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Beginnings and youth

Suharto's long reign as President of the Republic of Indonesia ended on 21 May 1998 in confusion and controversy. Equally, though not so dramatically, confusion and controversy surround his origins.

HE WAS BORN, official and semi-official accounts eventually agreed, on 8 June 1921, in the hamlet of Kemusuk, part of the larger village of Godean, about 15 kilometres due west of Yogyakarta.¹ He was 'just a mere village boy, born of a poor farming family'.² His mother was Sukirah, previously unmarried, from the northern part of the hamlet (Kemusuk lor). His father, already the father of two children from his first marriage, was named Kertosudiro (on the occasion of his second marriage he had changed his name from Kertorejo, the name he used during his first marriage; like many Javanese, Kertosudiro changed his name numerous times during his life to denote consequential changes to his circumstances). Kertosudiro, resident in the southern part of the hamlet, Kemusuk kidul, earned his living as an irrigation official, responsible for allocating irrigation water to the different fields of the village and for the general upkeep of the irrigation channels which were so vital for village agriculture. In return for his official duties, Kertosudiro had been granted a small piece of land, a hectare or so, called *lungguh*, to grow food for his family. (By the standards of the day, this was an unusually large amount of land.) He had no other land, nor cattle. He and his family lived in a small bamboo-walled house with a palm-leaf roof, without running water or electricity. Suharto's father and mother never left the hamlet of Kemusuk.

It was, the publisher of his autobiography tells us, 'a not so glittering childhood'.³ More bluntly, McDonald remarks, 'Suharto's early life was a remarkably disturbed one', even by Javanese standards where divorce was common and children encouraged to reach autonomy rapidly. Suharto himself acknowledged his early years as troubled: 'I had to endure much suffering which perhaps others have not experienced'.⁴ Amongst the earliest of them was the breakdown of his parents' marriage; they divorced just over five weeks after his birth; he was their only offspring. His father married another woman, who bore him four more children. Two years after her divorce, Sukirah also remarried, to a villager of Kemusuk named Pranomo, nicknamed Nomo, who took the name Atmoprawiro at his marriage to Sukirah. Together they had seven further children, the fourth of

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whom was Probosutejo, later to play a significant and controversial role in New Order business.

Neither Kertosudiro nor Sukirah appears to have played a direct and continuing role in Suharto's rearing; his father seems to have disappeared from his life – for the time being at least – after the divorce, while his mother appears to have suffered from severe emotional difficulties, perhaps a nervous breakdown, following his birth. Before the child Suharto was forty days old, and following a family quarrel, Sukirah withdrew into herself. Apparently partaking of the ascetic practice of *ngebleng*, she had sought refuge in the inner area of a village house.⁵ Silent and unable to be found for a week, and with the family in a panic, at last she was discovered in a badly weakened condition. In such circumstances, with Sukirah unable to nurse her child and little immediate prospect of her raising him, Suharto was given over to his paternal great-aunt, the wife of Kromodiryo, herself the midwife who had delivered him. Her daughter, Amat Idris, cared for him. His great-uncle, Kromodiryo, looked after him while the women were busy – Suharto seemed to hold him in particular affection – and took the young boy to the fields with him where he worked as a farmer. On one such occasion, Suharto remembers, he badly gashed his foot when a sickle he was using to cut grass detached from its handle.

Suharto returned to the house of his mother only after her remarriage, when he himself was aged about 4. Schooling began, at an unusually early age, in the nearby village of Pulihan, close to the house of his maternal grandparents, where his mother and her husband lived. But when his mother moved to the southern part of the hamlet (presumably to establish a separate household), Suharto moved school to the village of Pedes, attending class in the morning until around 11 a.m. and doing agricultural work such as tending cattle in the afternoons for his grandfather, Atmosudiro. On one occasion, he recalled, he allowed a buffalo he was leading across a dyke in the rice-fields to fall into a ditch, and cried when he found himself unable to extract it.

In 1929, at the age of 8, in order to continue his schooling Suharto was obliged to move to the house of his paternal aunt, married to Mas Ngabei Prawirowiharjo, a senior agricultural official in Wuryantoro, a small settlement 12 kilometres south of Wonogiri. The move seems to have been a ploy by his father, who was apparently unhappy with Suharto's circumstances; Sukirah, it seems, was so pre-occupied by her rapid series of pregnancies to her new husband that Suharto received little by way of attention, either physical or material. Convinced that Suharto's mother would not approve such a move, Kertosudiro took him, without her knowledge, by train, bus and taxi to Wuryantoro via Yogyakarta (where they stopped to outfit Suharto with new clothes) and Wonogiri. The youngster was warmly received by his new family, and later spoke with great fondness about his adoption by Bapak Prawirowiharjo 'as his own son' – indeed, the eldest son – in a family already well endowed with children, one of whom, Sudwikatmono, later became a prominent New Order business figure. There he was 'treated the same as the other children', and continued his primary-level schooling in Wuryantoro. After a year or so, however, apparently as a result of a calculated ploy which

involved promises by his mother of an early return to Wuryantoro, he was brought back to Kemusuk by his stepfather, Atmoprawiro, to be with his mother, and attended school at Tiwir – the third school he had attended in the Kemusuk region. He stayed in Kemusuk for less than a year. The tug of war between parents continued and, this time ‘with the knowledge of my father and mother’, the Prawirowiharjos returned Suharto to Wuryantoro.⁶

A QUESTION OF ORIGINS

This representation of the simple peasant boy, struggling alone from the very earliest years in a hostile and unforgiving world, was to become a constant motif in Suharto’s perception of himself; more important, it came to shape a certain moral view of the world, with its associated imperatives, and took on a more far-reaching import for his fellow Indonesians, as we shall later see. The story of his early years, as Suharto told it at the height of his power, served a political purpose as a kind of moral primer for his people; it spoke of inner strength in resisting the worst effects of the hand of fate, of the need for developing disciplined self-control, of the eventual triumph of perseverance over unpromising circumstances. ‘If’, Suharto later noted, ‘I remember the suffering of my childhood and youth, it could make me sad. But if one thinks of the benefits, it is precisely because of these sufferings since I was small that I have become a man. I have become a person who thinks, who has feelings, because I have suffered’.⁷

It was for this reason, amongst others, that in 1974 a story in the sensationalist Jakarta magazine, *POP*,⁸ sent Suharto into a fury. The report, mirroring long-circulating gossip about Suharto’s origins,⁹ claimed that he was the offspring of Padmodipuro, an aristocratic descendant of Hamengkubuwono II, Sultan of Yogyakarta (r. 1792–1810, 1811–12, 1826–28), who had unloaded the 6-year-old Suharto and his mother onto the villager Kertorejo because of an obligation to marry the daughter of an influential district chief. Calling a press conference at his Bina Graha office rather than his home, Suharto made an extended address to the hundred or so domestic and foreign journalists and senior officials in attendance, during which he attempted to lay the rumours to rest; he presented to the press a bevy of aged relatives and acquaintances who could testify to the truth of what he said: ‘I am a child born in the village of Kemusuk and, indeed, the son of a farmer from Kemusuk’. In Suharto’s view, the allegations made in the *POP* article were of such a kind as to raise serious disputation and differences within society, since they provided a ‘good opportunity for subversion’ and disturbing national stability, and would bring shame on the nation and create distrust in its leader.¹⁰

Notwithstanding Suharto’s 1974 elucidation, numerous aspects of the story of his birth and early life remain elusive and unclear. There are some puzzling discrepancies and oddities in these official and semi-official accounts.¹¹ For example, Roeder names Kertosudiro’s mother as the midwife at Suharto’s birth; Suharto himself names his father’s uncle’s wife as his midwife. An official account from 1973 relates that Sukirah endured a seclusion of forty days after her divorce, not the week mentioned in other sources. Again, in his account in 1974, Suharto states

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that his father separated from his first wife and married Sukirah; in his autobiography, however, he states that his father's first wife died. Roeder dates the separation of Suharto's parents to a time two years after Suharto's birth; Suharto's own account makes it clear that it happened soon after his birth. Roeder implies that Suharto was reared in the house of his paternal grandmother after his parents' separation; Probosutejo, however, claims that he lived with his maternal grandmother. Roeder places Suharto's move to live with his aunt and her family at age 9, while the genealogy in Suryohadi (p. 8) makes him 8 years old. Roeder also mysteriously calls Suharto's mother 'Fatimah', rather than Sukirah, an error that came about, Suharto suggests, 'because the name Fatimah is the name of the younger sister of my mother'. Roeder gives Tiwir as the place where Suharto began school; Suharto himself later states that it was in the village of Pulihan. In Roeder's account, and Suharto's recent autobiographical recounting, Suharto's father took him to the Prawirowiharjo family in Solo (a place in which Suharto is said to have taken great delight), and only later did the family move to Wuryantoro; in Suharto's 1974 account, the journey was made directly to the Prawirowiharjos' home in Wuryantoro. Roeder makes no mention whatsoever of Suharto's being brought back from Wuryantoro to live in Kemusuk.

There are other matters as well which require explanation. How was it, for example, that a man so apparently poor as Kertosudiro could afford to send his child to school at so young an age, and at a time when only a tiny proportion of Indonesians received any kind of formal education? How could it be that Suharto's father remains such a shadowy figure, appearing at the time of his birth, and then disappearing (apart from those times when they 'met occasionally'), coming into the picture again only at times when Suharto's best interests needed catering for, or in the guise of the friendly gift-giver, donating a goat – an expensive present for a poor, landless peasant – to the young boy Suharto?

It is at least conceivable that the true story varies considerably from this official tale. At the outset, it seems very unlikely that Suharto himself was closely related to any person with royal blood in the Yogya *kraton* (palace), although Notosudiro, Suharto's maternal great-grandfather, had taken for his wife a woman descended, by a distance of five generations, from the princely son of Hamengkubuwono V by his first concubine. But the picture of shadowy parents, an obviously distraught mother, a father who disappears almost immediately after Suharto's birth but who nonetheless keeps a watching brief on his progress, is certainly in accord with the notion that Suharto was an illegitimate child. If this notion is true, it is possible that Suharto's real father was a person of some means, certainly not just a village irrigation official who was so poor that 'he did not himself own even an inch of land'.¹² He may well have enjoyed a higher official post. He may have been someone outside the village who arranged for Kertosudiro to play a father's role – admittedly in a limited way – and to ensure Suharto's overall progress. Indeed, Suharto's former neighbour and close associate, Mashuri, later expressed the view that Suharto's father was a peripatetic village trader of Chinese descent.¹³

Whatever the case – and in my view the notion of illegitimacy is perhaps the most compelling one – Suharto was anything but the simple son of a villager.

While he played a part in village life, it was essentially an ancillary job to his major occupation as student, and his romantic remembrances of village life – eating eels, tending cattle – have the strained quality of one trying one's best to be what one is not. Education of the kind Suharto enjoyed over many years was exceptional for most Javanese peasants; generally speaking, their labour was so valuable that it could not be wasted in such dubious activities as schooling.

What, then, can we conclude about Suharto's earliest days? It seems reasonable to conclude that he was the illegitimate child of a well-placed villager, probably one with connections beyond the village, or someone of some means who might come in continuing contact with villagers. He was, in fact, farmed out to relatives from an early age and, indeed, taken out of the village. The opportunities he enjoyed for education were extraordinary by the standards of village life at the time. From the age of about 8 – notwithstanding later reports of his youth spent within the village environment¹⁴ – whatever close contact he had with village life was effectively ended, when he joined the family of a lower Javanese official living in a town and saw village life from the perspective of officialdom on those occasions when he accompanied Prawirowiharjo on his inspection tours.

WURYANTORO

Once finally established in Wuryantoro, Suharto seems to have experienced a more settled existence. He continued his primary school education (apparently riding a bicycle part way to the school), began to receive formal religious instruction – though his circumcision was delayed until he was 14, allegedly because of lack of funds – joined the Hizbul wathon scouts, and seems to have modelled himself on the moral pattern set by his foster-father, Prawirowiharjo. Judging from his later accounts, he was a persistent but not brilliant student; there is no sense that he was developing a sophisticated view of the world from his studies. Rather, his fundamentalist mental universe was best represented by his increasing attachment to aphorism, something that was to mark his life thereafter. Put simply, he developed the view that useful knowledge could be encapsulated into a collection of wise sayings that were timeless and which, if followed, would provide their own reward. Thus,

At that time I learned about the three 'don'ts': 'don't be startled [that is, troubled], don't be surprised, don't be arrogant'. These later became the guiding principles of my life, which stiffened me in facing problems which might have shaken me. I always remember the teachings of our ancestors: 'respect for God, teacher, government and both parents'. Even after I became President, I have not changed in this matter in the slightest. I hold these teachings in high esteem and I believe in their truth.¹⁵

The demands of Suharto's education soon brought yet another change of domicile. In 1931, in order to attend the first year of junior high school (*schakelschool*) at Wonogiri, he moved, together with Prawirowiharjo's second son Sulardi, to Selogiri, a few kilometres outside Wonogiri. There he stayed with

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another relative; Sulardi's elder brother, Sudiarto, was already in residence. At Wonogiri's Hollandsch-Inlandsche School (Dutch-Native school), Sulardi was joined in class in 1933 by the daughter of the newly arrived district chief of Wonogiri, R. M. Sumoharyomo. Siti Hartinah, two years younger than Suharto, became a social associate of Sulardi; she would later become Suharto's wife. According to Abdul Gafur, Siti Hartinah's biographer, the Sumoharyomo family developed a strong and close relationship with the Prawirowiharjo family once they moved to Wuryantoro around 1937. Suharto may have come to know his future wife then, even though he did not return to live with the Prawirowiharjos until the late 1930s.

After a period at Selogiri, Suharto, now aged about 13, was forced to move yet again, this time taken by his father to Wonogiri because of a family break-up at Selogiri; in Wonogiri, he lived with the childless family of a relative of his father, Harjowiyono, a retired railway worker. In these circumstances, Suharto was required to perform many tasks around the house, 'like a house boy',¹⁶ ranging from cleaning to cooking, shopping, and collecting water; these, he later reflected, saw him become 'a worker, someone who could stand on his own feet if necessary' and 'learn many things quickly'.¹⁷ There is some indication that he was treated rather badly at his Wonogiri home, receiving no pay and feeding himself from the family's leftover meals.

Through Pak Harjo, Suharto became acquainted with the locally well-known Javanese mystic and religious teacher Kiai Daryatmo, who also worked as an irrigation official. Both in the company of Pak Harjo and, later, on his own, he was a frequent visitor to Daryatmo's house, hanging about the place, absorbing the discussions and teachings he overheard when Daryatmo entered into discussion with or gave advice to those who came to consult him about religious, philosophical or medical matters. The relationship with Daryatmo was a special one, and it seems clear that Suharto, already apparently predisposed to devotional practices, absorbed a great deal of spiritual backboning from him. Daryatmo remained in Suharto's life long after; he was consulted for advice by Suharto in the early 1950s when he was a regimental commander in Salatiga, and regularly afterwards as well.

The difficulty of finding sufficient money for the regulated school clothing at Wonogiri was the reason, according to Suharto, for still another move, this time back to Kemusuk, whence he rode each day by bicycle to continue his higher school studies at a Muhammadiyah school – 'more extended lower education', as the Dutch called it – in the city of Yogyakarta where, it seems, there were no such clothing regulations and where he completed the second grade.¹⁸ Suharto has little to remark about his experiences in Yogyakarta, which, according to a leading nationalist figure, 'was well known as the centre of the movement for national independence' in the late 1920s.¹⁹ He notes that it was there that he first heard of indigenous protest at the colonial order, and about the organisation of meetings to discuss matters. His reaction was that of most of his fellows at the time who took little interest in strange and potentially dangerous new movements: 'All this did not yet make a strong impression on me'.²⁰

When he finally completed his schooling in 1939, Suharto was around 17 years old. In the context of the times and the fate of his fellows, this was an extraordinarily privileged level of educational achievement, even though formally he had not reached a high standard of schooling. It is, moreover, curious that he relates that his father and others could afford to educate him no longer, and that he had finally to embark on the world of work.²¹ Notwithstanding the difficulties caused by his early fragmented life, Suharto appears to have borne no animosity to those who reared him and shows a genuine regard or fondness for them; fate had dealt him this life, and he himself had to face and solve fate's consequences:

My ideas about life are based on belief in God, belief in His Power. Thus, I firmly believe that whatever God wills is certain to happen. Because of this, I believe that the fate of humankind is traced by God. Every single thing which God wills for humankind and for the entire world will happen. Therefore, there is no point in being regretful or troubled. We just leave it all to fate. There is no need to be shocked. The fact that some people seem to have been the subject of special treatment should not be a cause of astonishment. There is no need for us to be wide-eyed and say, 'That's terrific'. Just see God's hand in it, and we won't be astonished. If we have position, wealth and have something more than others, don't forget that in time it can change if God so wills it. Therefore, if we have a high position we should not act arbitrarily, and those with abundant riches should not forget where they came from.²²

Suharto's intensely self-regarding autobiography reveals little of the human side of his youth. Apart from his clear distaste with his experiences living with Pak Harjo in Wonogiri, we have no everyday sense of his life: his social relations, his daily routines, the material circumstances of his life in various places, his remembrance of emerging maturity. He mentions that he played soccer with his friends at Wuryantoro, but names only a couple of boyhood friends: Kamin and Warikin.²³ The latter later reminisced that Suharto played in defence, but often scored goals; 'he could run fast, his muscles were as strong as rattan, his body tough. He attacked the ball and played hard'.²⁴

We know nothing about his other social interests and leisure pursuits, although he later reminisced about his foster-father in Wuryantoro taking him along on his agricultural inspection trips and to the Sunday market to check out prices.²⁵ Nor do we have much sense of his evolving intellectual capacities and interests – what he learned in school and what he thought of it or his sense of place and history. He was, we can safely assume, no reader; there is no mention of anything like the 'hundreds of [Dutch] children's books and novels' which the renowned nationalist leader, Syahrir, read in his childhood,²⁶ nor anything approximating the claim of Sukarno, Indonesia's first president, that 'all my time was spent reading. While others played, I studied. I pursued knowledge beyond mere lessons'.²⁷ Suharto's social life and education had been solely monolingual; there is no evidence that he learned Dutch or other languages or knew anything of them. There is, indeed, no sense of his ever having experienced any Europeans, although he must have done, or espousing any interest in European traditions; there is,

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equally, no sense or acknowledgement of the fact of the colonised status of his land.

The emotional and material trials of his childhood and youth shaped an introspective and exceedingly self-reliant turn of mind, what McIntyre calls 'an emotional autarchy'; 'I always remember the experiences and difficulties of my childhood', Suharto later remarked, 'and that is why I always stress the importance of knowing and being true to oneself'.²⁸ His characteristic mode of examining and solving confusion, puzzles and problems of self-esteem was to look inward, not outward.

FROM SCHOOL TO WORK

Suharto found it difficult to find work in Kemusuk (although he gives no indication of the kind of work he was seeking), and decided to try his luck in Wuryantoro (presumably living once more with the family of his aunt), where 'I knew a lot of people who I hoped would be able to open doors for me'. He was, finally, successful in obtaining a job as a clerical assistant in the local village bank (*Volksbank*) in Wuryantoro, accompanying the bank clerk as he did his rounds by bicycle, in full Javanese dress, collecting applications for credit. While Suharto claims not to have enjoyed the work and to have found it uninteresting, he managed to master book-keeping by studying at night, and he also took to reading the newspapers and magazines that came through the office. However, an accident which tore his clothes – which, he claims, rather strangely, his aunt could not afford to replace – cost him his job.²⁹

Upon leaving his employment at the village bank, Suharto first thought to enlist in the Dutch navy but, on his account, quickly changed his mind when he discovered (perhaps remembering his Wonogiri experiences) that he had been nominated to be a cook. He sought work without success in Solo, and returned once more to Wuryantoro where he worked as a labourer on infrastructure projects. Finally, and probably with some desperation, he sought a three-year enlistment in the KNIL (Royal Netherlands Indies Army).³⁰ The opportunity probably arose simply because, with the threat of approaching war, the Dutch were recruiting heavily for their colonial army, which numbered about 35,000 in 1938. Suharto was not the first, nor the last, to throw in his lot with the army when other prospects looked bleak. He began his service on 1 June 1940.

Suharto's basic military training was conducted at the KNIL school at Gombong, west of Yogyakarta, where 'we trained from morning till night' and where, he later claimed, he began to study Dutch.³¹ Having passed the training course 'first in my class' – not the last time, truthfully or not, he was to make this claim – Suharto was assigned to Battalion XIII at Rampal, near Malang, late in 1940 or early in 1941.³² A short stint of night-guard duty at Gresik saw him contract malaria; after returning to Malang, he had a recurrence which caused him to be hospitalised for about two weeks. Thereafter he returned to Gombong, where he was accepted into the cadre school for training as a sergeant.

WAR

Once he had completed training and been promoted to sergeant, the outbreak of war saw Suharto attached to the Reserves at army headquarters in Bandung. A week after he took up his posting at Cisarua, the Dutch surrendered to the invading Japanese. Rather than run the risk of being captured and interned, he abandoned his uniform and fled back to Wuryantoro, where he immediately succumbed to another bout of malaria. Unable to find work in Wuryantoro, he moved to Yogyakarta, tried to learn typing, and fell ill with malaria again; 'I really had to learn patience, gaining a mastery of myself which would be useful later on'.³³

Once recovered, on 1 November 1942 – the date on which police affairs were formally passed from the *Kempeitai* (Japanese military police) to the newly structured occupation police force – Suharto availed himself of an opportunity to join the police force. Presumably his uncle, Prawirowiharjo, made use of his connections to help Suharto gain the position since, according to Roeder, Suharto heard of the chance to join while still in Wuryantoro. Once enlisted, he was dispatched for a three-month training course in Yogyakarta, which he 'passed, first in the class' because of his previous experience in the KNIL. He was assigned as assistant to the Yogyakarta chief of police, apparently at the rank of *keibuho* (assistant inspector). It is not clear just what Suharto did in the occupation police force, although he mentions that 'because I passed first in the class I was made a courier and then told to learn Japanese'.³⁴ Given the emphasis of the police on the maintenance of internal security ('criminal matters became a secondary problem; what was most important were matters of a political kind'),³⁵ he may there have had his first experience of intelligence work. Equally, he may simply have served in a routine administrative role.

At the suggestion of his Japanese chief of police, he sought to join the Peta (Defenders of the Fatherland), a Japanese-trained and Indonesian-officered self-defence force, formed in October 1943. Peta's professedly defensive intent, to hold the line against threatening Allied attack and invasion, was reflected in its limited and localised structures: it was essentially a collection of local battalions (*daidan*), with no higher organisational structure, nor horizontal contact with other local battalions. Presumably, Suharto's desire to join Peta was opportunistic rather than ideologically driven; his political consciousness at the time was still minimal, and his choice driven by the chance to continue his previously interrupted military career.

Upon his acceptance into Peta – he was, he claimed, one of only two selected from 500 applicants – Suharto was sent on a platoon commander's (*shodancho*) course, which he found 'quite difficult'.³⁶ Given his background, and the fact that most candidate Peta officers had *priyayi* backgrounds or were at least the products of the upper echelons of village society, his selection probably indicates the benefits of patronage and his rank within the occupation police force, as well as providing further indication of his unusual level of educational achievement; generally,

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shodancho candidates were required to have at least a junior high school education. Moreover, given that ‘the criteria for selecting the candidate-shodancho were usually evidence of leadership qualities, “spirit” (*semangat*) and physical fitness’,³⁷ Suharto must already have given some evidence of the traits the Japanese required in their Peta officers. Presumably he began his shodancho training – lasting about nine weeks – in mid-October, before the first Peta battalions (most of them formed in southern Java) were created in December 1943.

The Peta training regime was grim and highly disciplined, and Suharto, ‘thin and small’ at the time, found it hard going.³⁸ It emphasised the attainment of physical fitness and spiritual strength and toughness. It was a “translation” of the Japanese *bushido* into Indonesian lore. The Japanese instructors sincerely gave their Indonesian pupils all the warrior’s values which they themselves have received at their military schools’.³⁹

For the first time, it appears, ideas of a nationalist kind began to impress themselves upon the young trainee Suharto; indeed, he describes Japanese efforts at indoctrination as creating a ‘fighting spirit among us, as sons of Indonesia, to defend our own land’.⁴⁰ The Japanese captain responsible for Suharto’s Peta company later recalled that Suharto was ‘a very patriotic young man’.⁴¹ This development in his consciousness and values was not just a reflection of crude and counterproductive Japanese ideologising – even then, Japanese propaganda appears to have evoked a large measure of cynicism in him – but, more important, their racist attitudes towards the Javanese, and the harsh treatment which he both witnessed and experienced personally under their rule (‘the desire grew within me to fight back against these people who had hurt us so deeply’).⁴² Equally important, perhaps – since Suharto was never one to push new and untried ideas in environments where their acceptance might be contentious – was the fact that such notions were becoming common currency amongst those with whom he mixed. Nugroho remarks that ‘the roots [of patriotism] could be found in the *ksatrian* (barracks) of the *daidan*’.⁴³ This was an environment that Suharto much enjoyed, and discussions of matters of this kind were common amongst Peta troops. Accordingly, as Kahin remarks, ‘by 1944 the average Peta member was consciously strongly nationalist, anti-Japanese, anti-Dutch’, while Anderson adds that ‘it was not only the experience of being in the Peta but the specific ideological training the institution provided that created and heightened the nationalist political consciousness of its members’.⁴⁴ It is important, as well, to note that Peta remained entirely free from any civilian control or authority, something later reflected both in the reluctance of former Peta officers during the revolution to submit to civilian direction and in the development of a model of the socio-political positioning of the Armed Forces within Indonesian society.

It was a matter of policy that Peta members should serve in their own regions in order to enhance their enthusiasm to defend against Allied attack. Thus, his training course successfully completed, Suharto – presumably dress-uniformed in the Peta officer’s white shirt, green jacket, green riding trousers and green cap, together with a smaller version of the Japanese sword – found himself transferred