

But perhaps what may do the saving after all is not a miracle, but a peculiarity: an attitude almost of indifference towards death. In Indonesia, people will still clamber to climb on the train, right to the roof, even after accidents occur time and time again; still crowd onto the deck, well beyond the boat's capacity, even though time and time again ferries and boats have sunk; and even still go on playing with fireworks, enjoying explosions big and small, just a few days after a bomb kills several people near a church ...

This is certainly not because they are amazingly brave. But it is because of something that shows up in those statistics: death becomes more intimate.

*Paralysis*. TEMPO, 21 January 2001

K.W.: 1455-1456

C.P. V: 501-503

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## LA VICTIME

I MEDIATE the haughty face of an Arab man in the sixth century, when Mohammed was all alone in the dead of night, drawing a sword close to the Prophet's throat and asking, 'who can protect you?'. I imagine that face, startled, and his sword drop and fall when the Prophet answered in a calm voice, 'Allah'. I imagine him astounded when the Prophet then picked up the fallen sword and quickly pointed the tip at the man's chest, but neither tricked him, nor gave him words of advice. He just sent him on home.

What could that man have been thinking as he went back home? Perhaps he was aware of how meaningless his attitude had just been: he didn't know that there was something more powerful at the artery in another person's neck—yes, something with more power over life and death than a million men drawing swords. Perhaps he finally understood why God's Prophet had not killed him; he too did not feel he had the power. At the moment that someone feels able to determine the fate of another, and feels one could take that life, at that same moment one raises oneself to become the All Powerful. Humanity, with all its limitations, is cast aside; to take the life of another is the same as wiping out all mankind.

Maybe that sixth century Arab also realised that the Prophet wanted to be fair, even to those who opposed him. Maybe he then came to the conclusion that justice is not revenge. And perhaps he eventually was able to witness a moment often praised in history: the Moslem victory over Mecca, without slaughter. The former enemy remained living in the city. Justice is an attitude of balance, for justice is part of caution against excess, including excess in anger.

'Excess', like due revenge, cannot be given a literal meaning: anger can only be truly considered 'in excess' and its avenging considered 'due', if fear, pain and the sense of oppression can be measured. But how can they be measured? Who will measure

them? In a torture chamber, in places of cruelty, screams cannot be summarised with words, with language, or with anything arising from convention. Pain, to use Pramodya Ananta Toer's words, is 'the silent song of a mute'.

Eventually, someone standing before others will stand without arrogance. He will not behave like one with a formula. He is not a measurer. He will not hold a sword high and decide: 'Hey, you kafir, you have been one hundred per cent insolent, and thus I must beat you up one hundred per cent.' He cannot actually be certain: 'You held a sword to my throat, therefore you *definitely* wanted to kill me...' Couldn't one say that the one who threatened actually came to test faith and resolve?

I imagine that sixth-century face because these days the past is recalled (and imagined) only with unceasing bitterness. 'I was tortured you-know-where before 1965', says so-and-so. 'I was tortured by so-and-so after 1965', says you-know-who. I am imagining that insignificant event that took place in the Arabic Peninsula in the sixth century, because these days the clamour is '*la victime, c'est moi*'.

Hubris, or pride, often enters by the back door. Suddenly it takes over and invades us. Like a ruler who says, 'The State, it is I', a tortured person who points the finger at himself and says 'The victim, it is I' also wrongs, for he raises himself up as the one monopolising memory and speech. Indeed, such monopoly was carried out by the 'New Order' through 'touching up' history just as the torturers 'touched up' the faces of the political prisoners. In other words, this is just what so-and-so and you-know-who in their extended hating do.

But shouldn't we note: isn't experience recalled, experience without end? Can't I extract and construct things from it?

To be aware of this is to be aware of how arbitrary memory is. Therefore, each written history needs liberty. Facing history, all people must be able to put forward and challenge each version of their past. But the need for this liberty does not come from a right. The need for this liberty springs from an awareness of limits.

The problem, therefore, is not how far we can understand the past. The problem, at the start, is not forgiveness and reconciliation,

but rather humility. Thus, with sword in hand, with the right to judge, we cannot immediately slit throats. We can be wrong, we have been wrong.

*La Victime*. TEMPO, 30 April 2000

K.W.: 1377-1378

## FENGHUANG

A BOY went with his father to the market to look at hundreds of severed human heads. His uncle mentioned the figure four hundred, the boy didn't know the exact number, but this is how he later spoke of it: 'The arcade was covered with heads, and more were hanging from the slats of the scaling ladders ... there were so many heads in such a big heap, every one of them dripping blood, freshly cut from human necks'.

This is not a story from Sampit, Central Kalimantan in 2001. It is a story from Fenghuang, a town on the west of Hunan province, China, in 1911. The person recounting the memory is Shen Congwen, a Chinese novelist who experienced much bitter history. I found this passage quoted from *Congwen Zichuan* in Jonathan Spence's *A Gate of Heavenly Peace*, a stunning account of the lives of Chinese intellectuals and their revolution.

In 1911 Shen Congwen was only nine. The tremors of revolution that brought the imperial Manchu dynasty tumbling down also passed by his birthplace, the town of Fenghuang. But here the rebellion failed. Those Chinese behind it quickly saved their skins, and so the Miao farmers were accused. It goes without saying that they were arrested. Huge numbers of them. Each day between one to two hundred farmers were dragged in by the army.

Seeing this number, even the officials and the executioners began to get flustered: how could they execute all of them? The problem was solved with a simple 'method of justice': the Miao farmers accused of rebellion had to take part in a lottery. It is said that the soldiers on duty would take them to a temple. In the large pavilion, each prisoner had to throw a pair of bamboo sticks. Anyone who could land one or both of the sticks face up would be 'innocent' and freed, while those who landed both sticks face down would be 'guilty'. They would be taken away to the slaughter place.

That day hundreds of necks were cut, and hundreds of human heads still dripping blood were heaped in the market arcade; a few pieces of string from which were hung severed human ears were stretched from corner to corner ... savagery, it seems, needs spectators.

We can differentiate, of course, between the savagery of Fenghuang in 1911 and the savagery in Kalimantan around the end of the twentieth century. The former is systematic extermination from above. The latter is free-for-all carnage that erupts suddenly. The former is used to impose a system of order. The latter it seems is without design. But they both desire public recognition, horror wishing to become terror, a snarl that terrifies the crowd. They both differ from savagery that is private in nature, when a sadist slices up his victim in a closed room and then stores the head and ears in the fridge.

But it is not only spectators that are sought by the butchers in Fenghuang and Kalimantan. The savagery also seems to need a bit of humour: and so hundreds of severed human ears are strung up like a line of shrivelled fruit hanging out to dry. I always remember the gripping coverage by Richard Lloyd Parry in *The Independent* of the savagery that took place in West Kalimantan in 1997, when the Dayaks slaughtered the Madurese there: a pair of heads, male and female, were placed on a drum, and in their machete-wounded mouths were stuck cigarettes.

Savagery needs a bit of humour to drive home the point that the strong, the victors, may rightly ridicule the vanquished. Victims must still be insulted. There, a sense of mirth is part of total destruction. Milan Kundera once wrote that laughter is, in the beginning, the devil's territory. Sometimes the Angels fail to open their mouths and counterbalance this evil force, and the door is wide open for laughter of all kinds. Including the laughing that comes from the Devil: its echo says that every single thing has no more meaning. The Devil points out that even the grave is something funny.

But the Devil can't always come with a laugh like this. In times past, when native Americans killed their enemies, it is said they would always scalp the victim and save this as a souvenir. There was

the victor's sense of pride, but there was also a sense of respect for the opponent so that something of his body would not just be tossed away. Those who had gone on into the eternal battlefield should not be mocked.

But victory is different between those who win because of one-to-one contest and those who conquer enemies through systematic slaughter or carnage. In the former, victory means life won through wrestling in the same ravine with loss, namely death. Here, victory is a secret moment. It cannot be experienced by another. In the latter, where those—with or without organisation—together exterminate other unarmed people, victory is an easy oppression. It is not necessary to examine the truth of whether those slaughtered are guilty, or whether they are even a fitting enemy. Man, with his individual fate, has been treated as merely a representative of a group. The group is all; collectivity is truth. When one human, who is singular, is no longer permitted to speak, at that very moment, in fact, extermination has begun.

Fenghuang. TEMPO, 11 March 2001

K.W.: 1469-1471

C.P. V: 504-506

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## ANGRY

I KNOW you are angry these days. And yes, civilisation can also start from anger. But there would be no civilisation if anger did not develop to become politics. And so every war has an element of anti-war, and all anger has closure. Isn't it the case that people, every hour of their lives, are aware that there are always others? And with those others—at times strange, frightening, suspicious, or amusing—you or I must converse.

Politics begins from conversations like this. So too trade, imitating one another, exchanging stories, morning greetings, and giving way. From this, history occurs, for history is generally not a story of conquest. In the end, even a military general will say that conquest is a very expensive endeavour.

These days your anger is not alone. People are angry everywhere, it seems. One hears only a small element of restraint. But everywhere, even so, all factors of anti-anger must be voiced. Particularly at a time such as this. In New York, that wounded metropolis, people are trying. For a week now, people have appeared wearing black clothes of mourning, and carrying the message 'Our grief is not a cry for war'. A few days after this started, people came to the northern plaza of Union Square. 'We gather as bombs are falling in Kabul', said the Reverend Peter Laarman, minister at Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village, there among the crowds. *The New York Times* noted that the people came at two thirty in the afternoon. They lined up, and kept on coming, all ten thousand or so of them, the line stretching seven blocks of that large city, moving towards Forty-Second Street and Broadway. In the line, they were shouting 'Peace, Salaam, Shalom'.

Three languages, three words from three religions, and so much sorrow: sorrow for the nearly five thousand people missing or dead at the World Trade Center that September 11; sorrow that this loss has

created self-narrowing patriotism and bomb-dropping anger. Sorrow that God is proclaimed and manifest with bitterness, and that justice is undergoing a metamorphosis: becoming hate.

Maybe this is why that day on Forty-Second Street, Christians, Jews, Moslems and Hindus met. Speeches were declaimed. The Bible, the Koran and other sacred texts were read. Rabbi Ellen Lippman from a synagogue in Brooklyn said, 'My greatest fear is that we will kill thousands of non-combatants'. Margarita Lopez, staff of the Lower East Side Council uttered what at that moment was wanting to be said to the generals and their president in Washington, D.C.: 'Not in my name, not in the name of New York City, not in the name of my district, you're not going to kill anyone in Afghanistan, Pakistan, or anyone in the Middle East'.

On Forty-Second Street that day, you see, the word 'my' became 'our,' 'I' became 'we', 'me' became 'us.' But maybe you are asking, doesn't the word 'us' have a limit? Won't there always and forever be people outside the circle?

Yes, indeed 'us' has a limit. But mankind needs something political precisely with this limitation; something that is born from it. It is precisely with this that civilisation finds its pivot. Civilisation is a process that changes the exclusive 'us' of 'us here' into the inclusive 'us' of 'all of us together'. But, you will now be asking, how can two enemies jointly and inclusively call themselves that second kind of 'us'?

These days, violence makes many things impossible. Violence offers an image of a world that we actually do not know on a daily basis: a world made up of two sides that are completely ruptured. When Samuel Huntington spoke of the 'clash of civilizations', he used a metaphor of violence, and he was wrong because of that, for the relations of the civilisations of 'Islam' and 'the West' (we actually don't know precisely what these words mean), have never been in a state of irrevocable rupture.

I think that is what was seen that day on Forty-Second Street. Two Nobel prizewinners for peace were there, one of whom was Mairead Maguire who pioneered the peace movement in Northern Ireland that was shattered by terror, in the midst of the war between

the militant Protestants and Catholics. 'We don't need to use more violence', Ms. Maguire said. 'As I saw in Northern Ireland, it only begets more violence.'

You will probably retort 'Ah, but that's all outdated'. Maybe Maguire's phrase has become a cliché to you, one that needs no more consideration. What alternative is there to anger, when a group feels tyrannised? And isn't the cry for peace often spoken with hypocrisy? Aren't those who now condemn war against the Taliban the ones who previously never criticised the war against the Serbians? Aren't those who mourn the death of five thousand at the World Trade Center the ones who never wept over the death of the Iraqi soldiers shot by American forces after their surrender, or the death of children suffering from economic blockades? Weren't those who condemned the slaughter in Lebanon the ones who said nothing at all about the slaughter in Algeria?

The list could go on. But hypocrisy, or oblivion, or ignorance, should precisely not go on and on reproducing one-sidedness. There has to be a full stop: enough, we have indeed wronged, or we will wrong: every one of us can be unjust. And after that full stop, we depart: we understand that to take the stance of justice, even towards enemies, is the moment when mankind finds the universal, when God is named the one God of all mankind: The One God. This confession of wrong, this stance of justice, and the strengthening of what is universal, can bring mankind back together again. War, terror, hate, will all appear as incidents that cannot continue. They are not the primary pattern of life.

I know you are angry these days. But what I am trying to say is that anger has a margin. Behind that margin is forgiveness. Forgiveness in its most radical sense: forgiveness proposed by Derrida (in forthright terms) as forgiving 'the unforgivable'. In other words, unconditional forgiveness, something that cannot be done through legislation and courts of law, or through reconciliation.

There is indeed 'madness' in this forgiveness, Derrida says; but in the experience of a victim of terror, there is a zone of experience that remains 'inaccessible'. That zone is a secret that must be respected. In the end, whoever is angry—Bush, Osama bin Laden, the Taliban

soldiers, Ariel Sharon, the tortured Palestinians, and you and I—has to know: none of us can access that zone, entirely.

Anger indeed has a margin: forgiveness and humility.

*Marah*. TEMPO, 21 January 2001

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## LA PATRIE

**I**N a nervous, clandestine room, in German-occupied Paris, Albert Camus was writing for an underground magazine: 'I should like to be able to love my country and still love justice'.

The fighting between the occupying forces and French Resistance was still raging. The magazine *Combat* was still being published, to communicate news and opposition ideas to its limited readership. Camus kept on writing his unique editorials. He presented a series of letters to his friend, a German, who was of course on 'the other side'.

We don't know where that German came from. Maybe he was an imaginary friend. Or maybe he was an intellectual who really existed and who could state what 'German' meant to him at that time of fervid nationalism. 'The greatness of my country is beyond price', is what he said. 'And in a world where everything has lost its meaning, those who, like us young Germans, are lucky enough to find a meaning in the destiny of our nation must sacrifice everything else.'

There is something stirring in words like this. But to Camus, there was something terrifying. 'No', he said, 'I cannot believe that everything must be subordinated to a single end'.

What we find here is an argument against the twentieth century spirit of totalitarianism. This argument admits that there is indeed something sensed as glorious when we are prepared to follow an idea, a belief, a fervour, or a group of humanity that is larger than any single one of us standing alone. But the question is whether, with such rationale, it is right that people lose the furthest reach of their souls. The thundering totalitarianism of Hitler's Germany or Mao's China, says, 'Yes, it must be like that'. But then, what? Eventually we need a belief that one day, at a certain moment, mankind will be whole once more, not merely part of a grand sacrifice. Without that,

there is only a ritual of destruction.

A friend of mine has an interesting idea about *Pancasila* (Indonesia's state doctrine, The Five Principles) and patriotism. According to him, what is important in *Pancasila* is not each individual principle, or the grouping of the five of them as one cluster. What is important is precisely how each principle can act as a balance of another. And so, if someone tends to be overly fervent in upholding the spirit of nationalism then at the same time people must be reminded that they have to observe the spirit of 'just and civilised humanity'. If people tend to overstep the mark in their practice of faith in 'the One and Only God', simultaneously people have to be requested to view, too, whether this, at the same time, is also observing 'democratic values'.

I don't know whether this way of looking at *Pancasila* is acceptable to those upgrading-course leaders in their safari suits who often bore people silly. But this kind of interpretation at least propounds something: 'native land' is something important, but it must first be questioned as to how important it is, for whom, and at what moment. In other words, there is a relationship that has to be viewed at that moment. When, during Soeharto's New Order, members of the theatre group *Teater Buruh* (Workers Theatre) whose self-expression was constantly banned, met in a locked room, and weeping, one by one kissed the Indonesian red and white flag, then we sort of understand that the 'native land' symbolised by that simple flag is a country of oppressed people, the Indonesia of the tortured.

Now of course, the map, the name, the latitude and longitude of this country are probably the same as those in the head of Mr X. But the 'Indonesia' of the place where those workers shed their tears is not the native land of Mr X, who feels that he, or his friends, of his acquaintances, or his group, should be grateful to the Government for their special position, that they can now enjoy so many things. Probably this is why what Camus says has more resonance to us, rather than to Mr X. 'I want to love my country and still love justice'.

That anonymous German, Albert Camus's friend beyond the demarcation line, thought that if this is the case, then Camus did not

love his native country. Our love of fatherland, the German more or less said, has to be unconditional. But I am sceptical whether this can still operate these days. How easy it would be if a country were continuously present as a mythological creature. But we can imagine that to Marsinah, murdered with a pistol barrel probably fired into her vagina, her 'country' had been taken over by the 'state', and the 'state' had been taken over by those pistol-toting officials. If Marsinah were still alive, she would say; 'If the country meant for me is like this, then I am better off far away from it'.

What is saddening is that people like Marsinah actually have only one country, the place where they are born, grow up, and die. They don't have the money to go to another country, to buy real estate over there, or to become professionals in the world of multinational corporations. They have no other ground, while over and around them people debate the meaning of 'native land' and 'Indonesia' with rituals, with mile-upon-mile of safari jaunts, parades, television broadcasts, or with the thrust of all those guns.

*La Patrie*. Suara Independen, No. 01 June 1995

K.W. :1120-1122

C.P. V: 455-457

## STONING

THEY tied the body to a stake. Around that wooden pole a hole was dug, half a metre deep. Dozens of people encircled it.

One by one, slowly gathering speed, and working more and more as a group, those people threw stones—dozens upon dozens of stones—at the body that could not escape. A few dozen stones struck the chest and groin. Others hit the head. Some pierced the eyeballs, smashed the nose, gashed the forehead. Blood flowed, skin was torn open, the skull was fractured, brain spurting out, the eyes broke loose of the sockets. A process of half an hour. Maybe more. And eventually the person sentenced died, bit by bit.

I have never seen a stoning—and I have no wish to see one. But I know that this happened in my country just recently, and what I have described is an image like a silent horror film that disturbs dreams, and is probably not that far from what actually happened. You are asking, perhaps, why I didn't say whether the person sentenced was male or female. Ah, what's the difference? What is certain is that there was pain, there was torture, there was death.

Barbaric? Truly, I don't know the meaning of 'barbaric' these days, but I know even less why a method like this is chosen to kill a sinner.

And you will probably say to me: this is because you don't know the command of God. And I will ask, because I ask myself: what is punishment for, actually? For God—as though God desires it? Desire is a sign of need, yet do we not call Him The Essence of Perfection?

I have never imagined Him as a Power that has to be satisfied, especially with the offering of a body that has turned into a pile of flesh, crushed, bloody. They say that in times past, in Inca lands, there was a ceremony offering human sacrifices to the presence of the Sun God. But my God is not a God like that. My God is The Great Bestower: He does not demand recompense.

Of course it was not only the Incas who killed in the name (or command) of their worship. Each religion has its own moments of cruelty. In The Old Testament we read of how an angry Yahwe wanted to 'impale' the heads of wrongdoers. We read too of how the tribes of Israel stoned a family to death, including the children, of a man found guilty of stealing war booty. In Christian history we can read of how on July 22 1209, an army acting in the name of the Pope attacked and looted Béziers in southern France, so as to wipe out the followers of the Cathar sect in that city. When the Papal Legate was asked how the army was to distinguish between the Cathar sectarians and the true Catholics, he answered; 'Kill them all. God will recognise His own'. That day, fifteen thousand people were slaughtered: men, women, children.

We know too of how the Inquisition, imposed in 1233 (and officially ended in Spain in 1834), interrogated the purity of faith of anyone at all considered suspect, and sent hundreds of people to be burnt at the stake through accusation of heresy. The term *auto de fe*, which actually meant 'deed of faith', became synonymous with deed of cruelty. And it was not only the Catholic Church that did this: there were imitations from the Calvinists in Geneva to the Ku Klux Klan in America (anti Catholics, Jews and the Blacks).

But such violent punishment cannot go on indefinitely. What was accepted, forcibly or not all those centuries ago, is now too extreme. Man is always able to negotiate with the most demanding law: Moses did this with Yahweh, Jesus Christ continued to work on the Sabbath, and Mohammed did not just accept God's command that his faithful pray fifty times a day. Times not only change together with norms. Times also increasingly make the wise aware that purity of law will never be absolute among us.

Of course the pretext can be given that stoning in these times is an attempt to copy the original law of the times of the Prophet. But what is 'original' actually? 'Original' comes from the root 'origin'. But 'origin' is something relative. Punishment by stoning does not 'originate' from Mohammed's time. It was already in the Law of Moses. And even in Christ's lifetime there was still a group that wanted to stone a prostitute to death, until Jesus reminded them, in

a famous phrase: 'Let he who is without sin cast the first stone'.

To me, this also means 'Let he who is without history have the right to operate "original" law'. History has never made something pure remain ever pure. Purity is only when Adam was in Paradise, before he and Eve came down to earth and became subjects with full mandates, free subjects, and in this freedom able to think, interpret, err perhaps, but precisely in this knowing themselves as weak, mortal, limited. Because of this, man has no rights over the lives of others: he cannot assimilate the other, making difference the same, in a totalising way.

Rajam. TEMPO, 20 May 2001

K.W.: 1483-1484

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## GOD

**G**OD was gagged and screamed out in Ayodhya. The Babri mosque had been standing since the sixteenth century, causing no trouble. But last week it was destroyed by those convinced that faith had summoned them: a large group of followers of Hindu 'revivalism'.

Since then, about seven hundred people have died. The Moslems attack the Hindus, the Hindus attack the Moslems, regardless of whether or not they had anything to do with the Ayodhya incident. Who is wrong and who is right has become obscure. God is proclaimed, with differing names, in this carnival of hate that they think is a parade of truth. But is He listening?

No—not if we view God as Tagore did, not if we worship God as Tagore worshipped him. 'I know thou takest pleasure in my singing. I know that only as a singer I come before thy presence', Tagore described his relationship with God. A song is love that radiates, clear, free and simple, without complicated ritual, grand ceremony, and fancy places of worship. Without pretension. Those who love and sing are not going to consider their own way as the expression for people in all places, at all times. Love, like song, is not law. Love, like song, differs from one person to the next. Love, like song, does not spread anger.

But in Ayodhya there was only the yell of war. There were no individuals. Only the mass, the group. In the midst of thunderous noise, mouths foaming, Tagore was not mentioned; he might sound like a softhearted poet, a loner. The God that he mentions in *Gitanjali*—'Thou hast brought the distant near and made s brother of the stranger'—has become a strange God.

It is astounding that God can be worshipped in ways different to Tagore's—or to the way a Moslem recalls God daily as The Compassionate and Merciful. God is sometimes even imagined as

the The Sanctioner of hate and destruction. But is there really a way that is most correct to interpret Him? Who knows? How difficult, indeed, to project His complete image, uninfluenced by our habits, our behaviour, our concerns—in other words, our limitations.

Here we enter a tricky problem: interpretation. It seems to be no coincidence that intellectuals are tied up in knots again in the intricacies of how, really, the process of 'knowledge' or 'knowing' works—in other words, the epistemological process. There are no more Prophets receiving new revelation. At the same time life detects more and more circumstances that cannot always be clarified by extant concepts, models or examples. Old paradigms quickly become as dead as corpses. Last year's theories are quickly stale. People need revised interpretations, particularly if they concern knowledge about mankind, its origins and end. People are even beginning to be uncertain as to whether there can be a consensus about all this, and whether we can claim there is a single centre that can forge this consensus. And thus aware, people are now seriously analysing whether all of this isn't grounded in the way we give meaning to the world, just as a reader gives meaning to a text. The 'post-structuralists' even pay great attention to this matter of textual interpretation. To them, it impossible for human language to offer a single, finished meaning, without always sliding into other meanings.

Chaos? Confusion that has made many victims? Frightening indeed, if the problem extends to the way God appears in our consciousness: as The Avenger, like in Ayodhya, or as the One we can love with simplicity and humility?

Well, I prefer to return to Tagore, who can be so beautiful: 'You hide yourself in your own glory, my King', he wrote in his long poem, *Crossing*. 'The sand-grain and the dew-drop are more proudly apparent than yourself.'

*Tuhan*. TEMPO, 19 December 1992

K.W.:1012-1013

C.P. IV: 409-410

## JERUSALEM

**J**ERUSALEM: here the name of God is uttered each minute and hate is shouted every day. Perhaps each alley in this ancient city is a street of suffering, a *via dolorosa*, and each passer-by is excited to witness absolute power. Between the yellowing walls and olive trees, it is as though all these things appear: faith, absolutism, sacrifice, hate, reawakening, and bitterness. And the desire for immortality.

Just a few metres from the beautiful *Al Aqsa* mosque still stands the Wailing Wall, weathered for over two millennia. A few hundred metres from this place of Jewish worship stands the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, blackened by centuries of passing dust. I once asked why God had created all this—a cluster of differences that are not accepted as differences—and a world which has become a large Jerusalem: a place witnessing never-ending bloodshed. A friend replied: 'You really think it was God that made all this?'

God created hate, or the other way around, hate created God ... Is that the question? I am afraid to draw any conclusion, afraid lest there is a two-in-one relationship between the sacred and the profane, and there is something terrifying, even disgusting, in every truth. An etching by William Blake, *Jerusalem*, is inscribed with a series of perturbing questions:

... What is a church and what  
Is a theatre? are they two and not one? can they exist separate?  
Are not religion and politics the same thing? Brotherhood is  
religion,  
O demonstrations of reason dividing families in cruelty and  
pride!

Blake wrote this in the eighteenth century, but here in the twenty-first century we are still asking how precise, actually, that line of

division is: what exactly is a church, the place where God is worshipped, and what is a stage, a place of spectacle performing illusion? Are they not just the same thing? Is not religion also politics? And does not religion—which creates a sense of brotherhood between people—'divide families in cruelty and pride'?

There is a tone of bitterness in Blake's questions. Perhaps his hope for one hundred per cent pure religious behaviour was exaggerated. How could that be? 'Church' is riveted to 'stage', and 'religion' to 'politics' because man never interprets his God standing by himself. No one today is 'like Moses on Mt. Sinai', to use a line from Amir Hamzah's poetry. On that mount there was just one human faced by God, but now we do not live on mountain peaks or in deserts, but in crowds, in certain places, at certain times. God speaks and becomes history.

When God becomes history, His word travels from place to place and from time to time. It crosses the diverse, and it discovers the unpredicted. It becomes a narrative, a retelling of aspiration and deed. And we know that deed is always carried out by a body, brave, but governed by limits. There is no longer anything that can be absolute, nothing that can become final meaning. In this way, the Word is never alone, it lives amongst others, and debates, answers back, grows, branches out.

But there are times when God becomes history, and other times when history becomes God. All that is made and done by humans—with their diverse bodies, fates and times—develops to become The One. Deeds become experience, and experience is codified as teaching. Once teaching is divorced from its metaphor, it quickly or slowly becomes doctrine, something worshipped.

Tragedy occurs when God stops being history and history appears as God. In other words, when belief, which arose in the past, is no longer entwined with the frailty of human affairs today. It is then that the eternal takes over from the mortal.

In Sophocles' play, the gods take over Oedipus's fate. He is destined to murder his father and marry his own mother. He tries to escape this fate, but fails. And yet he is punished for this deed—in the name of justice. In Shakespeare's play, the indecisive Hamlet

eventually does something that brings about tragedy when his father's ghost, appearing from the realm of the dead, succeeds in pushing him to take revenge. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Arjuna, who is reluctant to wipe out his own kin, finally joins the battle when Kresna, with his authority and knowledge as Visnu, succeeds in persuading this reluctant son of Pandu. And the fratricidal war between the Bharata families becomes more savage, eventually ending in futile victory.

There is something noble and moving in these actions, particularly when we ignore the raging cruelty and hate, and the people piled up, dead. Perhaps this is what is celebrated in Jerusalem, with its repeated tragedies: man has been killing and being killed since the Crusades, both for martyrdom and through fear.

Until when, we don't know. Once history becomes God, then that historical hate can even be perpetuated to become something eternal. Maybe John Lennon was right: 'God is a concept by which we measure our pain'.

*Jerusalem*. TEMPO, 29 October 2000

K.W.: 1431-1433

C.P. V: 50-52

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

**G**OENAWAN MOHAMAD was born in 1941, in Batang, a small town in Central Java. The Dutch colonial government exiled his parents in 1927-1930, for their involvement with the left wing nationalist movement. After three years spent in a remote West Papua camp, the family was allowed to return to Java. Six years after Goenawan was born, in 1947, the Dutch occupying force executed his father.

As a young poet living in Jakarta in his 20s, Goenawan was drawn into a bitter literary and political controversy when he joined a group of artists and intellectuals who signed the Cultural Manifesto in 1963. The manifesto was to oppose the Stalinist doctrine of socialist realism to be imposed by the then powerful Indonesian Communist Party with the support of President Soekarno's Guided Democracy. Soon, the manifesto was condemned as 'counterrevolutionary' and banned. In 1965, Goenawan fled to Europe, with the help of some friends. He got a scholarship at the College d'Europe in Bruges, Belgium.

In October 1965, a dramatic political change took place in Indonesia. The political rivalry between the Indonesian Army and the Communist Party reached its climax when a group of left-leaning army officers killed several high ranking officers. The army struck back. Hundreds of thousand of people were massacred or jailed. Gradually the Army took control of the country, by pushing President Sukarno, who defended the Communist Party, into a corner. Sukarno fell from power in 1966 and was detained until his death in 1971. In 1966, Soeharto, the general who unseated him, became the president.

Right after his return to Jakarta, Goenawan joined *Harian Kami*, a daily newspaper opposing both Soekarno and Soeharto; the newspaper was banned by the latter. In 1971, with others, he

started a weekly news magazine called TEMPO. In 1984, Soeharto's regime banned TEMPO for the first time. The government revoked the ban after two months. In 1989, Goenawan went to Harvard University as a Nieman fellow.

In 1994, again the government closed down the magazine, this time for good. With other colleagues, Goenawan established ISAI, (Institute for the Study of Free Flow of Information), a cover organization to create a network of underground publications and a clandestine news agency. In 1998, after a large-scale student protest, Soeharto left the stage. His regime collapsed. The media became free. Former TEMPO journalists decided to revive the magazine in 1999.

In 2000, Goenawan left the magazine to focus himself on writing. He continues to write his weekly column, short essays called '*Catatan Pinggir*' (literally: marginalia), something that he has been doing since the early 1980s. He also writes literary and philosophical pieces, mainly for *Kalam*, an Indonesian quarterly on the arts, literature and ideas.

Goenawan also writes poetry and librettos. In June 1999, his '*Kali*' was staged as an operatic work at On the Board theatre, in Seattle, WA. In November, his long poem, '*The King's Witch*', was used as the libretto of a musical piece by Tony Prabowo, an Indonesian composer, for a Julliard School of Music concert at the Lincoln Center, New York.

Goenawan is a leading member of the Utan Kayu Community, (to which ISAI now belongs), a Jakarta alternative centre run by media, cultural and political activists to promote freedom of expression and thinking.

His published works consist mainly of four small volumes of poetry and several books of literary and political essays (e.g. *Kata, Waktu*. ('Words, Times', Jakarta, 2001).

**J**ENNIFER LINDSAY, born in New Zealand, Australian citizen and resident, has spent nearly twenty years in Indonesia as a student, researcher, diplomat, and foundation program officer,

with a consistent interest in Indonesian arts, cultural policy and language. *Sidelines*, her translation of essays by Goenawan Mohamad, was published in 1994, and she does a weekly translation of Goenawan's column for the English language TEMPO magazine. She is currently research affiliate at the Department of Performance Studies at the University of Sydney, Australia, and in 2003 will be Visiting Fellow at the Asian Research Institute at the National University of Singapore.

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