

BRIDGES OF FRIENDSHIP

Reflections on Indonesia's Early Independence and Australia's Volunteer Graduate Scheme Includes writings from Betty Feith and Kurnianingrat Ali Sastroamijoyo Edited by Ann McCarthy and Ailsa Thomson Zainuddin



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Bridges of Friendship

FOREWORD

International volunteering has for decades been a valued component in international development thinking and practice. It emerged in the post-Second World War era as a response to skill shortages in developing countries and as a vehicle to express a new internationalism. Naturally enough, each country's international volunteer organisation reflected the unique characteristics of that country. The British Voluntary Service Overseas, now known simply as VSO, began life in 1958 as a program for school leavers and was at least partially informed by a sense of obligation and opportunity as former British colonies claimed their independence. The United States Peace Corps, from its inception in 1961, was a program of the State Department and has always been an expression of American foreign policy and its interests. But, in different ways and to varying degrees, international volunteer programs all share in the multiple aims of providing cost effective know-how in places and communities where it is needed and engendering mutual understanding across cultures through respectful personal relationships.

Without suggesting that the global enterprise of volunteering owes its existence to Australia's Volunteer Graduate Scheme (VGS), it was clearly the progenitor. The VGS was not just the first scheme of its kind, but was also the standard bearer for a particular philosophy and ethos vividly displayed in this volume. It combines Betty Feith's story of the thinking behind the establishment and the practicalities of running the Scheme with Kurnianingrat's reflections on it and her recollections and correspondence. In this way the book, which features Betty Feith's history of the VGS and Kurnianingrat's personal reminiscences, showcases both the intentions and the outcomes of the Scheme in bringing about deep interpersonal understanding, respect and friendship.

The VGS had many unique characteristics. In the first place, it was initiated by students at Melbourne University in the immediate post-war environment. There is probably nothing like war to stimulate students' international awareness. Furthermore, personal experiences of the world at war were injected into campus life by personnel who had recently returned and whose presence narrowed the social distance between lecturers and students. It was also a campus where spirited debating of issues of substance was pursued in both the Labor Club and the Student Christian Movement.

But perhaps the most defining characteristic of the VGS is that it was co-created by Indonesians and Australians. The idea surfaced at an international student conference in Bombay where the invitation for Australians to work alongside Indonesians and under their direction was first issued by an Indonesian student leader, Abu Bakar Lubis, who later went on to be a career diplomat in the Indonesian Department of Foreign Affairs. As Betty relates, a small but determined group, mainly in Melbourne, rallied support for the concept amongst students, national organisations, civil servants and politicians in both Australia and Indonesia, eventually securing an inter-governmental agreement. This too was unique in that it provided for operational costs to be shared between the Australian and Indonesian Governments, while leaving the liaison, publicity, coordination and administration to the honorary organisers in the Scheme's committees in Melbourne and Jakarta, acting under the auspices of the National Union of Australian University Students.

The ethos of the Scheme was also co-created, with the volunteer graduates being very much influenced by the thinking and behaviour of the Indonesians they worked with. This is one of the reasons why Kurnianingrat's memoirs are so priceless. She reveals her lived experience as an aristocratic girl in late colonial times, a young professional woman in the Japanese Occupation and a participant in the Revolution and its aftermath. Her stories, even the humorous anecdotes, serve to bring the dramas of colonialism and liberation into clear light, particularly her experience of social division and the impact of her awareness of not belonging to "the ruling race". As the experience of a professional and a nationalist, it translated into an understandable sensitivity to and a determination to avoid paternalism of all kinds. After reading her story it is easy to see why she would have been initially cautious, if not reluctant, to take on the services of volunteer graduates who were offered to her workplace.

There is an echo here of Herb Feith's observation that Molly Bondan, his initial sponsor and mentor, had needed to accustom herself to the idea of having him work with her. "Molly, I realised, had hesitated before offering to help me to work in Jakarta. She had tested me in a long correspondence before taking that decision."

In the straitened circumstances of Indonesia in the 1950s, the Indonesian civil servants who were the colleagues, mentors and supervisors of the

¹ Herb Feith. "Molly Bondan: Pioneer, Mentor and Role Model", in *Half a Century of Indonesian–Australian Interaction*, edited by Anton Lucas (Adelaide: Flinders University, Dept. of Asian Studies and Languages, 1996), p. 12.

volunteers necessarily had modest lifestyles. The volunteers insisted on a moral decision to identify as far as possible with their Indonesian friends, to live in a style as close to them as possible, even to earn the same money as similarly qualified Indonesian civil servants. They were determined to demonstrate that they were not colonial in their attitudes or demeanour in the workplace, in homes or in public. This conscious rejection of what others took as the entitlements of race meant eschewing expatriate lifestyles and, with notable exceptions, expatriate company.

Molly was also a powerful demonstration of how to live modestly and avoid giving offence and she had a powerful influence on the volunteers, much to the dismay of Australian Embassy officials who described her attitudes as "anti-Australian and anti-white".²

The volunteers' identification with Indonesia went further than issues of lifestyle and took on a distinctly political edge. It is clear that Indonesian supervisors and colleagues of the early volunteers not only talked the nationalist talk; through demonstration and collegiality they showed that nationalist pride was something one lived, and the volunteers embraced this challenge. Their wholehearted embrace of Indonesian nationalism was very much of the era. There was a romance in identifying with the Indonesian Revolution and relishing the opportunity to be part of nation-building.

Indonesia did not have a good press in Australia, which became increasingly the case as Indonesia moved towards Guided Democracy. The volunteer graduates found strength in each other and increasingly closed ranks against critics of Indonesia, striving to at least make Indonesia more understandable to Australians. But there is no doubt the wholehearted identification with the direction of Indonesia's politics became more difficult, as did the administration of the Scheme.

As Betty points out, one enduring legacy of the VGS has been the influence of people who drew on their first-hand experience of living and working in the country to help inform Australians better about Indonesia and the circumstances of its people. The VGS had another impact, which is at least as far-reaching. Betty's story of the VGS ends in 1963 when its administration was taken over by the Overseas Service Bureau (OSB), but it continued to exist as a scheme separately funded by the Australian Government to the end of 1969 (at a scaled back level) until it was absorbed into the OSB's global Australian Volunteers Abroad program.

Molly Bondan. In Love With a Nation: Molly Bondan and Indonesia – Her Own Story in Her Own Words, edited by Joan Hardjono and Charles Warner (Picton, NSW: C. Warner, 1995), p. 220.

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The continuities were crucially important. The people involved in establishing the OSB and designing its programs had been intimately involved in the running of the VGS, most notably Jim Webb, Frank Engel, Herb Feith and Hugh O'Neill. This ensured that much of the ethos and principles of the VGS were preserved in the OSB's DNA. Over recent decades there have, of course, been changes. The Overseas Service Bureau changed its name to Australian Volunteers International and there have been shifts in the details of its relationship to government, but throughout these changes there has been constancy in upholding the values first enunciated and put into practice by the VGS.

Around the globe, and in Australia, diverse approaches to managing international volunteer programs have emerged. Within Australian Volunteers International, principles originating in the VGS continue to be maintained. Volunteers are professionals selected for both their skills and their personal competencies; they are assigned to positions only at the request and on the approval of the agency they are to work with; their remuneration is more in line with local than expatriate conditions. There is a clear understanding that the benefits are mutual, and the entire operation is founded on establishing respectful relationships across cultures and across social and economic divides. The impact of the VGS continues to inspire people who are active in the area of international volunteering. It deserves to be more widely known, and *Bridges of Friendship* is an invaluable contribution to that end.

Peter Britton

Former Executive Manager, Programs and Deputy CEO, Australian Volunteers International

> Founding Member, Herb Feith Foundation

Melbourne, 3 May 2016

PREFACE

Some years ago, when I was at Monash researching my biography of Herb Feith, Ailsa Zainuddin asked for my help to make good on a promise she had made to her former colleague and friend, Jo Kurnianingrat. Jo was a senior member of staff in the Ministry of Education in the English Language Inspectorate, where in 1954, Ailsa and Betty Feith worked as volunteer graduates. Herb, Betty and Ailsa went up to Indonesia as a trio, Herb returning to his former position in the Ministry of Information where he had worked from 1951 to 1953. Jo quickly established a rapport with the Australian women, as she had spent a year studying and touring in Australia in 1950 as one of the first Indonesians to receive a scholarship from the Australian Government.

As this book reveals, the Australians formed lifelong friendships not only with each other, but also with their Indonesian colleagues. This was helped by the fact that many of the VGS crew, including (especially) Ailsa, were fabulous letter writers. Over years of corresponding, during which they shared views on family life, gender equality, politics and all manner of things, Ailsa had encouraged Jo to write her memoir and was closely involved in its drafting. Jo died quite suddenly in 1993 and, although her memoir was incomplete, Ailsa was very aware that what Jo had recorded of her early childhood, family life and education, life under the Japanese Occupation and her work for the Revolution and in the newly independent Indonesian Government was important testimony and accounting of this period in Indonesia's history, imagining and formation as a nation.

In 2008 Ailsa and I began to cast around for ideas about how to best present and publish Jo's work, which was short of being a complete book manuscript yet much longer than a journal article. We spoke with the journal *Indonesia* who had earlier published Ailsa's obituary of Jo (reproduced with permission in this volume) about publishing it in two parts. At that time, however, Ailsa decided she needed to consult with Jo's family again to ensure that they were indeed supportive of her moves towards publication. This began a process of close consultation with members of Jo's family, which, importantly, coincided with Ailsa's working together with Ann McCarthy to organise her personal archive, which included significant correspondence with Jo over many years, including during the period she was writing the memoir. As is apparent in the letters reproduced in this volume, there was an expectation that Ailsa would eventually be involved in publishing the memoir.

So, when Ailsa and Ann invited me to meet them some years after we'd made our initial inquiries with *Indonesia*, we quickly agreed that Ailsa's correspondence with Jo was also valuable and somewhat precious documentation both for contextualising Jo's memoir and for depicting a friendship based on mutual respect and values.

Once the decision was made to frame Jo's memoir within the context of how it came into existence, by recording the part played by Ailsa and their friendship which began with the VGS, a further decision was made to include Betty Feith's seminal early history of the Scheme, hitherto unpublished. As Herb's biographer, I was extremely lucky to have access to Betty and her fabulous memory first-hand, but her thesis has also been, without question, a vital resource for my own research. Very early on I was given a precious rare copy of it and got my first glimpse of some of the wonderful historical documents contained in its Appendix – the first letters written by the Student Christian Movement group at Melbourne University (not yet VGS) and so on. The thesis, "Putting in a Stitch or Two", and its full Appendices are reproduced in this volume for the benefit of many more readers and researchers than the few of us who have had access it to date. Publication of Betty's thesis is, therefore, a significant complement to the archive of VGS documents held at the National Library of Australia in Canberra.

A highly valuable accompaniment to this collection of historical documents is Ann McCarthy's insightful introduction to each of the works. As Ailsa's archivist and researcher, Ann has worked side-by-side with Ailsa and Betty. In doing so she has developed a deep knowledge of the writings and their authors. When reading these introductory sections, it is clear that Ann, Betty and Ailsa have discussed the works at great length, considered deeply the time and context in which they were written, and cast a critical eye over how each might be read many decades later. She has provided a significant additional resource and useful guide for readers of this collection.

Assembling this collection, including the digitisation and reproduction of "Putting in a Stitch or Two" and its Appendices and the transcription of the letters, has been a mammoth task undertaken with much love by Ann, Ailsa and Betty together. I commend and congratulate them on their efforts.

Jemma Purdey

Herb Feith Publications Committee

Melbourne, 29 April 2016

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Compiling this book has been a collaborative effort involving a wide range of people in Melbourne, Jakarta and elsewhere. Former volunteer graduates Thelma Rungkat, John Gare, Ann Pryosusilo and John Foster shared their memories and knowledge of living and working in Indonesia under the Volunteer Graduate Scheme, or, in John Foster's case, under the equivalent New Zealand scheme. Ann Pryosusilo also forwarded to us invaluable biographical information about Harumani Rudolph-Sudirdjo, which she received from Marya Kristi Rudolph, Harumani's daughter. Thelma's daughter, Sari Baird, drew our attention to Thelma's photographs and letters from VGS days, which would make rich source material for future projects. Sari also helped organise a convivial lunch in June 2015. Sadly, Thelma passed away on 25 May 2016, before the completion of this book.

In Jakarta, Goenawan Mohamad and Widarti Gunawan put us in contact with Kurnianingrat Ali Sastroamijoyo's niece, Hadayanti Jayusman. Hadayanti Jayusman gathered together family photographs of Kurnianingrat, Harumani, and other friends and family members, and went out of her way to get copies of them to Melbourne, with help from Ailsa Zainuddin's daughter, Nila.

Two graphic designers lent their technical expertise and creative talents to the photographs which feature in the book. Suzanne Pascoe carried out most of the improvements to the image quality of the photos, using Photoshop and other software, and Suyin Lim provided the original design of the book's front cover and photograph pages.

Sjahisti Abdurrachman and Anton Alimin provided translations of a number of Indonesian and Dutch words and phrases used in "Other Worlds in the Past".

Peter Britton, former Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Australian Volunteers International, shared his historical knowledge about the VGS, and both he and Ruth Oliphant, Executive Coordinator, provided useful information about the historical records held by AVI. Suggestions and comments received from Peter, John Gare, Jemma Purdey, Ailsa Zainuddin, Betty and Annie Feith and Suyin Lim also helped improve the introduction and other front matter to this book.

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Throughout the project, my conversations with many of the people identified above have been a very enjoyable part of my task – special mention to Sue Pascoe and Suyin Lim, who did such a fabulous job on the photographs. To Ailsa, Jemma, Betty and Annie, who have been involved from go to woe, thank you for putting your trust in my editing and compiling skills, it has been a pleasure working with each of you.

Ann McCarthy

18 November 2016

INTRODUCTION

In September 1959, *Djembatan*, the quarterly newsletter of the Volunteer Graduate Scheme for Indonesia, published an opinion piece by Kurnianingrat Ali Sastroamijoyo, writing as Jo Kurnianingrat, about the approach adopted by the Scheme. Then in its fifth year of official operation, the Volunteer Graduate Scheme (VGS) provided opportunities for Australian graduates to work on assignments for the Indonesian Government, earning the same rates of pay as similarly educated Indonesians. Kurnianingrat Ali Sastroamijoyo was formerly deputy head of the English Language Inspectorate (IPBI (Inspeksi Pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris)) in Jakarta where a number of Australian volunteers had worked. Familiar with the difficulties inherent in the giving of aid, in her article Kurnianingrat observes the potential for paternalism and misunderstanding of the needs and conditions of the recipient culture. The VGS, she concluded, had successfully steered a path around such obstacles:

Summing up, I can only say that I have a deep appreciation for the Volunteer Graduate Scheme and the way it tries to establish friendly relations with Indonesia. No matter how important knowledge, experience, and money are, in establishing good relationships it is the attitude of the people which counts most, and the Volunteer Graduate Scheme has been very wise in making this a point of consideration in their selection of people.¹

Helping to establish friendly relations with Indonesia was a defining objective of the VGS, which pioneered a model of volunteering based on salary equality and other expressions of identification by volunteer graduates with Indonesia and Indonesians. Between 1950 and 1963, forty-two Australians worked in Indonesia under the Scheme, carrying out a variety of roles and in some cases completing multiple assignments. These modest beginnings laid the foundations of a volunteer programme which continues today; since 1951, when the first volunteer, Herb Feith, arrived in Jakarta to work for the Department of Information, over 10,000 total volunteer placements have been completed by Australians in numerous

[&]quot;An Indonesian Opinion on the VGS" by Jo Kurnianingrat, published in Part One of this volume.

countries round the world.² The VGS has been recognised as an influence on the establishment of both the American Peace Corps and the United Kingdom's Voluntary Service Overseas organisation.³

As well as giving Kurnianingrat's professional opinion on the Scheme and issues surrounding foreign aid, her article also bears out the lasting friendships established among the author and her colleagues at IPBI during the mid-1950s. Australians Betty Feith (née Evans) and Ailsa Zainuddin (aka Tommy) worked at IPBI as volunteer graduates for eighteen months from July 1954. In the course of advancing the Inspectorate's role, namely to establish English as Indonesia's first foreign language, friendships formed among Betty, Ailsa, Kurnianingrat and another colleague, Harumani Rudolph-Sudirdjo (who also went by the name Nini). Later in the 1950s, Kurnianingrat studied at Cornell University at the same time that Herb and Betty Feith were living there; of the Feiths' arrival in Ithaca in upstate New York Kurnianingrat wrote to Ailsa, "it's nice to have people from 'home' here". In subsequent years in Jakarta, Harumani and Kurnianingrat were part of each other's immediate circle of friends, as was the case for Melbourne-based Betty and Ailsa, who had known each other prior to their stay in Indonesia. Ailsa and Kurnianingrat exchanged regular letters from the 1970s, and Ailsa also corresponded with Harumani, and with Kurnianingrat's sister, Yetty. Additionally, the Australians and Indonesians saw each other during visits Betty and Ailsa made to Indonesia, and during a number of trips Harumani and her children made to Melbourne, when they would sometimes stay with the Zainuddins. The diverse writings brought together in this book offer a window into the friendships among the four women, their respect, affection and mutual interests and outlooks.

The figure of 10,041 assignments was provided by Australian Volunteers International and pertains to placements arranged between 1951 and 2015. The number would be much higher were other partners in the Australian Government's *Australian Volunteers for International Development* program (Scope Global, and, until recently, the Red Cross) taken into account. Additionally, New Zealand's Volunteer Graduate Scheme, which was established in 1959 and modeled on the Australian Scheme, has seen over 3,000 New Zealanders work in volunteer roles in the Asia-Pacific region, the majority of them through Volunteer Service Abroad. (See the website of Volunteer Service Abroad (http://www.vsa.org.nz/about-vsa/, accessed 9 September 2016).)

See, for example, Peter Britton's Foreword to this volume. See also "An Australian Peace Corps?", a memorandum issued by the Overseas Service Bureau in March 1964, which is reproduced in Part One ("Putting in a Stitch or Two", Appendix D).

⁴ Letter from Jo to Tommy, 21 October 1957. From a transcribed extract, in a file of biographical notes and extracts entitled "Kurnianingrat Ali Sastroamijoyo" (1919–1993), Papers of Ailsa Thomson Zainuddin, privately held.

Introduction

The first of these writings in the present volume is Betty Feith's study of the VGS, entitled "An Episode in Education for International Understanding: The Volunteer Graduate Scheme in Indonesia 1950-63 - 'Putting in a Stitch or Two" (referred to in the text of this volume as "Putting in a Stitch or Two", as Betty also referred to it). Betty's history shows the aims of the Scheme to have encompassed both supporting the goals of the newly formed Indonesian Republic and helping to inform and engage Australians about their nearest northern neighbour. The conception of aid-giving advanced by the Scheme, Betty writes, was one that many volunteers perceived "quite deliberately and self-consciously as a 'New Direction' for a relationship between Australians and people of non-Western societies who had recently won political independence". "Putting in a Stitch or Two" includes discussion of some of the problems encountered by the early volunteer graduates as they set about their tasks. A lack of suitable work was one difficulty faced by some volunteers, while other issues were broadly associated with culture shock. Betty relates such difficulties to the ethos of the Scheme as a whole, and, specifically, to certain complexities and tensions inherent in the aims of the VGS. Additionally, she considers the lasting effects of volunteering, both upon volunteers themselves and upon Australian society as a whole, in areas such as the teaching of Indonesian Studies and Asian Studies in high schools and universities and the actions of pressure groups seeking reform of immigration policies, in particular the White Australia policy. The establishment of the VGS, historian John Legge has written, can be understood in relation to Australia's "developing ties" with Indonesia in the 1940s-1950s, together with other contemporary developments such as the extension of aid to Indonesia (among other countries) under the Colombo Plan and the strike by Australian waterside workers in support of their Indonesian counterparts.⁵ "Putting in a Stitch or Two" is followed by the full text of Kurnianingrat's opinion piece, "An Indonesian Opinion on the VGS", introduced above.

Also published in this book is Kurnianingrat's previously unpublished memoir, entitled "Other Worlds in the Past". Kurnianingrat was teaching psychology and English in government schools in Yogyakarta for most of the period of the Japanese Occupation and war for independence against Dutch rule. A supporter of the nationalist cause, the courage and initiative she demonstrated during this time would later be commended by historian

Foreword by John Legge, in Molly Bondan, Spanning a Revolution: The Story of Mohamad Bondan and the Indonesian Nationalist Movement (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1992), p. 11.

and political scientist George Kahin, to whom she passed banned speeches by nationalist leaders amidst Red Cross casualty lists, while in the presence of Dutch soldiers. Additionally, Kahin identifies her as one of the Indonesian women who established "rice kitchens" in occupied Yogyakarta. Following independence, and after a year living in Sydney observing the school system, Kurnianingrat worked extensively in the field of English language education, and in 1961 she became head of the English Language Department at the University of Indonesia. "Other Worlds in the Past" spans her early years, growing up in a Sundanese bupati (Regent) family, and her schooling and training as a teacher, through to her experiences of the foreign occupations and revolutionary struggle of the 1940s, as well as the establishment of the Indonesian Republic. The memoir includes an account of Kurnianingrat's time at the English Language Inspectorate, where she worked with Harumani, Betty and Ailsa. Aware that past events, and in particular the Revolution, could seem remote to a younger generation, Kurnianingrat dedicated "Other Worlds in the Past" to her grandchildren.

Additionally, this volume includes transcripts of personal correspondence salient to Kurnianingrat's memoir writing, which took place during her retirement. Kurnianingrat, then in her 70s, had virtually lost her evesight and was facing growing limitations in her daily life associated with her advancing age and physical frailty. Kurnianingrat could no longer write without assistance from others, let alone continue teaching, and her reading was done with audio books. In a letter from 1990, Harumani Rudolph had put to Ailsa her idea that Kurnianingrat write about her life, a suggestion largely motivated by a desire to help her friend address the frustrations inherent in her circumstances at the time. Ailsa responded enthusiastically to Harumani's idea, having also previously encouraged Kurnianingrat to document her past. Over the two and half year period between January 1991 and June 1993, a steady flow of letters, some including draft chapters of the memoir, were exchanged between Kurnianingrat's home in Cipinang Muara, Jakarta, and Ailsa's home and workplace in the southeastern suburbs of Melbourne. The task proved to be a rewarding one for Kurnianingrat. Kurnianingrat's correspondence with Ailsa, together with the letters exchanged between Ailsa and Harumani at the beginning of the project and at the time of Kurnianingrat's final illness, provide a record of the writing process in relation to Kurnianingrat's memoir, in the context of the lasting ties and shared loyalties among the three friends.

Together, the writings published here demonstrate a number of different dimensions to friendship: between individuals, and also between

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cultures, as a decisive aspect of people's everyday lives – in particular accenting the interwoven threads of our lives – and as an ideal symbolising human mutuality and equality, as embodied in the Volunteer Graduate Scheme. Of the social and political impact of the VGS in the context of political events in Indonesia at the time, Molly Bondan, an Australian whose abiding political and personal commitments to the Indonesian Republic are documented in a biography, *In Love With a Nation*, among many other writings, concluded:

The Volunteers did a lot in the way they used their knowledge to help others, but what they did in promoting friendship between Indonesia and Australia in those difficult early days cannot be measured.⁶

This passage suggests the lasting, positive contribution made by the VGS in "those difficult early days" of independence in Indonesia. Additionally, a passage in a letter from Kurnianingrat to Ailsa poignantly expresses the shared understanding, respect and affection intrinsic to friendship. In this letter, Kurnianingrat describes a dream she had had of the two of them sitting together, silently enjoying each other's company – as Kurnianingrat puts it, "I fully understood you and felt very close to you". She refers to their "conversation without words", a phrase that eloquently conveys their close friendship, notwithstanding the wealth of expression that actually passed between them over the years.

The Authors

Common life experiences undoubtedly contributed to the development of lasting ties among Kurnianingrat, Harumani, Betty and Ailsa, beginning with their shared commitments as teachers and educators working at IPBI during the mid-1950s. English teaching and training were the focus of Harumani's working life, as they were of much of Kurnianingrat's. Both women were educated at Dutch schools during the 1920s–30s, becoming proficient in several languages, including Dutch, Indonesian, Javanese, English and, in Kurnianingrat's case, Sundanese. Both would take up scholarships to study at American universities (Harumani at Barnard College, Columbia University, and Kurnianingrat at Cornell University),

⁶ Molly Bondan. In Love With a Nation, p. 109.

⁷ Letter from Jo to Tommy, 16 October 1988, in "Jo – Correspondence and Autobiography/Biography" (1955–1993), Papers of Ailsa Thomson Zainuddin, privately held.