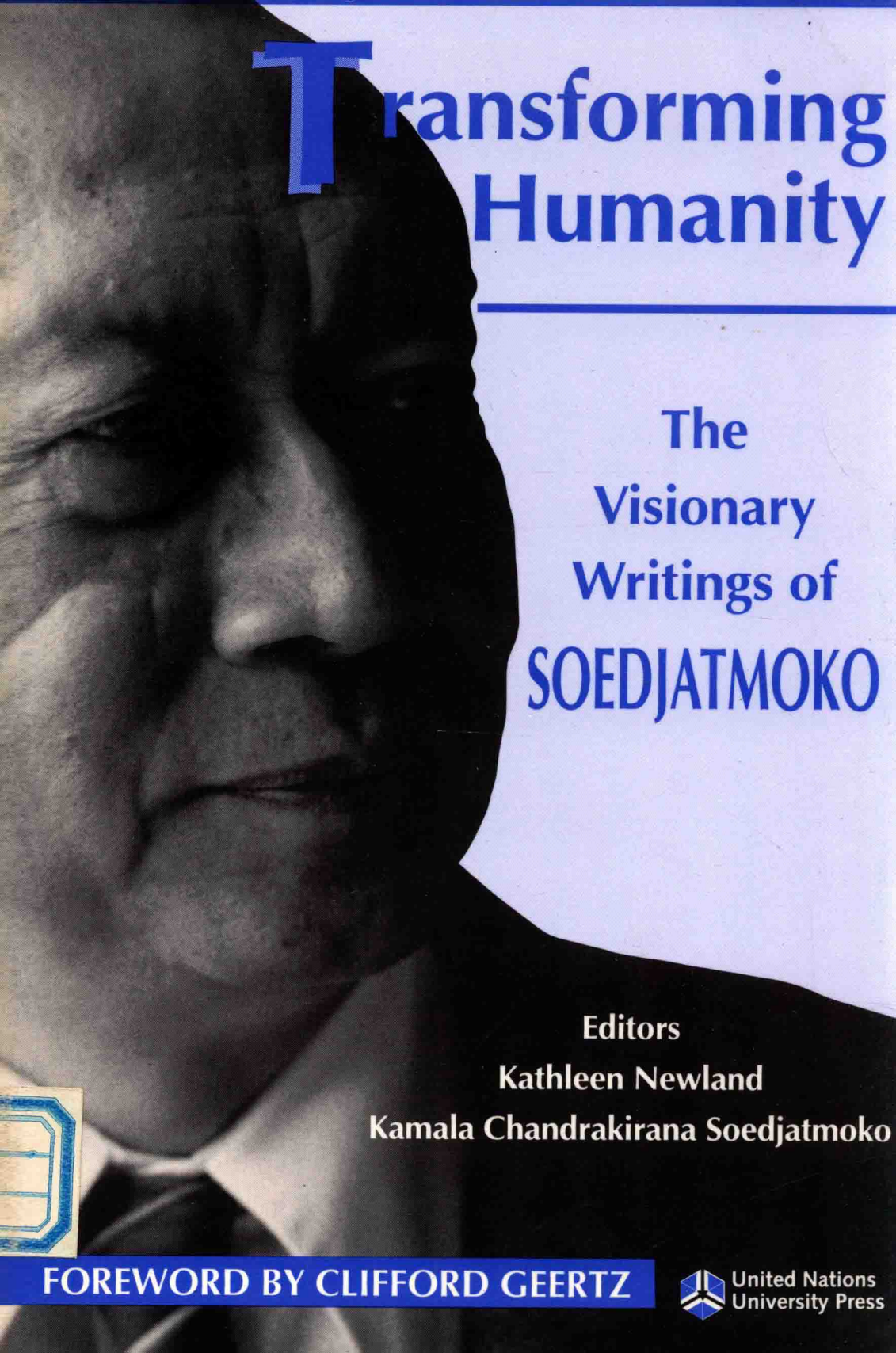

Transforming Humanity

The Visionary Writings of SOEDJATMOKO

Editors
Kathleen Newland
Kamala Chandrakirana Soedjatmoko

FOREWORD BY CLIFFORD GEERTZ

United Nations University Press

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To Danya,
Soedjatmoko's granddaughter,
and her generation

Transforming Humanity: The Visionary Writings of Soedjatmoko.

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TRANSFORMING HUMANITY

Foreword

There is, in the modern world, a dilemma that faces people who, as Soedjatmoko did, wish to serve their country not by flattering it or dominating it or extending its power but by recalling it to its proper self—to what in a less embarrassed age one would unashamedly call its soul. One needs to remain connected to this inner life with an intensity that gives one's words and actions the weight and resonance that come with commitment to something more than mere ideas—to a place, a time, a history, and a form of life. And one needs, at the same time, to transcend those things, to develop a richness of experience and a range of concern that allows one to maintain a distance from them and avoid the parochialism, the self-righteousness, the romanticism, and the distrust of change that is the the downside of patriotism everywhere. There is no one in our time—not Adam Michnik, Desmond Tutu, Abba Eban, or Octavio Paz, in whose diverse and particular company he clearly belongs—who managed this dilemma more effectively than Soedjatmoko. Rooted to the end, he was cosmopolitan to the end, and it is that which gives his writings their enormous force.

The rootedness came not merely from his childhood in the court city of Surakarta, the heart and center of Javanese high culture, but from his deep involvement, once he left it as a young man, in every phase of his country's evolution as an independent state. He conspired in the student movement during the Japanese occupation. He fought in the revolution that freed his peo-

ple from the Dutch. He participated in the negotiations at the United Nations that established the international reality of the new Republic. He picked his way through the rising delirium of the Sukarno period—when Muslims, Communists, and the military clashed, plotted, and killed until, stirring popular hatred, they produced popular disaster. He served the quieter, more deliberate, and—at least in the beginning—less personalistic Suharto regime (which emerged after the massacres) as its first ambassador to the United States and then had a falling out with it over its hardening autocracy. And he ended his career in Yogyakarta trying to reawaken in a new generation the hopes and ideals that had inspired his own. For nearly half a century, his life and that of his country seemed internally fused. It is hardly possible, at least for those of us who found ourselves caught up with them both, to think of them apart.

The cosmopolitanism came from Soedjatmoko's conception of himself—which was there from the beginning but grew stronger with time—as a world citizen: a Third World intellectual with something to say both to other Third World intellectuals who were trying to be heard in the global centers of power and to those who were harder to reach but more closely connected, at least culturally, to such centers from the First and Second Worlds. That extraordinary early embassy to the United Nations in the late 1940s, when he was only twenty-five and had not been outside the country since early childhood, launched a career not merely of representing Indonesia's interests abroad (which, after all, a lot of people have done) but of exemplifying its ideals—what it wanted to stand for, and what it wanted to stand against, in the postwar, postcolonial, post-laissez-faire world. (There is, to this day, a group of now aging American and European friends of Indonesia who still proudly boast that they met "Koko"—as everyone who ever encountered him, however briefly, always called him—in those electric early days in New York.)

Later, of course, his stature on the world stage grew a great deal larger and the audience of his admirers a great deal wider—as ambassador, as rector of the United Nations University in Tokyo, as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Ford Foundation, and most of all as a tireless traveler to and speaker at international public events, scholarly conferences, program planning sessions, and the like. (One of the last times I saw him was at a meeting in Princeton, set up by the Rockefeller Foundation,

to stimulate interaction among Third World scholars working on development who were otherwise isolated from one another. The program turned out to have an important effect in connecting African, Middle Eastern, and Asian scholars directly, without the paternal intermediation of Americans and Europeans.)

Some of the results of all this activity are presented in the following pages from which the tone, the range, and the force of his mind can be grasped. But there was much more—his work on Southeast Asian historiography, on the comparative study of culture, on the role of the mass media in shaping political life. I never knew him when he wasn't up to some project, plunging into some subject, organizing some discussion. As inward and reflective a person as he was, he gave his life to the public world. Just a couple of years before he died I had some discussions with him in connection with his coming to that ivory tower of ivory towers, the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. The plan was that he would spend two or three years there to recollect in tranquillity and write up at a distance what he had learned from his political and scholarly career, what conclusions he had come to about himself, his country, this century, and the world. He was passionately, almost desperately, eager to do this (though he worried about how so much quiet would affect him after a lifetime spent in the middle of things). He began to project chapters, propose subjects, outline issues that he wanted to discuss with me and other scholars, particularly young ones. He kept saying, yes, I really *must* have time to bring my experiences together, to express my views in a sustained way. But right now there is so much that I need to do in Jakarta. Things are really beginning to move. Everything is changing or about to change. Maybe next year . . .

I am not, alas, one of those who knew Soedjatmoko during the New York days. I first met him in Jakarta in October 1951 when I arrived, together with some colleagues from Harvard, as a young, largely ignorant, and wildly overconfident graduate student about to embark on a two-year study of religion in central Java. It was the day after the first attempted coup—or half-attempted coup—in the new state's history, the now largely forgotten October 17th affair. The city was tense, with various military personnel in the streets and various rumors in the newspapers. But Soedjatmoko, who as a stalwart of Sjahrir's socialists was disappointed in the turn of events, sought us out not for

political reasons but for intellectual and personal ones. We spent, as I remember, the entire night talking with him and some other younger Socialist Party of Indonesia figures about Indonesia's history and culture and about the value our work might have for its future. What I remember most besides the warmth and, at a difficult time, the optimism is the total candor of Soedjatmoko and the other Indonesians. He, and they, simply assumed that we were as we represented ourselves to be, that we wanted the country to prosper, and that we could be trusted and talked to as friends, not merely "dealt with" as possibly useful, possibly troublesome, foreigners. It was an extraordinary introduction to a man and a country. And after all that has happened, much of it not pretty, this is how I still think of him, and of it.

For me, that long and miraculous night was the beginning of what has been more than forty years of work on and in Indonesia with Indonesians. During those years I had many other intense and mind-shaking encounters with Koko—in Manila, in Tokyo, in Princeton, and again in Jakarta. In the pages that follow, the reader can catch something of the man I knew as well as at least the outlines of the summing-up book that he was too dedicated to all of us to take the time from us to write.

Clifford Geertz
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Contents

Introduction

Soedjatmoko was an Indonesian thinker who believed that, as a Third World intellectual, he had the responsibility and the right to contribute to the debate on the future of the global community. He saw his role in life as that of a free intellectual whose disinterest in attaining personal political power allowed him to focus on the interests of the weak and the marginalized as well as those of humankind as a whole. He aspired to a role akin to that of the traditional Javanese sage, the carrier of basic values of society and humanity. He believed that his inherited cultural values and his experience with nation building and development in a Third World country gave him insights that could be useful to a world undergoing rapid transformation. He was also convinced that he was participating in a process by which non-Western cultures would take their rightful places alongside Western civilization to enrich and strengthen an interdependent, crowded, and fragile world.

The product of a particular time and place with which he identified closely, Soedjatmoko was condemned to being slightly ahead of his time and apart from his own society. He was a man of many apparent paradoxes: profoundly Javanese but a committed internationalist, an intellectual mystic, a gregarious loner. Although he spent long periods of his life in self-imposed or externally enforced isolation, he insisted that, for him, thinking was a social process.

Soedjatmoko was troubled by the state of the world as he saw it. Reflecting on the performance of the post–World War II development effort, he could not help but express his disappointment. The world, he declared, remained conspicuously beset with unacceptable suffering, want, and strife as the gap between the rich and the poor continued to widen. Structural inequality was to him a tragic legacy of our time. He saw political conflict, economic recession, and environmental pollution spilling across borders and throughout the international system. These were the facts of interdependence. But he was alarmed that no society seemed to have mastered the dislocations of the twentieth century with its dizzying growth of populations and massive movements of people, its instant communications, alienating technologies, shrunken spaces, and horrifying destructive power. He saw that despite its great diversity, all humankind was united in a common vulnerability to violence and the destruction of the earth's life-support systems.

Despite his dark view of the present state of the world, Soedjatmoko refused to indulge in apathy. He was confident that once societies recognized their common vulnerability and the inseparability of their futures, the first step toward humankind's survival would already have been taken. He had no panacea to solve the world's problems; he did not believe in panaceas. Rather, he thought that we should consider ourselves as undergoing a process of mutual learning in which everyone is both teacher and student. It is the capacity to learn, more than any other single factor, he believed, that would determine the viability and integrity of our societies.

Soedjatmoko focused much of his work on issues of development, though not to the exclusion of other issues of global transformation. His work on development departed from much of the conventional thinking—or perhaps carried it forward. Although never underestimating the seriousness (and destructive potential) of material deprivation, he was equally concerned with intellectual, cultural, and spiritual impoverishment. His work turns our attention to dimensions of development that are too often neglected: Freedom, democracy, human rights, and tolerance were as crucial in his view as capital-output ratios and export targets. He was quite certain that the industrialized countries still had developmental tasks ahead of them and that they had things to learn from the Third World.

He arrived at an extraordinary synthesis of ideas through a lifetime of intellectual effort. That effort was to fit together the shifting, kaleidoscopic patterns of simultaneous social, economic, and political change at levels ranging from the minutely particular to the cosmic. No field of inquiry failed to interest him, from chaos theory in physics to psychiatric interpretations of culture, from economic development modeling to Islamic architecture. He was often described as equally at home in Western and Eastern culture and discourse. It is probably more accurate to say that he was fully at home in neither, for he could always see the missing piece in any self-contained explanation derived from a single worldview.

From the tensions within him he derived enormous creativity and provided enormous stimulation to others. His ability to see a number of sides of a problem simultaneously made him a valuable and valued interlocutor to Indonesians coming to grips with the challenges of nationhood, to others from Third World countries grappling with the issues of development, and to those from North or South engaged in the serious business of trying to comprehend—and perhaps even manage—the often convulsive transformations of the age.

When Soedjatmoko died in 1989, he left more than a hundred pieces of writing—the legacy of a lifetime of rigorous thinking about the future of Indonesia, the developing world, and humankind as a whole. This volume presents a selection of his work produced between 1970 and 1987. Bringing these pieces together in a single volume permits an integrated reading of his work and shows the breadth and complexity of his thinking.

Soedjatmoko's writings cannot be characterized in terms of conventional disciplinary categories or approaches. This is partly because his education was eclectic. He learned to distrust the fragmentation inherent in "scientific" method and was wary of what he perceived as overspecialization in the academic disciplines. He was uninspired by absolutes and would not offer simple answers to the complex problems with which he was concerned.

Soedjatmoko's writings, instead, are characterized by a syncretic use of major works of scholarship. He gave equal consideration (though not necessarily equal weight) to the works of Nietzsche and Ibn Khaldoun, to Metternich and Gandhi, to Vivekananda and Thomas Merton. The synthesis at which he arrived

was unique. Often described as an interpreter between East and West or North and South, he was much more than that, for he brought to the issues of the day a distinctive analysis born of his personal search for understanding.

Skeptical of "solutions," Soedjatmoko valued the process of searching for solutions as much as or perhaps even more than the outcome of the search. His was the approach of someone who had no desire to impose ready-made answers or to foreclose undiscovered options. And while he labored to establish a viable sense of direction, he knew how difficult it is to predict the consequences of our actions. Too often he had seen unanticipated outcomes overwhelm intended results; hence his emphasis on qualities of responsiveness, resilience, restraint, and open-mindedness. At the same time, he was keenly aware of the fallibility of human beings. It was only natural for him to voice a reminder that there would always be room for failure, and even tragedy.

Soedjatmoko's writings reflect his own perception of the role of the intellectual. In a paper he wrote on Third World intellectuals (Chapter 1 in this volume), he expressed his view that the role of the intellectual is:

> to define the problems of their societies . . . to sharpen the vision of the kind of society they want theirs to transform into, to relate emerging value patterns to changing social realities, to illuminate the road ahead, to identify pitfalls and constantly to search out alternative roads, to find the significance of each new development in relation to the common goals.

The intellectual, he believed, had the responsibility to defend the common goals of freedom and justice—a task that required

> a strong moral commitment . . . [and] a clear vision that is armed with a firm grasp of the economic, political, social and cultural contexts within which the struggle [for freedom and justice] is to be waged.

In light of these views, the value of scholarship is not to be judged simply by precision and elegant presentation but by its relevance to the common good. To a fellow Indonesian intellectual, he once said, "we think not for ourselves . . . [but] for the people . . . [so] they will be ready to have their rendezvous with history."[1]

Soedjatmoko lived his life in pursuit of the challenges he himself set for intellectuals. Perhaps because he never earned the degree that would have stamped his education "complete," his thirst for knowledge was unquenchable. All his life, he seized upon new (to him) authors and arguments with relish. He loved the give-and-take of vigorous debate. Sometimes he would pause and grin in the midst of it, as if carried away by the sheer fun of it—or, sometimes, by his own eloquence. The exchange of ideas was as vital to him as breathing—a fact that made the narrowing of political debate in Indonesia particularly painful. He especially loved the fierce and passionate commitment of the young. In maturity, he urged his contemporaries in positions of authority not to fear it or seek to suppress it. Since his death, his stature as a "sage" has continued to grow. He is seen as a model of the free intellectual by many of those to whom he dedicated his thinking: the younger generation.

At various stages of his life Soedjatmoko worked as a journalist, a diplomat, and an international civil servant, but he was first and foremost a humanist. Human growth and well-being were at the core of his concern; they were, in his view, the ultimate purposes of any endeavor and the standards by which human achievements were to be judged.

Soedjatmoko was brought up with the idea that one must strive for freedom. This was at the core of the education Soedjatmoko received from his father, one of the most influential people in his life. Soedjatmoko's father, Saleh Mangundiningrat, was a medical doctor—one of the first generation of Indonesians trained in Western medicine and one of the few with a doctorate from Holland. He was also a well-read intellectual and a Javanese mystic. Political freedom ranked high in his scale of values, but not higher than inner freedom of the mind and spirit. His life was filled with the pursuits of his intellectual curiosity and spiritual longings.

Dr. Saleh, as he was commonly known, was an avid reader. His library contained books on world history, philosophy, the development of science, and literary classics.[2] His collection included writings by Western thinkers such as Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche and by Indian intellectuals such as Krishnamurti, Gandhi, Vivekananda, and Ramakrishna.[3] Dr. Saleh encouraged in his son the