

PART ONE

Two Sumatran Childhood Memoirs

Imagining Modern Indonesia via Autobiography

INTRODUCTION

Personal narratives have deep public resonance in twentieth-century Indonesia, where the process of growing to adulthood and traversing a life is often recalled in terms similar to those used to think about society and the past in a more general sense. In the cosmopolitan, city-based national culture and in many Indonesian ethnic minority societies (the country has over three hundred of these, based in rural, village regions), telling a life unavoidably also involves telling history in terms of passages through ages of time and transitions between levels of consciousness and social awareness. Indonesian narrators of both public and private histories tend to draw on the same lode of symbols about eras, times of darkness and light, maturation, and growth toward greater intellectual awareness from an earlier age of social obtuseness and ignorance. In other words, Indonesian historical memory and personal memory are both animated by certain closely related key scenarios and social images, and societal histories and personal narratives interpenetrate. They also draw on each other's storehouses of aesthetic richness and emerge as deeper, more meaningful social texts because of that. Put another way, art animates the telling of history at both the public and personal levels in unusually thoroughgoing ways in this uncommonly time-conscious country.

This interpenetration of autobiographical memory and public history seems to be particularly acute for Indonesians who were born during the first two and three decades of this century. These men and women often attended Dutch-administered elementary and secondary schools in the 1920s or 1930s—a bittersweet experience that gave them their first personal taste of life in the European-dominated, colonial Indies. As young

adults these men and women saw the archipelago abruptly seized by the Japanese forces in 1942; this extraordinary generation then went on to help the Indonesian national revolutionary effort in the late 1940s in their individual ways, in their diverse ethnic societies, or in more cross-culturally mixed cities. If they enjoyed a long life, they then went on to suffer or savor other major eras of Indonesian time: the Sukarno years of prideful nationalism and political chaos, and since 1965, the more stable, Jakarta-focused, fervid economic developmentalism of the Soeharto regime. Indonesians born early in the century know well that their individual lives and their family memories hold these larger eras' historical imprints deep within them in vibrant ways.

Taking advantage of this situation, this book presents the first English translations of two modestly phrased yet superbly insightful childhood memoirs from Sumatra, both published soon after the Indonesian Revolution (1945-49), which liberated the island chain from Dutch control. The memoirs, which are both written in the national language, Indonesian, are P. Pospos's *Aku dan Toba: Tjatanan dari Masa Kanak-Kanak (Me and Toba: Notes from Childhood Times)* and Muhamad Radjab's *Semasa Kecil di Kampung (Village Childhood)*. Both published in 1950 and written outside Sumatra, in Java, during the Revolution, the autobiographies recall childhoods spent in late colonial times, from roughly 1915 through the 1930s. The Pospos book is set in Toba (one of the rural home regions of the Batak peoples in North Sumatra) while the Radjab memoir is set in Minangkabau, in West Sumatra. In reconstructing their boyhood selves and in writing about their remembered passage from childhood to maturity in the colonial Indies' final, unsettled decades, the authors of these two small books were also writing about much larger issues, such as national Indonesian society's own journey toward revolution and independence from an age of colonial subjugation and what these memoirists portray as an era of pervasive intellectual naïveté clouding the lives and social perspectives of Indonesian villagers and townspeople. Recalling the personal past, for these memoirists, becomes a witty but bitter effort of actively creating the public future, and trying to imagine an Indonesian national society of deep self-consciousness, social awareness, and religious sophistication. The extent to which the nascent Indonesian national society surrounding them in 1950 actually conformed to these ideals the authors leave as an open topic.

Writing of themselves, though, the two writers chronicle Sumatran childhood worlds and states of Toba and Minangkabau village consciousness which lead (by the time the remembered children reach the threshold of adulthood) to mature selves who hold strikingly cosmopolitan, self-critical, and *socially* critical views of their village ethnic universes. By the time they are seventeen or so, the boys have almost become ethnographers of their

home ethnic realms and also of those Sumatran worlds' senses of time, place, language, society, and person. By the end of each narrative, the stories' new almost-adults look toward the *rantau* (the social and moral precincts outside the Sumatran rural ethnic home regions) with a sense that these polyglot areas contain a future that will bring personal and public liberation from the shackles of "unthinking traditionalism." Modern Indonesia lies out there, the memoirists aver, in the hearts and minds of young people. That is, among sophisticated school graduates like the two authors and their implied readers, all of whom live away from a village home and the past, in Indonesia and the future. One of the great strengths of these autobiographies, in fact, is their catalysis of very common twentieth-century Sumatran assumptions about history and place (about the past and the future, about an ethnic village home counterposed to a cosmopolitan, distant *rantau*) into the publically accessible aesthetic form of the printed boyhood memoir about personal, seemingly modest journeys to adulthood.¹

At the same time they are chronicling these changes in their remembered childhood selves (and advocating, although, they know, hardly guaranteeing similar changes for Indonesian society as a whole), the memoirists also write by implication about the challenging linguistic task of recording personal memories and larger social portraits in print and prose. The authors do this in a knowing way, against a background of Sumatra's long-established, eloquent traditions for orally evoking the past. For centuries, Sumatran ethnic societies (see maps) have employed such genres as sung or droned chronicles, oral epics, and chanted clan genealogies to recreate a supernaturally powerful past. Some of these histories are recited in association with magically charged script texts, barkbooks, bone reliquaries, funerary obelisks, or sacred clan heirlooms. Pospos and Radjab are quite self-conscious about writing *printed* personal narratives in a modernist key, against this sometimes oral, sometimes sacred-text-oriented and certainly much more communal background. They invite their readers to share in their linguistic "maturity" in this effort. The memoirists' consistently self-deprecatory and often ironic tone is central to their vision of writing in general, and to their understanding of Indonesian historical writing in particular. The authors know they are writing "minor lives," not chronicles of prominent nationalist figures; propagandistic prose and hortatory history become impossible in this prose climate.

Beyond presenting my translations of these books in part 2, I also offer an interpretive reading of them in this introductory essay. As an anthropologist concerned with issues of modernity and tradition as these ideas have been constructed in twentieth-century Sumatran social thought (and particularly via popular media forms such as printed leisure-time literature),² I am convinced that these memoirs should be appreciated as gentle but nonetheless quite profound texts about revolutionary ways of thinking

about Indonesian history. These small books can be read, I think, as building blocks in the country's effort to invent Indonesia, as an imagined community, as Benedict Anderson has set out that idea in his book *Imagined Communities* (1983).

Anderson asserts that modern printed popular literary forms such as novels and newspapers can foster new ways of thinking about social community in societies fragmented into separate ethnic worlds, in colonial empires. Modern literature allows readers and writers to imagine new national communities, with greatly expanded social horizons and more secular time frameworks than those available in oral media forms such as clan genealogies, or in written, script texts such as court chronicles, which themselves have heavy oral residues. Newspapers and novels encourage readers (Anderson asserts) to imagine a complex but interactive social world surrounding them, full of diverse planes of discourse and their correspondingly diverse moral worlds. These publication forms also lead readers to think of themselves as existing in so-called real, secular time, from which vantage point they can 'look back' to their society's earlier 'more mythic' modes of apprehending and telling history. The latter mythic forms emerge as entertaining (or sometimes, ethnographically diverting) forms of older "oral literature," in this new, 'more knowing' perspective. The self-consciously sophisticated reader of newspapers or novels, Anderson goes on, is also able to stand back from the flow of simultaneous events occurring at different spots in the world and work to integrate this variegated timescape into a single consistent realm, in relation to his or her own perspective, as reader. Finally, the imagined time and place of novels and newspapers makes the imagined community of the nation thinkable (1983, 31). Both worlds (the one in leisure-time print literature and the one imagined in a nascent national society) are essentially fictional ones, being composed of persons the reader or citizen will never be able to actually meet in person.

Popular literature forms such as the childhood autobiographies at issue here seem to me to promote the same variety of innovative social thought, and a special, almost seditious critical perspective (cloaked inside innocuous-looking boyhood memories) in cultures such as Revolutionary-era ethnic worlds like Toba and Minangkabau, and in their overseas diaspora communities in cities in Java. Pospos and Radjab seemed to have intuitively grasped the fact that childhood memoirs about the 1920s and 1930s were perfect vehicles for imagining a nation through print literature.

I assert all this, well aware of the fact that some deconstructionist critics of Indonesian literature might prefer to see texts such as the two translated here as bereft of larger social meanings, and as examples of the play of language per se, independent of hidden social semantics of the sort I perceive.³ I also make my admittedly ambitious claim that these memoirs

are “about history” and about the Indonesian national enterprise despite the fact that previous commentators on these two particular autobiographies (such as G. W. J. Drewes, in his 1951 essay “Autobiografieën van Indonesiers”) have considered these books to be well written but fairly limited, minor portraits of recollected childhoods. In other words, most other researchers have seen these books as being more in the nature of reminiscences of childhood *per se* than important historical statements. In my reading (and I would speculate that this would also be true for the books’ authors and for some of their more thoughtful readers), these tales of 1920s and 1930s childhood days spent in out-of-the-way Sumatran villages and school towns point beyond the surface meanings of their texts toward wider arenas of Indonesian social thought. The autobiographies seem to me to be about large issues of language, meaning, religious speech and action, public memory, private lives, “ethnic tradition,” and “Indonesian modernity”—although on the surface the books are indeed simple chronicles of childhood experiences.

These autobiographies are also deeply political, despite the fact that the narratives do not mention major national figures such as Sukarno or Mohammad Hatta (Indonesia’s first president and vice president, the latter a Minangkabau man), nor do they dwell on the nationalist movements of the 1920s and 1930s (which had Sumatra as a major regional base),⁴ nor do they deal to any extent with Holland/Indies political relations in the late colonial decades. This period, which of course provided the time frame for the authors’ stories, was the time when student political clubs, Islamic unions, merchants’ groups, and loose-knit communities of intellectuals were attempting to lay the organizational groundwork for the Indies’ eventual independence from the Dutch. Much nationalist activity along these lines took place in Toba and Minangkabau during this period. But, most of the action in the two memoirs is concerned with the minor emotional dramas of two village boys’ lives as they navigate successively larger and larger realms of familial, religious, and schoolroom experience. Nevertheless, by describing such minor journeys, the books are about the very heart of Indonesia’s effort to create itself as a modern nation. That is, these memoirs are records of individual passages toward states of consciousness in which people can question the ideological givens of village life, the received truths of organized religion, and village notions of time and society, and then go on to “migrate toward” (a major image for Sumatran writers) the new imagined community of Indonesia, as a multiethnic nation created by the conscious cooperative work of patriots drawn from these two authors’ own exact generation. Note how this vision of “growing up toward Indonesia” and toward the rantau and toward critical forms of consciousness goes far beyond some simple political or military resistance to Dutch oppression. Revolution for these authors means a revolution of the spirit, an

invention of modern Indonesia—and resistance to and overthrow of the Dutch colonial state is only one constituent part of this larger, deeper transformation of thought and “revolution of eras.” It is also important to note that this action takes place not in mythic time but in secular time, with people actively intervening in history to channel its course and control its pace—and to astutely record its passage, in print. Few artists’ efforts could be more revolutionary than this; few could be more deeply Indonesian.

It seems to me that much important Indonesian thought about nationhood and about the critical late colonial decades in places like North and West Sumatra is often phrased in just such personalized terms as these. My own life history interviews with elderly rajas (ceremonial chiefs) and retired schoolteachers in the Angkola Batak area near Sipirok, for instance, often include a similar evocation of revolutionary national history through personal recollections of life journeys very similar to those Pospos and Radjab write about. Public evocations of certain poignant, painful emotional states relating to individual lives as they were lived during these pivotal decades may work, I suspect, as a sort of coded language for talking about the larger and more overtly political transformation of the colonial Indies into an independent Indonesia. This convergence of personal and public memory is of course what makes the study of twentieth-century autobiography in the country so important. (And what makes oral history work so crucial today, before this older generation of men and women born between 1910 and 1920 dies without telling their stories. Few of these people had access to print publication, as Pospos and Radjab did.)

It is intriguing, also, to see that there are striking parallels between the emotional worlds of childhood created in these two autobiographies and the childhood lives described in other personal memoirs of late colonial and early nationalist times. Moreover, there are marked similarities between the emotional terrain of our two childhood biographies and the fictional world of Indonesia’s finest modern writer, Pramoedya Ananta Toer. This is particularly true of his short stories about the Japanese occupation and the national revolution in his collection *Tjerita dari Blora* (Stories from Blora, 1952). A reading of the social, personal, and temporal imagery of the Pospos and Radjab memoirs will provide a means to begin to suggest reasons for these concordances across the literary scene of 1930s–1950s fiction and nonfiction in the country, although a deep consideration of the parallels between Indonesian fiction and these two memoirs is much beyond the scope of this essay. But first, some background to my reading of the memoirs’ imagery: a short discussion of the texts and their authors, and the ethnic societies surrounding them, and then a consideration of autobiographical writing within Indonesian and Malay historical traditions. This is already a well-researched topic (see, for instance, Sweeney

1980a, 1980b, 1990; Reid 1972; Watson 1989. Drewes's 1961 *Hikayat Nakhoda Muda, De Biografie van een Minangkabausen Peperhandelaar* [The biography of a Minangkabau pepper trader] offers a useful comparative text, although the piece is a biography, not an autobiography).

THE TEXTS AND THEIR AUTHORS

P. Pospos's *Me and Toba: Notes from Childhood Times* was published by the government printing house Balai Pustaka in 1950. Muhamad Radjab's *Village Childhood* appeared, as noted, in the same year, again under Balai Pustaka auspices. The very existence of this publishing house was itself part and parcel of the political and artistic creation of Indonesia (Teeuw 1967:13-15; Drewes 1981). Begun in 1908 by the Dutch colonial administration as an organ for publishing high-quality works of fiction and folklore in refined, grammatically elegant Indonesian, by the 1920s Balai Pustaka had developed into a major venue for popular literature, particularly "journey novels" turning on love-story themes. In their Indonesian-language book list, the house published works that directly engaged issues of Indies modernity: the strains and pressures of life in big multiethnic cities; love marriages versus arranged matches, based on family alliance considerations; and the emotional turmoil of educated young people caught between village tradition and cosmopolitan school experiences and careers in the more Europeanized sectors of society. A number of Balai Pustaka novels (most of them by Minangkabau authors) enjoyed wide circulation among the educated classes in both Java and Sumatra. These novels included Abdul Muis's *Salah Asuhan* (Wrong upbringing), 1928; Marah Rusli's *Sitti Nurbaya* (S. Nurbaya is a girl's name), 1922; and Nur Sutan Iskandar's *Salah Pilih* (Wrong choice), 1928. The boys in Pospos's and Radjab's childhood memoirs were presented as avid readers of such Balai Pustaka novels; these love-story books, in fact, form a constant backdrop to much later Sumatran fiction and nonfiction writing.

Both of the boyhood memoirs, as noted, were written in the rantau, outside Sumatra, during the revolution years. The volumes were published in Jakarta in Indonesia's first year of independent existence. The early 1950s saw the publication of two other similar childhood recollections, set in the same time as that of our two autobiographies. These works were the prominent Minangkabau novelist Nur Sutan Iskandar's *Pengalaman Masa Kecil* (Childhood experiences), 1948, and the Muslim religious essayist Hamka's *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup* (Life memories), 1951-52. The first volume of this latter memoir deals largely with Hamka's younger years, although the set is rarely labeled a childhood memoir per se. After this early 1950s period, childhood memoirs receded from view as an impor-

tant genre of modern Indonesian letters. Why this was so is a puzzle to which I hope students of later Indonesian literary periods will address themselves. This present essay will, at least, shed some light on the fact that childhood memoir publishing emerged with special force right after the Revolution. A related topic is the remarkable similarity of all these memoirs to Indonesia's first full-blown modern autobiography, the nationalist leader Dr. Soetomo's *Kenang-Kenangan* (Memories, 1934).

This is a similarity to which we can turn momentarily. But what of the two men who wrote the two extraordinary books translated here? Pospos recently retired from a career as an editor in a Christian publishing house in Jakarta. Radjab died in 1970, after long service as a newspaperman, essayist, social commentator, and university lecturer in Jakarta. Neither man is nor was an especially prominent public figure, at least in the sense that neither was a major politician, nor is either writer seen today as an important professional historian (although Radjab did publish several popular histories and folklore books on Sumatra and Sulawesi). In 1950, each man was just launching his career in the world of print. Pospos was thirty-one years old and working in Jakarta as a high school teacher; Radjab, at age thirty-seven, was employed as a newspaper editor for *Indonesia Raya*, also in the capital.

Each of the writers had already led an extraordinarily literate and even text-obsessed life by the early 1950s. After the publication of their childhood reminiscences, each author continued this trajectory into Indonesia's print culture. In a pattern typical of many Sumatrans of their generation who were educated in colonial-era schools and who came from ethnic societies, like Toba and Minangkabau, fascinated with the printed word, Pospos and Radjab spent their careers using books and newspapers to expand literacy's scope into public intellectual discourse for the new nation. And, in a poignant way, both men succeeded in having just the sort of literate, secular career that (as we shall soon see) they were struggling toward as children.

P. Pospos, whose real name is P. S. Naipospos (Paian Sihar Naipospos) was born to a family of modest means and social standing on October 9, 1919, in Tapanuli (in the subprovince now known as North Tapanuli). His only published work is *Me and Toba*. In July 15, 1987, and August 22, 1987, letters to me, Pospos writes that after attending Schakelschool (a private, proprietary elementary school that did not use Dutch) and H.I.S. (a Dutch-language primary school) in the Balige area (a heartland Toba region) he went on to the Christian MULO school in Tarutung. This market town was an administrative and church center located on the road between Toba and the port town of Sibolga. MULO, Meer Uitgebreide Lagere Onderwijs, was a prestigious secondary school employing Dutch-language instruction; MULO worked as one of the gateway schools for further edu-

cation in the colonial school system. Upon graduation from this secondary school Pospos moved to Bogor, West Java, where he enrolled in M.L.S. (Middelbare Landbouw School, a sort of high school), where he studied for two years. He moved to Jakarta and enrolled in A.M.S. (Algemeen Middelbare School, also a high school). After two years the school was closed because of the Japanese Occupation. Pospos then continued his study in S.M.T. (Sekolah Menengah Tinggi, a level of high school), graduating from this school after two years. He taught in a public high school during the first few years of national independence. During this time, he also enrolled in Faculty of Letters of University of Indonesia for three years and earned the M.O. degree (Middelbare Onderwys, a degree similar to the bachelor's). From 1952 to 1964 he was employed at the Balai Alkitab (Biblical Studies Publishing House) in Jakarta. From 1965 until his retirement in 1989, Pospos worked at the Badan Penerbit Kristen (Christian Publishing Concern), also in Jakarta. Much of his work consisted of preparing translations of exegetical and theological works for a general Indonesian audience of readers. Pospos and his wife have four children: the eldest daughter is a physician; the eldest son is a civil engineer; the second daughter is a veterinarian; and the younger son is studying political science.

Muhamad Radjab was born June 21, 1913, in the Minangkabau rural homeland in West Sumatra, in the village of Sumpur, Padang Pandjang. He spent most of his adult life and career abroad, that is, in the rantau's outlying lands in Java. He died August 16, 1970, back in West Sumatra once more, in Sumpur. At the time he had been attending a conference in Padang on Minangkabau ethnic culture. For the last two years of his life, in fact, Radjab had been concentrating his writing and research on Minangkabau literature and ethnic traditions and had planned a book on these topics. His numerous obituaries in Padang and Jakarta newspapers noted that his widow was left to raise eight children, most still at home.

Radjab's family was not among the high hereditary Minangkabau nobility. However, they had endeavored for several generations to garner social prestige of another sort: the family lines on both his father's and his mother's sides boasted many Islamic religious teachers and several *haji* pilgrims. Radjab made this Muslim family milieu a major focus of tension in *Village Childhood*.

He attended village elementary school and also local Koranic recitation schools (*surau*s), finally progressing to the Sumatra Thawalib school in Padang Pandjang (this was an Islamic middle school). In his late teens and early twenties ("escaping" from country Muslim schools, in the view put forward in his memoir) Radjab attended the teacher training institute, Sekolah Normal Islam, in Padang, from 1932 to 1934. He then migrated to Jakarta and soon after that to Bandung, where he sped headlong into a

newswriting career. After brief service as a junior reporter on the Padang paper *Persamaan*, he worked on the Jakarta paper *Pembangunan* from 1934 to 1935. Radjab followed this with a job as an assistant editor on the magazine *Persatuan Hidup* in Bandung during the Japanese Occupation years 1942–45. The next two years, during the Indonesian Revolution, he worked as an editor for the news service Berita Antara in Jogjakarta, Solo, Malang, and Jakarta. In the years 1947–49 he was an editor on the daily paper *Detik* back in West Sumatra, in the small city of Bukittinggi; the next year he was an editor for the same paper in Sulawesi. The latter is a large, ethnically diverse island northeast of Java. Radjab's experiences there resulted in two books about the island's folklore and about one of its prominent ethnic societies, the Sa'dan Toraja. Balai Pustaka published his journalistic, enjoyable ethnographic volume *Toraja Sa'dan* in 1952, and his *Dongeng-Dongeng Sulawesi Selatan* (South Sulawesi folktales) in 1950.

In 1950 and the following year Radjab was an editor for the daily newspaper *Indonesia Raya*. Until 1955 he again worked as an editor for the news service Berita Antara in Jakarta. Following this, from 1955 to 1963, he served as a bureau chief for the feature wire service Antara Features. Then and until his death he headed the research section of LKBN Antara. Drawing on his extensive reporting background and supplementing this with some graduate-level coursework in the law school and the faculty of social sciences at the University of Indonesia (1959–1963), Radjab also lectured on social issues at that university, at Mahaputra University, and at Trisakti University.

Village Childhood was Radjab's second book, appearing a year after his *Tjatanan di Sumatra* (Notes on Sumatra, Balai Pustaka, 1949). This volume was a journalist's account of Sumatra during the Revolution; Radjab did the research for this somewhat meandering study while part of the team of reporters sent to the island by the Nationalist government's Ministry of Information. *Notes on Sumatra*, briefly discussed below, presents a view of the island's journey to modernity and Indonesian nationhood supplemental and complementary to that set out in *Village Childhood*.

The same year that *Village Childhood* appeared, Radjab had another book published by Balai Pustaka, the previously mentioned *South Sulawesi Folktales*. In rapid succession his *Toraja Sa'dan* and *Perang Paderi* (The Padri wars), 1954, were published. This last book was a rather heated narration of the history of the 1820s Padri wars in Minangkabau. The last book of Radjab's career marked a return to the ethnographic perspective essayed in his early works on Sulawesi societies. This work was his 1969 *Sistem Kerabatan di Minangkabau* (The kinship system of Minangkabau).

Radjab was also a prolific translator of fiction, social science works, and law texts from English into Indonesian. His eleven major published trans-

lations include three works by Dostoyevsky (all translated from 1948 to 1949) and various volumes on law and legal history.

Pospos's and Radjab's careers show both of them to have been fascinated with issues of religion, holy texts, language, the translatability of languages, ethnic literatures, social history, and the vexing matter of how authors might best describe complex social worlds, whether they be the nineteenth-century Russian landscapes of Radjab's fiction translations or the Sumatran scenes from these authors' own lives. These same large preoccupations are found again in Pospos's and Radjab's boyhood memoirs.

Pospos and Radjab address their memoirs to a broad Indonesian-speaking audience that includes members of their home ethnic societies and residents of other ethnic locales in the country: Java, Bali, Sunda, Toraja, and so on. Both authors know that Toba and Minangkabau⁵ have strong ethnic profiles in Indonesian thought: Toba as a rather rough-mannered society of smart, aggressive go-getters who assiduously maintain patrilineal clan ties in the most distant precincts of their diaspora as well as "back home" in Tapanuli rice-farming villages, and Minangkabau as a simultaneously Muslim and matrilineal society with a striking record of success in business enterprises both in Sumatra and more far-flung parts of the island chain. Though neither memoirist takes especial care to set out Toba or Minangkabau social structural arrangements in great detail, in the course of each book readers do learn certain background facts. Toba's patrilineal clans, or *margas*, for instance, trace back many generations and are fractured into quarrelsome, rivalrous lineages. The latter are linked to similar lineages of other clans through ranked marriage alliances; wife-giver lineages, or *hula-hula*, bestow their daughters as brides on their indebted, subservient, lower-ranked *anakboru* ("girl-children"), their wife-receivers. The *hula-hula* in turn are subservient to their own wife-givers, while *anakboru* will play the wife-bestowing role to yet another lineage. Ideally at least, these marriage alliances are asymmetrical (wife-givers should never receive a bride from their *anakboru*) and endure over many generations. In practice, strict upkeep of this ideal vision is mostly confined to the wealthy, "core ancestral" lineages of a region; smaller, commoner lineages such as Pospos's own have much less traffic in the exalted myths of Toba "ancient marriage alliances," although regular village families do at least try to encourage their sons to marry a daughter of the mother's brother (the perfect arrangement, within *adat*). Toba in the 1920s and 1930s had circles of rajas or chiefs claiming hereditary positions of leadership within "sacrificial communities," village settlements loosely united into ceremonial leagues and cooperative irrigation societies. However, these chiefs were already much beholden to the Dutch administration; Toba *adat* chieftaincies, in fact, were weak and faction-ridden even before the colonial state

penetrated Tapanuli in the 1850s and 1860s and finally established full control by the turn of the century.

A renegade, self-styled "priest king," Si Singamangaraja XII, led a guerilla resistance to the Dutch takeover for thirty years but was finally shot to death in 1907, effectively ending organized Toba combat against the "Kompeni," the Company (a then-popular Toba way of referring to the Dutch colonial state as well as its predecessor, the Dutch East Indies Trading Company). Protestant Christianity flooded through Toba in this same era, following its expansion northward starting in 1861 from its initial mission field in Sipirok. Under the charismatic pioneer missionary Ingwar Nommensen, who converted a few Angkola and many Toba to Christianity under the German Rhenisch Mission Society auspices, Tapanuli towns like Balige and Tarutung became Protestant strongholds by the time of Pospos's birth.

Minangkabau stood in great contrast to this. West Sumatra's several distinct subsocieties (in the Tanah Datar valley near Batusangkar, the Agam valley, around the mountain town of Bukittinggi, and the Limapuluh Kota valley centering on Payakumbuh) had histories of hierarchical, statelike organization tracing back to at least the fourteenth century, in contrast to Toba's decentralized, fragile chieftaincy leagues. An important peppergrowing region and a major gold-mining area until the mines were depleted by the 1780s, the Minangkabau kingdoms had forged a series of shifting trade alliances with Aceh in the sixteenth century; over the next one hundred years West Sumatran pepper acted as a magnet for traders from India, China, and Portugal. In 1663, the Dutch established control of Padang and built a fortified trading post nearby on the Batang Aran River. Throughout the late 1600s, the Minangkabau courts, especially that at Pagaruyung, extended their influence northward into the Angkola and Mandailing Batak regions and southward into Rejang. During the Anglo-Dutch war, 1781-84, the West Sumatran coast came under British control; British administration of Padang and environs was reestablished from 1795 to 1819, during the Napoleonic Wars. After that period, Dutch control remained firm; Padang developed into an important trade city, newspaper center, and school town (as did Bukittinggi); and Minangkabau merchants became fixtures in distant Sumatran towns and cities.

Conversion to Islam had begun early, in the late fourteenth century, and by the time the Dutch established political control of West Sumatra, Islam was universally accepted. In fact, Minangkabau had become a center of Sumatran piety and Muslim learning. Powerful Muslim traders began to compete with the old royal houses for political and economic preeminence by the late 1700s, the period when the mines were depleted (the economic base of the traditional nobility). Islamic reformers, led by the puritanical Padris, condemned cockfighting, gambling, opium use, allegiance to feudal models of kingship, adat ceremonialism, and strict matrilineal

inheritance of wealth and village titles. During the 1820s, the Padris had acquired military forces and pushed northward into Mandailing and Angkola, converting the population to Islam. The 1820s and early 1830s saw continued military action in heartland areas of Minangkabau, as the Dutch attempted to co-opt local leadership and defeat the Padri forces. This they eventually did in 1837, when the town of Bonjol, under the Padri leader Tuanku Imam Bonjol, fell to Dutch forces.

West Sumatra continued its role as a hotbed of religious and political dispute throughout the rest of the colonial period. The Modernist Muslim movement hit the area with full force by the 1920s, and advocates called for school reform, expanded educational opportunities for women, and a deeper knowledge of scriptural theology, shorn of the accretions of local adat (in Radjab's memoir, the boy is positioned between such a modernist faction and some adat traditionalists, and he consciously refuses to fully take sides. However, the autobiography as a whole is enlivened by the sort of social critique and commitment to a search for meaning found in the modernist Islam of 1920s Sumatra).

Many Minangkabau secondary school graduates found themselves without jobs during this period, and social dislocations of this sort spurred a communist-incited armed insurrection. This revolt failed and many participants were jailed. West Sumatra remained, however, a center for nationalist thought throughout the 1930s and the Japanese Occupation years from 1942 to 1945.

Each memoir assumes a general knowledge of this ethnographic and historical background, for Toba and Minangkabau. At the most basic level, however, each memoir has a much more intimate focus, with its action structured around the growing child's progression through a series of successively higher levels of school (secular schools for Pospos, Muslim ones for Radjab). As the remembered child graduates from one type of schooling to the next (and manages in both books to muddle his way through entrance exams and exit exams, by cramming his brain full of facts) each boy discovers larger realms of the social world outside his immediate parental household. In Radjab's case the home is quite complex, for his mother had died when he was an infant and the baby was forthwith shuttled between his father's niece, his assorted aunts, and his father's additional wives (Minangkabau Islam and adat allow multiple wives). By age six Radjab was living in the Muslim surau, or recitation school community for boys; there he was learning how to puzzle out and recite the Arabic verses of the Koran. A similar movement away from his natal household also took place at a young age in Pospos's recollected life. By age eight or nine, he had begun to board with relatives in little Toba market towns such as Balige so that he could have easy access to more prestigious schools than those available to him back home near Narumonda. Other similarities of