

INDONESIA RECONSTRUCTED – NAVIGATING A NATION DIVIDED

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'Self-concept of a Nation'

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Firstly, I thank Christoph Behrens for inviting me to this symposium that bears an intriguing title, Future Indonesia. Berlin seems to me an apt location to have a conversation on 'Self-concept of a Nation' – our first theme this morning – as its irrepressible energy for self-reflection and continuous reinvention is precisely what has drawn me for years to this exciting and thought-provoking city. Thank you again for the opportunity, Christoph.

The invitation to speak here came to me through a passage in a book. The book is Pankaj Mishra's The Age of Anger: A History of the Present (2017), which, according to one of its reviewers, is 'a wake-up call' for our age.¹ The passage is a very brief one in which Mishra surveys non-Western intellectuals who have questioned the Western model of development and who hold the conviction of finding "locally resourced solutions". From the Muslim world, Mishra mentions two names – an Iranian during the reign of the Shah, Ali Shariati, and an Indonesian during Soeharto's New Order regime: Soedjatmoko, my father.

Soedjatmoko, who passed away almost 30 years ago, was what one might call these days a public intellectual. He came of age during Indonesia's post-colonial nationalist revolution and spent his life thinking and speaking about freedom and humanity in development, about the essential roles of culture and religion for human growth, and about learning and the humility of mind towards global transformation in an interdependent world. Not long into Indonesia's New Order era, Soedjatmoko was treated as a political dissenter by his government. As he shifted his engagements internationally, he was welcomed into the ranks of 'the Third World intellectual' and invited into various forums of global thinking. In today's noisy world, his voice and message have been mostly lost, ignored and forgotten, including by Indonesians themselves. So, I suppose I should thank Pankaj Mishra for raising him from the dead.

This morning, however, I speak not of my father but of Indonesia and how to think about it and its future as a nation. As an activist-citizen and a feminist, I am deeply aware of how complex and precarious our relationship is with the nation and state.

During the first decade of Indonesia's *reformasi*, I was part of the leadership of an institution that until today remains quite unique: a presidential commission to address violence against women, Komnas Perempuan, or the National Commission on Violence Against Women. We shared the general euphoria in the nation about righting the wrongs of the New Order and building a new and better Indonesia for future generations. As a movement, among our first achievements were: a quota for

¹Fraser, The Guardian, 23 January 2017.

women in elections and a law on domestic violence. The latter created unexpected challenges for us. Strong protest came from the ranks of conservative *ulama*, declaring the law an over-reach of the state and a sign that the women's movement has gone too far beyond what they believe to be the accepted boundaries.

Eventually, we witnessed how democracy's advancement simultaneously also brought about backsliding on women's rights. Decentralization, which was one of the hallmarks of our democratization process, became fertile ground for the rise of local regulations whose goal is to control public morality. Last year, Komnas Perempuan identified 421 discriminatory local bylaws around the country, many of which involve regulating women's dress, behavior and mobility. When the Ministry of Internal Affairs repealed more than 3000 local bylaws deemed inconsistent with national law, none were from Komnas Perempuan's list. Midway in our reform process, about a decade ago, a controversial law on pornography was passed amidst widespread public protest. Drafted as a draconian bill to control women's sexuality, after heated debate, its final version ended up targeting women in the entertainment industry and criminalizing homosexuality.

Ultimately, after brief moments of successful gains, Indonesia's reform process came to produce contradictory outcomes for women's rights. The women's movement found itself on the defensive, protecting already achieved gains and preventing further backsliding. Now, on the 20th year of *reformasi*, we stand on one side of a divided nation. It has become clear that the change in political leadership 20 years ago was not just about a changing of the guards in the highest political office. It also marked a re-negotiation of who we are as a nation. Thus the title of my talk today: Indonesia Reconstructed – Navigating a Nation Divided.

I hope you will bear with me as I share with you a framework of thinking by which I wrestle with the idea of nation and Indonesia.

We are simultaneously users and producers of the narratives on our nation(s). To me, the nation is an evolving notion shaped by the (in)actions of the state and structured by global forces and conversations. It finds meaning in and through the lives and choices of communities and individuals who navigate diverse and ever-changing contexts and who negotiate constantly across their multiple (and often conflicting) loyalties. My notion of the nation has evolved across time in three intersecting scenarios: nation as memory in motion; nation as geography of struggles; and, nation as fortress and battleground. Allow me to take you through them one by one.

Nation as memory in motion

My memory of family is intricately connected to my memory of the nation. I grew up in an extended family that took part in the fight for Indonesia's independence, in which storytelling about the trials and tribulations in the struggle were a frequent pastime. Behind the funny and at times painful anecdotes, there was always an implicit message equating nation and values. The composition of my extended family also reflected the archipelago: multiple ethnicities and diverse religions and beliefs. Among my aunts and uncles, interfaith marriages were the norm rather than the exception, and we celebrated both Eid and Christmas as a matter of fact. By time it was my turn to enter the institution of marriage, in the mid 1980s, it was no longer

possible to marry outside one's religion, as the civil registry was no longer allowed to recognize them. By now, schools are even teaching children to avoid saying 'Merry Christmas' to those who celebrate it.

My family is not unique to Indonesia. In order to sustain today's divisiveness in the country, we are called upon to forget even our own family heritage of pluralism. Apparently, memories of our own families' diverse origins and ways of life have not convinced us of the impossibility of rigid delineations in such a pluralistic nation as ours. The undeniable porousness of our archipelago's borders and scientific DNA evidence of our inherent plurality as a people have failed to immunize us from the ambitious political schemes aimed to seize power by a strategy of divide and conquer.

In my endeavor to be the good citizen, I became, along with my fellow activists, the collector of stories that have been silenced, forgotten, or denied, including those about the mass atrocities of 1965/66. At a time of the world's preoccupation with the Cold War and America's associated conception of the so-called 'Domino Theory' in Southeast Asia, Soeharto received needed international support in his pogrom against Indonesia's Communist Party, which was among the largest in Asia at that time. The result was the mass killing of half a million people in 1965/66, an Indonesian Gulag in the Spice Islands of the Moluccas that lasted more than a decade, and five decades of stigmatization towards the survivors. As we start to piece together testimonies from the survivors and break the 30-year taboo of speaking about what happened in 1965/66, it is interesting to witness young Indonesians discovering their own families' links – as victim or perpetrator – to that episode of human tragedy. It is yet another example of how family history intersects with the nation's narratives and traumas.

Our inability to fully and officially reckon with our bloody and vicious past, even in Indonesia's current democratic environment, betrays a failure in reconciling the deep cleavages in our society, each with their distinct – and conflicting – collective memories about the nation's tumultuous journey.

This is not to say that Indonesia has not made compromises in order to reconcile the different forces within the nation.

When the Constitutional Court had to review a submission challenging the constitutionality of our Marriage Law's provisions on polygamy, we were led to understand that this was itself a product of political compromise way back in 1974, i.e., between those who saw the law as a means of social change and aspire to establish monogamy as the law of the land versus those who saw the law as a means to legitimize conventional practice and provide legal protection to polygamous marriages. The compromise – as articulated in the law – is that polygamy was to be legally recognized but only upon decision of a religious court and permission by the first wife. In 2007, this compromise was contested by a man who believed that the precondition of the first wife's permission as undermining his constitutional right to freedom of religion.

Pancasila, the five-pronged foundational principles of Indonesia as a nation, is also a product of political compromise, particularly its first principle of 'Belief in God Almighty', in which the word used for 'God' is free of any predisposition to a particular religion despite the fact that Islam is the majority religion in the country.

The phrasing of ‘Belief in God Almighty’ was accepted as a compromise to an alternate proposed phrasing that included the obligation of Muslims to abide by Sharia Law. During the *Reformasi* era, as the political movement pushing for an Islamic state in Indonesia gained strength, this long-held compromise has been put to the challenge and demands for the alternate phrasing re-emerged.

Our current debates as a nation demonstrate just how the notion of Indonesia is a historically specific product of negotiation and compromise among the diverse social-political forces deep within these borders. Our collective memory of our various compromises is today the subject of fierce contestation by men and women, young and old, alike. The construction and reconstruction of our collective memory as a nation shapes our imaginings of the kind of future that is possible and desired.

Alas, our moment is one of a collision of visions and memories unresolvable in today’s highly polarized society. At stake is our identity as a nation.

Nation as geography of struggles

I grew up in Jakarta, Washington DC and Tokyo, as the family followed my father’s zigzagged career as public intellectual, accidental diplomat, political dissenter and global thinker. Our home was an open house where a never-ending stream of friends and family would come from isolated villages and cosmopolitan cities to share their issues and struggles with my father. As a young girl, through informal chats at the dining table, and in bits and pieces, I begin to get a glimpse of the broad spectrum of places and predicaments. Eventually, I learn of the geography of Indonesia’s social, economic and political inequalities and injustices. I recognize how Jakarta and Java have maintained their dominance at the cost of the archipelago’s other islands and peoples.

Today, Indonesia is ranked with the highest rate of inequality in Asia, second only to China. The autonomy mandated to local government under decentralization has, sadly, too often become the site of elite capture and dynastic politics with rampant corruption. The inability of the state to overcome our deep and ever-widening socio-economic divides has become the grounds to challenge its credibility and to doubt the goodness of the idea of Indonesia, particularly by those who have lost out for generations.

Conflicts over land and natural resources are now the most widespread and unresolved in the country. With Indonesia aiming high to be among the Asian Tigers, citizens who live meagerly from the land, forests and seas find themselves face-to-face with the overwhelming force of corporate interests backed by the powers of the state. As decent livelihoods disappear from our villages, millions of young rural women have left their homelands to become family breadwinners through employment abroad, often under trafficked conditions and returning to exploitative relations at home. Chronic inequality – and the misery and violence associated with it – feeds into a narrative of the failed secular state and gives credence to the idea of a theocracy as the better alternative. Last year, when a would-be female suicide bomber was arrested by the police, the public’s eyes opened to the fact that Indonesian female migrant workers were being radicalized by Islamist extremists through online and offline recruitment abroad.

The void of an isolated and alienated existence, alongside unresolved frustration over injustices, create fertile ground for the acceptability of absolutist ideologies.

In fact, chronic inequality and injustice have meant that Indonesia – and the contours of its borders – has never been an uncontested idea.

The people of Papua dispute the credibility of the 1969 referendum that placed their land within the borders of Indonesia. Decades of blatant racial discrimination, plundering of natural resources and gross human rights violations have perpetuated and accentuated demands for independence. In East Timor, resistance against Jakarta's invasion in 1975 thrived for more than two decades in the hearts and minds of its people and eventually sealed them their freedom, despite decades of violent repression by Indonesian authorities. In Aceh, the Free Aceh Movement challenged Jakarta's claim to their natural resources as being unfairly disproportionate and engaged in armed combat for more than a decade. This open armed conflict finally ended in the aftermath of the Asian tsunami in 2004, with mediation from Helsinki. In all these corners of the archipelago, there has been no proper reckoning of such atrocities conducted in the name of Indonesia, despite the past 20 years of democracy.

Indonesia's human rights movement, that emerged and grew out of resistance to the New Order, insists that state accountability and redress for the victims of all these gross violations are preconditions for reclaiming the integrity of the nation. They are also well-aware that the nation's capacity to fulfill its own promise of justice and humanity to all its people depend on the effective functioning of the international rules-based system, particularly those built in the framework of human rights.

We know that nation-states not only direct their focus within their own boundaries but also concern themselves with the global community and the fate of common humanity. While our geography defines the contours of struggles within our borders, our future depends on our capacity to go beyond it and become a responsible member of the global community. Indonesia clearly establishes its place in the world in the preamble of its Constitution of 1945 where it expresses its stance against injustice in the world and its commitment to contribute to world peace. Upon the end of the authoritarian New Order regime, during the early years of *Reformasi*, Indonesia signed on to almost all the major international human rights treaties and core human rights principles were integrated into the amended Constitution.

Unfortunately, we must also accept the fact that the global institutions of peace and human rights are themselves in crisis these days, along with what seems to be a general weakening, and maybe even disintegration, of many post-Second World War constructs around the world.

Meanwhile, the legitimacy and enforceability of international human rights law continue to be challenged from within our nation.

Human rights – including women's right to equality – have been stigmatized as demands imposed by the West and dismissed as the tools of ill-meaning outsiders. Those who abide by these rights and defend them are too often accused of betraying their country, culture and religion. In international forums on human rights, our

government has progressed since the New Order era but often remains timid and defensive, flustered by protest over Indonesia's human rights record in Papua and with regard to the mistreatment of minority communities by the Muslim majority. It struggles with competing interests from its own brand of identity-based geopolitics within the Muslim world and ambitions of economic ascendancy in Asia.

Nation as fortress and battleground

These days, Indonesia has been having a peculiar preoccupation: an obsession with the crime of blasphemy.

A couple of weeks ago, in Medan, North Sumatera, a woman was sentenced to 1,5 years in prison for commenting on the high volume of the loudspeaker-induced local mosque's call for prayer. The woman, who happened to be Buddhist, had done so in a private conversation with a local stall owner. Somehow, a hysteria of hate ensued against her and her house of worship, emboldened by a fatwa from the local council of *ulama* that declared her small act an affront to Islam. Law enforcement officers took up the case as such, as did the court through its verdict.

Last year, in Jakarta, during the election for its governorship, a vicious campaign was waged with the energy of a *jihad* against the incumbent, Ahok, who is a double minority: a Christian of Chinese descent. Despite having been one of the most able and non-corrupt governors, he was stigmatized throughout the campaign as a heathen with no business leading Muslims. In social media, his words were altered and twisted to incite Muslim hatred. Despite weak evidence, no case made as such by the prosecution, and defenses constructed even in the framework of Islam, the judges convicted Ahok to the crime of blasphemy and sentenced him to two years in prison, in a proceeding surrounded by mobs in Muslim garb.

According to research by the Setara Institute, over the past five decades, there have been 97 cases tried under our blasphemy laws, which are enshrined in our age-old criminal code (inherited from the colonial times) and a law adopted during that tumultuous year of 1965. In a telling trend, most of these cases – as many as 88 out of 97 – were tried, ironically, under Indonesia's *Reformasi*. When the law criminalizing blasphemy was challenged in the Constitutional Court in 2010, their constitutionality was definitively upheld.

In our era of democratic opening, a new way of thinking grows fertile within our nation: Islam under siege and therefore must be defended from 'the other', in this case, fellow citizens and neighbors who happen to be of other faiths. Salvation is through the Islamic state, if not in name then in practice. Complex social issues – indeed, chronic inequality and injustices – are defined within a narrative of 'us versus them'. Through stigmatization, criminalization, violence and other forms of persecution, we have mastered the art of 'othering' and created a fortress mentality. We witness how the views of a few can spread like wildfire in a drought with the aid of political opportunists whose main interest is power and control.

Blatant attacks against minorities – be it religious, ethnic, racial or sexual minorities – are carried out in full public view. Persecution of the LGBTIQ community in Aceh continue to rise, including ad hoc "gender re-education" interventions in detention

centers by the police early this year. Just last May, the nation was shocked at the bombing of three churches in Surabaya, East Java, by a family of six – husband, wife, two teenage boys and two young girls – who carried out their mission together as suicide bombers.

In the meantime, our institutions of education, health and public service are being infiltrated with this worldview of intolerance and its fortress mentality. They have become battlegrounds between citizens with divided loyalties. We must not lose sight of the markers of this subtle but real wave of change.

Today, more and more elementary schools are making the hijab obligatory for girls, including in Jogjakarta. Male-female segregation in the classroom has also been reported as a growing trend. This past August, a photograph went viral showing kindergarten students marching on the streets in *niqab* and carrying replicas of machine guns. It turns out the kindergarten is under the supervision of the local military command. When asked by the media why this could not have been prevented, the local police reacted defensively and redirected attention to the account holder who uploaded the photograph on social media. In the home base of our national government, in Jakarta, a study of Friday prayer sermons in 100 mosques in government office buildings found that 41 mosques promoted radical ideology to varying degrees. Seventeen among them were actively recruiting for radical groups.

Our moment today is one of conflicting visions about the nation being battled out in a highly polarized society. Each space of social exchange is an emotionally charged field: shock, anger, bitterness, sadness. So many who saw Indonesia's social contract as a pluralist society as final and secure now feel betrayed and uncertain, not just because of the actions of their fellow citizens but also by the state for not taking a stronger stance when it mattered.

The state's response came only once the issue was defined in terms of the international agenda of violent extremism. In Indonesia, it is referred to as *deradikalisasi*. The state's security-centric approach – as part of a larger global trend – is disappointingly shallow and ill-suited for such a complex phenomenon. Government policies and pronouncements have demonstrated more ambivalence through half-hearted measures than a firm defense of our Constitutional guarantees. Protecting women's right to equality is not even in the picture in any substantial way.

Too often it feels that the men and women of Indonesia are left on their own to battle it out among themselves.

This battle for Indonesia is being waged in all fields of life, in private and public space. It is one that is not merely countering hate in social media. That is only half the battle. The other half must be one directed at the reclaiming of our institutions and narratives throughout our daily engagements: in schools, offices, clinics and the arts. The upcoming national elections will be a decisive moment – and many are already taking sides and placing their bets – but acts of defense and offense occur in everyday life all the time.

Future Indonesia: A case for reconstruction

It is an awkward time to speak about the future given the moment of disintegration and uncertainty – politically, economically and ecologically – that surrounds us all today everywhere, in Indonesia and the world. Almost every day we are shocked by incidents and events that we could not have imagined. Even here in Berlin, I notice with concern the existence of the police in 24-hour guard of a Jewish cultural center in the neighborhood I happen to be staying. Given all that has been done to address the dark past here, it seems unimaginable that we find ourselves in this situation today.

So, maybe this is indeed the necessary task of our time for each and every one of us: deciding what kind of a future we want and taking meaningful action now to make it happen.

For Indonesia, it is a timely project. This year, we approach the 20-year mark of our effort to reform the nation since our moment of political transition in 1998. Next year, we have our presidential elections and must choose between a former Special Forces military man with blood in his hands who is running with a young businessman and our incumbent civilian president who has decided to run with an elderly Muslim cleric with a track record of convening over many of our discriminatory fatwas. It is no wonder that many feel trepidation over Indonesia's pluralist future.

Each generation of conscientious citizens has its own burdens to carry and dreams to fulfill. For my father's generation, it was about freedom. For my generation, it was about human rights. What is it about for today's young Indonesians?

Given my view of nation as memory in motion, as geography of struggles, and as fortress and battleground, allow me to make an inter-generational call to action:

- Let us build the capacity to learn and seek out good practices from all corners of our country and the world, so that we could begin to envision new ways of thinking and doing and, thereby, embark on the transformation of our unjust institutions and systems, including and particularly with regard to our economic life and its links to the larger global order.
- Let us open our eyes and ears to the invisible and the silenced, discover and uncover our rich and volatile pasts, acknowledge and address our mistakes, so that we can continuously renew the narrative and identity of our nation on the basis of truthful self-awareness and grounded integrity.
- Let us reclaim, create and occupy spaces – the physical and their accompanying virtual space – for the purpose of constructing and reconstructing the building blocks of a just and inclusive existence for all in our neighborhoods, schools, places of worship, workplaces and nation-state.
- Let us lead responsibly within a political culture that does not garner power through the 'othering' of those perceived to be different; engage actively and simultaneously as informed citizens of our community, nation and the world; and contribute meaningfully to the functioning of the state not as a tool of

domination and control but for the common good, which, I must add, also means being secure and proactive in secular space.

Indeed, our moment calls for actions beyond the frantic grabs for power we are seeing everywhere and everyday, however pure or noble we consider the ultimate goals to be. Beyond the busy-ness of countering hate, it is a time for the hard work of creating, building and nurturing life-affirming spaces, narratives and institutions that could lead us towards a new critical consciousness for human compassion and the necessary social infrastructure for a shared future, on this fragile earth, for all humanity.

As it is clear from my suggestions above, Indonesians cannot do it alone in isolation. We must be part of a global ecosystem of the good.

In closing, we thank Pankaj Mishra for making us – that is, the global community – look into the mirror of history so that we move forward with self-awareness in what he calls our ‘age of anger’. Given his mention of my father, I reread his writings in preparation for this talk. Today, I thought it would make sense to share some of his thoughts, particularly those conveyed in 1984, during a symposium hosted by The Asahi Shimbun in Tokyo, Japan, entitled: “Message to the 21st Century”. He said, one of the most tragic legacies to the 21st century is the failure to overcome structural inequality in the world and the pervasiveness of fear in modern life. He was referring to the fear that comes from hopelessness, vulnerability and violence, including by weapons of mass destruction. Fear, in his view, is the impediment to growing the human capacity for empathy, compassion and moral judgment. Interestingly, he also cautioned us about ideology and the importance of being rooted in own distinct sense of self, which in the context of my talk today, I understand in terms of both personhood and nation. In his words:

The complexity of real life turns out to be too heavy for any ideological scaffolding to uphold ... The lesson in this is the need for a considerable humility of mind in the face of these enormous complexities of life – we must learn to leave room for the unexpected ...

New ideologies will undoubtedly continue to emerge as part of the yearning for a sense of direction and the search for understanding of the unfathomable. But we must recognize the limitations of ideologies – life is vastly more intricate and richer in its complexity, both more terrible and more beautiful, than any scenario we can imagine ... [T]he lesson for each human being [is] ... how important it is to retain a sense of self.

I thank you for your attention.

Kamala Chandrakirana is an Indonesian feminist and advocate for human rights, justice, and democracy. She led Indonesia’s National Commission on Violence against Women, as Secretary General (1998-2003) and Chairperson (2003-2009). In November 2017, she completed 6,5 years as a mandate holder in the UN Human Rights Council’s Working Group on discrimination against women in law and practice. For Asia and the Pacific, she is co-founder of the Urgent Action Fund for Women’s Human Rights Asia and Pacific and the Asia Pacific Women’s Alliance on Peace and Security. With feminist Muslims, she co-founded Musawah, a global movement for equality and justice

in the Muslim family, and co-initiated Indonesia's National Congress of Women *Ulama* (KUPI). Kamala served twice on *ad hoc* presidential task forces: to address migrant workers on death row abroad (2011) and to investigate the death of Munir, a human rights defender (2005). At Indonesia for Humanity, a human rights fund and women's fund, she is Chair of the Board of Directors. In ELSAM, Indonesia's human rights think tank, she is the Board's Vice Chair. Currently, she coordinates a national coalition (KKPK) of 50+ human rights organizations and victim/survivor groups advocating for truth and justice for past human rights violations.