

the exaggerated estimation of the value of his own kind, of his own work, and of the labours of his own people.'

That sense of being superior to the natives can reach the most comic and at the same time most abhorrent level because, like the theories of race in Europe in the eighteenth century, they carry the claim of science. A Dutch psychiatrist who lived in Java, P.H.M. Travaglino, for example, declared in 1920 that adult Javanese continued to display immature, childish attitudes. 'The *inlander* are still in an earlier stage of evolutionary development', Travaglino wrote.

In this mental stage of childishness, this *kinderlijk niveau*, the natives had to be led, to be developed—and it is not surprising that the colonial rulers regarded them as not yet ready to have rights. Travaglino, a scholar, felt capable of giving an alibi for colonialism, which was no other than an aggression—and also the fruit of a sense of pride and a sense of anxiety, mixed.

To be sure, these days, a sense of pride and a sense of anxiety no longer produce colonialism. Yet, there is a different aggression. This aggression is the attitude of propounding that *my group* is better than *your group*, and yet is afraid of being rocked or pushed by *your group*. And so, the demarcation line is drawn very tight, just as the colonial government used to draw the line of apartheid tightly. Attempts to make them the same are considered undermining, as treachery. The drive to understand each other and the urge to be inclusive, are seen as an infection of filth. And even we speak like one of the characters in Jean Genet's play. 'What we need is hatred. From it our ideas are born.'

*Al-Identitas*. D & R, 10 March 1997

K.W.:1159-1162

C.P. V. 193-198

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## II

*Faith is the mother of all kinds of architecture. In our souls it forms peaks and crannies, and builds fences to safeguard what-is-within from the pollution coming from what-is-without.*

—The Body

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## SACRED POETRY

**I**F sacred texts were merely books of law without poetry, humans would have been living for a long time with barren spirits. The Bhagavad Gita, the Bible, the Koran: in the midst of our contemporary experience, one thing we need is to revive the poetry found within them.

And this doesn't mean merely to translate them with verbal decoration or to read them in a beautiful style. The poetic translation of the Koran pioneered by Mohamad Diponegoro in Indonesia some years back, or Nyoman S. Pedit's attempts with the Bhagavad Gita, proved they did not have to ornament. For we do not need such ornament. More fundamental to the revival of the poetry of sacred texts, is actually to revive our own spirituality. To me this means a renewal of attitude, so as to be able to accept sacred texts as not just a kind of code of criminal law.

For indeed, God spoke in human language, in poetry. And poetry, with its symbolism, its rhythm, with all its energy, does not dictate. Poetry is speech to the soul, which involves the acknowledgement of the other as a person, with all that this implies. Accepting sacred texts as living poetry means to accept the word of God not as a decree, but rather as an invitation to dialogue; not as intimidation, but rather as the bestowal of love. In this way, we free ourselves from a biased, confining view about God and mankind; God as a kind of tyrant, and humans like His colonised subjects, already exiled, and forever distrusted.

Too often we are asked to be in fear of Him, and we all too frequently forget that we can actually be attracted to Him and love Him. Henry Miller, in his autobiography, writes that once he suddenly noticed on a wall in Chicago writing in ten-foot high letters: *Good News! God is Love!* as though this good news had to be made into a headline—even though this 'news' was not actually any

new truth. For this not-new truth had been long stifled, and mankind had, for a long time, not known of it. We know the character Hasan in Achdiat K. Mihadja's novel, *The Atheist*: he suffers because since his childhood God has been depicted to him as the Owner of Hell, speaking only of threats and never of consolation.

A God who does not cheer is a God depicted not as the All-loving and All-forgiving, but rather as the All-hating. And if so, he is a futile creator. For then our life loses its meaning, man is just one absurd product. And then we forget that life is a gift, that the world is not a cursed place of exile, that man is important, a caliph on earth, and not a hunted dog.

To accept the important meaning of man is actually our problem now. If we believe there is no coercion in religion, if we are open enough to live within the poetry of God's words and not merely to live within His threats, then we have to trust man with his freedom. For God bestows upon us what Iqbal calls the 'freedom of human ego'. For the relationship between man and God, which these days is called a relationship between 'I-and-Thou' is a relationship of Subject-to-subject. It is only through the poetry of sacred texts that this kind of relationship can be experienced: my self is not submerged, but rather emerges, with a living spirit, in liberty. In short, a relationship without ambition, where humans can give thanks within a situation of devotion and intimacy, a direct contact without any other person as intermediary—for in the end, poetry cannot be determined by a go-between.

Indeed, in the end, the conversation of God with man in poetic experience is not determined by a third party. We can get assistance from someone else to interpret the Word of God, but then it is up to us to determine our attitude. Through poetry, the words of God convey not merely His being, but also His mystery. For in the meeting transformed by poetry, language is enriched, approaching comprehensive depiction, and portraying realities that cannot be completely clarified by analysis. Poetic articulation does not speak of details, bit by bit. Its articulation contains its own ambiguity, and yet can still communicate. Through poetic language such as this God

can appear in our hearts, creating an inner experience, which made the poet Chairil Anwar write:

Although it is truly difficult  
to remember the all of You

He experienced the mystery of God, which opened up all kinds of possibilities of interpretation, without there ever being fullness of depiction. No one can resemble God, and no one can claim to have found the one and only Truth of Him. That is why God gives each of us the opportunity to relate to Him. In this way, to revive the poetry of sacred texts means to open the door to a free, authentic and individual communication between God and man. To revive that poetry means to avoid the tendency of stasis in our systems of belief. Faith cannot be transplanted, religion cannot be regimented, and interpretation about God cannot be monopolised.

I think we need awareness like this in our times.

*Puisi Kitab Suci. Harian Kami 1968*

K.W.: 19-21

## THE BODY

FROM the early mist of the morning, thousands of deer gather, look about, or meander untended in the pine forest of the city of Nara. No one disturbs them in this vast park. It is as though their lord is still enchanted by them, so too the tourists who become more numerous in the heat of the day: since 752, at the Todai-ji temple, a statue of Buddha has stood, sixteen meters high. People say that this figure dominating the *Daibutsuden* space represents a depiction of the essential noble nature of Buddha.

Status and stature—it is as though the two are linked. Strange, actually. How can it be that grandeur is upheld in honouring someone who came into the world precisely to deny grandeur? Didn't Siddharta Gautama leave the palace and return to the people to teach, in the Deer Park, about a life of suffering as long as man remains tempted by desire?

This question of grandeur could be applied just about anywhere. In the coastal town of Amalfi in southern Italy is the Santo Andrea Basilica, a structure that combines elegant Romanesque style with Byzantine goldwork. In one of the far corners is a statue of the Virgin Mary. She stands beside the body of Jesus, lying with blood flowing. The Blessed Lady wears the dress of nobility, dark in colour and embedded with jewels, and on her head is placed a queen's crown.

Why does purity end up dressed in worldly garb? Why is grandeur eventually realised in a stone construction of thousands of cubic meters? I am reminded of Amir Hamzah's poem, when he expresses his longing for God. 'I am human, longing for feeling, longing for form.' Faith is the mother of all kinds of architecture. In our souls it forms peaks and crannies, and builds fences to safeguard what-is-within from the pollution coming from what-is-without. In the space of the world, it builds holy temples and sacred mosques in a longing for feeling and form. Whether a large room or small, a

stark building or a decorated one, a statue or calligraphy—all is exuberance of the senses to praise God. The body craves its satisfaction, even in matters concerning the depiction of spiritual desire.

The body, in religion, is indeed a paradox. There are so many rules imposed by sacral command to regulate the body, as though this part of man forever gives rise to anxiety, and therefore needs to be safeguarded against. And yet, at the same time, it is as though there is also the admission that the body is of such importance that worship—and sacrifice—are always an expression of the physical. Perhaps this is why there are those who consider that the elimination of apostasy and the removal of difference in faith can only be carried out through the annihilation of the body, not through persuasion. We read about how Al Hallaj was burned, just like those who were burned at the stake of the Spanish Inquisition.

The body is indeed a point of contradiction: is it the centre of defilement, and thus to be denied, or at least controlled? Yet is it not also a presence in deed, so that only through the body can good be enacted?

There is a debate in Confucian thought, particularly in old Japanese manuscripts, which illustrates to me a controversy about the body—a controversy that also continues in the history of Buddhist, Hindu, Christian or Islamic thought, or in anything that aims to translate good deed in the world. At least, this is what I concluded from the Naoki Sakai's explanation in *Voices Of the Past*, his book which is most impressive for both its research and philosophical content.

The main character is named Ito Jinsai. He is an expert on exegesis of Confucian thought of seventeenth century Japan, who explains his philosophical position through commenting on earlier interpretations found in classical Chinese works. Ito places himself as one who denies 'Song rationalism', particularly the experts from the Zhu Xi school.

Good, according to the Zhu Xi school, is within the thought of man as part of his nature, which is everywhere and forever the same. The self ('I') is in harmony with the universality of the heavens.

Almighty awareness pervades and shapes my consciousness, and makes my goodness universal. With this guidance, my behaviour is valid. Here, the control of body by thought takes place, and in this way the path towards good can be followed.

Ito Jinsai, on the other hand, emphasises the significance of the body. To Ito, it is not the universality within the soul that unifies mankind, but rather togetherness: the soul or self as Zhu Xi depicts it, is basically assumed to be self sufficient, and needs nothing outside itself, nothing else. In Zhu Xi's philosophy, the world and steps leaving traces in the dust of its path, have no influence on the soul. Even though it is precisely within the world, in the brushing up against others, that good occurs.

The body is not as the Song rationalists imagine: the material cannot be fully planned. There is always the unpredictable. Because of this, the enactment of goodness is not an easy thing. It is not only humility that is important here, but also a feeling of togetherness: each self alone will be insufficient, will be unfinished. As Ito says: 'The Way is like the road; it is that by means of which people come, go, and encounter. It is named the Way by virtue of the fact that it enables people to encounter one another.'

A simple path, certainly, not a grandiose space and form, closed, and saying, 'Take witness, this is perfection'.

*Tubuh*. TEMPO, 6 February 2000

K.W.: 1350-1352

C.P. V: 421-423

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## WOUNDS

ISLAM is a religion that is full of *élan*, but its community of believers has a wounded heart. A friend once called it, in a tone of melancholy, 'a wounded civilisation'.

This description comes from V.S. Naipaul, of course, when he was writing about the distant land of his forefathers in *India: A Wounded Civilization*. In history it seems there is always a civilisation that soars to be later struck down, and the 'wounded civilisation' syndrome appears. To Islam, this wound is relatively new: at least its remnants are still acutely felt at the end of the twentieth century. In other words, it is not completely healed.

Formerly, when newly arrived on the face of history, the Moslem community accepted life with hearts of joy and conviction. They didn't balk at searching for knowledge in China, in copying Greek works, in tapping poetry from Persia or theatre from the Far East. From all of this they created many things, discovered many things. It was as though they were in the process of carrying out a mandate given by God to become caliphs on earth, and to affirm a covenant.

But then the Islamic countries got cornered. In this twentieth century the majority of Moslems live in a wide territory called 'The Third World'. They are right at the bottom according to current measures of achievement. And when people still recall Ibnu Khaldun or Avicenna it is precisely with a sense of pain in their hearts.

What happens then is a process, with consequences occasionally depressing and occasionally brilliant. The depressing is a sense of hopelessness. This lack of hope is what maybe makes people desert religion. Or perhaps they don't desert what they believe in: rather, some of them decide to exercise *takfir* (disavowal)—namely to disavow the entire contemporary world outside of themselves as the space of the *kafir* or unbelievers.

That world outside is indeed a world that is not always comprehensible and acceptable. It is full of things whose origins are 'non-Islamic', and even, and especially, 'Western'. There are machines, large-scale businesses, democracy and basic respect of individual rights; there are also porno films or the philosophy of Karl Marx. These things have a strong presence, and in one way or another seem to mock those of us who choose not to go along with them. And so it is understandable that we tend to reject them.

But to reject does not mean to defeat, and that is the problem. Maybe this is where 'takfirism' is born, a term I prefer within Islam's own history compared, say, to the term 'fundamentalism'. Not yet able to defeat that world with all its wrongs, some Moslems cut off contact with every scrap of influence from outside their world of reference. And so the attempt to purify behaviour begins. The more the world of the 'kafir' (unbelievers) over there is sensed, the more vigorous that will to purify.

'Takfirism' inevitably involves an attitude of rejection and opposition. This rejection can be very extensive: because constitutional democracy and pluralism come from 'the West', for example, then these too can even be seen as conflicting with Islam. Here a constant sense of suspicion prevails. Scientific experiments, artistic innovations, and cultural diversity usually local and indigenous in nature, are also, in turn, an anathema.

Needless to say it is more difficult for 'the 'takfirists' to accept compromise. Purity precisely seeks life without compromise. For as is seen in history, teachings, mental attitudes or values all turn out to be factors that cannot themselves create the objective world. Thus, we cannot really blame Moslems' misguided thinking or deviant teachings and prohibitions, however manifest, as the source of economic backwardness, just as Hindu culture cannot completely explain poverty. However perceptive Max Weber and Sombart may be, there are many holes in their theories arguing that Protestantism in northern Europe brought about the progress of capitalism.

Precisely because of this, merely through adhering to the purity of teachings, the 'takfirists' will be disappointed yet again when they see the modern world continuing to just push the believers aside. For

history is not forever determined by the purity or contamination of doctrine; there are so many factors of chance that put us within the level of the 'Third World', as a wounded civilisation. Fortunately, a wounded civilisation sometimes produces brilliant things. Like Islamic communities everywhere, in Indonesia it also feels under pressure. And yet, at the same time as more and more educated are emerging among more traditional Moslem adherents in Indonesia, among Moslem circles there is also a rainbow and fireworks of thinking that appears much more alive than in other circles. These people don't all agree with each other. But neither do they all despair that the situation is beyond hope, and that outside all is black.

Maybe because of this, that rainbow and fireworks is called divine mercy. For this wounded civilisation is precisely a civilisation that is not yet dead—and is even healing itself. It can't be written off that easily.

*Luka*. TEMPO, 3 November 1984

K.W.: 522-523

C.P. II:122-124

life experienced in history: 'justice' signifies something that does not exist in an atmosphere of rampant injustice, and 'order' signifies something that does not exist amidst public confusion. As to the form of such justice and order, this will depend on the wrestling for hegemony between all participants in the political process. Eventually there will be winners, but even so, they will not finally stay on top forever.

Faith and morality are such signifiers: their meaning will eventually be filled in by those who, for a while in history, hold hegemony. God is often seen to be on our side, without us asking, if this is so, then who really is responsible for our behaviour? Could that be faith? Maybe not. Perhaps the old servant in Hemingway's story is actually right: mankind is only able to keep God out of history which often goes astray by praying, 'Hail nothing, full of nothing, nothing is with thee'.

*Nada*. TEMPO, 10 September 2000

C.P. V: 433-435

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## INTERPRETATION

THE Taliban shouldn't be singled out for criticism. When women were forbidden to work in offices in Afghanistan, when Mullah Umar's government closed schools for girls, what actually happened was the perpetration of misogyny—and we can be amazed at this: that hate towards women has such a long history. In Jewish texts and religious knowledge. In Christian experience. In Moslem life. In the Greek era, in Roman times, among Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucians, in various customs from the North Pole to New Guinea, it transpires that the prevailing discourse is, to use the words of Hamlet in Shakespeare's play: 'Frailty, thy name is woman!'.

Now we are able to ask: why is injustice that denigrates women perpetuated, and often affirmed, by religions? To what extent does God, as the source of justice, operate, with written and spoken word, in an unjust world? Last week, listening at *Teater Utan Kayu* to a fascinating lecture on gender bias in Koranic interpretation by Dr. Nasaruddin Umar, professor at Syarif Hidayatullah State Institute for Islamic Studies (IAIN), I think I got a glimpse of an answer: God, represented by a collection of written words, is forever God-within-language. And thus His words are not a whole inspiration as originary revelation. 'When the revelation of the Koran descended using Arabic, then clearly there appeared problems that require critical scrutiny', Nasaruddin Umar said.

The Koran, as we now know it—a great divine inspiration expressed in human words—has undergone a series of transformations: it is *kalâm al-yâti*, the word of essence, that has transformed into *kalâm al-lafz*, the word of enunciation, and finally 'descended' to the world of language on earth. Every series of transformations, Nasaruddin Umar said, always meets with reduction of meaning or distortion of sense. Any human language has its own limits and characteristics. When that language, as part of its culture, elevates

men over women—as is evident in the structure and vocabulary of Arabic and Hebrew—then the message conveyed cannot be pure from that imbalance. Or, as is seen in the Koran, that revelation operates within a paradox: there is the 'spirit' to free women from injustice, but at the same time that 'spirit' finds its body within an utterance which, to quote Nasaruddin Umar, 'corners women'.

Language is indeed no clear path, no straight line capable of being entirely controlled by the users. Language is a jungle that astonishes, but within it is found a tangle of vines that often confuses understanding. And there are also hidden chasms, gaping difference. Maurice Blanchot even speaks of *l'entretien infini*, 'infinite conversation', which 'holds itself between {se tient entre} two points which do not constitute a system, a cosmos, a totality'. In this view, conversation between A and B will not fuse B with A or vice versa. This *entre* is like a deep abyss, 'an irreducible distance'. This conversation is not a dialogue moving in the direction of symmetry. Each of them, A and B, discovers the other in his or her wholeness, in his or her 'strangeness'. Particularly so in a terrifying conversation: between God (that 'other' in absolute form) and man.

This is why 'infinite conversation' arises. Interpretation is never-ending. As Nasaruddin Umar said, 'He who most understands the meaning of a Koranic text is certainly God alone'. Now, when there is no one who can ask Him directly for clarification, even the learned pious are unable to say that they have the final word. Differing voices are not to be buried. Particularly for a language like the one used in the Koran: 'It has been made possible', said Nasaruddin Umar, 'to write and read a number of verses in more than one way'.

But this condition of 'more than one way'ness indeed creates problems. God-in-language also means God-in-history. Unavoidably, there is tension when The One and Absolute is enmeshed with the world, with reality of 'more than one kind' and changeable. Inevitably, there is always anxiety that wishes to affirm the one-and-absolute, but at the same time there is a lifeworld that is necessarily relative, uniform and limited. How can this tension be resolved? In the end, as history notes, religions unified interpretations about

God, with single centres of 'truth,' through power, and even violence. Followers of other interpretations were then turned into 'heathens,' muted, drowned.

In this practically-unarbitrated competition, how can those weak in power, like women for instance, be protected? Formerly, people tried to find one form of arbitration through recording the word of God in a document, as protection from the arbitrary colonisation of interpretation. And then the word became the book, and the book became the source of authority. But this was not without risk. It was precisely when it was raised up as solid and straight authority, as straight as The All Truthful, that the book ceased to stir the heart. At that moment mankind lost 'infinite conversation'.

Taliban. TEMPO, 17 February 2002



before the Indonesian army was sent to 'take' East Timor, your voice was earliest in warning of the dangers of 'imperialism' emerging from within.

Why Bung? You were not a fortune teller. But maybe because your nationalism, like Loyok the worker's nationalism, is a voice of solidarity. Not solitude—not one hundred years of solitude.

*Surat buat Bung Hatta.* TEMPO, 12 August 2002

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## IV

*For democracy is finally a way of viewing history: not as part of an eternal and finished nature which is symbolised by a cemetery and silence, but rather history as the commotion of we who are living, shifting, differing, and not infrequently making mistakes, while acknowledging imperfect humanity.*

—Dur

demand not only individual skill, but also management. The bureaucratisation of violence is born, together with those who hold the monopoly of violence: and, behold—professional armed forces appear.

Yet at the same time, a society needs the equipment that organises a state: there are tax offices, courts, those who make rules and regulations; and the power of the guardians of balance. Those who hold the monopoly of violence must yet be able to acquiesce to the citizens who pay taxes and the costs of that bureaucracy. Guns must have lords.

Therefore, Sir Market should not touch these elements. Commercialisation must stop right here. The army must not be mobilised by those offering the highest wages. A terrible fate will strike a city when Sir Market infiltrates this far, and a state no longer behaves as a state but rather as a kind of black market: the generals offer military service to interested parties wishing to use violence—maybe someone who wants to collect a debt, maybe a casino or brothel owner, maybe an importer of narcotics, or maybe some public figure who bears a grudge.

And in the end, the poor will be unprotected. Precisely like the drivers who were killed by the bomb blast at the Stock Market in Jakarta that day: just a few hours after the television had been switched off, the victims were no longer mentioned.

*Sang Pasar*. TEMPO, 24 September 2000

K.W.: 1417-1419

C.P. V: 172-174

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## TRUST

**M**AY 1998. Buildings on fire. Shops looted. Stories of rape going around. People seized by fear and anger, especially the Chinese. And yet, not all areas with luxury houses and fancy stores were being attacked. In the northern part of East Jakarta, tanks and armoured cars were parked in front of one such complex. About three army platoons on alert. Why?

Maybe we can find the answer looking elsewhere. On that day of unrest, in an area we will call B, a shopping centre manager with good connections phoned the commander of the nearest army unit at the headquarters about five kilometres from his office. Realising that no one knew where the looters came from, he asked for army protection for his shopping centre. The Commander on the other end of the line expressed his readiness to help, but added, in a low voice: 'we request some assistance with the operation costs, sir'. The manager inquired how much. The reply: ten million rupiah.

For a moment he was taken aback, but then said he would have to discuss it first with his boss. However, over the next hour he was unable to get a decision because no one knew where his boss was. By the time the manager finally took the initiative and was brave enough to decide to pay that amount, the Commander had already sent his troops elsewhere: to a rich residential area in the south. The estate director there had not given the price asked a moment's thought. And so, sure enough, at around four thirty in the afternoon, the shopping centre at area B, with no forces deployed to guard it, was set on fire by the crowd, the luxury goods dragged outside and looted.

Where was the Republic of Indonesia then? Where were the public bodies that are supposed to protect tax-paying citizens? The Republic came to a standstill. In front of every fearfully locked door, before and after the fires, the Republic of Indonesia was replaced by clusters of power, which would not join together. There was no

communal nation. There was only 'me and you', not 'all of us'. What political scientists call 'social capital' had collapsed, or was irrelevant.

Indeed, if there is one thing that corruption most destroys, it is that 'social capital': Each individual or group believes that togetherness is impossible, because each person bribes or asks to be bribed—outside of the law—to get whatever he or she wants. A suspicion economy rules. And the costs are high. If it is easy for trader A to trust trader B in a syndicate, there is no more need to find fees for notaries and lawyers when all they do anyway is act as bribe agents. And it is not necessary to find money to pay off the judges when a dispute occurs and a case is taken before the court.

Suspicion economy appears together with uninvolvement politics. Communal co-operation, neighbourhood familiarity and such things may appear sporadically in small affairs—such as organising a good burial for a dead neighbour—but never on a scale larger than within an immediate radius of five hundred meters.

In the midst of such uninvolvement politics, democracy is easily threatened. Indonesia did once succeed in bringing uninvolvement politics to a halt. This was when the populace flocked—enthusiastically, but also patiently and peacefully (patience and peace being signs there are still remnants of 'social capital')—to the 1999 elections. Hope flared once more, like a lighthouse beacon. But the weather quickly turned bad. The Republic of Indonesia stopped again. 'Social capital' was extinct when someone suspected of being a thief was beaten, murdered and burnt by the mob, when a village in Tegal was burnt down by the inhabitants of another village, and when in the Moluccas the army and police failed to stop the civil war that has been going on for months, with thousands of victims. Who is still able to believe that there are institutions that work on behalf of 'all of us', and not just 'you and me' while cutting out 'them'?

When distrust is rife, there is no hope for what is called 'civil society'. Unlike what is commonly assumed, civil society involves faith in the emergence of a nation, a republic, that can be controlled. Citizens who band together to form independent self-governing organisations nevertheless communally require a protected platform,

so that these small organisations can grow and help each other grow. The guardian of this communal platform is the nation, or, more precisely, the 'republic'.

Where does it come from? When society no longer cares about forming a republic where they live, when there is no longer any trust, then maybe a 'republic' will still emerge. But this 'republic' will be like the world of Don Michael Corleone: the most effective solution is extermination. Discussion is impossible, because discussion is give and take, which will never happen when everyone is saying to himself: I mistrust, therefore I am.

*Percaya*. TEMPO, 13 August 2000

K.W: 1404-1405

C.P. V: 169-171