
I

*The world is a conversation
between differing fellow beings*

—Differing

DIFFERING

EVERY December there are always people who slowly turn the key in the door of their rooms and listen to the world asking: are we *really* all the same? Every December: when people think about human rights, about the universal yet problematic in humanity, and about commonplace matters like commercialised Christmas, or, in quick succession, the changing year.

Every December there are always people who buy cards and write an address at the top: are Christmas, the month of Ramadhan and the days of *Id*, really witnesses to a one God and a varied humanity, in a life that is basically calm, peaceful, where people can exchange greetings, write cards, declare their longing or condolences, or just send some news? Or is it one God, diverse humanity, and times that are never the same?

Every December there are always people who read page three in the newspaper and cannot reply. There are so many dilemmas outside the front door. A few weeks after December 1991, *People* magazine told of the murder of Tina Isa.

Tina was the daughter of a family from the West Bank in Palestine that had migrated to America in 1985, when she, the youngest child, was only around three years old. On that December day, Tina was found stabbed to death. It was not difficult for the police to find who had killed this sixteen-year-old girl. The murderer was her own father.

The father murdered her because he believed that Tina had brought shame on the family and his own sense of honour. She worked at a fast-food restaurant, and was dating a young black man, a school friend. Zein, the father, did not allow it. He wanted to marry off Tina in the same way as he had married off his older daughters: choosing a husband was the father's prerogative. But Tina protested, resisted her father with harsh words, and finally

one night, while her mother held her arms and body, the father stabbed her. *Die, My Daughter, Die!* is the title of the article in *People*, January 20, 1992.

'Anyone growing up in the Middle East knows that being killed is a possible consequence of dishonouring the family', *People* quotes an anthropologist who was born and raised in Jerusalem. Could Zein be sentenced? Isn't one entitled to have authentic customary law?

To differ is what human rights are about. The paradox of human rights is that their starting point is something universal—whereas the universal can be interrogated by the particular, which is not necessarily the same as what is assumed by that universality. If there is anything that constantly teases us, it is the matter of 'differing' and its meaning in life.

Perhaps, in the beginning, there was differing. But 'the beginning' did not appear, ready, from out of nowhere: even it was a product of differentiation, of difference. Everything that exists gets its identity through being different, and every existing being is always within a situation of comparison with the other. Differing, therefore, cannot be ensnared. In Javanese, the word *beda*, which is the same as the Indonesian word *beda* for 'differing', can mean 'differing' or 'other', but it can also mean 'tease'—a teasing that is playful and enjoyable. In other words, something that has no final purpose of having a final 'product'. It has no teleology.

About thirty years ago, Emmanuel Levinas spoke of *le visage de l'autrui*. He spoke of the 'face' (*le visage*) and how the other person, who appears before and within us in a concrete way, cannot be abstracted, cannot be formulated, because he or she always transcends what I say and comprehend about him or her. Levinas spoke of the *l'autrui*, or what in Javanese is called *liyan*, meaning 'that which is differing' but can also mean 'the other'. To Levinas, it is in the meeting with and admission of *le visage de l'autrui* that human ethical moments occur. We do not meet desiring 'product.' We meet with and in something that is infinite.

But here again is a tease: in life there is the infinite, but there is also a need for the finite, a violent one. Tina was murdered. Zein

was imprisoned. Justice often demands a balance, as is represented in its symbol. Justice also demands that there be a uniform standard, like scales. Justice-on-the-scales is halted differing. In justice, a third party will always be present.

And yet every December there are people who ask: who is represented by the judge, by the third party? Is it true that she represents something that can be accepted by all parties? In other words: something universal? Or is that universal merely the victory of those who appear and do the most talking? Suddenly there is a need, a longing perhaps, for 'the same'. In Malay, the word for fellow beings is '*sesama*,' or 'the same'. And thus we meet the world.

The world is a conversation between these differing *sesama* or fellows. Christmas and *Id* are spread wide with songs, cards, and objects that cross boundaries because of money and trade—many and varied, but yet with a pattern that has often become similar. Maybe here a relative difference that is not absolute, teases and fascinates. Not hate, anger and murder. Not for mutual indifference, mutual exclusion, nor violence to wipe out the different—to submerge infinity within totality, to submerge the infinite within that which is round, one, whole, solid, stuck, uniform, cruel.

Desember. TEMPO, 24 December 2000

BAKU

SAMUEL Huntington didn't say anything new, even though it was mistaken. When he warned there would be a 'clash of civilizations' there was an older prejudice behind his assumption. And perhaps too, a more ancient obsession.

I'll quote a dialogue from a novel written by a mysterious writer named Kurban Said, a work published in 1937 in Vienna and enthusiastically received. He tells of a young Moslem man of noble birth who came from Baku to visit Georgia, the country where the family of Nino, the young woman he loved, lived. The host—the 'European'—invited him to camp in the forest. Ali went with him, but that night he said, 'The world of trees perplexes me, your Highness ... No, I do not love trees.'

The shadows of the woods oppressed him, and it made him sad to hear the rustling of the branches. 'I love simple things: wind, sand and stones', Ali says. 'The desert is simple like the thrust of a sword. The wood is complicated like the Gordian knot. I lose my way in the woods, your Highness.'

And in this, a dichotomy is presented: 'the woods' and 'the desert'. In this part of the conversation, Ali Khan does not contradict when his host, a Georgian, says that this is probably the difference between East and West: in the West, man finds the woods 'full of questions'; in the East, 'The desert man has but one face, and knows but one truth, and that truth fulfils him'. From the desert comes the fanatic. From the woods, the creator.

This contrast is the start of the 'clash' of Huntington's nightmare. Reading *Ali und Nino*, one could wrongly surmise that the 'clash' would be averted in this love story. The main character, the 'I' or Ali Khan, falls in love with a young classmate, a Georgian Christian girl. Ali comes from a Persian aristocratic family that lives in a huge house full of servants and carpets. He is clever at school,

but also a boy who in his own way makes fun of the Russian teachers who instruct him in the town of Baku. He succeeds in graduating from school, maintains his love for Nino, the daughter of a Georgian prince, and intends to marry her.

If *Ali und Nino* is not a Romeo and Juliet, this is because it is set in the period just before World War I, in a place perfect for a story like this: in Baku on the coast of the Caspian Sea, where Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan meet, in a territory under the Russian Empire, and brushing borders with Persia. And thus Ali wins the hand of Nino. Certainly there are religious and racial obstacles obstructing them. At the beginning, Prince Kipiani refuses Ali's request. But all is overcome without blood and iron. An old friend of Ali's, an Armenian named Melik Nachaarayan, comes to help. Through negotiation, Nacharayan succeeds in convincing the Kipiani family to give their blessing to the marriage.

Nevertheless, *Ali und Nino* is not a story welcoming the birth of a hybridisation. Rather, the novel is fascinated with difference, about the 'Asiatic' world that has a thick demarcation with 'Europe'. And even difference becomes contrast. 'The desert' is not merely different from 'the woods', but in opposition to it.

Everything becomes fixed. This is why, even though it was written in the first person, the 'I' seems like a beautiful doll displayed in an antique shop, among the carpets, the old city, the Tehran harem, the traditional songs, and the Syi'ah rituals in the month of Muharram. Reading this 275-page thick novel, I entered a neat prose structure, beautiful, and yet I did not find within it something usually present in moving love stories: an interior.

The novel was published in German, at a time when in Austria the arts were flourishing in the climate just before the war, and they say it was well received. Then war broke out, and the once-popular work was forgotten until finally, among the ruins in Berlin, in a second-hand bookshop, a translator found it. In 1971 the English version was published. In 2000 it appeared again, published by Anchor Books, with an epilogue by the novelist Paul Theroux.

Just like thirty years before, Theroux, who once wrote a review of *Ali and Nino*, praised it, which seems rather odd to me. He called

it 'a bravura display of passionate ethnography', and he is right. But he doesn't consider that the novel is thus fine, but boring.

At the end of the story, Ali Khan dies while defending Baku from the occupation of the Russian Red Army. But actually, he is already long dead. He is there merely to represent 'Asia' for us; he is an 'I' without any pulsating soul. From the beginning he has already clumped himself into a category: at school, Ali tells his teacher that he 'rather likes Asia' and that he does not want to cross to 'Europe'. He falls in love with Nino, but he doesn't seem depressed facing the world of this Christian girl from Georgia. He refuses to try to enjoy the woods. From the start, we know what is driving him. And even when he kills Nacharayan, the person who helped him, merely because he heard that Nacharayan was going to abduct Nino, Ali is presented as a person with not a smidgen of confusion, regret, or sadness. To this 'Easterner', to kill is like a cultural imperative. And when he bites the Armenian's neck, he does not forget to drive his identity home: 'Yes, Nacharayan, that's how we fight in Asia ... with the grip of the grey wolf'.

And that is how Ali Khan dies: frozen on the border of culture. Everything else is a historical event roaring outside of him—which actually we already know from history books. But I understand why *Ali and Nino* could grip Europeans in the 1930s, when the Nazis were starting to show their colours. They were readers used to imagining the 'Asiatic' as a separate category of humanity; wild, savage, interesting and thus sexy in nature: inhabitants of an exotic space. This novel serves up the 'other' as something attractive, but also amusing, frightening, 'not-for-us'.

And who was the author Kurban Said, actually, and why did he offer the 'Asiatic' not as an interior, but rather as a panorama? Theroux once thought that 'Kurban Said' was a Tartar who died in Italy in 1942. But then it transpired that this name was the pen-name of two people: Elfriede Ehrenfels, an Austrian aristocrat, and Lev Nussimbaum, a Jew born in Baku and later raised in Berlin, who converted to Islam in his youth and took the name Essad Bey. The former came from the Old Europe. The latter was a wanderer. Both of them wanted Ali Khan 'to be understood', and therefore

he was not allowed to emerge untamed from his stall.

But maybe this was not their fault. From Aristotle to zookeepers, (and Samuel Huntington), humanity seems to have an obsession with two things in mutual opposition: difference and categories. Categories neatly sweep up difference: difference should free us from categories. Yet, in the name of difference, categories are not infrequently imposed, like fortresses in a war, and we deny that which cannot be identified. Then we live with strange words like 'reptile' and 'Asiatic'.

Each 'civilisation' ends up as something rigid once people have wiped out whatever is odd outside the castle. And so the clash of civilisations is not a dispute between civilisations, but rather, violence within a territory wanting to be marked off as 'a civilisation'. Like prison.

Baku. TEMPO, 3 February 2002

NADIA

WHEN does an innocent girl become a woman? Nadia found the answer when she was eighteen: when she was kidnapped, when the door was closed before her. When she could no longer stand by herself, no longer dream by herself.

The news was broadcast over Norway on October 3, 1997: Nadia, the daughter of Moroccan immigrants who had become Norwegian citizens, was forced to return to Morocco to be married in that country on the west of North Africa. It was her own father and mother who kidnapped her. Nadia was able to phone a friend at the shop where she worked, before not turning up for work on September 1.

She told how she had been beaten, drugged, and dragged into a car that carried her, handcuffed, to Morocco. Her passport had been seized, and she was held at her father's childhood home. Upon hearing this, her friends contacted the police. When the police were slow to react, her friends reported to the Department of Foreign Affairs. Immediately the Norwegian ambassador in Casablanca arrived to inform the Moroccan government of the case, and to hold discussions with Nadia's parents.

The Norwegian government had a motive to act. It was not only Nadia who was a citizen of that Scandinavian country, but also her parents. Her father had come to Norway in 1971 and become a citizen in 1985. Her mother, too. They both spoke Norwegian, and lived on state social welfare, from the father's benefit because of a heart condition, and benefits for the three children. They received 17,500 kroner each month, without the father working.

So the ambassador held discussions with the family, who considered they had done no wrong. Heavy, delicate discussions. The ambassador almost lost his patience, and no one knew what

could be done. Nadia's father was also a citizen of Morocco, a country that allows dual citizenship. In Morocco, Nadia was not yet a woman, even though the whole story had happened because she was considered an innocent girl no longer.

And then, one day, Nadia suddenly reappeared at Oslo airport. She came on a ticket bought by her father. Perhaps fearful that his welfare benefits would be stopped because it was already more than a month since he had left Norway without giving notice, the father had given in.

But a year later, Nadia's parents were nevertheless taken to court. The state accused them of violently detaining someone against her will. There was no forced marriage accusation. Yet, if the detention were proven, they could get prison sentences of a minimum of one year and a maximum of fifteen.

Nadia appeared before the judge. She entered through a back door. Her head was covered by a black blanket. She did not want to be stared at by the crowd, or to exchange looks with her parents. It became known that she had been in hiding for a year; not living with her parents, but at secret addresses.

That day she gave evidence, with all poignancy, that her parents had indeed done wrong.

This whole story has been retold by Unni Wikan, a lecturer in social anthropology at Oslo University, who was a witness in this case, and who wrote up Nadia's case in *Daedalus* (Fall, 2000). Wikan notes how difficult Nadia's position was: in the eyes of her parents, and in the view of Moroccan society, she was a traitor. She caused her own parents, who had given birth to her and raised her, to be sentenced.

The judge did indeed ascertain that the parents had carried out a crime. But there was no fifteen-year prison term. There was no prison sentence. The father was sentenced to fifteen months' with probation, and was fined with court costs. The mother got one year. Wikan, who had been a witness and who knew that Nadia had spoken the truth, described to the judge what the effect would be on Nadia and the family if the father, and especially the mother, were locked up. Nadia would be widely cursed, even by

her own friends. Any reconciliation between the girl and her parents would be impossible.

The judge seemed to take notice. The sentence was cautious. And yet, six months later, Nadia's father died of a heart attack. Indeed, what was noted was this: a conflict. What the judge considered wrong—and here she was determining for anyone living in Norway—clashed with what was right according to tradition and the parents from Morocco. For they considered their right and their duty was to force Nadia to follow the path they had determined for her. The head of the Islamic Community in Norway, Mohammed Bouras, even said of the judge's decision that it was 'an insult to all Moslems'.

What actually happened: the forcing of 'Western' values on a minority group in a secular European country? Or a step in protecting a threatened woman? Which is the more important: the community or the individual? Justice is complicated. Its face is often hidden. Except perhaps when we know that God, or the most bitter pain, is on the side of the unempowered.

Nadia, TEMPO, 17 December 2000

K.W.: 1450-1452

C.P. V: 498-500

REFLECTIONS

THERE is a Chinese story about mirrors and humans. In the time of the Yellow Emperor, it is told, the world of mirrors and the world of humans were not separated as they are now. They differed from each other. There were no beings, colours or shapes that were the same. The two kingdoms lived peacefully side by side. The inhabitants of each kingdom could go in and out through mirrors that divided them.

But one night the creatures from the kingdom of mirrors attacked the earth. They had terrific force. Even so, the bloody conflict ended in victory for the kingdom of humans. The Yellow Emperor used magic. The attackers were forced to retreat, and they lost.

The enemies were imprisoned in the mirrors. As punishment, they had to copy—like in a dream—whatever humans did. Their power had been taken from them, as also their forms. They were made into mere obedient reflections of the human image.

Yet this situation is not eternal. One day to come, as the storyteller tells, the Emperor's magic will end. The mirror-creatures will free themselves. At least this is how Jorge Luis Borges writes it, who put this story—or even created it himself—in his *Book of Imaginary Beings* published in 1957.

A narrative, as Borges himself once said, is 'an axis of innumerable narrations.' This tale about mirrors and humans becomes, amongst other things, a parable. A post-modernist thinker, Jean-François Lyotard, for example, considers this tale as a story about modern man who conquers the world outside of himself. Modern man, this argument goes, builds the world outside just as the Emperor cast a spell on the mirror creatures: making it imitate his own form exactly.

In this interpretation, the Emperor can maintain his position

THE WORLD

THE world before Slobodan Milosevic. The world, or The Hague. Or The Hague and the world—there's no difference any more. I am sitting in a chair in a place far remote from that old, narrow city in the Netherlands, watching him on the television screen, watching him on CNN, just like other people in almost every large city or small town all over the globe. In other words, the world is indeed staring at Slobodan Milosevic. And vice versa.

He arrived, or more precisely was dragged, from far away, from a country that used to be called Yugoslavia, to a foreign place with a foreign language. Here he sits, in a room in that neat International Court, as though an uncomfortable guest, not a prisoner. I look at his scowling face. His attitude of arrogance, or defiance, more precisely. I see in his eyes some fleeting confusion before the International Court judges. Who are they, these people speaking English wearing black togas trimmed with bright red? And who is he, Slobodan Milosevic? These basic questions keep returning. And it isn't going to stop there.

Mr Milosevic, say the reporters on radio, TV and in the newspapers, is a prominent figure who has been accused of carrying out 'crimes against humanity'. But he was also the president of a republic where, since 1989, he was voted in twice by his people (he couldn't be chosen a third time only because of constitutional rules), and he was chosen while the public knew that he initiated the ethnic cleansing of Muslims and Croats. Isn't it the case that he is evil to others, but not to the Serbians? Isn't it the case that he also represents what the majority of them wanted?

But maybe he is also a new phenomenon: with this we know that 'the world' is now a story of power different from what it used to be. A large portion of Serbian votes has no more meaning once beyond the boundary there is a force that can have different

intentions. The world changes. But the more things change, the more they stay the same.

The world changes, when Slobodan Milosevic can finally be taken to The Hague. What has until now been claimed and hailed as 'national sovereignty' becomes something solid no more—at least at that moment. Yugoslavia is finished. Serbia, which used to be just one part of that southern Slavic country, can no longer shut the gate against pressure coming from outside. 'National sovereignty' is jolted, because 'the nation' suddenly no longer exists as a final entity. It turns out that the state can now act in such an unjust way that 'the nation' which was so closely bound with that state is no longer a single 'nation'; there are the butchers and the butchers' victims.

And how it is that the butchers can be called butchers and the victims called victims? In the end this comes back to a series of values that concern not only the Serbians and their Milosevic. Here it seems that the word 'nation' no longer stands as a final entity: here it increasingly has to be acknowledged that a human being cannot be fully described merely as a member of a nation and a citizen of a country.

To someone like Milosevic, human beings can, in fact, be almost entirely described in terms of their membership of an ethnic entity. 'Serbian' and 'non-Serbian'. To someone like Milosevic, actually there is no longer that thing called 'nation'—a new union transcending these ethnic differences. Ironically, to those who consider that Milosevic has committed 'crimes against humanity', humanity is declared (and acknowledged) as humanity because of similarities between humans beyond boundaries of race, religion, time, and region.

Quietly, the idea of 'universal humanity' is in circulation once more, after years of accusation and relegation to the corner. The Marxists used to consider 'universal humanity' as a kind of sin because it put the class of the oppressed in a relationship with the oppressors. There was also the time when people like Mahathir considered 'Asian values' as essentially different to 'Western values', and considered anything universal as non-existent. There

were also some 'post-structuralist' thinkers who considered 'universal humanity' as a notion determined by middle-class, male Europeans. And then there is Milosevic. Also George Bush, perhaps, who considers America a unique country, able to separate itself from the earth when the entire planet is threatened by ever-growing global warming.

But no matter what, there is in the end just one earth, an isolated planet, and in The Hague what needs to be affirmed is the word 'humanity'. The problem is: who will affirm it? The judges on the International Court in their funny togas? I see fleeting confusion in Milosevic's eyes. The world has changed, but in that change, the same seems to return: only the rich, strong countries are able to say, 'the world is me'. And the poor, weak countries end up accepting that 'world' as a bestower of the final decisive and legal word on cruelty and punishment. The Nuremberg Trials that tried the Nazis who had murdered so many human beings in WWII were, after all, trials by the victors with money. And in The Hague...

To punish or to forgive cannot be separated, it seems, from power, force, sovereignty. But how would it be had there been no Nuremberg, and if there were not The Hague? What kind of world would then be judging the murderers?

Dunia. TEMPO, 22 July 2002

THE WEST

THE West always makes us disturbed. Almost everyone in the Third World senses, or knows, that 'the West' is an undefined area, peopled by those who once colonised us, with a power that placed us formerly at their feet, that humiliated us, and that now remains something in which we can see our own reflection. We scrutinise ourselves before this mirror: are we smaller than they, larger than they?

Larger, said Sanusi Pane half a century ago. Arjuna is a more complete hero than Faust. We are made up of both body and soul. They—those Westerners, epitomised in the human creatures of Goethe's creation—are Faust. They will join forces with the devil, if necessary, for the sake of science. For us, the soul and God are not dead. But for them . . .

Sanusi Pane is just one of a stream of such voices. In India there was Tagore, in Pakistan Muhammad Iqbal, in Egypt Qutub, in Iran Ali Syari'ati and so forth. Japan has Kita Ikki and his Yusonsha club—and Africa has Franz Fanon.

Even in the West these ideas have become a cliché. Forty years before the Beatles left on their pilgrimage to the spiritual teachers of India, the character 'A.D.' in a novel by André Malraux, departed for the 'East,' just like the writer himself. In the last letter in the novel he utters a kind of farewell to Europe, that 'great cemetery where only dead conquerors sleep . . . you leave me with only a naked horizon and the mirror of solitude's old master, despair.'

Malraux titled his novel, written in the form of letters, *La Tentation de l'Occident*. The word 'Tentation,' in English means both 'temptation' and 'test' or 'trial.' In the East people are indeed tempted by the West. In the West they are tested. 'This great troubled drama which is beginning, dear friend, is one of the temptations of the West', writes A.D. to his friend Ling in Malraux's novel.

This is an unfinished process, and will perhaps never come to an end. Every now and then we may carry out a 'week of hate' as in Orwell's novel *1984*. 'The West' is then a sort of ghoul that we can mock. Or we can remain indifferent. We order Swanson icecream and supersonic F-16As, we order Gucci designer-wear and high-tech equipment. But whether we hate or remain indifferent—two very different reactions—in fact we are never sure where we should begin and end in speaking about that thing 'the West'.

Are we able to draw a distinction between the West that has produced computers but also novels, striptease but also Mother Theresa, nuclear bombs but also humour? In other words, can we talk about West as 'one,' when the Middle Ages have long given way to a post industrial age, and the concerned 1960s have given way to the cautious 1980s?

It is not only Europe that changes. The West may indeed reflect us, in an unexpected way as a sudden surprise. The way we regard it depends partly on the reflection itself and partly on our own situation.

In his famous fourteenth-century work *Muqaddimah*, Ibnu Khaldun wrote about a 'country of the Franks' in the realm of 'Rome' that was situated to the north of the Mediterranean, ruled over by the king 'Sanluwis bin Luwis'. He praised this country, especially for its scientific knowledge, particularly philosophy. Ibnu Khaldun does not appear to have known much about the West. To him the West was not important. But it is exactly in this that Ibnu Khaldun differs from us today. He did not feel inferior, nor was he overawed. He could praise in passing.

In those times the test of the West had not yet begun. When this drama began, not a single person could avoid it. In the Third World we, like Ling in Malraux's novel, can write as he did to his Westerner friend, '*Cher Monsieur*, how can I find myself except in an examination of your race?'

Barat. TEMPO, 12 May 1984

C.P. II: 117-118

VISNU

VISNU sleeps, and humanity feeds dreams to his slumber. Visnu sleeps on the Endless Ocean and lets the dreams run, for he wishes to always recall what is of beauty and the non-vile of the world.

This is what mankind must do, according to one Hindu belief: we must carry out our *dharma*, so that the beautiful is not extinct, and becomes a reminiscence of human life. It is this reminiscence that will be an important part of Visnu's dream. And with a good dream, in the time to come after the universe is destroyed, Visnu the creator can make another universe bringing no disillusionment ...

There is anxiety in this Hindu story, but also hope. Our problem these days is that we are further and further away from such a conviction; the conviction that there will be apocalyptic change, a total demolition that will be followed by a better world. Perhaps the world is getting older and more tired. There are piles of scribblings describing revolutions intending to destroy and rebuild, but which turn into trite epics: what is demolished is not completely destroyed, and what is rebuilt is disappointing. Now we may perhaps still be able to imagine the sleeping Visnu, but we doubt there is an Endless Ocean. What is becoming increasingly clear is that it is the dream, which is limited.

It is not that there are no longer angry people demanding change. Actually, there are more of them. Marxists used to assume that because capitalism controlled the entire world and had a tight grip over all sectors of life, transformation would occur and be carried out by a single petitioner and reformer, namely the proletariat. This was not because this class had become a mythical creature as some kind of holy vanguard, but rather because, with capitalism's tentacles spreading everywhere, practically everyone had been sapped of energy. And in this way the anger and

demands of the workers could become the anger and demands of anyone and everyone: something universal.

But now times have moved to a different stage, and Marx is long gone: capital has indeed penetrated everywhere, but it is as though people have lost the universal. The workers' protest is only one of many protests heard. There are also the screams of the women's fight; the yells of the black, the brown, the yellow; the petitions of various religious groups; and the claims for rights of denied cultural expression. A *din*. Politics has become a competition between disconnected desires. What people want to destroy and rebuild are no longer one. The universal has been replaced with the particular.

It is not surprising that in all this *din*, people are not only more doubtful whether 'universal humanism' exists, but also whether it is true that a system will collapse, and change will come about. Just look around us: Indonesia appears to be undergoing transformation, but then again, no—perhaps because Indonesia (as V.S. Naipaul said of India) has become 'a million mutinies', and 'a million mutinies' will eventually not show any great reformation. In fact, in those parts of the world where capitalism has become a system that can no longer be prized open, Revolution (with a capital R) is no longer mentioned. Disconnected rebellions are handled one by one. Monday, confronting the demands of the workers—which are maybe met, maybe not. Tuesday, hearing the women's protests—accepted or ignored. Wednesday, the system listens to the claims of X, Thursday, Y ... and at the end of the year, the system still has never collapsed.

I don't know if it is this that is called 'post-modern political struggle'—or in other worlds, particularism, with limited dreams. I don't know whether I, living in Indonesia, can complain with Slavoj Žižek, a Slovenian intellectual who frequently addresses Western Europe, that there is no longer any opposition to the 'totality of Capital'. I myself am dubious whether one is only able to change the world within the confines of the horizon that currently binds one, for this horizon ultimately is formed through our own steps in assuming the extent of space. In other words: the limitation of our dreams is ultimately our own construction.

Indeed, there is something disturbing in the limitation, and *din*, of 'a million mutinies'. I feel disturbed not because they are diverse, loud and many. I am troubled because when we never cease celebrating the particular, we will deny the ties that give politics worth: the ties between victims. A historian complained that what unifies mankind these days is actually the awareness that mankind is no longer one—and I think there is nothing sadder than this. When a murdered Palestinian child no longer has any tie with an old Israeli who is killed, and a Moslem who is slaughtered does not have the same fate as a Christian who is beheaded, then it is not only the universal that is lost, but life itself is negated.

We indeed are not, each of us, *Visnu*—a god who creates from his dream on the Endless Ocean. We have our limits, and we know that history does not spring from the universal, but rather starts from particular destinies. But the world has never changed through an isolated strangled voice, has it?

Visnu. TEMPO, 5 November 2000

K.W.: 1434-1436

C.P. V: 326-328