as it proved it could influence government policy. Yet, among activists, the government’s quick concession also caused unease, as it took the fire out of a movement that was finally starting to spread.

The anti-government movement continued, but it suffered from internal divisions and tricky realignments to include ambitious political newcomers who were warming up for next year’s elections. Many other controversial issues followed, provoking minor protests that still took time and energy in preparations, and in any case did not unsettle a government that was now preoccupied with securing its position ahead of the elections. One issue that still provoked broad actions was
the American war on Iraq in March 2003. While this was an obvious target for mass protest for Islamic groups, on the left side of the spectrum it only exposed the existing fragmentation; apart from the peace rally at the US Embassy on the night of the first attack, which brought together thousands of students and NGO activists from organisations across the spectrum, I attended many small anti-war demonstrations with different groups at different times. And there were so many other protest targets. One cartoon in *Media Indonesia* (31 March 2003) summarised the situation aptly: amidst protesters marching against Bush, a child says, ‘Brother, don’t forget the other demos’.

The experience of students in these five years of reforms was that it was hard to make a lasting public impact. Wave after wave of mass mobilisation – from the dramatic promise of people power at ‘Semanggi One’, to the successful battle against the military at ‘Semanggi Two’, to the ‘polarised’ battles over Wahid, to the promise of a 2002 revolution, to the flash of protests against the price hikes and Megawati’s administration, not to mention the countless other protests about local issues in Jakarta and especially the regions – the student movement repeatedly made an impression and booked several tangible results, which warranted its continued special license to act. But, the fire was repeatedly extinguished – either by violent repression, legal repression, government concessions, or ‘third party’ intrusion – and each new setback came with disappointments that exacerbated the internal divisions. A promising way out of the spiral of conflicts emerged in the wake of the ‘historical mistakes’ made during the battles over Wahid, which for many bred the conviction that, no, ‘playing politics’ in the sense of engaging in the power struggles of the elites was not the student movement’s realm of play, but, yes, they were political actors who could cooperate to achieve political goals while respecting political differences among them.

For the students, the disintegration of the first major alliance across the spectrum, the 2002 front for revolution, was not as vexing as it might have been for some of the older activists involved, who viewed it as a real opportunity to gain political influence, if not ‘take over power’, as the discourse went. One of them, an activist from the late 1970s, complained to me: ‘How can we make progress if the students don’t take this seriously? They lack commitment’. While implicitly acknowledging that they did need the students to make inroads, this was a typical complaint of older generations who failed to actually listen to the students’ arguments and to recognise that they were committed: to their own play. The students might not be committed to the plans concocted by older activists – who rehearsed the same old ‘boring’ arguments over and again (as one younger activist put it at one of the meetings, after an older person slammed the young generation for their ‘lack of discipline’) – but they were very much committed to their own radical communities and to developing these communities.
In becoming serious political actors, many student organisations transformed into ‘mass organisations’ with long-term social and political programs. In the long and arduous process of getting there, the students certainly did ‘play politics’ in the sense of learning the game of political organisation, including dealing with internal factions, furtive interventions, and external pressures and competition, as well as striking and dissolving alliances with political others. In this transition from action front to political organisation, they not only rediscovered themselves as political actors, but thereby also redefined the meaning of student struggle and the notion of being an agent of change. A student movement’s task was not only, or even primarily, to perform dramatic, heroic mass mobilisation in order to establish the next ‘milestone’ in national history; rather, it was to embody the change and strive for lasting societal and political change through long-term organising – and further to do so in a playful fashion, as ‘an exercise for the future’, as FAM-UI’s Meji put it. Indeed, this was a very energetic and forward-looking exercise, despite the constant disputes and the apparent decline in mobilisation.

Therefore, the ‘burning tyre’-metaphor that once crossed my mind proved to be inaccurate, since it overlooked the off-stage evolution of a student movement in transition. Nonetheless, public action continued to be crucial for many reasons: to make a public statement, to create political pressure, to fire up one’s own and each other’s spirits, and to attract new members by making this spirit visible. And the evolution continued: in May 2003, not long before the end of my fieldwork, the students struck one more mass alliance to demonstrate that they were serious about changing the old system.
PART V:

CONCLUSION

The ‘old guard’ – student activists from 1998, from different organisations (including KB-UI and Forkot) – attending the founding of the most recent leftist student organisation, Front Mahasiswa Nasional (National Student Front), June 2003 (Yatun Sastramidjaja)
14

Place, Memory, and Self: Deconstructing Destinations

Places and Bodies of Struggle

The film begins with a black screen, and a dedication in white:

This film is dedicated to / all the students and innocent people / who gave everything they had, / including their lives, to fight / for truth, justice, and democracy. / May God bless them all. / AND / This film is also dedicated to / The Indonesian Armed Forces, / who, in their brave struggle against / the forces of anarchy, fought to / the death vicious students armed to / the teeth with inflammatory / posters and deadly megaphones. / May God forgive them all.

The voice of a young man can be heard reciting the Student Pledge. Then, to the sounds of a national hymn and a drumroll, images are shown of students in action, with captions naming the campuses and organisations involved in the 1998 student movement in Jakarta. The captions further identify the places that would ring familiar to any student demonstrator in Jakarta: Pancoran (the road in south Jakarta often travelled on long marches from the campuses at the south end of the city to the centre), Monas (National Monument, near the State Palace), Tuprok (Tugu Proklamasi, the Proclamation Monument), Bundaran HI (the roundabout by Hotel Indonesia, leading into Sudirman Road), Atma Jaya–Sudirman (the campus at the end of Sudirman), Sudirman–Semanggi (the entry into the Semanggi cloverleaf leading from Gatot Subroto Road to the Parliament), Polda Metro Jaya (the Jakarta police headquarters near the Parliament), Taman Ria Senayan (a park five hundred metres from the Parliament, with a pedestrian bridge over Gatot Subroto Road that has often been the site of stand-offs and clashes between students and security forces), and MPR/DPR (the Parliament). The opening scenes of the documentary We Want Justice (Saroengallo 2002 [1999]), mentioned in Chapter 13, vividly capture how much these places in Jakarta matter to the experience of the student movement.

The significance and signifying power of place – in particular, specific places with specific localities and names – did not immediately occur to me. Being educated in the Western tradition of reading events and organising history by dates
and other figures, I was mostly focused on time. Thus I constantly asked activists, when being told about certain incidents or events: ‘When exactly did it happen?’ And the reply was often: ‘I forgot’. Or they would tease me, as did Rio, who said: ‘Why be so romantic about data anyway? The important thing is that it happened and we survived!’ I also noticed that dates were often mixed up. I confronted Eko about it, and he said: ‘Yes, that’s bad; you see, we’re not used to documentation yet, while it’s actually important. It’s pathetic that I, as secretary general, don’t even remember the date of our first congress, or the second’. As a researcher trying to collect reliable data, this could be frustrating, and I insisted that they keep a record of dates, if not for the sake of history then surely for the sake of justice, as the lack of documented history only further obscured instances of state violence. However, Agus gave a sobering explanation, pointing out that records were never secure in a repressive context, since they were easily lost in police raids or militia attacks, in which documents and computer files were destroyed, or worse, taken for intelligence purposes.

But the more discouraged I became by the neglect or loss of such records, the more I became aware of a different logic of remembering and ways to organise collective memory, perceptible in their frequent mentioning of places. This was most evident at those casual occasions of sharing anecdotes among old comrades, which would often begin with a phrase like, ‘Hey, remember Semanggi…?’ or Salemba, Tuprok, or other places in Jakarta where the activists had shared experiences, and were reminded of them when passing the location. If one place had been the scene of several key events, such as Semanggi, it sufficed to ask: ‘Which Semanggi?’ (rather than ‘when’), and the reply would be ‘Semanggi One’, ‘Two’, or perhaps last month’s clash with security forces at Semanggi. Due to the lack of records and a distinctive logic of remembering connected to place, the physical structure of Jakarta – its specific roads, bridges, buildings, squares, street corners, and monuments – became the student movement’s alternative diary. This diary serves to store, organise, and testify to collective memories of past events, especially events involving violence, and the political and personal meanings attached to them or produced in them. Moreover, the landscape of Jakarta provided student protesters with a map of action, which they could draw on to produce alternative meanings of space and power.

Ever since Sukarno infused Jakarta with signs of Power (see Chapter 5) – in a manner reminiscent of traditional Javanese ideas of ‘power’ as a cosmic force that transcends mundane exercises of power and politics (see Chapter 2) – student movements have drawn on this urban landscape to re-inscribe it with their own signs of Power. This started with the 1966 KAMI movement, which introduced the ‘long march’ through the main arteries of the city into the repertoire of student
struggle (see Chapter 6). This long march was modelled after historical prece-
dents; in particular the pemuda rallies and parades of the early revolution in 1945,
in which educated nationalist youth, drawing on the militant repertoire and spirit
of struggle nurtured during the Japanese occupation, took possession of the cities,
filling them with their own revolutionary collective bodies, flags, and graffiti. The
term also recalled the army’s legendary long march during the guerrilla war in
1949 (see Chapter 4). But KAMI turned the long march into a distinctive student
spectacle, competing with the signs of state power with an ‘army of students’ who
had been raised by the state itself to ‘continue the national struggle’ and ‘carry the
message of the people’s suffering’ (see Chapter 5). Thereby, the iconic style of
student protest in Indonesia was established – with masses of students wearing
colourful campus jackets (or, later, other distinctive activist attire) and hoisting
banners and university flags (or those identifying the organisation), orderly yet
brazenly marching through the city’s main arteries, clogging the roadways and
forcing the public to take heed of their clever slogans, cheeky songs, and easy-to-
remember demands, painted in graffiti across the city and explained on pamphlets
handed to commuters in buses and through car windows. While also borrowing
from global repertoires of struggle, the student movement’s patriotic persona as
the vanguard in national struggle made it a competitor to the state, rather than just
an opponent, and provided it with a special license to invade places of Power and
play with the ‘landscapes of meaning embedded in these places’ (Guano 2002:
312). The state was also aware of this potential. Therefore, even for KAMI, the
special license came with a limit, as symbolised by the image of a yellow jacket
drenched in blood.

As Guano (2002: 311) argues regarding the protests against President Menem
in late-1990s Argentina, symbolic places of power provided the protesters with
‘crucial arenas for their war of representations’. By using the places of the ‘spect-
tacle of power of the state’, and profiting from the publicity they generated, they
created a highly visible space for their own spectacle of national representation
and provided the public with an alternative site of identification and unification in
which to rally against the Argentinean state. However, in Indonesia, such a pro-
cess of identification and unification was complicated by the fact that the body of
protesters was an exclusive body, which precluded participation by other bodies
of the nation. The body of ‘students’ as such became a trope of agency, which
was separated from other social categories by distinctions of age, class, know-
ledge, radical sensibilities, a forward-looking imagination, and a distinctly playful
style, ever since the self-identification of kaum muda as the agents of a dawning
new era (see Chapter 3). This embodied notion of student agency then became a
self-perpetuating, mobilising narrative of the collective body and self of students,
spurring new bouts of mobilisation throughout the generations. But the more this
narrative was elaborated by the accumulation of memories of vanguardism, the less it also allowed for inclusive participation. Even when the students attempted to create room for others, it just did not fit the narrative.

‘Students’ and ‘the people’, for one, formed separate bodies. While students since the early days of Boedi Oetomo claimed to speak and act in the name of the ‘rakyat’, their unification had been a troubled affair since the turn to populism in the pre-war youth movements (see Chapter 3). It became all the more difficult during the revolution, when pemuda found their role of ‘leading the people’ to be an illusion (see Chapter 4). Any remaining potential for unification was crushed by the 1974 Malari riots, which severed the ‘moral force’ of the student movement from the ‘anarchy’ of the massa by severing their respective spaces – the campus and the streets – which made it easier for the state to pursue its policy of depoliticisation (see Chapter 7). Meanwhile, unification with other civilian actors was precluded by the institutionalisation of myths about the student movement as a special force, one that bore a singular power (or Power) and that had to remain ‘pure’ from worldly, political interests and connections (see Chapter 7). Student activists who challenged these myths and tried to reconnect with the people and other oppositional actors – as occurred from the late 1980s, through community advocacy and forging broad alliances (see Chapter 11) – were promptly smeared with allegations of a dangerous association with communism.

The situation sketched by Guano (2002) – of an inclusive body of protesters, freely using symbolic places of power to wage their war of representation against the state, aided by mass media that transmit their messages undistorted – thus contrasted greatly with that in Indonesia. In Indonesia, the exclusive body of students, who were the only ones with the (limited) license to protest, and the symbolic politics of the state, whose scenarios of danger dominated the field of representational battle, constrained how students could use places in such battles. Even if the signs of danger could be played with – as in the symbolic battle of ‘OTB’ (‘organisation without form’) vs. ‘OTB’ (‘the opposition has arisen’; see Chapter 11) – the New Order state still controlled the discursive parameters of the battle, could greatly influence the media and their message, and in any case controlled the means of repression.

The New Order parameters were breached, however, by the phenomenal rise of the 1998 student movement, which (temporarily) eclipsed the state’s scenario of communist danger. This was not only possible because this student movement fit the conditions for a historic social drama (Turner 1974; see Chapter 12) – and thereby raised public memories of the (anticommunist) Angkatan 66, suggesting a ‘repeat of 1966’ – but also because the students keenly played up the image of spontaneity (Polletta 1998, 2002b). Being spontaneous meant that they were a
singular body driven by the call of crisis and history, thus embodying the spirit of the ‘truly playful’, who ‘springs forth to shatter routinely accepted arrangements’ and ‘figure possible alternatives’ (Handelman 1990: 68; see Chapter 2). This image transformed the political process into a student saga with a familiar script, which further bolstered the students’ special licence to mobilise. Yet this licence was limited, first, in terms of space, as was evident in the containment of protest on campus. It took cat-and-mouse games and real battles with security forces to pass the barriers put up at campus gates. But as these barriers were broken and the norm breaching spread to the larger public, as students began taking steps to unite with the people on the streets, the potential for unification was again precluded by violence: the Trisakti shootings and especially the ensuing riots. The occupation of Parliament made clear that it was only as an exclusive body, as the designated ‘star group’, that students could use this place of power to fulfil their ‘destined’ role of bringing the drama to its anticipated end: to bring down Suharto. Also, the students’ licence was limited in terms of time: after ‘The End’ of the drama, they were promptly evicted from this site of power (see Chapter 12).

The spatial, temporal, and narrative limits on the students’ licence to mobilise reveals the constraints that precluded the kind of popular mass movement that students envisaged around the trope of ‘people power’. This was most evident during the mobilisation in November 1998, when students continued the struggle in what they came to recognise as the real place of power: the streets. For days on end, their long marches created a spectacle unparalleled in the modern history of the student movement, as they ‘experimented with destroying the myth’, as Yodi said, by allowing the rakyat into the body of struggle – indeed, actively encouraging such by marching through densely populated areas inhabited by rakyat (see Chapter 13). Thereby, they not only appropriated the capital’s symbolic places of power but, by connecting the places of power to the places of the disempowered, they also drew alternative maps and produced new understandings of power – in terms of ‘people power’. In so doing, they created the space for ‘real collective action … with students and people united’, as Yodi said, which for the students made this the key event, not least for ‘removing the trauma of the May riots’. But they could not do so unpunished.

The Semanggi Tragedy (‘number one’) was tragic in more than one way. Not only because of the deaths, or because it thwarted the potential of ‘people power’ (although the ‘Ciganjur betrayal’ of the elite opposition leaders did more to that effect than the violence), but it was tragic because it exacerbated existing divides within and further fractured the body of the student movement. At the same time, the excessive violence turned Semanggi into a site of significance for the student struggle, and all the more so after the second deadly tragedy there one year later. It became a place where real, violent battle came to stand for the symbolic battle
between the student movement and the state. Hence, student protesters continued to return there – not just as part of their route to the Parliament, but as a place of power in its own right.

Semanggi, Revisited: Losing Ground

The power of Semanggi became clear to me on 21 May 2003, when I participated in a massive long march commemorating five years of reform. This long march in Jakarta was the climax of a spectacular five-day, 150-kilometre long march performed by thousands of students and workers from Bandung to Jakarta, which had been announced in the press for weeks ahead of time, including rumours of it being sponsored by certain political elites. I joined in with FAM-UI on the final day, starting at dusk from the UI Depok campus – partly going by Metro Mini buses, mostly on foot – marching to the regular places of protest (UI Salemba, the State Palace) and other locations of current political interest (the General Elections Committee, in view of the upcoming elections, and a number of ministries, where workers and fishermen were given the speaker’s platform on the command car to state their case), stopping at the Hotel Indonesia roundabout, where we joined masses of other protesters, and then all marching to the final destination: the Parliament.

This was the most exhausting protest I ever joined, as we had to struggle our way through the toxic gasses of Jakarta’s merciless traffic, which was even more congested than usual due to the many other rallies being held that day in the city, while misunderstandings and fights along the route further added to the students’ aggravation. As rain came pouring down in the afternoon while we were walking and still had hours to go, the crowd was also shrinking. Yet, as we approached Semanggi at dusk, all fatigue seemed to disappear. The students stepped up their pace, chanted militant songs ridiculing the army, and the students who escorted me began telling me spirited stories about their experiences of battle at Semanggi, recalling how ‘Semanggi’ had been their rite de passage into activism, in which they learned vital lessons of solidarity, courage, and cunning, as well as field techniques. The students were getting excited and in the mood for combat; the strange thing was, so was I – such was the power of the place as we passed Semanggi, and finally, after an eleven-hour journey, reached the Parliament, where we were greeted by four water cannons and hundreds of police troops in full riot gear, who seemed just as ready and thirsty for combat as the students.

I failed to witness exactly what happened next, as I got trapped in the mass of reporters and bystanders who were suddenly pushed back by police troops – using great intimidation and their rifles to drive back the crowds – over the pedestrian bridge leading to the other side of the six-lane road. There, I could no longer see
the scene outside the Parliament due to a tall, plasticised fence separating the two sides of the road. On the side where I had ended up, some commotion arose, with people separated from their friends, and vendors separated from their food stalls, busily talking and gesticulating about what had just happened – the students’ show of force and the police intimidation; what had not yet but could still happen – bloodshed; and what might have happened – a repeat of the occupation of Parliament. I also overheard speculation about the ‘true story’ behind the event – the familiar mastermind scenario – and the related power struggles of the elites. But the atmosphere quickly turned calm, as people left the scene or simply sat down on the pavement waiting for things to return to normal, and the debates quieted to a murmur of chitchat against the background of the evening traffic that continued to roar through regardless of anything happening on the other side of the road. This was an anticlimax to an expected confrontation. As nothing could be seen, nothing seemed to happen. But after a long and exhausting day of rallying, I was all ‘revved up’; both as a researcher and a participant I refused to just accept the paradox of an imaginary anticlimax to an imaginary climax.

After some time (it could have been half an hour or less; time tends to stand still and simultaneously speed up in such anxious situations), I met an acquaintance, an activist who also had been accidentally evicted, and he agreed to escort me back to the other side, though only after some persuasion: ‘What’s the point of going back there? Here you’re safe and it’s all over’. Defying the angry traffic we crossed the busy highway, climbed over a lower fence back down the road, and jogged back to the Parliament, where we arrived right on time to witness an elaborate ritual of mutual provocation between students and security forces – a rhythmic synchronisation that indicated that this was not the first, and probably not the last, time that they would come face to face.

While most of the thousands of protestors had retreated (including virtually all of the female students), several dozen ‘die-hard’ students, including many from FAM-UI in their yellow jackets, remained on the scene to face the overwhelming police force. The two sides faced each other in rows – the students clutching arms and the policemen clutching their sticks and shields – with a space of less than twenty metres and two water cannons between them. First, the police commander ordered his troops through a megaphone to advance ten steps; at once, the student korlap instructed his comrades, also through a megaphone, to move ten steps back. This was repeated at least five times – while both the police commander and the student korlap (who stood almost back to back) encouraged their men to keep their spirits high – from the students’ side, I heard, among others, ‘Yellow jackets shall never retreat!’, even though they were slowly moved back – and between the motions the water cannons intermittently shot at the students’ feet to make them slip. When a student did slip, some of the policemen would holler in
triumph, but the fallen student was quickly helped back on his feet by his comrades, and they would close ranks again and continue to defy the police as one body, apparently with boosted determination and pride. As I moved along from the side of the Parliament, beholding the fascinating ritual, which almost seemed like a dance, I nearly forgot that this was a threatening situation. But then someone suddenly hurled a Molotov cocktail at the police; the police commander instantly yelled: ‘Attack!’ and simultaneously the student korlap yelled: ‘Retreat!’ At once, policemen who had thus far been watching from behind the Parliament fences, seemingly separated from the game, began throwing rocks and pieces of wood at the students. At what seemed to me incredible speed (given that most of the students, including me, wore sandals), we raced back to Semanggi, chased by policemen throwing rocks, until we finally reached our bus and jumped in. The policemen continued to throw rocks at our buses and shout insults, and students from other campuses dared us to get off the bus and continue the fight. But we drove off to UI Salemba, where we could finally rest. (As mentioned in Chapter 2, I owed my escape to my secret bodyguard, who was from FAM-UI.) We heard that three students were caught, beaten, and arrested. As the logistics team handed us water cups and simple rice meals, which we thankfully delved into while seated on the floor of the campus yard, many students began sharing anecdotes of previous battles at Semanggi, saying, ‘This was nothing yet; remember when they brought dogs, and stole our shoes and mobile phones?’ Several activists who had seen me at the place of battle or running gave me high-fives for voluntarily passing this rite de passage (see Chapter 2).

The next morning, I searched the television channels and newspapers for reports of the clash, but to my surprise there was little or no mention at all of any of the actions that had taken place the day before. This was a far cry from last year’s anniversary of reformasi, when all the protests and events, amidst the ‘2002 revolution’, could still count on full media coverage. Apparently, the media were now too immersed in the power games of the political elites in the build-up to the June 2004 elections. But in my mind I also related the lack of media attention to something that had struck me at the scene of confrontation: the tall and non-transparent plastic fence separating the sides of the road, which made it impossible for commuting citizens on the other side to see and witness the clash taking place by the Parliament. It reminded me of something Sitha told me: the former ‘escape routes’ around the area, which she had used during the Semanggi Tragedy in November 1998 to escape the bullets, were no longer accessible. The fences that they used to climb over to get themselves to safety had been raised to an average height of two metres and furnished with barbed wire. The only way left to run now was back to Sudirman Road, and they had better run it fast.
Erasing and Raising Memory

In November 2003, six months after this rally, and five years after the first Semanggi Tragedy, the latest of Jakarta’s prestige projects was opened at Semanggi: a huge mall called Plaza Semanggi, with a shopping centre, cinema complex, and luxury office space. Jakarta Governor Sutiyoso (a former general and governor since 1997; his re-election as governor in 2002, championed by Megawati, had been another target of student protests) presented the plaza as a first step in realising his vision for a ‘new Semanggi’, which would offer citizens a ‘downtown experience’ matching those of global cities like Paris and New York. This was part of Sutiyoso’s larger urban beautification project (see Kusno 2003), initiated one year earlier with the renovation of the Monas Park around the National Monument, including the erection of a colossal pointed fence that enclosed the refurbished park, with a limited number of entrance ways, meant to ‘create order and comfort for visitors’. The fencing of Monas Park created some controversy, not only for its high cost (Rp. 8.7 billion) at a time of cutbacks in public expenditure, but also for reducing the park’s public function. Sutiyoso brushed all criticism aside, arguing that the fence enhanced the experience of decent citizens, by excluding ‘criminals’ and other ‘undesired people’. The latter referred to lower-class citizens who previously made intense use of the park as housing and vending space. But ‘undesired people’ could also include protesters who frequently rallied at Monas, since this monumental place of power in the heart of Jakarta offered a conveniently central, spacious, and relatively safe space for mass rallies against the state institutions surrounding the park, including the State Palace and government ministries. Barring protesters was also the effect of another one of Sutiyoso’s beautification projects: the installation of a huge water fountain around the Welcome Statue on the Hotel Indonesia roundabout, another favourite spot for protest rallies, as it was conveniently located between Monas and Sudirman, where protesters could easily hand out leaflets (or flowers, when mourning the death of a comrade, a ‘fallen flower’) to the commuting citizens driving through the congested roundabout. Since the completion of the project in 2003, it became impossible for protesters to gather large masses at the site, since there was no longer an open area in which to convene.

Sutiyoso’s urban symbolism recalled the New Order construction of modern urban dreamscapes to appease the middle class (see Chapter 8), again creating a separation of classes, a severing of the nation’s bodies. It also fit the neoliberal policy of Megawati’s government, which prioritised ‘downtown experiences’ – protected behind fences and gates – over facilitating the public good and protecting civil rights. One of the ironies of the era of reform, then, was that it did not turn cityscapes into more publicly accessible or democratic public spaces. Rather,
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fences became higher, walls became thicker, and roadblocks became more common. What would become of the act of remembering, so deeply connected with place, now that public spaces were being emptied of potential ‘disturbances’? How would the ‘downtown experience’ of Plaza Semanggi relate to the experience of violence previously associated with Semanggi? What would happen to the memories of violence and the militant spirit of struggle borne by them? Perhaps it was hoped that the nation-state would arrive at a state of normalcy, after years of turmoil in the era of reform, by smothering memories of past horrors with ‘downtown experiences’.

The beginning of the end of the era of reform – or the ‘death of reformasi’, as student activists called it as early as 2002, during the united ‘front for revolution’ against Megawati’s government (see Chapter 13) – may indeed be dated to Megawati’s rise to power, when status quo forces, including the army, closed ranks to reconsolidate their power, even though the regular game of politics with its inter-necine power struggles continued. The fifth anniversary of reforms in May 2003, with the rally and fenced-off clash described above, proved to signal a return to ‘normalcy’ – that is, a state of ‘ordered disorder’ (see Chapter 8). Thereafter, all political energy and media attention were redirected away from any form of norm breaching (see Chapter 12) to the legislative elections on 5 April 2004. Adding to the ironic turn of the era of reform, the elections were won by Golkar, the New Order party, with 24.5 percent of the vote, followed by Megawati’s PDI-P at 21 percent. This was followed by the first direct presidential elections on 5 July, won by former general and now chair of the Democratic Party Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (with almost 40 percent of the vote), with Megawati coming in second (at 32 percent), and a striking third place for former general Wiranto (26 percent), who had endorsed Golkar. The runoff on 20 September, between Yudhoyono and Megawati, was won by the former. The era of reform had come to an end.

Shortly before the elections, an activist from the Alliance of Victims of State Violence published a letter on the website of Semanggi Peduli (Caring about Semanggi), titled ‘Elections: Forgetfulness’ (Pemilu: Pelupaan). It pungently captured the critical issue of ‘forgetting’:

Perhaps some of us have had this experience: when strolling down a traditional market, we suddenly sense a penetrating stench when entering the fresh meat area. For those of us not used to shopping at traditional markets, the brain might promptly give off two options: continue to look for fresh meat to prepare that fine meal, or turn away and go home? Relax, that won’t be necessary! Go ahead and find that meat of your choice. As for the smell? I can assure you that the repulsive odour will evaporate within minutes and you will gradually feel comfortable in its surroundings. Our senses will eventually ‘accept’ the presence of that odour. Don’t worry, this is perfectly natural, not a disease.
This specific odour not only exists in the meat stalls of our traditional markets, but also in our beloved Republic. It’s there in Ambon, in Aceh, in Papua, even in some places in the capital: Tanjung Priok, Trisakti, Semanggi, Klender, Glodok. These are filled with the human blood that gushed out of bodies by the thrust of bullets and bayonets, or the human flesh of those burned alive. These were events of the utmost cruelty. But the ensuing process is even crueler: forgetting. It is not a disgrace if the stench of traditional markets evaporates with time. But once the memory and especially the heart starts to function like the nose in catching the stench of the market we have truly failed in our humanity. Take the Trisakti and Semanggi One and Two tragedies. How many of us – who six years ago sank down in shock at witnessing the atrocity via TV, radio, or printed media – still feel that sense of grief today, right now? How many of us still tremble, bow our heads in speechless silence, at remembering what happened in the Chinese districts in Jakarta? Do we remember … or have we forgotten?

Slipi Plaza is standing erect again, luxurious and bustling with sellers and buyers; Klender Plaza too is again beckoning to consumers. Sudirman Road is busy handling the traffic jams of Jakarta. The students and people who died at Sudirman have been branded provocateurs; the rape victims have been relegated to the land of fairy tales, and the souls of people rising into the air through the crisp stench of freshly burnt meat have been given their own label: looters. Life in Indonesia, second by second, goes by as if nothing happened. Like a nose forgetting the stench of the traditional market, our minds and hearts have begun to forget these human tragedies. Systematically, high military officers, the ‘masterminds’ of these events, bombard our society’s collective consciousness with statements steering the evaporation of public memory of the bloodshed. ‘Let’s welcome the future… let’s not be chained by the past… reconciliation… islah⁴ … let’s move ahead towards a bright Indonesia!’ In the same spirit of forgetting (and fooling the people), these generals … have reappeared in public life … to run for president of Indonesia in response to a supposed longing among part of the public for a strong leader, which they interpret as a military president.

God has created our nasal organ with the ability to adapt to the smells around us, including putrid smells that are indeed troubling. But the same God has also gifted each of His children with a conscience, to always be sensitive to humanitarian problems, to not make us think that the falling of victims is just a part of life that doesn’t need further attention. An open conscience will ensure that we don’t adapt to violence and make it a natural part of life. It is fine for our nasal organ to adapt to the putrid smells of the market, but don’t ever allow our conscience to function like our nose. Let it always speak, let the truth always be voiced, because forgetfulness is crueler than the tyranny itself.

The issue of ‘public amnesia’ became a major topic among activists as well as social scientists. But the debate usually revolved around the recollection of the familiar key events: the Trisakti Tragedy, the May 1998 riots, and the Semanggi Tragedies in Jakarta. This was also apparent in the abovementioned documentary, which closes again with a black screen listing the names of the ‘Heroes of Reform-
masi’ – the students who lost their lives in the cited tragedies – scrolled in white. This was not uncontested. Student activists outside Jakarta often wondered why only the victims of ‘TSS’ (Trisakti, Semanggi One, and Semanggi Two) became martyrs, while in other regions students had also died in confrontations with security forces. Ironically, the same question was also raised by the ‘other victims’ of the Semanggi Tragedy, namely the Pam Swakarsa militia, who had been attacked by local residents and some beaten to death (see Chapter 13), and who claimed a right to be commemorated as well. While this claim did not receive a serious public response, it did raise the important issue of who and what is remembered.

After 2004, student protests around specific issues continued, but there was no longer a recognised ‘student movement’. At the same time, the trope of student struggle became all the more visible in the public sphere – not in the form of long marches and other spectacular street performances of resistance (though these still occurred, especially with the rise of the labour movement, which absorbed many of the former student activists), but in the form of popular youth culture. Through this channel, the ‘spirit’ of student resistance had begun spreading to broader middle-class youth publics well before Suharto’s resignation, and since reformasi its fashionableness grew enormously. This was most evident in music and clothing trends, as not only punk-rock bands (long the voice of resistance) but also many pop and young Islamic dakwah bands began adopting the language and themes of student struggle, and activist dress codes were simulated in a range of fashion items – including buttons and bandanas, and t-shirts with ‘Revolusi!’ or the symbols of communism printed on them, as well as the image of Che Guevara or the iconic image of pemuda leader Sutomo and his slogan: ‘Freedom or death!’ But if t-shirts featuring activist slogans and heroes only shape youth consciousness to a certain extent (for as long as it is fashionable), perhaps a stronger impact could be expected from the dissemination of the activist persona on screen.

The 2005 feature film Gie (directed by Riri Riza), a 147-minute biopic about Soe Hok Gie based on his published diary (see Chapter 6), was a striking example of how the image of student struggle was revived in popular culture, even as the student movement was in decline. While any other movie on this subject would not have caused the public hype this movie did, Gie featured the popular movie star and young heartthrob Nicholas Saputra in the lead role of the legendary student activist. Production started in 2001 amidst the turmoil of reformasi, taking three and a half years as the filmmakers faced such difficulties as failing to find a printing house willing to produce the needed PKI flags. At that moment, there was also the controversy over Wahid’s proposal to revoke the 1966 decree banning Marxism (see Chapter 13), indicating the extent to which the communist spectre continued to haunt public consciousness. The filmmakers thus feared that
sensitive scenes would be censored, such as one scene showing a crowd of PKI supporters waving the PKI flag and yelling ‘Long live PKI!’, or another scene showing security forces opening fire upon student demonstrators. But Gie passed the censor relatively intact (except for a brief kissing scene), which many viewed as evidence that the reform era did make a difference in Indonesia. Film critics and audiences hailed Gie for showing a side of history that is at odds with the official version. Moreover, it raised widespread hope that the film would revive the spirit of activism among youth. Such hope is implicitly conveyed in the film itself, which ends with the message that Gie’s ideals to see Indonesia free of injustice and corruption had not yet been fulfilled. Alongside the film’s release, a seventh edition of Soe Hok Gie’s *An Activist’s Diary* was printed (the last edition was printed in 1993). The publisher, LP3ES, also expressed the hope that Gie’s story could become an inspiration to today’s youth, who apparently lacked a suitable hero. Yet, the fact that this reprint of Gie’s diary featured film star Nicholas Saputra on the front cover, replacing Gie’s image that was relegated to the back flap, raised criticism. Reviving memories was fine, but the question of *how* to remember remained. Was this not mere romanticisation of an icon, in a manner that distorted the memory of his true self?

Romanticisation and distortion of histories of struggle – as had previously happened with the pemuda of the revolution (see Chapter 4), the war and revolution (see Reid 2005), and the Angkatan 66 (see Chapter 6) – again became the mode of remembering for the 1998 student movement, with similar effects of historical containment. As Strassler (2005: 279) argues, ‘nostalgia, amnesia, and mythic historical narrative worked to shape popular memory of reformasi – particularly among students themselves – even as the project of reformasi remained unfinished’, while the ‘very discourses that framed them as heroes of reformasi’ in effect had ‘the students’ historical agency contained’. Strassler shows that this was most evident in the many photo exhibitions on *reformasi*, typically focusing on the heroic student struggle, which began burgeoning right after Suharto’s resignation, and continued throughout the era of reform. While these exhibitions promoted the ‘idea of the photograph as a witness that produces new witnesses among its viewers’ (2005: 283), their main visitors were the same students seen on display, who seemed to be fascinated with the ‘images from the “glory days” of their struggle’, and thereby contributed to ‘increasingly relegating their history-making to a nostalgically recalled past’ (2005: 284). Strassler mentions an exhibition held in Yogyakarta and Solo in April 1999, which featured photographs from the ‘Three Orders’: Sukarno’s Old Order, Suharto’s New Order, and the ‘Reformasi Order’. While photographs from 1998 dominated the exhibition, ‘the inclusion of “historical” photographs in the Three Orders exhibition served, also, to frame reformasi as (already) an historical period, a present already antici-
pating its own closure’ (2005: 286). Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 12, the end of that history had already come to pass with ‘The End’ of the historic drama in May 1998 – anything that came after that narrative endpoint could merely be an embellishment of that. As Strassler (2002: 304) further notes, the relegation of reformasi – and the student movement – into the past, while it was still ongoing in the present, was also effected by the archiving of the photographs and other materials by state institutions; these images were thereby framed ‘within nationalist history (rather than the personal history of students)’, and used ‘to support a mythic narrative that constructs “youth” as an ahistorical subject, severing their ties to particular social and political contexts’. As discussed in Chapter 1, the ultimate effect of such decontextualisation was that it stripped the students of their political identity and agency – in addition, indeed, to stripping their ownership of their personal history.

With place-memories erased from Jakarta’s cityscape, the generals returning to power amidst a public culture of selective amnesia, popular culture romanticising the symbols of resistance and making them empty signifiers, and archives and photo exhibits relegating the living and present struggles to the realm of contained history, where could memory live on as something other than backward-looking nostalgia, as something productive, indeed agentive? The answer lies in narrated experiences of personal historicity.

**History vs. Historicity: Narrating Experience and Play**

At the beginning of Chapter 1, I quoted one activist as saying that, in the end, they – the 1998 student movement – became ‘nothing but heroes in vain’. This was only partly true, though. Yes, they became ‘heroes’ – not because they saw themselves as such or sought to be so, and those activists with whom I conducted my research certainly did not, but because they were constructed as such through the bold media headlines announcing the triumphant end of the student saga, the photo exhibits and archives, the credit they received from respected public figures – such as Arief Budiman, who called the 1998 student movement the ‘heroes of the decade’6 – and other representations that zoomed in on the moments of historic battle and victory on stage. Yet, indeed, their accomplishment was partly ‘in vain’, given that becoming ‘heroes’ and an ‘Angkatan’ did little to further their ongoing struggle to ‘destroy the old system’. On the contrary, being labelled as heroes hampered their efforts to shed the myth of student struggle – with all its exclusivity, narrative containment, and denial of political identity. Finally, despite efforts toward organisational ‘consolidation’ and forging all kinds of alliances, the student movement’s accomplishments were in vain as the movement was in decline, as symbolised by a lonely pile of burning tyres.
Yet, at the same time, it had been anything but in vain, because in the process – through the successes and failures on stage and behind the scenes – the experience of mobilisation and organisation in the unique circumstances of historic battle and political transition taught them valuable political lessons. It taught them not only how to play the game of politics, but also how to influence it and how not to play it. While the students were frequently criticised for making political ‘blunders’ – or ‘historical mistakes’, as Eko said (see Chapter 13) – that was how they learned. Playing politics for high stakes, in circumstances of high expectations, spurred the students to experiment with the political roles and repertoires assigned to them – including rediscovering their genealogies, which were then also played with, and pushing the limits, taking risks, trying out new avenues, and dealing with the consequences. This is how they discovered and gave shape to their political positions and subjectivities. Even the conflicts, deep disappointments, and traumatic experiences that accompanied each setback taught them more about their political selves and convictions. Indeed, as Turner (1974: 156) argues, regardless of the outcome of the social drama, ‘the result is an increase in what one might call social or plural reflexivity, the ways in which a group tries to scrutinise, portray, understand, and then act on itself’. In that regard, the actors did become ‘heroes’ – heroes in their own drama. As Turner (1974: 156) quotes from Barbara Myerhoff:

As heroes in our own dramas, we are made self-aware, conscious of our consciousness. At once actor and audience, we may then come into the fullness of our human capability – and perhaps human desire to watch ourselves and enjoy knowing what we know.

While an understanding of student movements in terms of isolated events contributes to trapping them in narratives of history – which are typically narratives about the ‘success’ or ‘failure’, the ‘rise’ and ‘fall’, of particular movements – reconsidering them as a process of play, learning, and reflexive growth might also help to offset the unreasonable expectations that are often invested in them, not least by students themselves. It is to acknowledge, as Meji from FAM-UI, but also many other student activists told me, that ‘this is just an exercise’ (see Chapter 13). Indeed, rather than a historic event, the student movement is an exercise in historicity. As Touraine (1981, 1988) defines it, ‘historical actors’ are those who engage in a battle for historicity, or for the capacity to influence society’s governing cultural orientations (see Chapter 2). Such a battle cannot be won through events or mere struggles for power; it can only be realised by living it, by embodying the counterhegemonic voice, vision, and play in society.

The true significance of student movements, then, is that they nurture and shape what Crossley (2003) calls a ‘radical habitus’, which is acquired through
the process of political socialisation that occurs through movement participation itself, and which typically gives rise to a disposition for continued activism. Both structured by protest and structuring protest, the radical habitus thus contributes to the ‘perpetuation of activism as a social practice’ (Crossley 2003: 51). As DeGroot (1998: 9–10) also argues: ‘It is better to speak of the legacy of student protest, rather than of its achievements’; ‘the most enduring legacy of student protest is personal: a habit of activism carried into later life’. Indeed, in the ongoing personal as well as collective battles for historicity, activism becomes a script for practice, the story of a life.

In acknowledging the significance of this script, the story needs to be told in its proper context. As I have shown in this study, activist lives do not start with becoming an activist. While an activist disposition comes into its own through the radical habitus acquired in the course of movement participation, it is itself also structured by the previous experiences of young, reflexive selves. Furthermore, I have shown that becoming a radical – both before and during movement participation – is not a straightforward process, but shaped by experiences of conflict, disappointment, and dilemmas, as well as the spirit of agency. By telling these stories, the story of the student movement might be liberated from its surrounding myths. It might help to recontextualise the memories of protest into the personal and political histories of which they are part. Myths can only be reproduced, or debunked, or played with. But real, embodied stories – in all their messiness – can continue on in further processes of action and reflection.

**To Be Continued …**

How, then, did the story of this movement, and the stories of these activists, continue? The activists who participated in my research between 2001 and 2004 have moved on to adult lives and professions. Many are married (often with fellow activists) and have children, and some have entered or started businesses, yet few have turned their back on politics altogether. Quite a few former student activists have entered political parties. For student leaders of formal student organisations this had always been an easily envisioned career path, but now this could lead to a more varied range of parties. For student leaders who had emerged from the protest movement, however, with its long antipolitics tradition, this choice of career had to be justified – either as the natural outcome of deep personal convictions or as a strategic move, but in any case as a narrative of continued struggle. One person who would fit the first narrative is Ihwan. Once an ‘extremist’ (see Chapter 9), who then tried to ‘heat up’ and ‘open up’ the campus mosque association (see Chapter 10), before becoming a KAMMI branch leader in 1998 (see Chapter 12), and the national KAMMI leader in 2002, playing an important role in forging
once-unimaginable alliances with leftist groups as part of the front for revolution (see Chapter 13), he is now a member of parliament for PKS (formerly PK, with the added ‘S’ for ‘sejahtera’, or ‘prosperous’). The relationship between PKS and KAMMI has often been derided as one of patron–onderbouw, but in the case of Ihwan, knowing his passionate past, I could only see his choice for entering the formal political arena as deeply personal and idealist. I recalled what he told me in my interview with him, in 2002:

It’s an everyday struggle to guard the spirit. I mean, we’re young now, but realising change is not a sprint; it’s a marathon, a very long process with all kinds of thorns and lots of obstacles, challenges, and temptations. It’s a very heavy process, so it’s also about stamina. That’s why we say that change starts with changing one’s character. So, our spirit differs from those who want to reap results today without sowing the seeds for change tomorrow, and the more distant future. We need real characters; we need people who are ready to become the characters of long-term change. [Me: What kind of character would that be?] Well, generally speaking, real characters have endurance. This also means they can resist instant temptations; they must, because there are many temptations along the way. But we must remain consistent with our long-term vision for change. There are many who don’t; for them it’s about saving their own skin, about becoming a prominent figure: ‘As long I can enjoy my influence, why should I care about change?’ – those types. So to prevent becoming like that, we must build our character while we’re still young.

As Ihwan suggests, the student movement that he was part of has produced both ‘sell-outs’, who fail to resist the temptations of power, and ‘real characters’ – both in the sense of strong individuals with strong political convictions and the endurance to continue fighting for real change, and in the sense of characters in stories of struggle. In the latter sense, to ‘build characters’ while they were ‘still young’ also meant to construct alternative political stories by themselves, about themselves, before being encapsulated by the conventional myths and the game of politics. To do so required critical self-reflexivity; it required real agency.

Another character cited in this study who became a politician was Irfan – the campus senate ‘player’ (see Chapter 10), who became a PRD activist and had to go underground (see Chapter 11), and then became a prominent actor in the 2002 front for revolution (see Chapter 13). He is now the chair of the Islamic party PPP branch in his home region, a position that he reportedly owes to his skills in playing the game of politics, in a remarkably similar manner to how he once won the senate chair position at his university. Some of his former comrades would mark him as a ‘cheat’ for that reason (but that is also how they know and accept him), but I recalled what he told me in my interview with him, in 2002:
A revolutionary can’t stay within his own community of fellow revolutionaries, having a ball among themselves. He needs to spread out among the masses of the real world. That’s called real organising. Organising is about spreading what we’re talking about among the masses; it’s about making that connection with the masses, not just among ourselves. That also means becoming part of those masses, really earning a living there – because a revolutionary also has to earn a living. Many so-called organisers are whining that they have given up too much already – their studies, their careers, and so on – saying they can no longer survive this way, they can’t make money, and then they give up and their whole life becomes a failure. But that’s about choice, isn’t it? In the end, it’s about militancy, which has to be a creative militancy; an organiser must be creative to combat weariness among the masses and within himself while also making a living.

Irfan was certainly among the most ‘creative’ political players of my respondents; his transposition of ‘organising while making a living’ among ‘the masses’ from the field of labour to that of politics is one expression of that. But he was not the only leftist activist who made that choice. Many did, especially ahead of the 2009 elections – when the generation that started out as student activists between 1990s and 1998 were in their mid- to late thirties – apparently as a strategy to use these parties’ national infrastructure and mass support base to influence the political system from the inside. Already in December 2004, some fifty PRD activists, including Budiman Sudjatmiko, announced they would enter PDI-P, arguing that the realisation of ‘real reform’ required ‘real political power’, which PRD clearly lacked. A few years later, after a meeting in June 2007 of the National Gathering of ‘98 Activists (Perhimpunun Nasional Aktivis ’98, or Pena ’98), a recommendation was issued for ‘1998 activists’ (who came to avoid the term ‘Angkatan’) to ‘enter the legal political arena … in order to realise the transformation we long for’. Adian Napitapulu – the former ‘leader’ of the ‘leaderless’ Forkot, secretary general of Pena ’98 in 2007, and currently a prominent member of parliament for PDI-P – explained: ‘Upon reflection, [we realise that] our movement thus far has had one shortcoming: we didn’t have the capacity to make policy’.9

Hence, as in the aftermath of the 1966 student movement, the movement came to be divided into ‘parliamentary’ and ‘extra-parliamentary’ paths (see Chapter 6), and as it did in 1967, this created some controversy since many activists, like Agus in 1999, firmly believed that ‘the line had to be clear’ and that entering the system one opposed was ‘hypocritical’ (see Chapter 13). The difference, however, was that in the current political field the two paths of struggle were closely connected through personal and organisational links, as many of the activis	 turned-politicians also remained active in, or otherwise connected with, the type of radical NGO-work that activists like Agus chose as their path of life. This also
meant that the young politicians had something to fall back on, when they proved not to last in the formal political arena. Indeed, many have left it disenchanted and returned to what they still viewed as the ‘real field of struggle’ of grassroots organising, joining the numerous other former student activists who never left or who stayed closely connected to this field.

The vast majority of the activists cited in this study are currently employed in NGOs working on human rights, democracy, labour, and urban poverty; peasants’ or women’s issues; or with environmental and cultural movements. Many have been active in these organisations since they were students. Others, while still occasionally volunteering for these NGOs, have become journalists cum media activists, such as Sitha, or university lecturers, such as Yodi and Rio, who have become fellow lecturers at the same university that they once ‘heated up’ in 1998. There they continue to promote activist ideals, whether in the classroom or on the streets. Still others are on their way to become academic researchers, pursuing a PhD abroad, specialising in subjects true to their political and social orientations. Not surprising to me, then, virtually all of them have stuck with activism in spirit if not in action.

This was dramatically demonstrated around the presidential elections in July 2014. Almost all the activists I once worked with (at least those on the ‘left’ side, but also a striking number of those on the ‘right’) joined forces to campaign for presidential candidate Joko Widodo, then governor of Jakarta and known for his populist policies, who was championing the (by now ‘activist-infiltrated’) party PDI-P. He was running against Prabowo Subianto, the former top-ranking New Order general and Suharto’s son-in-law, who was allegedly behind the abduction of student activists in 1998, the Trisakti killings and subsequent riots, and other human rights violations. During the campaign, which proved to be a real thriller, with the two candidates running neck and neck in the polls, the broad activist alliance behind Widodo went all out for their candidate – with mass rallies, epic rock concerts (including a catchy campaign song written and performed by the rock band Slank; see Chapter 9), and during and after the elections a nationwide grassroots movement to monitor the election process. Undoubtedly owing to their efforts, Widodo won the presidency. Another year later, however, there was again disappointment – and again there were protests, conflicts, and debates.

To me this only further attests to the spirit of activism, the enduring spirit of passionate souls and critical minds. To return once more to the question of ‘heroes in vain’, I wish to conclude that it has been all for the better that they did not become ‘heroes’ according to established notions of such. Rather than heroes, by becoming the characters of their own messy stories of life – with current futures that no longer hinge on ‘historic success’ or ‘failure’, but rather on political convictions that are sharpened, sustained, and revised through ongoing conflicts and
debates about substantial issues of political principle – they have defied encapsulation in the long-established narratives of national struggle. Through this long process of actualisation – from student movement *eksistensi* to continued political existence – they have deconstructed their ‘destined’ destinations. And the process is ongoing, for as long as the spirit lasts.
Glossary

ABRI  Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia, Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia
Akrab  Aksi Rakyat Bersatu, United People’s Action
aliran  ideological stream
AMPD  Aliansi Mahasiswa Prodemokrasi, Prodemocracy Student Alliance
Ampera  Amanat Penderitaan Rakyat, Message of the People’s Suffering
Angkatan generation
API  Angkatan Pemuda Indonesia, Indonesian Youth Generation
Aspri  Asisten Pribadi, Personal Assistants; team of advisors to Suharto composed of top generals
asrama  student dormitory
Bakorstanas  Badan Koordinasi Bantuan Pemantapan Stabilitas Nasional, Agency for Coordination of Support for the Development of National Stability
bapakisme  ‘father-ism’; unquestioned deference to the ‘father’ or authority figure
BEM  Badan Eksekutif Mahasiswa, Student Executive Body
BIA  Badan Intelijen ABRI, Armed Forces Intelligence Agency
Bulog  Badan Urusan Logistik Nasional, National Logistics Agency
CGMI  Consentrasi Gerakan Mahasiswa Indonesia, Indonesian Student Movement Concentration
Cipayung  puppeteer in the wayang theatre, also ‘hidden hand’ or ‘mastermind’
DMPY  Dewan Mahasiswa dan Pemuda Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta Student and Youth Council
DPR  Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, House of People’s Representatives
dwifungsi  ABRI’s ‘dual function’ in defence and socio-political affairs
FAMI  Front Aksi Mahasiswa Indonesia, Indonesian Student Action Front
Famred  Front Aksi Mahasiswa untuk Reformasi dan Demokrasi, Student Action Front for Reforms and Democracy
FAM UI  Front Aksi Mahasiswa Universitas Indonesia, Student Action Front of the University of Indonesia
FKMY  Forum Komunikasi Mahasiswa Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta Student Communication Forum
FKSMJ  Forum Komunikasi Senat Mahasiswa Jakarta, Jakarta Communication Forum of Student Senates
FNPBI  Front Nasional untuk Perjuangan Buruh Indonesia, National Front for the Struggle of Indonesian Workers
Forkot  Forum Kota, City Forum
FPI  Front Pembela Islam, Islam Defender Front
FPPI  Front Perjuangan Pemuda Indonesia, Struggle Front of Indonesian
Playing Politics

Youth

GEMSOS  Gerakan Mahasiswa Sosialis, Socialist Student Movement
G30S   Gerakan 30 September, 30 September Movement; abortive coup in 1965
GMKI  Gerakan Mahasiswa Kristen Indonesia, Indonesian Christian Student Movement
GMNI  Gerakan Mahasiswa Nasionalis Indonesia, Indonesian Nationalist Student Movement
Golkar Golongan Karya, Group of Functionaries; ruling state party under Suharto
golput  golongan putih, white group; election boycotters
HMI  Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam, Islamic Student Association
HMI MPO HMI Majelis Penyelamat Organisasi, HMI Council to Save the Organisation
IAIN Institut Agama Islam Negeri, State Islamic Institute
ICMI Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia, Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals
IKIP Institut Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan, Institute of Teacher Training and Education
Iluni UI Ikatan Alumni Universitas Indonesia, University of Indonesia Alumni Federation
IM  Indonesia Muda, Young Indonesia
IMADA Ikatan Mahasiswa Daerah, Regional Student Union
IMM Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah, Muhammadiyah Students Association
intel intelligence officer, secret agent, informer, infiltrator
IPB Institut Pertanian Bogor, Bogor Institute of Agriculture
ISTN Institut Sains dan Teknologi Nasional, National Institute of Science and Technology
ITB Institut Teknologi Bandung, Bandung Institute of Technology
jago 'cock-style' criminal, an archetypal figure in Javanese culture
jilbab female Islamic head scarf
KAMI Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Indonesia, Indonesian Student Action Front
KAMMI Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia, Indonesian Muslim Students Action Front
kaum muda the youth, ‘the young’
KAPPI Kesatuan Aksi Pelajar-Pelajar Indonesia, Indonesian Pupils Action Front
KB UI Keluarga Besar Universitas Indonesia, Greater Family of the University of Indonesia
KNPI Komite Nasional Pemuda Indonesia, National Committee of Indonesian Youth
Komrad Komite Mahasiswa dan Rakyat untuk Demokrasi, Student and People’s Committee for Democracy
Kopassus: Komando Pasukan Khusus, Special Forces Command
Kopkamtib: Komando Pemulihan Keamanan dan Ketertiban, Operation Command for Restoration of Security and Order
Kostrad: Komando Strategis Angkatan Darat, Army Strategic Reserve
KRI: Komite Rakyat Indonesia, Indonesian People’s Committee
LBH: Lembaga Bantuan Hukum, Legal Aid Institute
LDK: Lembaga Dakwah Kampus, Campus Organisation for Islamic Proselytising
LIPI: Lembaga Ilmu dan Pengetahuan Indonesia, National Institute of Sciences
LMND: Liga Mahasiswa Nasional untuk Demokrasi, National Student League for Democracy
mahasiswa: student
Malari: Malapetaka Limabelas Januari, Fifteenth January Disaster
Masyumi: Majelis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia, Indonesian Muslim Council
MMI: Majelis Mahasiswa Indonesia, Indonesian Student Assembly
MPR: Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat, People’s Consultative Assembly
Monas: Monumen Nasional, National Monument in Central Jakarta
NKK/BKK: Normalisasi Kehidupan Kampus/ Badan Koordinasi Kemahasiswaan, Normalisation of Campus Life / Student Coordination Board
NU: Nahdlatul Ulama, Association of Ulamas
OTB: 1. organisasi tanpa bentuk, formless organisation  
2. oposisi telah berdiri, the opposition has risen up
P4: Pedoman Penghayatan dan Pengalaman Pancasila, Guidelines for the Comprehension and Experience of Pancasila
Pam Swakarsa: Pasukan Pengamanan Swakarsa, Voluntary Security Guards
PAN: Partai Amanat Nasional, Party of the National Message
Pancasila: ideological basis of the Republic, comprising five pillars: belief in one God; just and civilised humanity; national unity; democracy by representative consensus; social justice
PDI: Partai Demokrasi Indonesia, Indonesian Democratic Party
PDI-P: Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan, Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle
pembangunan: development; the central pillar and slogan of the New Order
pemuda: youth
pergerakan: the movement
pesantren: school of Koranic studies
Pesindo: Pemuda Sosialis Indonesia, Indonesian Socialist Youth
Petrus: penembakan misterius, mysterious shootings
PII: Pelajar Islam Indonesia, Indonesian Islamic Pupils
Pijar: Pusat Informasi dan Jaringan Aksi untuk Reformasi, Centre of Information and Action Network for Democratic Reform
PK: Partai Keadilan, Justice Party
PKB: Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa, National Awakening Party
PKI Partai Komunis Indonesia, Indonesian Communist Party
PMII Perhimpunan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia, Indonesian Association of Islamic Students
PMKRI Pergerakan Mahasiswa Katolik Republik Indonesia, Indonesian Catholic Student Movement
PMP Pendidikan Moral Pancasila, Education in the Morals of the Pancasila
PNBK Partai Nasionalis Bung Karno, Bung Karno Nationalist Party; later Partai Nasionalis Bangsa Kesatuan, National Unity Nationalist Party
PNI Partai Nasional Indonesia, Indonesian National Party
posko pos koordinasi, coordination post
PPKN Pendidikan Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan, Education in Pancasila and Citizenship
PPMI Perserikatan Perhimpunan Mahasiswa Indonesia, Indonesian Student Federation Union
PPP Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, United Development Party
PPPI Perhimpoenan Peladjar-Peladjar Indonesia, Indonesian Students Association
PRD Partai Rakyat Demokratik, People’s Democratic Party
priyayi Javanese aristocracy
PSI Partai Sosialis Indonesia, Indonesian Socialist Party
PSPB Pendidikan Sejarah Perjuangan Bangsa, Education in the History of National Struggle
rakyat the people
resi clairvoyant hermit-sage
RNMI Rembuk Nasional Mahasiswa Indonesia, National Conference of Indonesian Students
SI Sarekat Islam, Islamic Union
SMID Solidaritas Mahasiswa Indonesia untuk Demokrasi, Indonesian Student Solidarity for Democracy
SMY Solidaritas Mahasiswa Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta Student Solidarity
STF Driyakarya Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Driyakarya, Driyakarya College of Philosophy
Tritura Tiga Tuntutan Rakyat, People’s Three Demands
UBK Universitas Bung Karno, Bung Karno University
UGM Universitas Gadjah Mada, Gadjah Mada University
UI Universitas Indonesia, University of Indonesia
UII Universitas Islam Indonesia, Islamic University of Indonesia
UIN Universitas Islam Negeri, State Islamic University (formerly IAIN)
UKI Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Christian University of Indonesia
UKSW Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, Satya Wacana Christian University
UMI Universitas Muslim Indonesia, Indonesian Muslim University
UMY Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta Muhammadiyah University
Unair Universitas Airlangga, Airlangga University
Unas Universitas Nasional, National University
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Undip</td>
<td>Universitas Diponegoro, Diponegoro University</td>
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<td>Unhas</td>
<td>Universitas Hasanuddin, Hasanuddin University</td>
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<td>Unibraw</td>
<td>Universitas Brawijaya, Brawijaya University</td>
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<td>Universitas Jakarta, Jakarta University</td>
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<td>Unpad</td>
<td>Universitas Padjajaran, Padjajaran University</td>
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<td>Unpar</td>
<td>Universitas Parahyangan, Parahyangan University</td>
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<td>Unpas</td>
<td>Universitas Pasundan, Pasundan University</td>
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<td>UNS</td>
<td>Universitas Negeri Solo, Solo State University</td>
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<td>USU</td>
<td>Universitas Sumatra Utara, North Sumatra University</td>
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<td>UUD 45</td>
<td>Undang-Undang Dasar 1945, Constitution of 1945</td>
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<td>WP</td>
<td>Wahana Pembebasan, Agency of Liberation</td>
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<td>YAI</td>
<td>Yayasan Administrasi Indonesia, Indonesian Academy of Administration</td>
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<td>YLBHI</td>
<td>Yayasan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Indonesia, Indonesian Legal Aid Institute</td>
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CHAPTER 1: IN SEARCH OF AGENCY

1 Former KB-UI activist, interviewed 23 December 2002.
2 FPPI activist, interviewed 19 February 2003.
3 Former University of Indonesia student, interviewed 24 October 2002.
4 Suara Mahasiswa UI Online, 3 August 2003.
5 Besides these book chapters, the few English-language studies include one paper adapted from a Master’s thesis (McRae 2001) and two articles on the Islamic student organisation KAMMI (Madrid 1999; Kraince 2000), which is studied apart from the student movement at large, thus indicating scholarly interest in political Islam rather than student activism. In Indonesia there was a brief surge of publications after 1998 (e.g., Widjojo et al. 1999). The spirit of reforms also spurred interesting publications on student movements that had been neglected in official history, such as those of the 1970s (Hariyadhie 1998; Aly 2004). A major gap that remains is the history of the communist student movement, which was wiped out in 1965–1966.
6 D&R, 3 January 2000.
7 Scholars stressed sociopathological mental states befalling the youth, such as anomie or Oedipal crisis, and blamed these on dysfunctional socialisation. In his study of the 1966 ‘student revolt’ in Indonesia, Douglas (1970: 115) traces its ‘roots’ to ‘incongruous child rearing’ in Indonesian families, where the children learned ‘the art of separating manifest behaviour from affective attachment’, so that respect for authority remains ritualistic and fragile: ‘Formal authority often is not congruent with effective authority, and Oedipal tensions which might stimulate rebellion against authority are evident’. Psychologist Feuer (1969) introduced the link with Oedipal crisis, further diagnosing this protest generation with ‘juvenocracy’, ‘nihilism’, ‘suicidalism’, and a ‘dangerous lack of fear for danger’. For sociological debates of the time, see Lipset (1967), Lipset and Altbach (1969), Altbach and Laufer (1972), and Archer (1972).
8 Weber also notes, however, that these ‘are not absolute contrasts but rather supplements, which only in unison constitute a genuine man – a man who can have the “calling for politics”’ (in Gerth and Mills 1946: 127).
9 For a discussion of the concept of ‘free spaces’ in social movements, see Polletta (1999).
10 This can be illustrated by Douglas’s (1970) study of the 1966 student movement, which traces the effects of political socialisation under Sukarno on the students who would rise up against him. He sets out criticising theories that examine socialisation ‘from the point of view of the political system rather than the individual within it’ (1970: 10). Douglas (1970: 6) argues that ‘the basic dynamic of the political socialisation process is the continuing interaction between individuals and certain social structures within the political system’ that are ‘not specifically political’, that is, the family, school and mass media. He then reveals deep inconsistencies in the socialisation process and how this caused students to
develop ambivalent political attitudes, which enabled them to revolt against the regime that politically raised them. His functionalist bent is revealed, though, when he explains this in terms of the ‘disturbed authority relations’ and a ‘lack of social cohesion’ caused by political instability. This implies the alternative of a ‘normal’ state of affairs – a stable political culture with an underlying unity and order, reproduced through functioning socialisation mechanisms – where student movements (or Oedipal crises) ideally do not occur. The student movement is thus mainly seen as a symptom of system breakdown.

CHAPTER 2: PROTEST AND PLAY

1 Classical narrative theory distinguishes between ‘narrative’ and ‘story’, with ‘story’ denoting the sequence of events preceding its articulation into narrative discourse. But I make no such distinction, agreeing with Davis (2002: 28n3) that ‘there is no such thing as a prediscursive story’.

2 On some days, my research took me to a activist political training in south Jakarta in the morning, a midday rally at a campus in central Jakarta, or a political discussion at a campus in north Jakarta, or a seminar at a convention centre in west Jakarta, then an afternoon street rally. And when that rally was over and participants went home, I would bump into and feel obliged to join another rally of a rival group that had deliberately scheduled its event such so as not to overlap with the one I just left. In the evening, I would still have a discussion, strategy meeting, or birthday party of other groups to attend. And afterwards, I had to try to record my multiple impressions of the day in research notes. It was quite an adrenaline rush.

3 I recorded thirty-one life stories of activists between two and six hours in length. One other respondent narrated her life story for me on paper, thirty pages long. Through casual conversations I also gained much information on other activists’ life stories.

CHAPTER 3: STUDENTS IN THE MAKING OF HISTORY

1 The cornerstones of the Ethical Policy were irrigation, transmigration, and education. It involved a drastic expansion of the colonial state into native society, as social institutions were redefined according to the needs of the colonial state. Beyond the policy’s lofty (and patronising) language, economic profit and social control were its key objectives. The growth of ‘native welfare’ had to expand the native market for the colonial industry; and ‘native edification’ should be seen in the light of growing security concerns, following a series of revolts by native workers and peasants against Dutch officials and landlords in the late-nineteenth century. There was a steep rise in government allocated budgets for ‘native education’; from 300,000 Dutch guilders in 1870 to 1409 million in 1900. See Ricklefs (1991: 156-160) on the educational reforms.

CHAPTER 4: SPIRIT OF STRUGGLE

1 Soon after their release Sjahrir, Sukarno, and Hatta made an agreement to pursue the nationalist movement on two levels: Sukarno and Hatta would work legally with the Japanese, and Sjahrir would organise the underground resistance (Kahin 1952: 104). See Legge (1988) for a discussion of Sjahrir’s student following in this underground resistance.
2 After his failed subversion against the Japanese, the former Gerindo leader had escaped execution owing to Sukarno’s intervention, and was instead imprisoned until the end of the occupation. Soon after this Youth Congress, in December 1945, Syarifuddin’s and Sjahrrir’s respective parties merged into the Socialist Party, with Sjahrrir as chairman and Syarifuddin vice-chairman.

3 This poem still impacts student consciousness today. For example, in the 2002 teenage movie, Ada Apa Dengan Cinta (What’s Up with Love), the protagonist, a nonconformist high-school student, is shown continually carrying around and reading in Anwar’s anthology, Aku.

4 Reid (1974: 54–55), for example, portrays the ‘distinct style of pemuda leader’ as one ‘with long flowing hair, military attire, a pistol – the badge of revolutionary authority – at the waist, and a sharp, decisive way of giving commands’. The scouting look, with khaki uniforms, would be more fitting, considering the scouting background of pemuda leaders like Sutomo.

CHAPTER 5: LIVING DANGEROUSLY

1 PNI obtained 22.3 percent of the votes, Masyumi 20.9 percent, NU 18.4 percent, and PKI 16.4 percent. PKI had made an impressive comeback after its defeat in the 1948 Madiun Affair, under the leadership of D.N. Aidit, a former member of the Menteng 31 asrama in the revolution, who won Sukarno’s support by supporting his policies.

2 For Sukarno, Indonesia’s ‘ongoing revolution’ was part of a global postcolonial movement, marking the rise of ‘new emerging forces’ (nefos) against ‘old established forces’ (oldefos), starting with the declaration of the Non-Aligned Movement at the 1955 Asia–Africa Conference in Bandung. In 1956, PPMI hosted the Asia-Africa Student Conference in Bandung, with a similar message against nekolim forces (Martha et al. 1984: 227–231).

3 See the discussion of ‘power’ vs. ‘Power’ in Chapter 1; briefly, ‘Power’ is used here to signify the traditional Javanese idea of power as a cosmological force to be accumulated and concentrated in a unifying centre (Anderson [1972] 1990).

4 On Sukarno’s monuments, see Anderson (1978), Leclerc (1993), and Kusno (2000).

5 Hence, he wished to be addressed by the term Bung, ‘Brother’ – a term of address also associated with the revolution days – rather than Bapak, ‘Father’ or ‘Sir’. Recall, though, how younger pemuda had admonished Sukarno as one of the ‘hesitant elders’ in the early revolution days.

6 This refers to the towns at the western and eastern ends of the country, Merauke being in West Irian.

7 It should be noted that the following is based on biased literature, as none of the sources cite the experience of CGMI. Since little information is available on CGMI’s position in this period, the following account thus mainly reflects the perspective of its foes (Karim 1997: 104–106; Martha et al. 1984: 279–283; Saidi 1989; and Sulastomo 2008).

8 Hardoyo (quoted in Lucas 2010: 7) mentions that CGMI had yet to ratify communism as its ideological basis at its congress on 29 September, and though they had invited PKI-leader Aidit as the key speaker, his outspoken performance (see below) shocked many of the CGMI students, at least it did Hardoyo.
State universities were also urged to break all ties with Western countries, but this was impossible since most depended on foreign assistance, especially from the United States. Observers such as Douglas (1970) have suggested that the US influence explains the rise of anti-communism among students who would constitute the 1966 student movement, but this ignores the fact that GMNI and to a lesser extent CGMI were also strongly represented at these universities, and moreover neglects the historical background of these contentious political sentiments as sketched above.

CHAPTER 6: A JACKET DRENCHED IN BLOOD

1 PKI’s allies preferred the term ‘Gestok’ or ‘October First Movement’, implying that the real coup occurred when Suharto made his move. Observers have suggested that the insurgents acted on their own without the PKI top’s knowledge, and that the CIA was involved at least in the aftermath (Anderson and McVey 1971).

2 GMNI’s position was also weakened by the fact that its political ally, PNI, again split into two camps, with the new camp creating its own GMNI that joined KAMI (in this chapter, GMNI refers to the original, pro-Sukarno camp).

3 This was the case during the ‘Malari’ riots in 1974 (see Chapter 7), when former KAPPI leaders were identified among those instigating the riots, which were then blamed on the students; see the next chapter.

4 Like Anwar, Gie had studied and travelled in the United States and other countries where student protest was at its height. There they interacted with other activists, and though they had to explain their anti-communist stance to their leftist peers, they very much felt part of this global student struggle.

CHAPTER 7: FROM LOYAL CRITIC TO YOUNG RADICAL

1 See Chapter 4 for a definition of the Pancasila.

2 Taken from the KNPI website, http://www.knpi.org (defunct).

3 *Mahasiswa Indonesia* featured a caricature of the assault, with the text: ‘One day after your order, General!’, referring to Suharto’s message at ABRI’s anniversary the day before the incident, 5 October, for ABRI ‘not to hurt the people’s feelings’ (Aly 2004:266). Significantly, Suharto was referred to by his military rank, as ‘general’, thus identifying him as part of the detested ABRI rather than the statesman he present himself to be.

4 The following account is based on newspaper reports, witness reports disclosed during Siregar’s trial (see Siregar 1994), and Aly’s (2004: Chapter 6) account of the events.

5 Sudomo also mentioned ‘remnants from Masyumi and PSI’ (a legacy of Guided Democracy spectres), and in a slip of the tongue he said that ABRI cannot blame PKI alone, lest ‘the public gets bored’ with the same old story of ‘remnants of G30S/PKI being scapegoated again and again’ (quoted in Siregar 1994: 19).

6 Siregar was tried on charges of undermining government policy; undermining the authority of the state, the legitimate government, and government officials; instigating unrest in society; disrupting public industry, distribution, production, trade, and transportation; and conspiracy to overthrow the government. He faced a sentence of twelve years in prison.

7 The ban was lifted two weeks later, on the condition that the newspapers ‘guard the good
name and authority’ of the government and president, contribute to national stability and order, and engage in ‘introspection and self-correction’ (Tempo, 11 February 1978). The ban on student journals was lifted after six months, but less than a year later the journals Salemba (UI), Kampus (ITB) and Gelora Mahasiswa (UGM) were again banned.

8 Tempo, 28 January 1978.
10 Tempo, 3 June 1978.

CHAPTER 8: ORDER AND DISORDER

1 This keynote speech, delivered on the occasion of the twenty-eighth anniversary of the intellectual magazine Tempo, was Anderson’s first public appearance in Indonesia since 1972, when he was blacklisted by the New Order government for his publication, with McVey, on the 1965 coup affair (Anderson and McVey 1971).

2 In the HMI the issue was so contested that the Youth Ministry had to intervene, threatening to ban the next HMI congress. According to Karim (1997), the majority of the HMI members rejected the azas tunggal, but the HMI central leadership had closed a deal with Gafur (a HMI alumnus) just before the congress. Although the congress voted against replacing Islam with Pancasila, the leaders pushed through, threatening to expel members and close branches that refused to comply, thus ‘using the techniques of the rulers’ (Karim 1997: 132). This led a large faction to split from the organisation and found the HMI Rescue Council (HMI MPO); this became a major student organisation in its own right, though it was declared illegal and had to operate underground. Other youth groups that refused to accept the ‘sole ideology’ doctrine, such as the Indonesian Islamic Pupils (PII) and the Marhaenist Youth Movement (GPM), went underground from the start.

3 This program was largely designed by Ruslan Abdulgani, who during Guided Democracy had also designed the Manipol-USDEK indoctrination (Morfit 1981).

4 It is interesting to note the recurrent use of the term ‘cultivation’ – or pengembangan, from the root word kembang, ‘flower’ – rather than the term ‘guidance’ (pembinaan) that had been used since the mid-1970s, for example in the Guidance of the Young Generation commission set up after Malari. Pengembangan and the noun perkembangan mean ‘the act of developing’ or ‘development’, but different from the term for economic development – pembangunan, from the root word bangun, building – pengembangan, as Heryanto (1988) points out, had natural connotations. The use of this term in the context of state efforts to ‘develop’ or ‘nurture’ the youth thus constructed this effort as a natural process; as in a bed of flowers, their ‘growth’ depended on continuous care, strong roots, and healthy (Indonesian) soil containing all the essential nutrients for blossoming into a Pancasila bouquet. Thus, while some domains required cultural and natural ‘cultivation’ and others material ‘building’, the youth had to be ‘cultivated’ in order to ‘build’; the ‘flower of the nation’ needed government nurturing so as to ‘grow’ into proper ‘cadres of development’.

5 See Naning (1982) for a collection of policy lectures on political education, in which the concepts of regenerasi and kaderisasi were consistently coupled with the bequest discourse, presenting the values of the Angkatan 45, Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution in terms of a heritage in need of preservation (pelestarian).
Not only schoolchildren thought so; teachers, too, were frustrated by the textbook culture they were tied to, as they were aware of the minimal impact of the courses they taught. As Bourchier (1994: 57) illustrates, at a 1990 seminar of the Ministry of Education, one history lecturer ‘strongly criticised the dullness and narrowness of the PSPB syllabus and complained that this ‘made history teachers a particular target of ridicule among students’.

On the Indonesian middle class, see Robison (1986, 1996) and Tanter and Young (1990).

This saying was also the motto of the Education Ministry. It was taken from the philosophy of the 1920s Taman Siswa schools, yet without adopting it in full: to set an example that pupils will wish to follow at the front, to raise the spirit of creativity and innovation in the middle, and to guide from behind so as to foster initiative and responsibility (ing ngarso sung tulodo, ing madyo mangun karso, tut wuri handayani), as an ‘older brother’ would, according to Taman Siswa. But Suharto had no need for setting laudable examples or raising the spirit; by taking only the last phrase, the message was reduced to ‘father knows best’.

Opened in 1985, this amusement park was modelled after Disney World, even including Indonesia’s version of the ‘It’s a Small World’ attraction.

Accordingly, labour relations were also included into the New Order corporate structure through a single centralised labour union controlled by the state, the SPSI (since 1985; formerly the FBSI since 1973), and similar state-controlled unions were created for farmers and fishermen.

On the Petrus affair, see Barker (2000) and Siegel (1998).

Sukarno’s popularity made Suharto so nervous that he banned the display of Sukarno’s portrait after the 1987 elections, which only augmented Sukarno’s cult status and charismatic appeal. On the Sukarno cult and Suharto’s response, see Labrousse (1993), Brooks (1996), and Eklöf (2003).

‘Raise your souls, raise your bodies’ are lines from the national anthem.

CHAPTER 9: THE ART OF AGENCY

1 English terms in italics were pronounced in English.

CHAPTER 10: CAMPUS PLAYGROUNDS

1 Hassan, a Toronto-trained psychologist and former UI dean, revised the history and civics curricula to allow more room for ‘local knowledge’, and introduced ‘active learning methods’ (CBSA) to prepare the youth for the competitive era of globalisation.

2 The central student senate was implemented differently at each university. At UI it came to control all student activities, making it a powerful institution, but at other universities the format was more loosely applied. ITB never implemented it; the Forum of Departmental Association Chairs (FKHJ) remained the only central student representative body, which according to ITB activists hampered concerted action under the banner of their university.

CHAPTER 11: GAMES AND GHOSTS

1 Kompas 27 February 1987.

2 Kompas, 15 November 1989.
3 Criticism was initially voiced by elite dissidents who had been sidelined from the power structure, notably the 1980 ‘Petition of 50’ group, consisting of fifty retired generals and politicians, who signed a petition criticising Suharto’s manipulation of Pancasila as a tool against opponents (see Siswoyo 1983). Suharto simply dismissed the criticism and instructed the press to ignore them, while silently harassing the dissenters.

4 *Tempo*, 22 April 1989. This was a reference to the Kedung Ombo dam that became a key target of protest, discussed in the next paragraphs.

5 They did so by the name of Solidarity Group for the Victims of the Kedung Ombo Development, a coalition of students from forty-five universities, NGOs, Pastor Mangunwijaya, and university lecturers in Central Java, such as Arief Budiman. See Aditjondro (1993) and Stanley (1994).

6 In 1986, resisting villagers who renewed their identity cards found a new mark on them: ‘ET’ (*eks tapol*), for ‘former political prisoner’, or ‘OT’ (*organisasi terlarang*), for membership in a ‘forbidden organisation’. Others were threatened with receiving the same mark on their identity cards, and warned that their children’s and grandchildren’s cards would be marked as well.


8 Islamic student groups such as the campus mosque associations had mobilised before, but mainly for religious causes that did not implicate the state, notably international Islamic solidarity actions for Palestine and Bosnia.

9 The 1985 ‘package of five political laws’ included the law on political parties, the law on general elections, and the law on the structure and position of the People’s Consultative Assembly and the Parliament.

10 ‘Suharto: Dalang of All Disasters’ (‘*Suharto: Dalang Semua Bencana*’) was abbreviated as ‘SDSB’, which is the same abbreviation as that for the state lottery, the target of earlier student protests. The sticker action was part of a second round of anti-state lottery protests. This time Islamic groups did not join the protests, as Suharto had appeased Islamic groups through granting various favours (including the founding of the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals, or ICMI, led by Habibie) and by adopting a more pious image (see Aspinall 2005: 39–40; and Hefner 2000).

11 For SMID, though, such clashes also provided occasions to ‘test the front ranks’ and try out field techniques inspired by the South Korean student movement, such as ‘how to use banner poles for defence against attacks with police clubs, how to use water bombs made of plastic bags filled with colourant to confuse the troops’, and ‘how to fall down safely when attacked by troops’ (Gunawan 2009: 89).


18 One day after the riots, Hamid stated that PRD leader Budiman Sudjatmiko’s father was
'eks-PKI.' It turned out he had mixed up someone else with the same name.

19 For the experience (and life story) of PRD leader Budiman Sudjatmiko, see Gunawan (1999).

CHAPTER 12: CRISIS CALLING

1 See on the economic crisis, e.g., Aspinall, Feith, and Van Klinken (1999: 1–19).
2 One such leaflet (quoted in McRae 2001: 22) stated: ‘Suharto and his cronies possess extraordinary wealth, he won’t be affected by the monetary crisis, because his wealth, according to the reputable American magazine Forbes, totals US$40 billion or 320 trillion rupiah using an exchange rate of $1 = 8000 Rp. This money is stored away in foreign banks. Remember, Suharto obtained this money illegally, by siphoning off Indonesia’s bountiful natural resources. Suharto has caused the state to bear an enormous debt and has emptied the state treasury’.

4 On activist uses of the Internet in this period, see Lim (2005, 2006) and Winters (2002).
5 Rais was a leading figure in the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI) until Suharto had him removed from ICMI in February 1997 for his outspokenness. Thereafter his popularity surged especially among Islamic students, who began championing him as alternative presidential candidate.

7 This was also signalled by the defection of researchers of the national science institute, LIPI; on 20 January a number of LIPI researchers issued a statement criticising the government’s handling of the crisis and calling for ‘a change in national leadership’.
9 Tempo Interaktif, 28 February 1998.
10 Media Indonesia, 26 February 1998. Though this intervention seemed to be spontaneous, students had in fact planned it beforehand. The construction of ‘spontaneity’ is discussed below.
12 Adil, 4–10 March 1998.
14 While Rais thereafter grew in prominence as he sided with the student movement, specifically KAMMI (see below), after the MPR session Megawati withdrew from public and silently distanced herself from the anti-Suharto protests; not only because she tried to ‘shield herself from accusations that she tried unconstitutionally to unseat the president’, but also because she was ‘repelled by the openly oppositional and disrespectful attitude of many of the protesters’ (Eklof 2003: 287). Her distaste for the style of student protesters would also show in her response to the student protests mounted against her once she became president (see Chapter 13).
16 D&R, 4 April 1998.
17 See D&R, 4 April, and 18 April 1998.
18 One such clash (called ‘Bloody Cawang’) occurred in June 1996 at UKI – later one of Forkot’s strongholds – where soldiers from a nearby garrison raided the campus and attacked students after they had protested against the soldiers’ extortion of students and street vendors. Moreover, many members had experience in school brawls, and subsequently in campus brawls that also became a common sight during the New Order. Since the mid-1990s, though, as one activist told me, the inter-campus gang fights largely shifted to clashes with their common enemy: the military.
19 While resembling activist anarchism styles in Europe and the United States, this style appeared to be mostly drawn on Indonesian punk fashions; punk music had been an important outlet for social criticism since the late 1980s, and in later demonstrations, in the era of reform, punk communities frequently joined the students.
20 D&R 3 January 2000.
21 As was stated at a press conference, the resemblance in name with the historic KAMI was coincidental: ‘KAMMI is not a reincarnation of the 1966 KAMI of the past, because the historical roots and political setting is different. If there is a similarity, it is in the mission to put forward society’s aspirations and to guide this nation into change and improvement’ (Sidiq 2003: 103). See also on KAMMI’s early development, Kraince (2000). Rumours circulated that KAMMI was backed by Islamic intellectual institutions such as CIDES and ICMI, as well as by Kostrad commander and Suharto’s son-in-law General Prabowo Subianto, who was seen at the Malang congress. The former suggestion is plausible, given that KAMMI members were strongly represented in the student senates that were known to maintain ties with elite actors, but it is unlikely that Prabowo succeeded in co-opting this organisation, as he had little political capital.
22 The testimony, from PRD activist Pius Lustrilanang, was made public at a press conference on 28 April; he had been abducted by agents, detained in a secret cell, interrogated, and tortured (Nairn 1998). Other abducted activists soon provided matching testimonies. But the abductions did not stop. At least twenty-two activists were abducted; fourteen have remained missing since. After Suharto’s fall it was revealed that a Kostrad unit led by Prabowo Subianto was behind the abductions. Even without this disclosure, the affair greatly damaged both ABRI’s and Suharto’s reputations, domestically and abroad.

CHAPTER 13: TRANSITION AS PRACTICE
1 For example, in April 2003 a mob appeared at the office of Tempo magazine, turning the place upside down and assaulting a journalist for reporting on the criminal practices of Megawati’s associate Tommy Winata.
3 The National Front included prominent figures such as Ali Sadikin, Kemal Idris, and
Megawati’s younger sister Sukmawati.

4 The rally was organised by the Indonesian Council of Muslim Scholars (Majelis Ulama Indonesia), which was known for its close association with the New Order regime. At this rally, a new organisation was also founded, called Furkon, or the Islamic Community Forum for the Upholders of Justice and the Constitution (Forum Umat Islam untuk Penegak Keadilan dan Konstitusi), which organised most of the anti-student mobilisation before and during the SI MPR. Islamic sentiments against Forkot were fomented by rumours that Forkot was ‘an instrument of an unholy alliance between Christians and communists’, who plotted to unseat Indonesia’s devout Muslim president and then to ‘destroy Islam’ in Indonesia (Van Dijk 2001: 331).

5 The National Coalition for Democracy included prodemocracy actors that had previously taken part in the anti-Suharto movement, such as the playwright Ratna Sarumpaet.

6 While ABRI denied involvement, Jakarta’s police chief stated that the plan was for 125,000 civilians to reinforce the 118,000 policemen and 50,00 soldiers deployed in the city during the MPR session (Van Dijk 2001: 341). The militia turned out to be largely destitute men mobilised by Golkar-affiliated organisations such as Pemuda Pancasila and Furkon (Islamic Community Forum to Uphold Constitutional Justice). They were paid at least Rp 10,000 a day to attack the students, though both ABRI officers and Furkon strongly denied this.

7 Besides the student driving the car, three photo journalists were arrested for taking pictures of the incident, and their cameras were destroyed. The following morning Indonesian and foreign journalists staged a protest at the Parliament, the only protest at the site during the MPR session, demanding an apology from ABRI. Wiranto conceded, but he also bristled, asking why no one had yet apologised to ABRI for the car incident.

8 Protests against the violence continued for weeks. One week after the shootings, hundreds of students walked slowly down Sudirman, strewing flowers on the road. Protests also occurred in other cities. In Surabaya, students occupied the local radio station. In Denpasar and Medan, students briefly occupied the airport. In Yogyakarta, students attacked the military district command. Small riots also broke out in Jakarta and other cities, with people yelling ‘ABRI, murderers’ and, interestingly, ‘Police, PKI’. Several police officers were attacked. The Marines and the students often intervened to prevent further escalation.

9 Eventually, 151 soldiers and 12 officers served detention periods of two to three weeks for misconduct, although autopsies showed that most of the victims who died from bullet wounds were shot with live ammunition from a distant range, presumably by snipers.

10 Tempo, 28 December 1998.

11 Student volunteers received some form of compensation; the Rector Forum offered student volunteers three credit points. In Jakarta, students were particularly attracted to the University Forum for Free and Fair Elections, founded at UI Salemba, which received a budget of Rp. 24 million from the United Nations Development Fund. In March 1999, however, it fell apart over minor issues.

12 Pos Kota, 29 September 1999.

13 One of them reportedly gave Rachmawati a ‘heart attack’ during one of her visits; pointing his finger at her, he said: ‘You may be Sukarno’s biological child but we are his true
ideological children’. He was expelled.
14 ‘Buloggate’ began on 1 May 2000, when former head of Bulog Yusuf Kalla stated that State Palace groups had embezzled Rp. 35 billion from the Bulog Employees Welfare Foundation. Parliamentary inquiries began in June. In September the parliament established a special commission to investigate the Bulog case as well as the case of shady contributions received from the Sultan of Brunei (‘Bruneigate’). Wahid was deemed guilty in both cases, and was given a first parliamentary memorandum on 1 February. A second memorandum followed in late April, opening the way for a special MPR session to call Wahid to account and possibly dismiss him.
15 Adding to the confusion, some protests were staged under the name ‘BEM of All Jakarta’ or other designations with the name BEM in them.
16 The next day’s press reports presented different versions of what triggered or who started the clash; according to some, anti-Wahid masses spontaneously entered the campus, wrecking cars and motorcycles and attacking students; according to other reports, BEM-SI’s reaction was provoked by stones being thrown from the campus and a rumour that one BEM-UI student was abducted and held hostage inside the campus.
21 Kompas, 8 March 2001.
22 Kompas, 8 March 2001.
23 www.kampuskita.com/opini/opma1.html (online student journal; defunct).
25 This was also noted in the press, with news headings designating protesters as ‘students and labourers’ or ‘students and rakyat’ rather than merely ‘the student movement’; for example: ‘Ribuan Mahasiswa dan Buruh Tuntut Pembentukan Pansus’ [Thousands of Students and Labourers Demand Formation of Pansus], Kompas, 19 March 2002.
26 Jakarta Post, 29 January 2003.
30 For example, one person I saw appearing at opposition meetings in 2003 was the famous songwriter Eros Djarot, who had left PDI-P after failing to run for the chair position in 2000 and then founded the National Bung Karno Party (Partai Nasional Bung Karno, PNBK – later renamed Partai Nasional Benteng Kerakyatan, National Populist Fortress Party).

CHAPTER 14: PLACE, MEMORY, SELF
1 This fence was apparently erected in stages. During the early 2001 student protests around Wahid, when I also attended mass rallies at the Parliament, it was still a wire mesh with an open view to the surrounding area, which agile students could easily climb over. Before that time there was no fence.
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3 The website (www.semanggipeduli.com) kept a record of activists that had been missing and killed since 1997.
4 Islah is the reconciliation or settlement of disputes, often ceremonially performed. Since reformasi this has been much stimulated by the government as well as certain civilian groups, as a way to overcome the many conflicts that surfaced after the collapse of the New Order. Human rights activists however criticize this practice for leaving conflicts uninvestigated and unsettled.
5 After long negotiations with the interior ministry, the filmmakers were allowed to print five hundred PKI flags by themselves on the condition that the flags had to be submitted to the ministry after the film was completed.
6 Interview in Suara Mahasiswa Online, 3 August 2003 (online source now defunct).
7 For example, former UI student senate chair Rama Pratama became a member of parliament for PKS, and in 2009 former HMI chair Anas Urbaningrum became the youngest party leader in Indonesia, for the Democratic Party.
8 Again, as in 1999, this led many PRD branches to split and regroup in a contending organisation.
9 Kompas, 26 August 2008.
10 One peculiar case of activists-turned-politicians involves the victims of the April 1998 abductions (see Chapter 12), two of whom joined Gerindra, the party of General Prabowo who had allegedly been behind their abduction and torture, and they were joined by several of their comrades, who publicly cited Gerindra’s ‘anti-neoliberal’ program as justification (Indo Post, 7 August 2008). Many activists derided this choice as a sign of ‘trauma’ or ‘Stockholm syndrome’, but probably it should be understood as part of the former PRD activists’ strategy of ‘party-hopping’ and ‘party infiltration’ (indeed, ‘OTB’-style, see Chapter 11). According to critics of that strategy, though, this might ultimately backfire, not only because activists might fall for the temptations of power along the way, as Ihwan mentioned, but also because it might confuse the public, who now lacked a clear reference for opposition in the political spectrum.
11 These include well-known national NGOs such Infid (International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development) and the legal rights institute LBH, as well as smaller local NGOs, often of their own making.
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Summary – Playing Politics

The student movement is among the most mythologised figures in Indonesian history, in which the role of students as the ‘vanguard in the national struggle’ has long been exalted. Yet, the student movement is among the least understood political actors, as persistent myths about the student movement as ‘agent of history’ and a ‘moral force’ disconnect it from the social and political processes of student activism, and reduces it to an ahistoric icon of historic events. Thus viewed as a separate category, the student movement has been largely neglected in the scholarship on Indonesian politics, civil society, and social movements, a neglect that is further exacerbated by the elite bias in this field of study. Meanwhile, apart from specific case studies of student protests, theories of student activism have hardly evolved beyond the literature of the late 1960s and 1970s, which produced its own persistent myths about ‘young radicals’ and ‘students in revolt’ as a figure fraught with connotations of possibility and risk, again detached from political history and culture.

In this study I have sought to recontextualise the student movement in political history and culture and to re-embed it in the collective and personal experiences of its actors. I have attempted to deconstruct the myths surrounding the notion of student struggle by tracing their genealogy and political uses in Indonesian history, from the colonial era up to the recent era of reform, while examining their effects on the student movement’s dynamics of mobilisation and styles of action. In analysing these dynamics I have built on identity approaches in social movement theory; in particular, I have highlighted the role of narrative in the construction of the student movement as part of a political culture in the ongoing process of reconstruction, including the interplay between historical memories and cultural repertoires of struggle and activists’ sense of self and agency. Further, I have introduced the concept of playing politics, to highlight underlying dynamics of student protest as a process of (self-) actualisation, evolving at that interplay of political culture and subjective agency.

First, playing politics refers to the process of acquiring activist dispositions and a ‘feel for the game’ of activism through play – including the discovery of political selves through encounters with others, growing comfortable with the role of activist by playing at being one, learning politics through initiation, imitation, and trial-and-error, as well as the pleasure and excitement of collective action, as captured in the oft-mentioned ‘spirit of struggle’. Second, playing politics refers to the performative aspects of student protest – including the dramatic theatrical-
ity, scripts, and rhetoric, as well as cheekiness and playfulness characterising the style of student movements – which involves a mimicry as well as mockery of political roles and repertoires, whereby these roles and repertoires are both reproduced and reconstructed. Finally, playing politics refers to the ‘play realm’ of student protest in Indonesia, where the student movement – due to its historical mythologisation – has acquired a ‘special license’ to protest not granted to other actors. But, this license comes with a limit, which is established through ‘wars of representation’, or the symbolic battles that the student movement engages in with the state and other opponents – not only over its protest targets but also over the representation and control of the student movement’s identity and agency as a legitimate political subject, including its power to act and its space to move.

This study, then, is a historically extended ethnography of the narrative construction of the student movement, the symbolic battles it engages in, and its dynamics of playing politics. It is based on twenty months of participant observation across the movement’s networks in Jakarta – including thirty-two life-story interviews with (former) student activists from different cohorts and organisations – and discourse analysis of (Indonesian-language) historical texts and other sources. The fourteen chapters of this study are divided into five parts. In Part One I discuss the theoretical framework and methodology of my research, including a critical discussion of classical theories of Indonesian politics and student activism as well as the dominant strategy paradigm in social movement theory, arguing that they have contributed to circumscribing the definitions of student political identity and agency. As an alternative approach, I then highlight the role of narrative and play in protest, which also formed the basis of my methodology.

In Part Two, I trace the genealogy of the narrative of students’ ‘historical agency’, as it evolved through changing regimes – from colonial rule, to the Japanese occupation and the national revolution, to Sukarno’s Guided Democracy, and the first decade of Suharto’s New Order. I show how the experiences and battles of each era congealed into a specific set of narrative themes, which then set the parameters for the political identity and agency of future student generations. These include the theme of radical, progressive, uncompromising youth as a distinct political character; the theme of struggle as populist, militant action; the theme of students as the carriers of the banner of unity; and especially the theme of a determined spirit of struggle, which became the core of the identity of activist students and has since lived on through performed memory as the spirit of ‘making history through struggle’. Based on these narrative themes, Indonesian students found their ‘national duty’ as ‘history-making beings’. However, this also created paradoxes in students’ political identity that have kept student movements contained in a separate sphere of struggle for generations to come – including the tension between ‘national duty’ and ‘playful spirit’, between the
elitist exclusivity of political vanguardism and the populist identification with the people, and between the ideals of ‘unity’ and ‘autonomy’ of struggle and the reality of political partisanship and mutual rivalry.

These paradoxes were deepened during Guided Democracy and the first decade of the New Order, when students became enmeshed in the power struggles of national elites, while the narrative of student struggle was institutionalised as a national myth that was used as an ideological tool by those in power – from Sukarno’s manipulation of the 1928 Youth Pledge to attack his opponents, to Suharto’s manipulation of the Angkatan 66 myth as a legitimising narrative of his rise to power and to mark the end point of the role of students in the history of national struggle. Moreover, during Sukarno’s battles with the 1966 student movement and all the more during Suharto’s battles with the student movements of the 1970s, new disciplinary patterns were established to keep student protest in check, as the state began combining the strategy of narrative attacks – with allegations of ‘extremism’, ‘deviance from national values’, and ‘manipulation by hidden actors’ systematically thrown at student protesters – with military repression when students crossed the invisible boundaries of their ‘special license’. Since the 1974 Malari riots, these boundaries were set at campus gates, precluding students’ potential unification with the ‘dangerous masses’ on the streets. And since the 1978 crackdown on campuses, the ‘special license’ to protest even on campus was revoked, marking the start of two decades of systematic depoliticisation.

By then, however, students had developed a strong sense of political self and political sensibilities of their own, and a unique feel for the game of oppositional politics, over which the state had little control. These sensibilities were passed on through the stock of collective memories of struggle that reached students through alternative narrative channels – including poems, published diaries, critical articles, defence speeches of students on trial, and student-to-student socialisation. As I show in Part Three, these stories helped to politicise students even as they were subjected to the depoliticising socialisation programs of the New Order. However, I also show that the process of politicisation in this ‘era of stability’ started long before entering university, and need to be traced to the everyday experiences of disorder and discrepancy that confronted young people growing up in this climate from an early age. It was through these experiences that initial ‘no’s’ and ‘why’s’ cropped up in young people’s minds, and that oppositional subjectivities were gradually shaped before political awareness was formed. Once entering the university, these subjectivities combined with the oppositional narratives that were passed on from cohort to cohort in the ‘free spaces’ that activists created for themselves on and around campus – from study clubs, to the ‘night’ versions of (semi-) formal student bodies, to campus mosque associations. I show
how these ‘free spaces’ were linked with formal campus politics as well as off-campus movements, and that it was through these intricate ties and networks that students developed new activist identities and practices – including a penchant for radical populism – not through simple recruitment but in a playful process of discovery and improvisation, in which one activity and encounter led to another, each step strengthening their activist sense of self.

In Part Four, I show how these activist sensibilities further developed as new student movements rose onto the public stage under rapidly shifting political conditions – from the ‘student movement revival’ in the late 1980s to mid-1990s in the period of ‘openness’, to the repression following the July 1996 riots, to the dramatic rise of the 1998 student movement in a context of crisis, and finally the continued struggle for ‘total reform’ under three rapidly succeeding presidents. I show how, in each of these periods, the student movement and the state waged aggressive wars of representation to delegitimise the other – in which the state revived the old spectre of communism, while students attacked the core foundations of New Order power – but that it was real violence (the ‘foul play’ of abrogating the ‘play frame’ of symbolic battle) that ultimately determined the battles, whether in favour of the state or the student movement, although neither ended up as absolute ‘winners’ or ‘losers’ in such events. While violence often galvanised the activist spirit to fight back and further exposed the weak foundations of a cornered regime, it could also interrupt activist agendas, exacerbate existing conflicts within the student movement, and preclude unification with non-student groups, in particular ‘the people’. Moreover, as I argue in Part Five, once violence is made invisible and its memory is erased, or is domesticated in archival records, it also no longer raises the spirit. At the end of the story, then, as the era of reform came to an end and the state reconsolidated its power, the student movement also seemed to disappear into the past.

However, the experience of student movement participation was not in vain. As I show throughout this study, in each phase and in any circumstance, playing politics was a valuable learning experience that taught young activists more about the field and game of politics, and about themselves as political beings. In the end, the battles that young activists engage in are narrative battles for historicity, in which the political and personal meanings of historicity are intertwined. From ‘historical actors’ engaged in a battle to redefine their society, to political characters with spirited futures, the story of their political existence continues.
De studentbeweging is één van de meest gemythologiseerde figuren in de Indonesische geschiedenis, waarin de rol van studenten als de ‘voorhoede in de nationale strijd’ reeds lang wordt bewierookt. Toch is de studentbeweging één van de minst begrepen politieke actoren, omdat het door hardnekkige mythen over diens rol als ‘historische actor’ en ‘morele kracht’ wordt ontkoppeld van de sociaalpolitieke processen waaruit studentenactivisme bestaat, en gereduceerd tot een ahistorisch icoon van historische gebeurtenissen. Aldus beschouwd als een aparte categorie, is de studentbeweging veelal verwaarloosd in de wetenschappelijke studie naar de Indonesische politiek, civil society en sociale bewegingen; een verwaarlozing die versterkt wordt door de focus op elites in dit onderzoeksgebied. Ondertussen heeft de theorie over studentactivisme, afgezien van specifieke case studies van studentenprotesten, zich amper ontwikkeld voorbij de literatuur van de laat jaren zestig en jaren zeventig, die zelf hardnekkige mythen voortbracht over ‘jonge radicalen’ en ‘studenten in opstand’ als een figuur die beladen is met connotaties van kansen en risico’s, en ontkoppeld is van politieke geschiedenis en cultuur.

In deze studie heb ik getracht de studentbeweging weer in de context van de politieke geschiedenis en cultuur te plaatsen, en weer te verankeren in de collectieve en persoonlijke ervaringen van haar actoren. Ik heb getracht de mythen rond het begrip van studentenstrijd te deconstrueren door hun oorsprong en politieke gebruiken in de Indonesische geschiedenis te traceren, van het koloniale tijdperk tot aan de recente jaren van hervormingen, waarbij ik ook hun effecten onderzoek op de mobilisatiedynamiek en actiestijlen van de studentenbeweging. In het analyseren van deze dynamiek bouw ik voort op identiteitsbenaderingen in de sociale bewegingentheorie; ik leg in het bijzonder de nadruk op de rol van verhalen in de constructie van de studentbeweging als onderdeel van een politieke cultuur die zelf constant vernieuwd wordt, en de wisselwerking die hierin optreedt tussen historische herinneringen en culturele repertoires enerzijds, en het bewustzijn van zelf en agency van activisten anderzijds. Verder heb ik het concept van playing politics geïntroduceerd, om de aandacht te vestigen op de onderliggende dynamiek van studentenprotest als een proces van (zelf-)actualisering, dat zich af-speelt binnen die wisselwerking tussen politieke cultuur en subjectieve agency.

Allereerst verwijst playing politics naar het proces van verkrijgen van een activistische inslag en een ‘gevoel voor het spel’ van activisme door middel van spel – waaronder het zich gewaar worden van een politiek zelf door ontmoetingen met anderen, zich comfortabel leren voelen in de rol van activist door die rol te
spelen, politiek leren bedrijven door initiatie, imitatie, en vallen-en-opstaan, alsook het plezier en de opwinding van collectieve actie, zoals gevat in de term ‘spirit van strijd’. Ten tweede verwijst playing politics naar de performatieve aspecten van studentenprotest – waaronder het theatrale drama, de scripts, en de retoriek, en ook de brutaliteit en speelsheid die kenmerkend zijn voor de stijl van studentenbewegingen – wat gepaard gaat met zowel nabootsing als ridiculiseren van politieke rollen en repertoires, waardoor deze rollen en repertoires tegelijk worden gereproduceerd en gereconstrueerd. Ten slotte verwijst playing politics naar het ‘speeldomein’ van studentenprotest in Indonesië, waar de studentenbeweging – vanwege haar historische mythologisering – een ‘speciale licentie’ heeft verworven om te protesteren, waar dat van andere actoren niet wordt toegestaan. Er zit echter een beperking aan die ‘licentie’, die bepaald wordt door wars of representation, ofwel symbolische gevechten die de studentenbeweging aangaat met de staat en andere opponenten – niet alleen met betrekking tot protestdoelen maar ook met betrekking tot de beeldvorming rond, en controle over, de identiteit en agency van de studentenbeweging als een legitiem politiek subject, inclusief haar daadkracht en bewegingsruimte.

Deze studie is zodoende een historische etnografie over de narratieve constructie van de studentenbeweging, de symbolische gevechten die het aangaat, en haar dynamiek van playing politics. Het is gebaseerd op twintig maanden van participerende observatie, uitgevoerd langs de netwerken van de studentenbeweging in Jakarta – waarbij twee-en-dertig levensverhalen zijn opgetekend van (voormalige) studentenactivisten van verschillende leeftijdsgroepen en organisaties – en een discoursanalyse van (Indonesisch-talige) historische teksten en andere bronnen. De veertien hoofdstukken zijn opgedeeld in vijf delen. In Deel Eén bespreek ik het theoretisch kader en de methodologie van mijn onderzoek, met een kritische bespreking van klassieke theorieën over de Indonesische politiek, studentenactivisme, alsook het dominante strategie-paradigma binnen de sociale bewegingentheorie, waarbij ik bargumenteert hoe deze hebben bijgedragen aan een beperkt begrip van politieke identiteit en agency met betrekking tot studentenactivisten. Bij wijze van alternatieve benadering, leg ik vervolgens de nadruk op de rol van het verhaal en het spel in protest, wat ook de basis vormt voor mijn methodologie.

In Deel Twee traceer ik de oorsprong van het verhaal van de ‘historische agency’ van studenten, zoals het zich ontwikkelde door de veranderende tijdperken heen – van koloniale heerschappij, tot de Japanse bezetting en de nationale revolutie, tot aan Sukarno’s Geleide Democratie en de eerste tien jaar van Suharto’s Nieuwe Orde. Ik toon aan hoe de ervaringen en gevechten in elk tijdperk een specifieke set van narratieve thema’s voortbrachten, die de afgankening bepaalden voor de politieke identiteit en agency van latere studentengeneraties.
Hieronder valt het thema van radicale, progressieve, onverzettelijke jongeren als een eigen politiek karakter; het thema van strijd als populistische, militante actie; het thema van studenten als de dragers van het vaandel van eenheid; en vooral het thema van de vastberaden ‘spirit van strijd’, wat sindsdien de kern vormt van de identiteit van activistische studenten en voortleeft, door performances van herinnering, als een spirit van ‘geschiedenis schrijven door strijd’. Op basis van deze narratieve thema’s vonden Indonesische studenten hun ‘nationale plicht’ als ‘geschiedschrijvende wezens’. Dit creëerde echter ook paradoxen in hun politieke identiteit – die studentenbewegingen generaties lang binnen de perken van een afgezonderde sfeer van strijd hield – waaronder de spanning tussen ‘nationale plicht’ en ‘speelse spirit’, tussen de elitaire exclusiviteit van politiek leiderschap en de populistische identificatie met het volk, en tussen de idealen van ‘eenheid’ en ‘autonomie’ van strijd en de realiteit van politieke partijdigheid en wederzijdse rivaliteit.

Die paradoxen werden versterkt onder de Geleide Democratie en het eerste decennium van de Nieuwe Orde, toen studenten verstrikt raakten in de machtsstrijd van nationale elites, terwijl het verhaal van studentenstrijd geïnstitutionaliseerd werd als een nationale mythe die de machthebbers gebruikten als een ideologisch wapen – van Sukarno’s manipulatie van de Jeugd Eed van 1928 om daarmee zijn tegenstanders aan te vallen, tot aan Suharto’s manipulatie van de Angkatan 66 mythe die hij gebruikte als legitimering van zijn machtsovername en om het eindpunt te markeren van de rol van studenten in de geschiedenis van nationale strijd. Gedurende Sukarno’s strijd met de studentenbeweging van 1966, en des te meer gedurende Suharto’s strijd met de studentenbewegingen van de jaren zeventig, werden daarnaast nieuwe disciplinaire patronen gevestigd om studentenprotest in toom te houden, waarbij de staat de strategie aannam van narratieve aanvallen – met aantijgingen van ‘extremisme’, ‘afwijking van nationale waarden’, en ‘manipulatie door onzichtbare actoren’ die studentactivisten systematisch troffen – in combinatie met militaire repressie zodra studenten de onzichtbare grenzen van hun ‘speciale licentie’ overschreden. Sinds de Malari rellen van 1974, werden de grenzen geplaatst bij de poorten van de campus, om een potentiële samenkomst van studenten met de ‘gevaarlijke massa’s’ op straat uit te sluiten. Sinds de militaire repressie op campussen in 1978, werd zelfs de ‘speciale licentie’ om te protesteren op campus ingetrokken, wat het begin markeerde van twee decennia van systematische depolitisering.

Tegen die tijd hadden studenten echter een sterk politiek zelfbewustzijn ontwikkeld en eigen politieke oriëntaties, alsook een uniek gevoel voor het spel van oppositionele politiek, waarover de staat weinig controle kon uitoefenen. Dit bewustzijn werd overgeleverd aan de hand van het repertoire aan collectieve herinneringen van strijd, wat studenten meekregen via alternatieve narratieve kanalen
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– waaronder gedichten, gepubliceerde dagboeken, kritische artikelen, de verdedigingspleidooien van berechte studenten, en socialisering van student op student. In Deel Drie toon ik aan hoe de verhalen bijdroegen aan de politiserings van studenten zelfs terwijl zij onderworpen werden aan de depolitisering sociale programma’s van de Nieuwe Orde. Ik laat echter ook zien dat het proces van politiserings in dit ‘tijdperk van stabiliteit’ lang voor het betreden van de universiteit begon, en dat het herleid moet worden naar de alledaagse ervaringen van wanaar en tegenstellingen die jongeren die in dit klimaat opgroeiden al van jongs af aan confronteerden. Het was op basis van deze ervaringen dat een eerste ‘nee’ of ‘waarom’ zich nestelde in de gedachten van jongeren, en dat een oppositionele subjectiviteit vorm kreeg nog voordat politiek bewustzijn opkwam. Zodra zij de universiteit betraden, mengde deze subjectiviteit zich met de oppositionele verhalen die van cohort op cohort werden overgeleverd binnen de ‘vrijplaatsen’ die activisten voor zichzelf creëerden op en rond de campus – van studieclubs, tot de ‘nacht’-versies van (semi-) formele studentenorganen, tot aan campus moskee- verenigingen. Ik laat zien hoe deze ‘vrijplaatsen’ verbonden waren met de formele campuspolitiek alsook met bewegingen buiten de campus, en hoe studenten door deze complexe verbindingen en netwerken nieuwe activistische identiteiten en praktijken ontwikkelden – waaronder een hang naar radicaal populisme – niet zozeer door rekrutering, maar door een speels proces van ontdekking en improvisatie, waarin de ene activiteit en ontmoeting leidde tot de volgende, wat hun activistisch zelfbewustzijn telkens versterkte.

In Deel Vier toon ik aan hoe dit activistische bewustzijn zich verder ontwikkelde toen nieuwe studentenbewegingen in het publiek traden onder snel veranderende politieke omstandigheden – van de ‘wedergeboorte van de studentenbeweging’ in de late jaren tachtig tot medio jaren negentig in de periode van ‘openheid’, tot de repressie volgend op de rellen van juli 1996, tot de dramatische opkomst van de studentenbeweging van 1998 in een context van crisis, en ten slotte de voortgezette strijd voor ‘totale hervormingen’ onder drie snel opvolgende presidents. Ik laat zien hoe de studentenbeweging en de staat, in elk van deze periodes, agressieve symbolische gevechten met elkaar aangingen om de legitimiteit van de ander te ondermijnen – waarin de staat het oude spook van communisme van stal haalde, terwijl studenten de kernfunderingen van de Nieuwe Orde macht aanvielen – maar ook dat het uiteindelijk fysiek geweld was (het ‘vals spel’ van het tenietdoen van het ‘spel frame’ van symbolische gevechten) dat de uitkomst van de gevechten bepaalde, ongeacht of dit in het voordeel uitpakte van de staat of van de studentenbeweging, hoewel in zulke voorvallen geen van beide eindigde als absolute ‘winnaars’ of ‘verliezers’. Hoewel geweld de activistische spirit aanwakkerde om terug te vechten, en verder de zwakke funderingen blootlegde van een in het nauw gedreven regime, kon het ook activistische plannen dwars-
bomen, bestaande conflicten in de studentenbeweging verergeren, en eenwording met andere groeperingen, met name ‘het volk’, tegengaan. Bovendien, zoals ik beargumenteer in Deel Vijf, zodra geweld onzichtbaar wordt gemaakt en de herinnering eraan wordt gewist, of wordt weggestopt in archieven, zal het niet meer de spirit aanwakkeren. Zodra het tijdperk van hervormingen dus eenmaal tot een einde kwam en de staat haar macht opnieuw bestendigde, leek de studentenbeweging ook opnieuw te verdwijnen in het verleden.

Niettemin was de ervaring van deelname aan de studentenbeweging bepaald niet vruchteloos. Zoals ik in deze gehele studie aantoont, was playing politics, in elke fase en onder elke omstandigheid, een waardevolle leerervaring die jonge activisten telkens wijzer maakte over het veld en het spel van politiek, en over zichzelf als politieke wezens. Uiteindelijk waren de gevechten die jonge activisten aangingen narratieve gevechten om historiciteit, waarin de politieke en persoonlijke betekenenissen van historiciteit zich vermengden. Van ‘historische actoren’ die zich in een strijd begaven voor een herdefiniëring van hun maatschappij, tot aan politieke karakters met een begeesterde toekomst, heeft het verhaal van hun politiek bestaan een vervolg.