



**Interview by David Lowe, Jemma Purdey and Ahmad Suaedy with Dr Boediono, Jakarta, 23 April 2014**

**BA, Economics, UWA, 1960s cohort; MA, Economics, Monash University, 1970s cohort**

*[Edited transcript]*

David Lowe: I'll be brief by way of introduction because I realise how short your time is.

We are historians from Monash and, in my case, Cambridge University. My early work as a historian was on the history of the Colombo Plan and Australia's involvement in the Colombo Plan. More recently we've been working on a project that's looking at fifty years of Australian-sponsored tertiary scholarships, with the support of the government.

Our aim is to get a sense of the longer-term benefits, in addition to the many tracer studies and pilot studies that are done. We're very interested in the experiences people have, the networks they build, the connections that are maintained and how connections with Australia might change over the course of a life. So, with that in mind, we're delighted that you can talk with us for a while. We hope that it will be a reasonably informal conversation. I'll ask some questions and my colleague, Jemma, may also ask questions. Is that OK?

Dr Boediono: Yes, yes.

DL: Thank you very much.

Can I begin, Your Excellency, by asking about your early educational experiences, just briefly, before we come to the stage of your considering a scholarship to study overseas? Were there any particular educational experiences in your early life which stand out as switching on the light bulb or really igniting an interest?

Br B: [My experiences were] very common, normal. I was in a small town right from the first time I went to school until the end of high school when I moved to Jakarta. Well, at that time I think the number of students in good schools and universities was not as many as now so it was quite easy to get to university as long as you had reasonably good marks. Whereas now you have to put in a lot of effort to get to school.

At the time I was about seventeen and I did everything by myself. Now, I think, you have to involve your parents because of this more intense competition. There was nothing extraordinary at that time, it was very simple.

DL: How did you find out about the Australian Government scholarships?

Dr B: I found out because there was an announcement at the faculty about the Colombo Plan scholarship and who to contact. Mr <?> was with me and applied also. I think that was the first information that I got about the Colombo Plan scholarship, just an announcement on the board at the faculty.

DL: Was it a sense of opportunity and was the university of Western Australia something that was mentioned?

Br B: No. Not at all, we didn't know where we were going to be placed. We had no clue at all. We thought it was the most interesting thing to study abroad, and didn't care where we were put.



Jemma Purdey: You were just interested in going overseas.

Dr B: Exactly.

DL: You were a pioneer in the very early stages of the scholarship. Did you have any preparation? Did government officers come and do some language or introduction to culture or anything like that?

Dr B: Once we were selected. The selection was done by the embassy almost totally. <?> was involved so the embassy did all the work and they selected in Jakarta. Out of how many applicants, I don't know. They moved to other cities as well to do the same thing.

Once we were selected we were organised by our ministry of education to have orientation for about two weeks. Not about language and so on – I think they thought our language was sufficient – but about ourselves. 'You are an Indonesian citizen, you must do whatever is good for the country' and so on. It was kind of injecting patriotism. At that time, in the 1960s, it was very important.

Also, there were some talks from outside. I think there were some diplomats talking about life outside Indonesia because I think most of us had no experience of life overseas at that time. We were really just country boys and girls.

JP: Could I ask, Excellency, were you the first member of your family to travel overseas?

Dr B: No, my elder brother was an officer in the embassy in Egypt. I didn't have much discussion of this with him. From time to time he sent books, and so on, but otherwise I had no experience, no exposure to life overseas. Actually, there was some, Australia was one source of information. At that time [Indonesia] was already one of Australia's friends.

DL: On arriving in Western Australia, can you remember what surprised you the most? Were there some shocks that you didn't anticipate?

Dr B: Sydney was first. At the time it was summer and one thing that surprised me was [the clothes people wore]. I thought that westerners always wore ties, but walking along the street we found it quite relaxed, people wearing singlets and mowing the grass and so on.

JP: Did you stay in Sydney for a little bit? Do some orientation there?

Male voice 1: Yes, yes. One thing that shocked me, I remember, we came there in summer and it was Sunday; everyone was without shirts, going to Bondi, half-naked, driving cars ... *[laughs]*

JP: ... and women too!

Dr B: It was a shock, a cultural shock, but a pleasant shock.

DL: And the sound of lawn mowers too, was probably a [audio unclear]...

In terms of the university were there particular student bodies or organisations that helped you settle in and feel comfortable?

Dr B: Oh, well, we were already settled in Sydney for two months, learning language and a bit of exposure to culture. All of us were placed with families, which was good. We tried to learn the Sydney life.

JP: Do you remember much about the family you were billeted with?

Dr B: Yes, I do remember. They were a couple, the husband was an Englishman, the wife was

Ceylonese or something. They had one son, a naughty son.

JP: Oh.

Was it you and a friend?

MV1: Yes, I was staying with the same family. There were very hot curries.

Dr B: Then we moved to Perth. We were placed at UWA [University of Western Australia]. The first year we stayed together, also with a family. The husband was Italian and the wife was a Dutch lady.

MV1: They were both English teachers.

Dr B: Yes, they taught English. The husband taught English to Italians and immigrants and the wife was a general teacher.

MV1: They had a rule that during dinner, no English, must be Italian, because English is bad for the appetite.

JP: Fantastic!

Dewi Fortuna Anwar: So you learnt Italian?

Dr B: No, just 'manga, manga' – eat.

JP: Did you eat Italian food?

Dr B: Oh, often. That was the period when we had to adjust to university life. I think we did OK. Adjustment was no problem.

DL: Were there many other Indonesian students with you at the University of Western Australia?

Dr B: Oh yes, there were several, who had come before me. In total around five or six. And we made a very good association of friends with other Asian students, Colombo Plan and non Colombo Plan, especially the Malaysian students and Thai students.

The Malaysian students were much better organised than we were because they came in a block and they had already the government program and I think they had assigned somebody in Perth to take out the three. We didn't have that, but we were quite close. And, ironically, we were so close at the time of our confrontation policy with Malaysia. We debated but we were friends.

DL: That's a good story.

Did you also have to occasionally meet with someone from the Department of External Affairs?

Dr B: Yes, we were still taken care of by the department. There were two gentlemen who were taking care of us.

JP: After you lived for one year with the couple did you move out on your own?

Dr B: Yes, I think I moved to a flat or something ... a house; we rented a house with a number of Malaysian students. We rented a big old house and then we shared all the rooms, and it was cheaper. And we cooked.

JP: So that was fun times?

Dr B: It was fun times.

JP: But you also studied hard.

Dr B: I guess I did.

DL: Did you have the chance to occasionally do a little travel as well?

Dr B: Yes. The first travel, rather extended travel, that we did was on the occasion of the celebration of our Independence Day in Canberra. At the time the ambassador was kind enough to invite us, students from Western Australia, to go there to celebrate with them. We were known as a group of good singers, they knew that and invited us. It took many days, two or three days by train. It was elaborate, very elaborate.

JP: So there was some formal events that you performed at, is that what happened?

Dr B: I think so. I don't remember.

DFA: Did you perform on the train?

Dr B: Yes, we sang on the train.

Abdillah Toha: We were two or three days on the train so by the time we got to Melbourne, I believe, we knew everyone.

Did you come with us to Esperance?

Dr B: Esperance?

AT: Esperance is on the eastern tip of Western Australia. Kangaroo hunting. Did you do that?

Dr B: No, no.

AT: I did. It was very interesting, kangaroo hunting. What you do is bring a car with a big spotlight and the kangaroos sit in front facing the light ...

DL: ... you shoot them.

JP: Oh. It's sport ...

Dr B: It's not sport.

JP: No. You didn't do that though.

Dr B: No.

DFA: Sounds like a bad sport to me.

DL: Sounds like you were talented singers. Were there groups, student organisations, at the University of Western Australia that you also joined whether it was for singing or other activities?

Dr B: No, not at university. We performed a lot [audio unclear]...

AT: We performed in the student review.

Dr B: We did.

JP: That's interesting, because I speak to a lot of alumni from that period, from Indonesia, and they were all good singers. You were all excellent singers; it's very interesting. You were able to form these groups and make more friendships through that.

DL: And some universities around this time were starting to have international student magazines and things like that. Do you remember whether there was any of that at uni? Were you invited to write about your experiences as an international student?

Dr B: I don't remember.

JP: What kinds of challenges were there for you? It sounds like it was all very easy but it couldn't have been all ...

Dr B: Academic challenges. We came from a very different system. To tell you the truth we had to make a very special effort just to be on board with the rhythm of the lectures and so on. We were – at least I was – very far behind compared to colleagues who had studied at high school there. Even compared to the Malaysians, I felt that I was pretty ... so we had to do extra work.

JP: And did you get support in that? Were your lecturers supportive?

Dr B: Not directly. They were nice lecturers, but mainly we did it on our own. Just did some extra work in the library.

JP: Did you make friends with Australians as well?

Dr B: Yes, some.

DL: Have you maintained any of those connections?

Dr B: Oh. I lost track of them. In the later years, of course, when I moved to Melbourne and Canberra I think we still maintained contact.

JP: Did you both finish your bachelors at the same time?

AT: Yes.

JP: And then you had to return to Indonesia and take up a job. That was a condition of your scholarship?

Dr B: Yes, unless you were admitted to a higher degree program. As long as there was no objection from the Indonesian government, and normally there was no objection. But we went home earlier than that. We graduated in the same year, bachelor with honours, and he did much better than I did. We went home but then I had the ...

AT: I stayed for another year, after that, as a tutor at UWA.

Dr B: Oh, OK.

AT: Then I went home.

Dr B: At that time I went to Monash.

JP: Directly to Monash, from Perth. You didn't come home, at all, for a visit?

Dr B: I think I went home in the third year. I can't remember.

JP: When did you get married? I thought maybe you got married in between.

Dr B: I got engaged to my girlfriend, when I went home before I completed [my studies]. Then I got married after that.

DL: Did someone suggest you do a master's at Monash?

Dr B: No, I just did my homework. I thought Monash was good, quite new at the time. Monash was well known for Indonesian studies at that time, I was attracted partly because of that.

JP: Did you know any of those people at Monash in Indonesian studies? Herb Feith? And there were other Indonesian students at Monash, I guess.

Dr B: Yes, quite a number. I thought it was a much bigger university than UWA too. The environment was different, a bit more individualistic. Herb Feith, John Legge, Jamie Mackie – I was particularly close to Jamie Mackie because he was an expert on the Indonesian economy, the others were political scientists. We talked quite often and he gave some advice on the topic of my thesis.

JP: You mentioned it's more individualistic at Monash, a bit more liberating; you could do your own thing. Is that what you found?

Dr B: In a sense, yeah.

JP: What were your living arrangements like there?

Dr B: The first year I rented a room from a family, an elderly family, just across the street from the Clayton campus. An Indian student rented another room. I ate out; I didn't cook myself. My colleague from India would cook quite often, – curry. The year after, I moved to a dorm.

DL: It's a very different atmosphere in Clayton, Melbourne, from the University of Western Australia.

Dr B: Very different, yes.

JP: Did you enjoy Melbourne?

Dr B: I did. Yes, the city, very different to Perth and Sydney.

DL: We're both graduates of Monash. For a long time, and even now, getting to Monash depends on having a car. Did you have access to a car at all?

Dr B: No, no.

DFA: Bus to Huntingdale and train to Monash.

Dr B: I relied on my feet and public transport. It was OK.

JP: What about your music? Did you do any singing?

Dr B: No. We broke up. I didn't have the energy to form another group. It was more difficult to assemble people there for that kind of thing. I think we got busy with academic work.

DL: And, Your Excellency, in relation to leadership roles – and clearly you've been playing leadership roles – did you have a sense, for example at Monash, that you would like to use your knowledge and play leadership roles in Indonesia when you returned?

Dr B: I didn't think of that at all. Actually, I was thinking of doing academic work not government work. It's by default, in a sense, that I've become a government official. Some people thought I was a politician – well, you have to be a bit of a politician to be Vice President – but basically, I'm not a politician.

DL: I'm still thinking of the Monash experience. Were there other Indonesians there with whom you've maintained strong bonds.

Dr B: I don't think so, because Jamie Mackie has died, Herb has died, John Legge [is alive] still but ...

JP: ... he's very, very, very frail.

Dr B: Very frail. I had more lasting contact with my colleagues at the ANU [Australian National University].

JP: At the ANU you were part of a team of researchers. Is that how it worked?

Dr B: I was actually invited as a research assistant, a lowly research assistant, by Professor Heinz Arndt, a well-known professor there. He was interested in building the capacity, the research capacity of the Indonesian economy. He had a board of expert young students – I wasn't an expert student, I was the research assistant to the professor, but I interacted with them.

JP: Yes, and you're still in contact, very close contact, with a lot of those researchers.

Dr B: Yes.

DL: I'm just wondering about your reflections on the Colombo Plan as an idea, because you're in a unique position to reflect, having had several experiences in Australia. You were one of the earlier recipients of the Colombo Plan scholarship. At that time it was quite a pioneering idea and Australia's engagement with Asia was not very fulsome, but the Colombo Plan was the big exception. Is that how you reflect now and look back at what it achieved?

Dr B: I think it has achieved a lot of benefits to both countries, both peoples. I think the money the Australian government spent on the Colombo Plan was money very well spent. We always have affection for the country, the people. Despite some friction, and so on, the basic good will is there.

DL: And one of the things that I've always noted, when researching the Colombo Plan, is that it also involved a lot of publicity trying to educate Australians too. There was quite a bit of publicity about the benefits of having people from Asia studying in Australia. Did you feel that? Did you see the publicity and did you think that they were getting it right, that it was a good message?

Dr B: Ah, I don't know now. I have the sense that the number of Asian students, specifically Indonesian students, then was not as big as now and there was some kind of special interest among the Australian public to know about us. Sometimes we were asked to talk with a small group of [people]. I don't think [this happens] now because you have so many – some people say too many. That's a bit unfortunate but that's a fact. At that time we were still a rarity and sometimes, just along the street or at the station, somebody would approach us and talk. I don't know whether they do that now, I don't think so.

DL: It must have been interesting, though, those novel encounters in Australia. That must have been nice.

Dr B: Very nice. There was also some unkindness – I have to say that. For whatever reason a person might suddenly say 'I don't like you', or something like that, but it was minor, didn't stick in my head at all. They were mostly kind, very friendly people.

DL: And could you see some of the changes you're describing, in terms of the greater awareness of Asian students, being marked in your time from UWA to Monash and then ANU? Could you see the rise of interest levels in Asia over that time?

Dr B: During that time? Well, I guess, in a sense, yes. Because I moved in a direction that ended in my joining a group that were intensely interested in Indonesia, but I cannot say anything about the broader public.

I saw it at Monash because there was a group of Indonesia specialists – I was so very impressed with their knowledge – and when I went to the ANU, it was an even more focused group, very tightly knit and I was accepted even more.

JP: I think our time is up, unfortunately.

DL: Thank you very much, Your Excellency, for your time. Thank you everyone for sharing your memories and reflections with us.

Dr B: My pleasure.

JP: Terima kasih.