

Hearing Different Voices, Seeking Common Ground

by

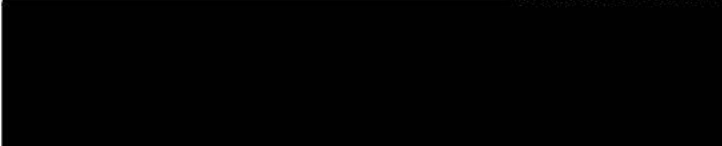
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We accept this thesis as conforming  
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ABSTRACT

Research in adult and distance education has indicated that women's participation remains problematic, particularly in countries where women are generally under-represented in post-secondary education. An example is the Indonesian Open University (Universitas Terbuka), where, in fact, women constitute approximately 20% of the overall student population. The central focus of the present cross-cultural inquiry is, therefore, hearing the voices of women students of Universitas Terbuka and seeking common ground with their experiences. This inquiry was conducted at a number of regional centers of Universitas Terbuka. The methodology of this inquiry was qualitative in nature, consisting of both semi-structured interviews with women students and reflective journaling by the researcher. The stories of the women students are interwoven with the story of the researcher conducting this inquiry. This produced a series of narratives of the lived experiences of both researcher and researched.

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Finally, and most importantly, I wish to acknowledge and honor every woman who shared her story freely and courageously with me, a stranger from a strange land. You each gave me your story and asked only for friendship in return. You invited me into your homes and into your lives. To all of you, I say, "Terima kasih banyak. Semoga semua selalu baik!"

## DEDICATION

To my family:  
Brian, Niall and Heather in Victoria;  
Auntie Mary in Wawanesa;  
Mom and Dad, Amy and Dru in Arizona;  
Dana, Janie, Lindsey and Aubrey in Kentucky;  
and my Grammas, Para and Hazel--my guardian angels.

Without your open and loving hearts,  
I could never have lived this experience.

**On Familiar Ground**

home ground  
standing my ground  
on my own ground  
both feet planted firmly on the ground  
from the ground up  
grounded in reality  
getting off the ground  
shifting ground  
losing ground  
moving to higher ground  
covering new ground  
cutting the ground out from under my feet  
giving ground  
going to ground  
breaking new ground  
ground-less  
gaining ground  
on firm ground

**an inch of common ground**

## An Introductory Context

Oh, it is so wonderful, so heavenly, to find feelings, ideas which are part of us  
and very dear to us, shared by others-  
and it is that which spins invisible yet strong threads from one heart to the other  
and brings us closer together than many years of association could!  
R.A. Kartini (in Cote, 1992, p.25)

The importance of education has long been recognized by women throughout the world. In the mid-19th century, Josephine Butler declared that the desire women have for education arises "from the conviction that for many women to get knowledge is the only way to get bread, and still more from the instinctive craving for light which in many is stronger than the craving for bread" (Butler, 1868, p.7). In the early decades of the 20th century, the English author, Virginia Woolf, wrote *Three Guineas*, which is an eloquent declaration of the legitimacy of a woman's experience of the world. In this book, Woolf argues that women's access to education was essential for their economic independence which, in turn, was essential for a critical intellectual autonomy in the world. Fifty years after Virginia Woolf's passionate declaration, Elizabeth Burge, Vice-president of the Women's International Network and an active participant in the International Council of Distance Education, suggested that, despite over one hundred years of formal distance education, "we confront the darkness of the unwritten experience of women as distance mode learners and educators" (quoted in Faith, 1988, p. vii).

In countries outside the Western world, the voices of women declaring the importance of education have also long been heard. It was at the turn of the century in Dutch-colonized Java that a courageous voice began to call for education for women. In 1900, Raden Adjeng Kartini, a young Javanese noblewoman, began to urge the Dutch colonial government to provide vocational education for the "native girls" of the islands now known as Indonesia (Kartini, translated by Cote, 1992). Since that time, much

progress has been made in improving the lives of women in Indonesia: women have more freedom, more educational opportunities, more equality. However, surprisingly little has been written in English about modern Indonesian society, in general; and even less has been written about women in Indonesian society, in particular. Locher-Scholten and Niehof (1992) suggest that, in academic research of the experiences and roles of women in society, "the steps that have been taken are merely the very first, and leave a great deal more to be done" (p. 1). This is especially true in the studies of Indonesian women, where research is still in the preliminary stages.

The passionate dedication heard in the voices of Kartini, Josephine Baker, Virginia Woolf and countless other women throughout the last century reveal the "great hopes education has aroused in the lives of women" (Kelly & Elliot, 1982, p. 49). To individual women, education has represented a possible means of escape from poverty and narrow horizons. Agnes Smedley (1929) writes movingly of such a quest in her fictional autobiography, *Daughter of the Earth*. To social and political reformers, women's education provided a means to ensure national independence and recognition by countering such social practices as child marriages and widow burnings. Kartini's writings give passionate testimony to her belief that education could free her beloved country. Impassioned opposition to women's efforts to become educated, although decreasing recently, continues to pay tribute to the power of education for women.

It was in response to these voices of women throughout the years and throughout the world that I undertook the present inquiry into the experiences and stories of women students of the Indonesian Open University, or Universitas Terbuka.

### **Women and Education Context**

It's interesting to get back [to school]. It's like you've lost,  
and you're going to regain what you've lost, by going back to school.  
Horsman (1990, p. 218)

Women are increasingly involved in all aspects of adult education. In the most recent, large-scale survey conducted in Canada, women were found to be far more likely to enroll in adult education than were men. In fact, according to Devereaux (1984), the majority (56%) of participants in adult education were women. While the majority of adult learners are women, they show very different enrollment patterns from those of men. According to Faith and Coulter (1989, p. 9), "female students...are more likely to select courses for general interest, with little confidence that their newly acquired knowledge will significantly enhance their employment or promotion opportunities". In the Canadian survey (Devereaux, 1984), women were found to make up 80% of the participants in leisure-activity courses but only 39% of those in courses which were job-related.

The high levels of participation of women in adult education have only increased in the decade since that 1984 survey. Miles (1990), for example, describes the "involuntary challenge women present to adult education just by being involved in formal adult education in such large and increasing numbers as social conditions and conditions of their lives change" (p. 247). This involvement continues to grow despite the obstacles women still face in accessing adult education. These obstacles include, but are not limited to, low incomes, little control over family income, low levels of employer support for job training, poor provision of child care and public transportation, lack of recognition of the knowledge and skills which women acquire in their unpaid family and community work, and course and exam timetabling which does not take into account the domestic demands and working day structures of women's lives (Miles, 1990; Matthewson, 1992; Phillip, 1993; Grace, 1994).

McLaren (1985) has suggested that, despite several decades of concerted effort on the part of many sectors of society to improve the status of women through education, there was "growing evidence that little had changed and that in some respects women's status had declined" (p. 151). McLaren is not alone in suggesting that adult education, despite its supposed interest in equality of opportunity, has been slow in responding to the interests of women. According to Miles (1990), in adult education in Canada, the "courses and curriculum continue to make 'ungendered' assumptions which ignore women and devalue their activities, and remain impervious to women's different learning styles" (p. 260).

Active concern about, and research into, adult education and the lives of women, although relatively new phenomena, have been the focus of a growing body of research in recent years (McLaren, 1985; Matthewson, 1992; Hayes & Smith, 1994). Hayes and Smith (1994), in an analysis of the perspectives taken in research on women in adult education, note small increases in adult education publications which focus on women and gender. They suggest that even these small increases may represent a step towards addressing the "omission and under-representation of women and women's concerns" in adult education (p. 202). A primary concern for Hayes and Smith centers on how this growing body of literature treats all women. In their review of articles from many perspectives, they found that little attention has been given to how race, culture, socioeconomic class and other factors might lead to differences in women's experiences and needs in adult education. Furthermore, they found that few articles focused specifically on racial or ethnic minority women, and even fewer on women in non-Western cultures and societies.

According to a number of researchers (McLaren, 1985; Miles, 1990), women's access to all forms of adult education throughout the world remains problematic. In the Final Report of the 1972 Unesco World Conference on Adult Education, concern was voiced for the "forgotten people"--that group of the educationally underprivileged among

whom "girls and women are often particularly disadvantaged" (Unesco, quoted in Bown, 1983, p. 41). In the two decades since that conference, a growing body of research has both documented (Kelly & Elliot, 1982; Faith, 1988) and investigated (Smock, 1981; Matthewson, 1992; Phillip, 1993) efforts to redress the inequality of access to education faced by girls and women throughout the world. Research on women in developing countries, however, has presented certain educational and cultural difficulties. Smock (1981) and Locher-Scholten and Niehof (1994) suggest that, in many cultures with ideals of female modesty, women are not easily accessible to researchers, especially male researchers. According to Smock, these difficulties may be lessened when female researchers conduct intensive, collaborative interviews with a small number of women participants. Despite these difficulties, a number of important researches have been conducted.

Smock (1981), in her inquiry into the educational opportunities and outcomes of women in developing countries, found that women's increasing access to education has allowed them somewhat greater options and possible improvements in their life prospects in comparison with less educated women. Even university training, however, does not necessarily eliminate sex differences in, and access to power, status, positions, and economic rewards. Smock concludes that education cannot be considered "a kind of modern-day magic wand" that can eliminate all gender-related inequalities and redress deeply-rooted structural inequities. Nevertheless, she insists that "failure to address the existing imbalances will relegate females indefinitely to a subordinate position in modernizing societies and the longer such disparities are allowed to exist, the less chance women will have of closing the gap" (p. 279).

In 1982, Kelly and Elliot presented a collection of the then current body of research on education and women in developing countries. This collection is oriented on the question of how education changes women's lives in the gamut of roles women must assume. They suggest that one important approach to research on sex differences in

education may be through tracing the effects of broad cultural patterns on women's access to education. This view is reflected in a number of researches (Smock, 1981; Adams & Bjork, 1969). Smock, for example, asserts that "the important subject of the interaction between cultural norms regarding sex roles and the development of girls' attitudes and aspirations regarding their education has been little researched" (1981, p. 95). According to Kelly and Elliot (1982), another important area virtually untouched by research is the effect of education on women's lives...in the family, as mothers, as individuals.

### **Women and Distance Education Context**

I feel like a big person internally.

Tongan woman distance education student, quoted in Crocombe, Teaiwa, Griffen, Va'a, Tuimaleali'fano, Schoeffel, & Toganivalu (1988, p. 161)

One area of research which has recently begun to address the issues surrounding education and women is in distance education. It is generally accepted that distance education widens access to educational opportunities for both women and men. In recent years, record numbers of students, including those in developing countries, have sought access to higher education through distance education programs (McIsaac, 1990; Bowman & Will, 1994). This is happening despite the fact that, according to Jevon (1987), distance education is still regarded by many as a "makeshift second-best alternative" to conventional systems of education (p. 15). Coulter (1989) proposes that, considering the fact that distance education is increasingly popular with women, the need to develop a "woman-centered understanding of distance education can be seen as an essential task for educators in that field" (p. 131).

The high degree of flexibility and individual control that distance education offers and the relief it gives from the twin restraints of time and location make it a most feasible option for those for whom campus-based education would be difficult, if not impossible.

This would seem to be especially true for women who wish to pursue an education while fulfilling their culturally determined domestic roles. Von Plummer (1994) suggests that there are two characteristics which are generally seen to render this mode of learning particularly appropriate for women by making distance education compatible with other spheres of life: "there is little or no attendance requirement, while at the same time, there exists a high degree of flexibility in learning schedules and time management" (p. 3). The "home-study" nature of most distance education has led to some feminist criticism of distance education as contributing further to women's isolation in the home. Coulter (1989), however, counters this criticism by citing research which has illuminated the material realities and limitations of the everyday lives of women (Luxton, 1980; Armstrong, 1984). For many women who are at home to raise children, distance education is the only way for them to balance their work in the home with the need to prepare to reenter the work force and/or with the need for an intellectual, outward looking activity. Another reason for women's participation in distance learning that should not be ignored is that, in some situations, home study allows a woman to hide the fact of her studies if the environment is nonsupportive or even, at times, hostile (Coulter, 1989).

It is my intention that the present inquiry add to the, as yet, limited body of research on women's experiences of distance education throughout the world.

### **Women's Participation Context**

Of all the women I mix with socially during the day, as far as I know, none are studying, or intend to study.

Distance education student, quoted in Grace (1994, p.16)

Research on participation, including deterrents and obstacles, is one of the most frequently studied topics in adult education. Most of the studies have employed survey research techniques in order to identify the characteristics and needs of both adult students

and potential students. In addition to gathering data on characteristics and preferences, many of these studies have focused on barriers or deterrents to participation (Kennedy & Powell, 1976; Rubenson, 1983; Cross, 1986; Hayes & Darkenwald, 1988; Garland, 1993; Deolalikar, 1993). Study after study reports the findings that more adults respond that they are interested in participating than actually do, that the primary obstacles are time and money, and that the more educationally and economically advantaged an individual is, the more likely that person is to participate.

In recent years, there has also been a growing number of studies which focus on women's participation in adult education in general, and in distance education in particular. These too have tended to be survey-based researches which have attempted to identify, quantify and rank the obstacles or deterrents faced by adult women in seeking education (Blais, Duquette & Painchaud, 1989; Scanlon & Darkenwald, 1984; Effeh, 1991). It is in the women's responses to open-ended or interview questions, however, that a compelling picture of the lives and experiences of these women become real. The response rate in many of these studies is much higher than usual for this type of survey research, often more than 75%, prompting one researcher to conclude that "women wanted to talk and to have their needs heard" (Phillip, 1993, p. 3).

Phillip (1993) conducted an inquiry into the participation of women in a distance education program at the University of Papua New Guinea. Although in many countries where distance education is available, the proportion of female students is close to half, Phillip found that the proportion of female students enrolled in the UPNG distance education program was approximately 20 per cent. Matthewson (1992) found similar figures at the University of the South Pacific (USP). Women in the Pacific Islands represent 51 per cent of the total population, but they only account for 30 per cent of the enrollees of the USP distance education program.

This phenomenon of the under-representation of women in distance education is not confined to developing countries. Although it is common for distance education

institutions in industrialized Western countries to have women constitute upwards of 40 per cent of the student population, in some "open universities", such as Athabasca University in Alberta, Canada, women make up the majority of the student population. It may be surprising, therefore, to note that Von Plummer (1994) found that the German FernUniversitat (FeU), or distance university, has a male-dominated student population with a proportion of women students of only 30 per cent. This under-representation in a mode of education which is generally seen to be particularly suitable for women led Von Plummer to attempt to identify those factors which contribute to such under-representation. These factors include, but are not limited to, the invisibility of women on the staff of the institution, the male-orientation of the course materials, and the complex nature of the responsibilities faced by women as wives, mothers, and distance learners (Von Plummer, 1994).

It is in response to such findings that Burge (1988), in her foreword to Towards New Horizons for Women in Distance Education, urges that a short-term goal of distance education research and practice needs to be a greater recognition of the experiences of women in distance education; in other words, there needs to be a "naming of the realities and problems" which may be peculiar to women studying at a distance (p. ix). It is my hope that the present research will make a contribution towards making visible the experiences of women studying at a distance, including the barriers, or obstacles, which they face and their strategies for overcoming those barriers.

## **Education in Developing Countries Context**

Schooling can be influential in societies where up to now the expectation has been that women's lives would be governed by the structure and precepts of the family, a feature that characterizes many third world cultures.

Smock (1981, p.5)

In recent years, adult education has gained national importance as an essential social service in the modern world, especially in the developing countries. A decade ago, Lowe (1983) asserted that, due to social, economic, and political changes, "the education of adults is perceived as a powerful instrument of innovation and adaptation, not as a frill but as a contemporary imperative" (p. 301). In many developing countries, however, national resources are scarce, forcing government policy makers to support adult education programs which are relevant to national development plans for increased economic production. Nevertheless, nation-building and development programs cannot depend on economic progress alone; it also requires the development of informed, knowledgeable, and involved citizens. There is often an additional need for national unity in those countries, such as Indonesia, which face ethnic, tribal and linguistic diversity. Almost a century ago, Kartini, an educational visionary, suggested that education could contribute to national unity in Indonesia. Today, adult education has come to be regarded by governments in the developing world as a viable method for achieving the twin goals of development and national unity.

In the modern era, however, governments of Western countries and developing countries alike have been forced to set and select their priorities. Lowe (1983) suggests that this process of setting priorities, and of asking the questions such a rational process requires, has had a beneficial impact on adult education in two ways: a) " it has made at least some economic and social planners aware of the untapped productive capacity of the adult population; and b) it has led some LDCs (lesser developed countries) to look at adult education as a key factor in national growth" (p. 302). In order to appreciate the direction

and present state of adult and distance education in Indonesia, a country with a very strong national growth initiative, an understanding of the Indonesian geographical and social-cultural context is needed.

### **Indonesian Context**

*A fundamental question about a culture is what kinds of lives its members are allowed to live.*  
Runyan (1986, p. 78)

Surprisingly little has been written in English about the kinds of lives people live in modern Indonesia. This is surprising, perhaps, because it is often through glimpses of the lives of ordinary people that cross-cultural understanding can be enriched (Williams, 1991). However, a picture of the unique physical and social-cultural environments, or contexts, in which these lives are lived is necessary to give meaning and texture to our understandings. It was, in fact, precisely those unique aspects of the Indonesian context which intrigued me and led me to the purpose of my inquiry, which is to make visible and evocative the lives of women studying at a distance.

Indonesia is a nation characterized by diversity. Geographically, it consists of over 13,000 islands spread over 2 million square kilometers of ocean. Demographically, its population of 200,000,000 consists of over 300 tribes with as many languages, and both matrilineal and patrilineal cultures. Although the state recognizes five major religions, including Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, 85% of the population follows the teachings of Islam (Indonesia Source Book, 1993).

Indonesia declared its independence in 1945 from Holland, after over three centuries of Dutch colonial rule. According to the new Indonesian constitution, men and women were guaranteed equal rights to employment, franchise, health care, political participation, and education (Hellwig, 1994). Despite these constitutional guarantees, on

Mother's Day, December 22, 1977, Indonesian newspapers carried articles which addressed the worsening educational chances, unequal pay and disproportionately high levels of unemployment faced by Indonesian women. In the 1990s, several researchers have found that, in spite of official emancipatory standards, the state continues to promote "housewifization", a policy which means that "women's primary role assignment as mother, wife and housewife has remained unchanged" (Berninghausen & Kerstan, 1992). Hellwig (1994) has defined the Indonesian term *ibuism* to be an ideology "which sanctions any action provided it is taken as a mother who is looking after her family, a group, a class, a company, or the state, without demanding power or prestige in return" (p. 200).

In a speech to the Indonesian people delivered on Mother's Day, 1984, President Suharto emphasized that women must be the keepers and transmitters of cultural morals and national values. In his speech, Suharto declared that it was the duty of women to filter the influences from other cultures which have recently begun to flood Indonesian society: to encourage positive elements such as self-discipline and industriousness, and to reject negative elements such self-interest and vanity (*Jakarta Post*, 1984). It is this duty of supporting and protecting the moral and intellectual development of succeeding generations that has been one of the state policy rationales for improving women's educational opportunities in Indonesia.

Studies conducted in recent years, by both Indonesian and foreign researchers, have been unanimous in their findings that women's educational levels remain significantly lower than men's (Manderson, 1983; Bendesa, 1990; Berninghausen & Kerstan, 1992). The demand for equal education for boys and girls has been slow in manifesting itself in the consciousness of the people. This is reflected in the official statistics that "only 2.9% of all Indonesian women, compared with 5.7% of men, complete a secondary education; only 0.2% of women and 0.7% of men complete a professional education" (Berninghausen & Kerstan, 1992). There is also a strict cultural norm which mitigates against higher education for women. This norm dictates that a man would never marry a woman who has

more education than he has, because he would be afraid that he would be dominated by a woman of superior intelligence (White & Hastuti, 1981 in Berninghausen & Kerstan, 1992). Despite this strong incentive to forego higher education, the voices of Indonesian women continue to acknowledge their desires. Berninghausen and Kerstan (1992) report the words of a young, rural Javanese woman, Ibu Mati:

Ever since I was little, my dream was to go to a higher school and become a teacher like some of my other friends, but my parents wouldn't let me. My father said that, as soon as a woman can write her own name, she doesn't need to go to school any more, and that only boys were allowed to go to higher schools. (p. 52)

As part of the Indonesian government's policy of improving access to higher education for all of its people, the Indonesian Open Learning University, or Universitas Terbuka (UT), was established in 1984 (Setijadi, 1987). At that time, only a fraction of the qualified applicants could find places in the 800 government and private universities. According to Dunbar (1991), "the formation of UT was seen as the beginning of a golden age of tertiary education opportunity: low cost, high-quality university study for a vast constituency of adult learners" (p. 164). Although women were not a specifically targeted population, it is well-accepted that distance learning is a mode of education particularly well-suited for women. It is interesting, therefore, and somewhat surprising to note that, ten years after its establishment, Universitas Terbuka presently has a female student population which makes up approximately 20% of a total enrollment of over 300,000 students (UT Computer Center, 1995). This fact alone warranted an inquiry into the experiences, perceptions, and obstacles of those Indonesian women who are seeking higher education through Universitas Terbuka. It is my hope that the present inquiry will provide a glimpse into the lives and experiences of these women of Universitas Terbuka. In addition, my inquiry may provide important information for the administrators of UT about the ways in which Universitas Terbuka could be made a more "women-friendly"

distance education institution. Finally, my inquiry will serve as a further contribution to the nascent body of research on women in Indonesian society.

### My Context

I too am a woman  
in distance education at Universitas Terbuka...  
not as a registered student  
but in the process just the same.  
I spend countless hours listening to Universitas Terbuka...  
I read, re-read and read again countless stories about Universitas Terbuka...  
I dream it, I see, hear and smell it.  
As I conduct my inquiry,  
I am truly *in* it...  
I speak the language of Universitas Terbuka,  
I am with the people of Universitas Terbuka,  
I live within shouting distance of it,  
I listen to women tell me of their experiences,  
dreams, perhaps nightmares of it...  
Oh yes, I too am a woman in distance education at  
Universitas Terbuka.

Carol Marie (Mimi) Harvey

### In What Ways?

*Many of the things that are taken for granted in the West just do not work here. I must be flexible and creative in fitting the requirements of Western academia to Indonesian reality. (August 20, 1995)*

The present study followed from previous research which suggests that women are faced with a particular constellation of barriers in studying at a distance. These barriers derive from the personal, social and material conditions which circumscribe women's everyday lives (Grace, 1994; Coulter, 1989; Von Plummer, 1994). In this earlier research, women's perspectives have been sought on the experiences, the opportunities and the problems that distance education presents them.

*Qualitative research can reveal much about the unique qualities of participants' lives (usually a relatively small and homogeneous sample); it can also hinder the revelation of the breadth and diversity of human experience (Fonow & Cook, 1991). Qualitative (feminist) research has unarguably enabled the accumulation of data in a number of areas of importance to women's experience. It seems to me, though, that all too often, the tapestry of women's experience that is being woven is missing the patterns and hues of the lives of women of other cultures, classes, and colors. (March 14, 1995)*

Shulamit Reinharz argues that the "paucity of case studies of women's experiences hampers our ability to engage in cross-cultural or comparative analyses of women's lives and organizations. Yet cross-cultural research is a necessary design if generalizations are to be produced that are not ethnocentric" (1992, p. 166). Research which focuses exclusively on women students of the Indonesian Open University (Universitas Terbuka or UT) had yet to be conceived of, much less undertaken. I designed the present study to make visible and evocative the stories and experiences of these women.

*Here is a good question for contemplation: if I had ever imagined in my wildest dreams just how hard this was going to be--I mean the whole*

*package: research, living, separation—would I ever have even for one moment contemplated doing it? (August 22, 1995)*

This section describes the research process of the present study which was designed to explore the experiences of women students of Universitas Terbuka. The selection of methodologies, or processes, in research is generally based on the kinds of information sought, and from whom and under what circumstances that information will be sought (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). The kinds of information I sought in this study were the subjective interpretations provided by the women's own definitions, descriptions and explanations of their experiences. Dunbar (1991) suggests that "the phenomenon of human communication through channels other than the immediate and direct is historically new in Indonesia" (p. 168). Indonesian women, as well as men, overwhelmingly prefer direct, oral communication, most often in an atmosphere of sociability.

*My thoughts and assumptions about how the interview process would go have been, if not transformed, at least drastically altered since my arrival here in Indonesia. In order to have the interview process go forward smoothly, and in order to obtain in depth information, I will need to be much more 'structured' in the interview situation than I had envisioned myself being. The cultural tradition of saying what the respondent thinks the interviewer wants to hear, combined with the inexperience of Indonesians in general and Indonesian women in particular, with stating their personal opinions or feelings about anything would make a completely unstructured, open-ended interview next to impossible to conduct so as to obtain anything revealing or evocative. (August 30, 1995)*

For these reasons, I chose to use semi-structured interviews to gather data on the lived experiences of the women participants of my study. This research strategy is consonant with that body of qualitative research in the field of education in which attempts are made to move beyond quantitative, psycho-metric approaches to research with student populations by exploring the phenomena of learning in the context of the students' personal, social, emotional, and mental experiences and environments (Grace, 1994).

I planned for the study participants to be able to talk in their own language, and with someone with knowledge and experience, both in their own country and culture (albeit as an "*orang asing*", an outsider, or foreigner) and with Universitas Terbuka, their distance education university. I hoped that this approach would facilitate an atmosphere of "women talking" within their usual cultural norms and with a comfort level which would encourage an interactive style of interviewing. The seminal work of Oakley (1981) on the relationships involved in the interviewing of women by women has given rise to considerable discussion of the notion of interactive interviewing. There has been little written, however, about the experiences of researchers conducting cross-cultural research about/with women.

*There is this nagging feeling that what I am doing is not 'cocok', not 'right' in some way. I feel strange talking about writing about the experiences of women in Indonesia. I am haunted by the writings of Oakley and Alcott (1991) on interviewing women and speaking for others. I think I will feel more confident when I actually have the words, the expressions of the women themselves. It is possible for me to know. It is possible that my interpretation will be evocative of the lives and experiences of the women I will be listening to. I must strive for deeper understanding. (February 22, 1995)*

An important issue which permeated the study was my own personal experience of conducting cross-cultural research "at a distance."

*I have been reading the only English language resource book I have been able to find here in Indonesia, a book called A Curriculum of Being by Berman (1991). I suddenly realized that I have, in some ways unconsciously, created a "distance learning" situation for myself in my research. I am here far from my university. I have no access to the great library facilities available to my fellow graduate students on campus in Victoria. I have little or no access to my supervisor, Larry, or my 'mentor', Antoinette. I have little in the way of materials for my research--just what I was able to bring in my already heavy bags. I must do the research (studying, learning, decisionmaking) completely on my own. I am living the experience of distance education--and it is tough--it is fraught with frustration and feelings of isolation--it is hard to stay motivated--it is full*

*of difficulties and obstacles which generally have to be faced alone. So, unwittingly, I have created for my research into women studying through UT a lived experience for myself of "studying at a distance". All my struggles which I have recorded are part of the experience, are part of the study, are mirrored in the difficulties and joys faced by my respondents in their struggles to study at a distance...so I must continue to record my efforts, my frustrations, my confusion, my isolation with my research—it is my research. (September 30, 1995)*

This issue encompasses one of the guiding tenets of qualitative research methodologies: that the reflection of the researcher upon her participation in the research is, indeed, valuable data. From this reflection process, not only can we gain insight into the data provided by the participants but also we can add to our knowledge of the use of research methods which rely heavily on intersubjective relationships (Dyck, Lyman, & Anderson, 1995; Fonow & Cook, 1991). Stanley and Wise (1993, p. 59) have suggested that:

All human attributes are brought into the research situation by researchers, are inevitably brought into it, whether this is library research or research "in the field"...It is this which we argue must be made explicit within feminist research. We believe that the way to do it is to make the "researcher" and her consciousness the central focus of the research experience. We refer to it as the "research experience" because we see it as an experience like any other, not as something different, special or separated-off through the adoption of special techniques such as objectivity.

In exploring both the experiences of Indonesian women studying at a distance and my own experience of conducting cross-cultural research at a distance, I understand "experience" to mean taking "real life as the starting point, its subjective concreteness as well as its societal entanglements" (Fonow & Cook, 1991, p. 66). I view subjective experience, both my own and that of the women I interviewed, as a process which denotes both our realities and our histories. My own subjective experience was documented in a research journal which, through self-reflection and perspective sensitivity, chronicles my journey from the initial planning stages through the period of fieldwork and data collection

to the telling of the stories. The stories of women learning "at a distance" in Indonesia will, thus, be interwoven with my story as a Western woman researcher also learning "at a distance" in Indonesia.

One of the ethical issues which must be confronted by women doing cross-cultural research is the balancing of respect for the women participants and respect for the various cultures involved in the research (Reinharz, 1992).

*I have been wrestling with the whole issue of one group imposing (or colonizing) their 'insights' and their values on another group. I am thinking of the various reactions I have encountered in describing what it is I am interested in researching. The reactions have, for the most part, been very different here from those I encountered in Canada. The majority of the women here do not question why I would want to study only women students. The men, except for one, all question why. This has made me think long and hard about the 'colonization' process. Am I part of this process? Are Western women, convinced of the truth and enlightened state of their position, attempting, in a way, to colonize the rest of the world? If so, what part am I playing in this process? Where do I stand on the globalization of women's rights, women's issues? Is this solely a personal interest which happens to fit a body of research in Western countries? I think that I have always recognized that the (essentially) Western concepts of feminism do not necessarily fit every situation/culture/society. Of course, it is a very complex issue here as it is everywhere. Those with extreme views just do not seem to recognize this complexity.*

*Most important for me is that I attempt to provide an evocative picture of the experiences of the women students of UT—how they go about studying through UT, and why. What sense do they make of it, what meaning do they take from it? I want to do more than just scratch the surface with the interviews I hope to conduct. I say hope because Ratna (my close friend and UT-assigned research team partner) is having trouble relinquishing her beloved quantitative methodology. She keeps asking me questions like: 'What are the variables? How can you get a representative sample? Why don't you send out 300 questionnaires to every regional center in Indonesia?' We in the 'developed' parts of the world have the luxury to move away from statistics and quantitative methodology towards less 'practical' modes of inquiry. Here, there is such an unrelenting drive towards 'Perkembangan dan Pembangunan' (development for economic*

*progress), that sometimes I almost feel embarrassed to describe my study. Do I feel a responsibility to UT? If so, what sort of responsibility? How can I determine what will be of use to them? How could I possibly know whether my research will be of great, little, or no use to UT? I already must believe that this is a worthwhile undertaking--for me, for my women participants, as a contribution to greater understanding of women's experiences, as a contribution to knowledge of the ways in which women live their lives...in a developing country, in a different culture. These are all beliefs I had when I conceived this study, and ones which I continue to hold even in the face of all these questions about why I would want to hear only women's voices. (August 18, 1995)*

After confronting the difficulties of accessing female distance education students in an island nation, I decided to attempt to meet potential participants at the various UT regional centers, although I acknowledged the possibility that I would, thus, be more closely identified both with the university and with the mantle of authority that would imply. I attempted to balance the power dynamics inherent in such a situation by carefully explaining to each participant both my personal and long-standing involvement with the staff of Universitas Terbuka and the fact that, although Universitas Terbuka was "sponsoring" my research for bureaucratic reasons, it was my own research.

*I am a bit conflicted about how much of my study is being 'co-opted', but I guess what I have to come to terms with is that I just would not be able, in this culture/society/country, to obtain enough data or even to arrange for participants without including others in the process. The important issue is that the manner, the method, itself not change too much. It must always be my inquiry. It is perfectly reasonable to work within the requirements of the 'powers that be' here in Indonesia...as long as the inquiry continues to feel like my own. (August 24, 1995)*

Most of the women I contacted were very interested (curious might be a better word) in the research and were eager to participate. For the most part, there was little hesitation about being part of my study.

*The women students I have talked with seem genuinely pleased to meet me, to be interviewed. Several of the women have been very clear before the interview even started that they wanted it to be more than just that*

*particular interview; they wanted to become friends. I think that there are few opportunities for women to get direct information about life in other countries and these women have such enquiring minds...they really want to know. I really hope I will be able to visit them in their homes, or, at least, that we may meet again. (September 13, 1995)*

I did encounter some resistance to the research from a small number of participants. This resistance took the culturally-acceptable form of initial agreement to be interviewed, then either refusal to fill out a personal data form or short, ambiguous answers during the interview. Thus, in some cases, my necessary identification with the government (in the form of Universitas Terbuka) mitigated against the free and open interchange I had hoped for; the macropolitics of doing cross-cultural research in a country where the government controls both access by foreigners to its population and access by its population to sources of information other than state-generated. However, the complexities of the micropolitics of research were such that, in many cases, more detailed, intimate stories were offered.

*In listening to the first interview tapes, I am struck by how earnest my respondents are in their efforts to understand my questions, my sometimes less than fluent Indonesian language. They manage to understand what I am trying to say even when I am not sure that I understand myself! (September 4, 1995)*

Five regional centers of the Universitas Terbuka were included in the study. In all, 25 women students of Universitas Terbuka were interviewed. All of the interviews took place at the regional centers since that was the easiest and least time-consuming method of contacting potential participants. However, this decision had an effect on the length of time each participant was willing, and many times able, to make available for the interview as most of the women not only live great distances from the regional centers but also have jobs and family responsibilities. Although I planned to interview the women more than once, the realities of both my situation in Indonesia and the physical environment of the women's lives precluded a second meeting in all but one instance.

*I have been reflecting lately on the difficulties which, it seems, face everyone in Indonesia. There are a myriad of such real barriers to what is, in other countries, a rather simple matter of getting from one place to another. Even when the distance is not great, the difficulties always are. I have been having dreams of being unable to get where I wanted/needed to go. Logistics here are really a nightmare and it is reflected in my dreams. To go anywhere requires so much thought, planning, negotiation and re-negotiation that I am exhausted before I even start on what is often a long and tiring journey to go a relatively short distance. No wonder people here are malas (reluctant, or lazy) to go anywhere. Anyway, I am beginning again to wrestle control of my environment. The alternative is that I begin to feel powerless and constrained to the point of intense anxiety as my dreams reveal. So I continue to try to find ways of doing what it is I need to do; but I can not believe how much energy it is taking. (October 31, 1995)*

As I was required by my sponsoring university to use UT regional center staff as intermediaries between myself and potential study participants, I would upon arrival at a particular regional center explain the purpose and focus of my research; and the nature of the women's participation to the (always male) director of the center (the *Kepala UPBJJ*). A letter describing the study and the sponsorship of UT, both in English and in Indonesian, was provided. Although there was considerable incomprehension (and oftentimes, suspicion) around the focus of my study being exclusively women students, all of the directors seemed eager to help me in any way they could.

The 25 women who agreed to be participants in my study ranged in age from 19 to 49 years.

*Today, I learned from Ari that there is an age limit for entry into state universities—no one over the age of 22 is allowed to enroll for the first time. This means that for women (and men, for that matter), the only choice after age 22 is either a very expensive private university, or... Universitas Terbuka. (September 2, 1995)*

Three of the five state - recognized religions were represented: Islam (17), Hindu (6), and Catholic (2). There were fifteen married participants (all with children, ranging in number from 1-5), nine single participants and one separated participant (with children).

The number of women who were employed was 17, compared with 8 who were unemployed. According to the latest statistics available from Universitas Terbuka (1995), approximately 87% of the female student population of UT is enrolled in the Teacher Education Faculty (FKIP). Not surprisingly, 10 of the 17 employed women participants were either school teachers or elementary school principals. The majority of Indonesia's present elementary school teachers graduated from the no-longer existent teacher training secondary school programs. They are now required to upgrade their education through Universitas Terbuka in order to have any chance for promotion or salary increases. The Indonesian government has undertaken several limited projects to sponsor a small number of teachers to take this upgrading diploma II from UT. However, the vast majority of teachers are being forced to pay for this upgrading out of an extremely meager salary of about \$90 CAD a month.

*I went out to a village about 90 kilometers outside of Yogyakarta today where I met a woman who is in charge of the tutorial program for the conventional teacher training program in that area. Conventional meaning that the students pay by themselves. She described for me the typical day-to-day life of the guru (teachers) who attend the tutorials. She said that the biggest problem for them was time. The students have to get up at 3:00 in the morning to get any homework done before they must take care of their children and husband. By the time they finish the household chores at night, it is too late and they are too tired to do any studying.*

*After this description, we piled into a Kijang (minibus) and ended up in this kampung (neighborhood in rural villages). The house of the guru we had hoped to meet (and I had hoped to interview) was an extremely simple wood structure. I could see inside the house when the woman's son opened the door. It was very dark--a swept-dirt floor, a single, small wattage bulb for light, and extremely poor furnishings--by anybody's standards. Unfortunately, the guru had not yet returned from school. Bu Ponyhem said that teachers are so poorly paid that most of them try to teach private tutorials after school hours to make ends meet. (September 8, 1995)*

As my research journal documents, I planned this research with a determination to put into practice the methods of many feminist social researchers (Oakley, 1981; Alcoff, 1991; Finch, 1984). These methods aim to create non-hierarchical, non-manipulative interview relationships. Feminist researchers who have adopted this participatory method posit that the best way to find out about women's lives is to endeavor to make the interview an interactive experience (Cotterill, 1992). My determination was sorely tried by the difficulties I faced once I actually arrived in Indonesia and began to collect data. These difficulties stemmed both from my own situation and from situations imposed by others and the environment. For example, although I was able to converse freely in Indonesian, I sometimes had trouble understanding the dialects (and often, the slang) of the women I interviewed. This difficulty meant that occasionally the interviews would be rather stilted and I found I sometimes missed a chance to follow up on a particular comment.

*This upstairs room is not the best setting for interviews and I am not in the best frame of mind to do them. Maybe I should call it a day and try again tomorrow or Wednesday. It is kind of like playing catch, though—I want the last one to be a good one. Funny how my language skills are so tied to my state of mind and state of emotions. I felt like I could not express myself today. Also, I had difficulty understanding the Javanese dialect of the women I interviewed this morning...very frustrating. (September 18, 1995)*

Other practical difficulties were imposed by the physical environment in which I often had to conduct the interviews.

*I arrived at the regional center (UPBJJ) at 10:30 this morning, a bit earlier than expected. I felt hot and sweaty from the long bus ride and from the walk from the bus stop. Hot and sweaty enough to assuage, or overwhelm, any nervousness I might otherwise have felt. I sat on the wooden bench in the open hallway for a few minutes just to rest, get the dust out of my eyes, and mentally prepare myself for the interviews. Bu Yeti, the UPBJJ staff member assigned to help me, then led me to the back where the tutorial room was located. It was a huge classroom with wooden chairs—must have been more than one hundred all together—a blackboard*

*and two desks at the front. There was no glass in the windows and little birds kept flying in and chirping all throughout the interviews.*

*There were also four people having some kind of discussion in the corner which, unfortunately, may have obscured some of one of the interviews. After two interview sessions, they left. About that time, a truck pulled up right outside the glass-less windows and began noisily unloading heavy furniture. I am not yet sure how audible the tapes will prove to be. (September 11, 1995)*

### Vagabond listening...

being radically open to the sounds which abound,  
times of vagabond listening come,  
unbidden, out of synchronicity...

when there is overpowering need to hear,  
the radical openness is easily found  
from soulplaces long forgotten...

isn't it ironic that to be radically open  
to whatever voices may sound forth  
compels mind-lessness of self...

to break with the unrelenting tyranny of time,  
hearkening the possibility of understanding  
to simply be in the listening...

Carol Marie (Mimi) Harvey

*It is early, the sky is just beginning to blush with the approach of dawn. The call to prayer insinuates itself into my dream state. Soft shir-shirrings of tropical birds in towering date palm and heavy-laden papaya trees provide an everchanging melody line for the mysterious, plaintive human beseeching. Chirruping lizard voices join in syncopation. The whispering whirr-click, whirr-click of the ceiling fan begins to lull my mind back to sleep. Ahhh, too late for that...the sleepy, smiling voices begin to echo back and forth in quiet greetings: Assalamualaikum...walaikumsalam...as men and women shuffle through my consciousness on their way to greet both the new day and their God. Chirring-chirring...the bicycle bells clear the way for the sellers of delicacies with which to quiet the growls of hungry stomachs.*

*I rise to join the symphony, padding noiselessly to the washing room. As there is no roof, the splashes of the water from the bucket bath, which is the way to bathe here, are accompanied by the splashes of water being tossed upon the ferns and flowers which quietly riot outside my room. As I step outside my door, the crescendo of life washes over me and I eagerly enter the music. As I move to the beat, the clip-clop of horses' hooves keep time to the rhythm of my steps. Bells hanging from harnesses provide a jangling refrain. The soft entreaties of the doe-eyed food vendors tickle my*

*ears, even as the tendrils of aromas tickle my nose. As I walk on, every man, woman and child calls to me gently, "Selamat pagi, Bu, selamat pagi" (Peaceful morning, my lady, peaceful day). The music of a new day begins.*

## Whose stories, whose voices ?

Finally, stories are powerful research tools. They provide us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems. They banish the indifference often generated by samples, treatments, and faceless subjects. They invite us to speculate on what might be changed and with what effect. And, of course, they remind us of our persistent fallibility. Most important, they invite us to remember that we are in the business of teaching, learning, and researching to improve the human condition. Telling and listening to stories can be a powerful sign of regard--of caring--for one another. (Witherill & Noddings, 1991, p. 280)

*Surely there is much to discover when we put our stories next to the stories of others. (April 26, 1996)*

In the following pages, there are women whose voices will tell their own stories, and there are women whose voices will tell their stories in chorus with my own. In some ways, of course, all of the women's stories must be told in my own voice as I must act as translator as well as interpreter. But I believe that, to a greater or lesser degree, each and every researcher finds it necessary to become both a translator and an interpreter, acting as go-between for the storyteller and her audience. Just as each and every reader finds it necessary to interpret these stories in her own terms, seeking her own sense which may be very different from mine. There is no right way to hear these stories; I am saying, "this is what I heard; this is what it feels like to me."

I trust that I have provided an accurate rendering of each woman's voice, each woman's story. I take some assurance (comfort?) in the words of an old *Ibu* (mother, woman) from Kalimantan, the mother of a close friend. "You really do sing our language, Mimi", Ibu Kesuma told me, her smile a maze of wrinkles framing laughing eyes. High praise, indeed! I know, however, that each listening ear takes its own interpretations from the stories it hears. My Indonesian friends, and UT-appointed research partners, provided listening ears to ensure that the translations of the interviews were as accurate as possible.

In the end, though, I alone take responsibility both for my translations of the women's voices and for my interpretations of their stories.

Using subjective vision in my research may mean that I have produced a different type of presentation for understanding my experience than other methods might have. This may result in different pathways of expression, but I trust that these pathways will have their own coherence and themes, and that they will have a form that is truthful to the extent that they faithfully express my experience as observer. My experience includes not only the stories of the women I interviewed but also the story of my inner life: my dreams, my metaphors, my sense of how it was for me to be there, to hear what I heard, to attempt to relate all of this to the reader.

My own story will be told in my own voices: my voice in the preparation, my voice in the process, and my voice in the present. There are other voices which must also be heard for they too were part of this research. The voices of administrators, teachers, friends, friends of friends...all part of the experience of my research.

## Our stories, our voices

### Indonesia

#### Bu Mimi

*The woman wakes to the many calls to prayer which echo through the growing light. She untangles her sweat-slicked legs from the sarong she uses to protect her feet and legs from nyamuk (mosquitos). As she glances blearily at her legs, the woman sees that once again neither the obat anti-nyamuk (anti-mosquito medicine) nor the sarong have been successful in fending off the tiny but effective attackers. She sighs and pushes her sticky hair off her steamy face and slowly rises from the sleeping mattress which rests on a woven mat on the tile floor. Outside the window, another cloudless day is just beginning. Already the men with the foodcarts are singing out their offerings--"Bubur Ayam"---"Roti"...each has his own distinctive call or horn or knock and already the woman has learned to recognize each call in time to run out and buy whatever she is hungry for.*

*Despite all the possibilities, at five o'clock in the morning, the woman is never hungry--only thirsty. After gulping down half a liter bottle of tepid water, she realizes it is time to fill the waist-high tub in the kamar mandi (bathroom) so that she and her roommate can mandi soon. She pads silently in her bare feet to the back of the house where the water pump sits in the corner. It is easy to make her way in the early morning darkness as there is no other furniture but the sleeping mattress and several moving boxes which serve as counters for the "kitchen area".*

*Once the woman steps off the ceramic tile of the main living area to the area at the back of the house, she flips on her sandals and the familiar slap-slap of sandal against brick echoes through the small house. The water pump must be primed each time the tub will be filled. As the woman pours the brackish water into the pump, she wonders again when the water will become less yellow, and better smelling. While the pump is beginning to work, she gathers the plastic buckets and pans that she and her just awakening roommate will use to carry the water from the back washing area to the kamar mandi to hurry up the process of filling the tub. Back and forth they go with the buckets of water until the tub is filled to the brim--it takes all of that to clean off the night's accumulation of sweat, dirt and dust. Before she bathes, the woman goes from door to door, unlocking each and checking to make sure there is no one inside. The gaping hole in the roof of the kamar mandi is worrisome--someone could climb up on the roof and get into the house that way--but it almost impossible to get someone to come and fix it. She and her roommate have*

*already been waiting for more than a week for the light sockets to be repaired so that they can have a light in the kamar mandi. Until now, they have used a candle in the bathroom, but she is worried because, even though her hair is shorter now, she is not used to bathing this way and might catch her hair on fire. Maybe later today someone will come, she hopes silently.*

*All around can be heard the sounds of the neighbors rising and bathing—a baby begins to wail next door and the woman can hear the curious, lovely melody of her friend's morning worship of prayers to Allah coming from the combination study-prayer room. After her prayers are finished, the woman's friend turns on her small radio. It is all she can use if she also wants to use the lights in the bedroom because the total wattage for the house is 450 watts. A new kind of music fill the rooms, a music mixing traditional Javanese gamelan and pop music—the woman thinks it sounds odd, but not unpleasant.*

*As it is now her turn to mandi, the woman gathers her soap, shampoo, and towel and steps carefully onto the wet tiles of the kamar mandi. The kamar mandi has a floor toilet like most toilets in Indonesia. She wonders when she will ever figure out how to use it efficiently—she muses that it is something that is never included in any orientation. The pail intended for use in cleaning one's self after going to the bathroom is floating in a plastic tub of water at the edge of the toilet. As she fills it with the brackish water in the tub, she remembers wistfully the soft white toilet paper she used in Canada.*

*To begin her mandi, the woman fills the pail and pours the water over her body. She gasps as the cold water hits her feverish skin, but the coolness of the water soon becomes refreshing and she pours pail after pail over herself. She never brushes her teeth with this water, however, as that is a sure way to become sick. The woman thinks to herself that there are so many ways to become ill here and she feels a stab of apprehension for she comes from such a clean country that she is rarely sick and then usually it is just a cold. She reminds herself for the hundredth time to wash her hands often and never to use anything but boiled water (air putih) to brush her teeth.*

*Her mandi finished, the woman begins to prepare breakfast while her friend/roommate takes her mandi. She leans over the small packing boxes which serve as kitchen counters and table to mix the coffee powder, milk powder and sugar in two glasses, adding tepid water from one of the*

*thermoses she filled last night after boiling the water for thirty minutes on the kerosene stove. She is glad that her friend from down the street brought over steamed bananas last night because all they had besides those bananas were two cheese buns which she had bought from a seller who passed by the house. Without a refrigerator, it is not possible to keep any food around--except for crackers and powdered drinks. If they are unable to find a way to get to the supermarket, or if they are too tired after the workday, they must make do with what they have on hand.*

*The woman and her friend sit on the mat to have their breakfast. Already the slight breeze of early morning has disappeared and she notices the drops of sweat already accumulating on her upper lip. "Kasih (the poor thing)", her friend says, "it must be difficult to try to become used to the heat of Indonesia". The woman smiles encouragingly at her friend's concerned face and tries to reassure her that she is cukup enak (comfortable enough).*

*While eating breakfast, the woman remembers the walk they took the night before to try, unsuccessfully, to use the telephone on the corner of the next block. They do not have a telephone--few of the woman's Indonesian friends do, as telephone service is very expensive and, despite the expense, there is a long waiting list to obtain a line. On that walk, she noticed just how many cats and dogs there were roaming the lanes, eating garbage, dodging people and cars, and getting into fights. For her friend, it is just part of the world she is immersed in. The woman can't help thinking of all the clean, pampered pets back in North America.*

*The woman comes out of her musings when her friend reminds her that the university van will soon be stopping in the narrow lane in front of the house to pick her and her friend up to go to work and there is still much to do. She first pulls the plug on the tub in the mandi--if the water sits all day it seems that there will be even more nyamuk than before and, besides, she hates to see the scum that settles on the water over the course of the day. She takes a cup of boiled water out to the washing area and squats carefully in front of the drain to brush her teeth. She glances up to see her friend carefully hanging her night clothes of long cotton pants and T-shirt on the shaky clothesline. They must wash their clothes this weekend when they have enough time to scrub them on the washing board and rinse them over and over again until they are clean. After hanging them on the line, it usually takes only one day for them to dry completely--at least now, in the dry season. It is such hard work that they try, despite the heat, to wear their night clothes all week without washing. The clothes they wear in the daytime must of course be washed after each wearing. The woman thinks*

*that it is lucky that clothes are relatively cheap here because she needs to change often in order to stay clean, dry and relatively comfortable.*

*While the woman dresses, she watches her friend, dressed in a long-sleeved white blouse and long gray skirt, carefully adjust her djilbab (veil) to ensure that none of her hair is showing. The woman finds herself wondering yet again how any woman could bear the intense heat of Indonesia, covered from head to toe with only her face and hands showing. Her friend chooses a beautiful pin she bought in Canada to add a bit of color, and then carefully locks the doors to the almost empty rooms of the house. The van arrives, already crowded with co-workers and the woman and her friend squeeze in for the hot, noisy ride to work.*

*The ride to the office is filled with gossip and rumors but the woman usually cannot follow the rapid, slang-filled conversation. Instead, she daydreams of her air-conditioned Honda and the almost empty streets she travels to get to the university in Victoria. Upon arriving at the office, she parts from her friend (who must use a machine which uses her handprint to keep track of her arrivals and departures from the office. Another friend has called the open university an "intellectual jail"). The woman goes straight to the desk which has been made available for her use while at the university. She will work there from 8:00 am until 4:15 pm when the van leaves to take everyone back home. It is a long day but at least the office she uses is air-conditioned--not many of the offices are.*

*Lunch is ordered in from a near-by warung (small food stall) and eaten at the desks. It is too hot and uncomfortable to go out to eat. The food is good, and very cheap--around \$1.00 for a complete meal. The woman usually tries to eat as much as she can at lunch, because the heat takes away her appetite later in the day and she can rarely eat in the evenings. Keeping healthy is a daily struggle--to eat and drink enough, to get enough sleep, to keep clean and comfortable. Despite everything, the woman feels relatively good most of the time. Nights are the worst times for her--the heat makes sleep difficult and eating almost impossible, the fatigue is so great that she cannot rest, the mosquitos are infuriating, and thoughts of home and family and the time remaining until she is reunited with them overwhelm her. During the day, she can usually stay busy enough and comfortable enough to distract herself.*

*After arriving home from work, the dishes from the previous night's meal and from breakfast wait along with any clothes that will be needed for the next day. Washing clothes is a long and tiring job. The woman remembers*

*the night before when she scrubbed clothes from 6:00 pm until 9:00 pm. First, the water pump had to be turned on and primed, then the large plastic basin filled with water and detergent and scrubbed clean of the rust from the water. The woman thinks ruefully of her rust-stained clothes and wonders why she always has to learn things the hard way. After the basin was clean, it had to be refilled and detergent and clothes added. Each piece of clothing had to be scrubbed by hand or with a washboard for a long time to ensure that all the dust, sweat, and dirt were removed. After a while, the woman's hands and arms became wracked with cramps from the rigorous action of scrubbing.*

*After every piece had been scrubbed, there remained the arduous process of rinsing out all the detergent and wringing out as much water as possible. The woman thinks that it is lucky that she had been working out with weights for so long before she came to Indonesia, otherwise she would never have been able to wring out enough water so that her clothes would not mildew before they dry completely. The back courtyard of the house is laced with clotheslines and by the time the woman had finished her laundry, it was filled with hanging clothes. Last night, the woman could not bear to think of the task of ironing all those clothes when they had dried. She just stumbled through the darkened rooms and fell onto the bed. She was too tired even to arrange the fan so that it would cool her during the hot night and thus she woke this morning feeling sweaty and stunned.*

*On nights when she and her friend still have the energy to do so, they spread out the sleeping bag on the mats and lay across it so that they can share the reading lamp they bought together while they work. The woman works at recording her feelings, impressions, and reflections about her experiences here in Indonesia while her friend struggles to translate her thesis from English into Indonesian. In order to get credit for her work and study in Canada, she must submit a translated version to her university. It is always difficult for either of them to stay awake and usually they give up trying by 9:00 p.m. and head off to their shared bed.*

*Early this morning, as the woman faced another day, she thought about her topic, the difficulties and barriers Indonesian women experience in studying through distance education, and she had to laugh ruefully. For her, the difficulties of just living, not to mention trying to conduct research on the difficulties faced by women studying through distance education, were almost more than she could handle. Her whole perspective on difficulties and barriers was beginning to be transformed by her experience of living in Indonesia. (August 16, 1995)*

## Bogor

*Just riding out a wave of panic. It almost seems that the issue is the possibility of doing cross-cultural research—especially qualitative research. It just crossed my mind that I should just do up a questionnaire and mail it out. Of course, I cannot do that but it seems that it might be more 'possible' in the sense of being easier to actually do. How I, as woman, wife, mother, student, researcher, friend and, let's be honest, as a member of a race which colonized Indonesia for centuries, how I am in this research is important. The other, the 'planned', curriculum just keeps slipping through my fingers at this juncture. Each experience is new and unique. The curriculum of this research is, indeed, lived experience. It seems possible that parallels of my own struggles with work, study, and relationships will show themselves in my interviews with the women students of UT. (August 10, 1995)*

## Cicih and Desti

Cicih suddenly leaned closer, looking furtively around the empty classroom. "You know," she whispered urgently, "my friends and I have to pay extra here at the regional center. We must pay extra to the invigilator of each exam. We pay for the transportation costs of the tutor each week. We pay extra for the teaching practicum. And then, we pay Rp 150,000 for graduation when we finish!!" In her indignation, Cicih had let her voice rise out of its whisper and, realizing this, she suddenly glanced around the room again before continuing. This gave me a chance to exchange surprised looks with my research partner, Ratna. I could see from her consternation that this was a revelation to her as well. The students who were sponsored by the government were supposed to have all their fees paid directly to Universitas Terbuka Central Administration in Jakarta.

Cicih began speaking again. "Not only that but sometimes I don't receive the study modules, or they aren't complete. The module materials for semesters 4 and 5 weren't complete. So I have to borrow the module from a friend. It is just written material, you know, there are no tapes to go with the written material. This really is an obstacle I have faced in my study here at UT."

Cicik was a young elementary school teacher who was studying at UT for her Diploma II through one of the government-sponsored upgrading programs. She was also, rather unfortunately, my first study participant. I say unfortunately because, as I was soon to be reminded over and over again, the lived experience of my research would be punctuated time and again with serendipity (or unpredictability, depending on perspective). Since I had only been in Indonesia for two weeks, I had planned to accompany Ratna and Agung (my other research team partner and close friend) to the regional center in Bogor, a hilly suburb of Jakarta, primarily to observe the examination process. As I was still living within my own culture to some extent, I did not prepare for the unexpected and, thus, found myself interviewing Cicik with little preparation to do so.

*It has been several days since I was sort of thrown head first into the interview process. Time to reflect...for not being at all prepared to do any interviews that day, I am surprised at the amount of information I was able to obtain. I only stumbled my way through a few questions in each interview--I had only Ratna's rough notes to work from! I am amazed that I did not run screaming from the school. Luckily, my participants were quite willing to talk to me, eager to answer my questions. I found myself wondering, however, if Cicik would have mentioned the extra charges if I had been there by myself. All in all, it was a good experience and I think I would have been really nervous if I had known ahead of time. As it was, I just dove in and did the best I could. Still, I feel like that guy in the Greek or Roman myth pushing the rock up the hill--except I am pushing my own sorry butt up the never-ending hill. But wait, it is not 'never-ending'...in fact, I can declare that I have reached the summit whenever I feel like I have!! That is an encouraging thought. (August 20, 1995)*

Teetering together on an old wooden bench outside the regional center in Bogor that same day, my second participant and I strained to hear each other clearly. Desti struggled to understand my less than fluent Indonesian, made worse by my nervousness and lack of preparation, and the less than ideal setting. I struggled to even hear her whispered, hesitant answers to my questions. "I am an elementary school teacher studying for my Diploma II. I am not sponsored by the government to upgrade, so I must pay by myself--130,000 rupiah a month--which is really difficult on my family's income. My

husband and I are both teachers and our salaries are quite low," she breathed in my ear. "Although my husband supports me, we must help each other if I am to succeed. I can't afford a pembantu (domestic help), you know. Students here must have a really strong desire in order to study through UT. Like me, I am a teacher, a wife and a mother...the biggest obstacle, besides the cost, is finding time for all my responsibilities!" Desti's quiet voice could not hide the strength of her emotion. Although her face was framed, and partially hidden, by the Muslim *djilbab* (veil) she wore, her eyes were both animated and fierce when they met mine.

In many ways, the two women I interviewed so unexpectedly that day in August were representative of the majority of the women students of Universitas Terbuka. They were school teachers (*guru*) who were required by the government to upgrade through the Diploma II program at UT. Although there are approximately 100,000 women teachers studying for the DII, the majority must pay for the upgrading themselves (Statistik Universitas Terbuka, 1995). One of my participants was not part of any sponsored program and the other was sponsored. This, then, was my first experience of how my own, and others', expectations would not be fulfilled.

Although one woman was sponsored and the other not, both responded similarly to my question about obstacles they faced in pursuing their studies through UT. They both answered that one of the biggest obstacles was cost. For Desti, the tuition of Rp 130,000 per month came out of an extremely tight household budget. Both Desti and her husband were *guru SD* (elementary school teachers); their combined monthly salaries would be around Rp 450,000. Cicih, who was sponsored through one of the government-funded projects, said that she "already wanted to continue my education but I didn't have the money." She, like Desti, responded that the costs were an obstacle. The difference was that Cicih was, in essence, paying for services which were in excess of the 'official' tuition.

*Strange experience this afternoon. After the two interviews, Agung, Ratna and I went to another school where the end of semester exams were taking*

*place. I was able to observe the exams in progress. There were no windows in the classrooms and the noise level seemed impossibly distracting to me, but the women and men taking the exams seemed oblivious to it. In the hall were at least a dozen children and several husbands. One woman came out and took a bawling infant from her husband's arms and carried the baby back into the exam room to breastfeed while she wrote her exam. Several other women would go out in the breaks between exams to feed their children and take them to the toilet.*

*As we were leaving, Agung told me to watch carefully. After saying goodbye to the head of the school, we suddenly ducked into another classroom. I quickly looked around and saw groups of four and five students pouring over answer sheets and carefully filling in their own. Agung began quite angrily to lecture both the students and the invigilator about their lack of *ketulusan hati dan kejujuran* (honesty and integrity). The deal was that the invigilator who was a local teacher hired to proctor the exams had sold the answer key to the students who were themselves teachers. Agung was shaking with indignation and frustration. Later I listened to him tell of many such confrontations—cheating is endemic, he says. I thought to myself that sometimes here it seems like cheating, or corruption, is systemic. On the other hand, the cultural norm of *gotong-royong* (cooperation) might be at work in a situation where people work together on an exam. It is very difficult to be outside one's own culture and remain non-judgmental. It was, however, Agung who was so outraged so maybe I am erring on the side of too much cultural relativism. Don't I believe that there is common ground, some universals which transcend cultures?? (August 20, 1995)*

Jakarta

*The other afternoon, as we were stuck in endless traffic, I listened to Ari explain for me the way to take an angkutan umum (public minibus) where I might want to go. I heard this bright, worldly woman tell me that the only way to do this was to just get on one and see where it goes. It made me think about the way things are so unpredictable here. People just seem to live their lives with few definite expectations. If you want/need to go somewhere, or do something, you just try one way--if that doesn't work--you try another way, or you don't go where or do what you planned, or you wait for something else to happen. Things often do not get done because they are so difficult to get done. I keep hearing over and over from my Indonesian friends that I just have to accept (terima) what happens. This philosophy of "ngerimo" (an ancient but still prevalent 'lifeview') infuses all of life--at least here on the island of Jawa.*

*I have listened to many people, both men and women, tell me that Indonesian women are not used to giving, or being asked for, their opinions. My own impression is that there is, generally speaking, little reflective thinking being done by anyone here. This impression is reinforced by the fact that this is a culture of receiving, valuing the individual's ability to "terima" (accept). I have heard a great deal of talk, both in conversation and in more public forums, about "nasib" (fate) and "kesabaran" (patience). In fact, that may be the most oft-repeated advice I am offered: sabar, sabar, Mimi!! (Patience, patience!!). One result I have observed is that people here generally seem to "accept", rather than "consider" or "question". To be honest, sometimes I find that I lose patience with such attitudes. (August 24, 1995)*

*Talk about patience...Pak Djalil, the Head of the Research Institute of UT, was talking with me earlier about access and opportunities for Indonesian women to obtain education. He said that there was no problem with access and opportunity for women. I told him about a recent piece of research I had just dug up that explored the low rate of participation by Indonesian women in educational seminars and trainings--not only low numbers of women attending but also low rates of actually speaking up during the seminars. He said it was women's own inherent attitude of inferiority which kept them from accessing education and from contributing their views in the public arena. He then dropped what sounded like a bombshell to my ears. "I don't know why women don't speak up more. We men love the sounds of women's voices--they are very pleasing to our ears." Now what do I think of that? (August 25, 1995)*

*I am waiting for my first "anticipated" interview here at the main campus of UT in Jakarta. I found myself wishing for some index cards-it is impossible to find them here! This is just one of the unanticipated difficulties of attempting to conduct research in a different world. It is a bit of an uncertain process without access to "mentors" such as Larry and Antoinette (my committee members) and, especially, Harv (my partner). I am going a lot on my intuition and on my preparation before arriving here. I have never done this before-how could I expect to know exactly what to do? This process will allow a growth both personal and professional which is not measurable in terms of how the interview process goes, how fluent I am, how many questions I am able to answer. It is only measurable in the confidence I have in the process, the knowledge I gain, the insights I am able to reach.*

*It feels as if I have reached a plateau in this climb. It has been an uphill struggle-fighting vines which entwined themselves around my arms and legs, my heart and mind; climbing against a landslide of emotions, unable to see clearly, unable to measure my progress, taking one small step to find a toehold--only to slide back down the mountain. It has felt that there were no resting places, no places in which to catch my breath, to recognize my surroundings. And then...last night, it seemed as if I had come upon a, if not familiar, at least recognizable place in which to rest awhile. It felt like I had discovered a climbing technique which was not such a struggle against nature but a way of moving with my environment which was more natural. I found that I could take off my protective gear and feel safe. I began to feel that I was moving with life here instead of struggling with it.*

*I have been waiting now for 2 hours for my potential interviewee to arrive. So much for getting all keyed up. It will or will not happen. Seems possible that this interview just won't take place today. I am a little dismayed at a sensation of relief I feel--I guess I am still a bit nervous about the interview process. Probably pretty normal--but I will have to work on these feelings as it will be up to me to arrange for interviews when I leave Jakarta. Whoops, here goes...it seems that there is a mahasiswa (university student) who is willing to be interviewed. (August 31, 1995)*

The main campus of Universitas Terbuka sprawls over many acres of land reclaimed from the jungle, on the far southwest edges of Jakarta. It is a long, hot walk to the Student Activities Building at the back edge of the campus. This building houses all

the tutorials which are offered at this campus and also any other activities which require a huge barn-like space. The actual tutorials take place in open rooms along the edges of the auditorium. There are student desks and a whiteboard in the classrooms. Out in the foyer, informal study groups meet wherever there is space. The offices of the tutors and the tutorial coordinator are jammed tight with desks and are filled with the sounds of telephones ringing, people talking, students discussing, and typewriters clacking. Much of this tide of sounds filters through the thin walls into the tutorial classrooms, often making it difficult to hear the tutor's voice.

*As I was preparing, nervously, to begin my first 'planned' interview earlier, I thought to myself that this really was not an ideal setting in which to try to have any kind of conversation, much less a research interview. The lack of privacy seemed, however, to affect only me. I did notice that both Budi and Reni looked around and lowered their voices when they wanted to say anything even faintly critical of UT. It is difficult to find privacy in a country with 200 million people who believe 'to eat or not to eat, it is being together that is important.' (August 31, 1995)*

Budi

My name is Budi, which means level-headed in Indonesian. I'm 24 years old and live at home with my parents here in Jakarta. I'm in the eighth semester of my undergraduate degree in Management here at Universitas Terbuka. You see, when I graduated from high school, my parents offered to send me to school wherever I wanted. I said, "I think I will go to UT." The tuition is cheaper and the style is more flexible, freer for me. And I could pay for my schooling myself from my earnings from my dance studio. That is why I am studying business management, because management is needed for business. I have a dance studio in my house...so I wanted to know how to manage my business so that it could grow. This is why I am studying Management; I want to know how to attract more customers. Management can also be useful for everyday life because it is logical. For example, I have learned how to manage the money, for salaries and other things.

I chose UT because it is great for me; I like it. The style is more flexible-you can study anytime, attend tutorials, talk with classmates. But you must have the desire and the spirit because studying at UT requires total patience. Even if a woman works, has children and wants to take classes at UT, she will make it if she has the desire. In my opinion, there really are no stupid people, just people who do not have enthusiasm and desire. If you have enthusiasm and desire, you can certainly succeed.

The thing is, when I first heard about UT from my older sibling's friend who was an UT student, I thought, "How hard can it be?" It turns out it is really difficult. Students here must be active learners; they must be very diligent in digging for answers from the tutors. It is the students who must really be active here, not the professor or the tutor. I attend the tutorials once a week but it is really difficult even to do that, you know Bu Mimi, because I must divide my time between teaching dance and studying my course materials. I must get up at three or four o'clock every weekday. That's the way it goes.

The biggest obstacle I face here at UT I would say has to do with the exams. If a student is taking the maximum credits in a semester, that means she could face four exams in one day. Usually this is impossible, because a human's brain is limited in its capacity to memorize, to remember all that information. If it happens that there are three or more exams in one day, one's brain can be overwhelmed or just too tired. It is like that with studying at UT; it is a real challenge. We have to be brave enough to face a lot of risks.

My parents have become quite supportive now that they understand that UT is a state university. You know, I pay my own tuition-more than 300,000 rupiah, including the modules. I had already prepared beforehand and now I don't have to worry. I have it all planned out. I will take my comprehensive exam in the early part of 1997 because I want to take a diploma in computers at a private technology institute after I finish here.

*Insha'allah* (If Allah wills it), it will all happen.

Some of my friends don't know much about UT yet. I tell them the quality of the education really depends on the students themselves; if we are really active, yes, maybe we

can be successful. That is one of the disadvantages of distance education--it is difficult to ask questions. Often the modules are full of typographical mistakes and we don't realize this if we can't attend tutorials. No matter what, the tutorials are the most important advantage. We would have to form our own study group if there were no tutorials. Now I attend tutorials here at Pondok Cabe twice a week.

If I had a friend who wanted to come to UT, I would want her to be really sure. Because if she wasn't sure, what about when it gets difficult? We must be creative and active here. We have to be self-disciplined or we won't be successful.

There are two things that UT really needs to provide for its students. First is a library where the students can find supporting materials to compare with what is in the modules. Also, a computer room. Actually, there is one but everyone is afraid to use it because if the computers are somehow damaged, there is no one, no money to fix them. The library and the computer room are two things which we really need.

Despite these obstacles, you know, I think the quality of the education is good here. I am really proud to be able to study here at UT. For me, my time is not tied up, I can make my own schedule. But I must decide beforehand just what my priorities are--with the dance studio and my studies. I must put my studies first. I must finish this year, I must. I can't really say that I am satisfied with my experience here at UT --just half satisfied because I am not yet finished. If I were already finished with satisfactory grades, if I had already reached my target, yes then I could say I was satisfied.

Reni

"You see, I wanted a better education than my parents had--they are both in the army and we never have enough money. There are six of us kids, you know, so my parents have not been able to put aside enough money for tuition to conventional state or private universities. Anyway, that's why I am here at Universitas Terbuka." Reni, dressed in jeans and a T-shirt with her ball cap fashionably turned backwards, grinned confidently at me as

she talked. When she paused to take a breath in her headlong rush to tell me her story, I tried unsuccessfully for the third time to close the door to Pak Armen's office. Failing that, I resigned myself to a steady stream of curious people wandering in and out. Reni, of course, appeared totally comfortable with the crowded, clamorous environment and, with little prompting from me, began her story in rapidfire Jakarta slang.

"I am just 19 and already in the third semester of my *sarjana satu* (bachelor's degree) in Business Administration," she offered proudly. "I heard about UT from my older sister's friend and, when I found out that it was cheaper and I could work at the same time as I study, I said that's for me. Of course, it is not possible to find work with just a high school diploma...but if I could find work, I would be able to study at the same time and at my own speed."

Reni stopped talking abruptly and leaned towards me, the grin gone from her face. "But, you know, it is really tough studying the modules all alone. I always try to attend the tutorials here at UT and, usually, my friends and I have an informal study group that meets right afterwards. You know, Mrs. Mimi, sometimes, if there are other activities scheduled in this building, we arrive to find that there are no tutorials!! This is really a problem for us because, you know, it takes much longer to finish here at UT than it does in a conventional university."

As I listened (and struggled to understand her *Bahasa Betawi*, or Jakarta slang), I was struck with how different Reni was from the two teachers I had interviewed in Bogor. Reni was just out of high school and doing what she wanted to do for her own future. She seemed to really enjoy her study at UT. When I asked what her feelings were about being an UT student, she replied, "Oh, I am *bangga sekali* (very proud) to be an UT student because UT is what my parents can afford to give me!" Despite the differences, though, she shared with my teacher-participants in Bogor the common obstacles of the cost, the unpredictability of tutorial provision and module availability, and the difficulty of finding the required self-discipline .

*So, I begin to hear hints of that common ground I find myself listening for, seeking to find. In Bogor, Cicih complained that the only thing in the 'libraries' in the regional centers is a photocopy machine on which the students can copy modules if/when they don't receive them. Reni mentioned that one of the obstacles was that the modules often don't arrive in time...meaning before the exam. There are, for all practical purposes, no library facilities available to students at any of the UPBJJs. The librarian here at the main campus tells me that UT previously used the Perpustakaan Wilayah (district libraries) for its students but that these libraries have now all been consolidated into the National Library and are unavailable for UT use.*

*Well, as Dad often reminded me, anticipation is always greater than realization...in this case, realization was easier than anticipation. I feel pretty good about the way the interview went, although there were so many distractions! An interesting perspective Reni gave--which makes it even more disappointing that somehow the tape recorder was shut off towards the end of the interview. It was a good lesson for me; I will be more careful in the future and I will continue to take written notes, just in case. All in all, though, a valuable experience. (September 1, 1995)*

## Yogyakarta

Yogyakarta is considered the cultural center of the island of *Jawa* (or Java), if not of all Indonesia. From Jakarta, it is twelve hours by train through brilliant rice fields, towering palm trees, brooding volcanic mountains and tumbling river ravines. Yogyakarta is home to the Kraton, the palace home of one of the few reigning Sultans left in Indonesia, to Gadjja Mada University, one of the oldest universities in Indonesia, to Jalan Malioburo, one of the most famous shopping streets in all Indonesia, and to the UPBJJ-Yogyakarta, one of the largest regional centers of Universitas Terbuka.

*The night train from Jakarta to Yogyakarta was fairly uneventful (for any trip in Indonesia). The air-conditioning was broken, the windows wouldn't open, the lights went out six times, I left my water and food supplies at the station in Jakarta, and I missed the pillow man (and my knapsack makes a lumpy substitute). As it was unbearably hot on the 12 hour ride, I had plenty of time to reflect on my first month of lived research.*

*It is good that we humans do not possess the ability to see into the future. In facing an unknown future one month ago, I clung to the present comfort, support and loving familiarity of my own family, my own culture and my own life. If I had know what the first four weeks were going to be like, wild horses would not have been able to drag me away. I would have promised anything just to forget the whole mad plan. As I said at the start, it is a blessing that we do not possess foresight.*

*What about hindsight? How has it been? How is it? What have I accomplished in this first endless month? First, it has been the most difficult struggle of my life--no, that is not true, but it ranks right up there on the difficulty scale. It has also been triumphant--each minute that I did not give up, pack my bags and Amex a one-way ticket home has been a triumph of my spirit. Each step I have taken on this journey has required a deliberate act of will.*

*How is it now? Some of my steps are easier; some come more naturally. Sometimes I can even forget that I am stepping! This is good--my poor willpower needs a rest. I have a routine. I feel like I am not always an outsider. I have even learned to get all the soap out of my underwear when I hand wash my clothes. I do not sweat quite so much. I still cannot speak*

*of my family without tears welling up in my eyes and my throat; I can, however, control the pain now when I think about them. I am feeling more confident about the interview process. My language continues to improve and I have, more or less successfully, conducted several interviews here in Jakarta and in Bogor.*

*What have I accomplished in these first four weeks? Well, I have arranged to get my visa extended (Insha'allah), developed my interview guideline in both Indonesian and English, read and made notes on dozens of articles and dissertations in Indonesian, written dozens of pages of journal entries, conducted two surprise interviews in Bogor, attended a wedding, prepared for and conducted an interview here in Jakarta, lived with friends here and learned how to do this, attended Hari Merdeka (Independence Day) celebrations at President Suharto's palace, and broke my glasses and figured out how to get them fixed. Besides all that, I have managed to stay both physically and mentally healthy. Quite enough for one month--only eight more to go!! There seems to be general confusion about which regional centers offer tutorials--I had naively thought that that bit of information would be fairly easy to come by. It will be interesting to find out, if I can find out. What will I do to contact potential participants if there are no tutorials? I have given no thought to this possibility.*

*I am still testing my perceptions about the apparent lack of reflection on experience amongst the Indonesians I know and have met. Is this lack of reflection because life is so hard, so filled with unchangable difficulties and frustrations that a person could not go on if she reflected too deeply on them? I could give dozens of examples but I think the most telling "evidence" of this mindset is that everyone is always telling me I think too much, I worry too much, I plan too much. What will this mean for my research? The speaker at an "Education for the 21st Century" seminar the other day was talking about the need to educate Indonesians to be more problem-solving, more creative...in so many words, more reflective. (September 3, 1995)*

*I think what I wrote last night about reflection is, well, worth reflecting on. Maybe I came here expecting to hear how people, especially women, in a different culture make meaning of their lives. But perhaps what I really wanted to hear is how do I? Can I make meaning of my experience of doing, learning, living alone at a distance from my family? I wanted to hear my own life's composition. How am I composing my own life? A solitary instrument is capable of making a wonderful sound, but a number of instruments playing together can be breathtakingly, achingly beautiful.*

*In re-reading my first month's journal, two issues continue to present themselves: the physical context and the socio-cultural context. The obstacles evident in these two contexts seem, at this point, to be far more immediate than the other admittedly daunting barriers which are present. Institutional barriers are so staggering that it seems pointless to even begin to chronicle them. As for situational barriers, so many of the women students of UT are in the mandatory upgrading program that their situations appear to be quite similar. They are all working teachers with the same subsistence salaries, almost all married with children (societal pressure to marry and have children remains quite strong in Indonesia) and the majority are Muslim. I am not so sure about dispositional barriers—although the culture at large places emphasis on conformity and group behaviors, the range in individuality appears to be greater than expected. (September 4, 1995)*

Pak (Mr.) Eko

*Today I started refreshing my Indonesian at Realia, the Indonesian language institute in Yogyakarta. It turns out to be a good place to meet people as well. I met an artist friend of the director. According to the director, his friend's wife wanted to take some courses at Gadjja Mada University here in Yogyakarta. It seems, however, that they already have two small children and so the artist melarang (forbid) his wife from leaving the house and the children to the pembantu (servant) to take these courses. He did consent to let her take some UT courses 'untuk mengisi waktu saja' (just to fill her time). I did not know this when I met and talked with Pak Eko. (September 4, 1995)*

I am a Javanese artist. I have spent many years doing works of art about the suffering of women in Indonesia. I have lived in the *desa* (village) and talked with many women who live and work as farmers. My own parents-in-law are *petani* (farmers). I have given them many books to help them improve their minds and broaden their thinking. But their lives are so hard, especially the women. Seven days a week, they must rise at dawn, wash clothes, cook food, go out to the fields until sunset. There is often little electricity in the village, so people just work, talk, and go to bed exhausted. There is no time for studying, no energy.

Many of the village women I have talked to say that they are happy with their lot in life. If they can raise their children and serve their husbands, they are happy. Maybe they

do not know that there is any other way to live, any other possibility. Maybe there is no other possibility. Most men I have talked to still consider that there is man's work and there is women's work. They feel it is below them to do women's work. Religion has a great influence on the relationships between men and women, and also on women's status in life. Maybe it is not the fault of the men as much as it is the fault of the system.

Pak Kris

*Today my guru was Kris, a young undergraduate student at Gadjja Mada University. He seemed eager to tell me about his family, and he also seemed rather bewildered by the changes in his world. (September 7, 1995)*

I grew up in a family where my parents shared in the housework and both had jobs outside the home. I now think I was lucky, but then I just thought this was normal until I reached junior high school and met friends whose mothers did not work outside of the home. Then I suddenly felt that something was missing from my home. I felt I had been cheated in some ways and lucky in others. The neighbors always say that my father gave my mother too many opportunities; it always surprises me when I hear this. My older sister is always angry with my parents. She always says, "It is not right for a man to do women's work." On the other hand, I am worried about these new radical feminists here in Indonesia. I am afraid that there will be a backlash and women will end up worse off than they are now.

*Many people, including my guru today, seem to be concerned about the new group of radical, very vocal feminists in Indonesia. They seem to be afraid of a backlash--a real fear, I agree. Everything here is immediately politicized. The official delegation from Indonesia to the Beijing conference has been spouting figures and percentages pointing to the success of the development process. It seems to me to be an attempt to deflect interest from the real issues. In addition, the NGO women are trying to focus the attention of the media on human rights issues concerning women in Indonesia, particularly in East Timor and Irian Jaya. The official delegation insists that the progress of development is naturally raising the status of women in Indonesia.*

*It is a very dynamic period for Indonesian society. Many issues of 'development' are being pursued relentlessly. One of these issues is the equality of women. Possibly because of the World Congress in Beijing, there is far more talk and there are far more articles than I have ever before heard or seen here. It is really a perfect time to be here. It will be interesting to see if the fervor about women's issues will die down in the media after the conference. I feel that the data I gather from informal conversations and observations will contribute greatly to the context in which the women's voices will be heard. Both internal and external contexts must be woven into the composition of the experiences of the women I am interviewing. (September 6, 1995)*

*There were less than a dozen articles about women's rights issues in the newspapers from the end of the conference until today, the day I am leaving Indonesia. (April 27, 1996)*

The UPBJJ in Yogyakarta is located in a warren of buildings on the grounds of Gadjaja Mada University. As it is one of the "showcase" regional centers, it has undergone, and continues to undergo, a great deal of expansion. During the three weeks I spent in Yogyakarta, I never saw any sign that the new classrooms were being used by anyone.

*After my Indonesian language classes this morning, I took the bus to the UPBJJ-Yogyakarta at Gadjaja Mada University to see if I could meet Pak Isa, a friend of a friend (I find I must use any connections I have). Instead I found myself being ushered in to meet the kepala UPBJJ (director of the regional center), a Pak Soeharto. He seemed genuinely eager to help me and when I explained what it is I hope to do, he said it could easily be arranged. I have a good feeling about being here...I think it will work quite well. (September 7, 1995)*

*It was funny yesterday. I felt very reluctant to just drop in at the UPBJJ. I felt that I would feel awkward, that my language would be inadequate, that I would meet with the same sort of incomprehension that the focus of my research would be women only. I also felt that no one would know what to do with me. But I went right ahead and went. I just got on bus 7, rode it to a spot opposite the path to the UPBJJ, walked in and introduced myself to the first UT staff person I met. Makes me reflect again on the question of why, for certain people, barriers (or obstacles) are not experienced as such, but rather as difficulties which must be, will be overcome. It will be interesting to hear if my experience will be echoed in*

*the experiences of the women I hope to interview here in Yogyakarta.  
(September 8, 1995)*

Ibu Sum

I am studying for my *sarjana satu* (B. A.) in accounting at UT for personal reasons because in Indonesia now there are restrictions on promotions for civil servants. So besides my own desire, it is important for my government position, for helping my career. Now the reason I am studying here specifically is that, as a civil servant, my time is limited. If I study at UT, I can study in my free time, in the afternoons so that neither my work nor my family are bothered. You see, I am married and I have two small children, 9 and 2 1/2, so I am *sibuk sekali* (really busy). When we were living in Jakarta before, I chose UT because it suits the life of a civil servant. If I need to move to accompany my husband, I can still study through UT. I can continue to add to my knowledge as well as further my career.

My life is quite busy. I have very little free time at the office because I work for the tax department. At home, there are the children and my husband to take care of, so usually I have to study late at night after everyone else is asleep. Although my husband, like all Javanese men, doesn't help me with domestic duties, he does support me in other ways. For example, if I don't have money to buy the modules, he helps me borrow the materials. And, as long as the family does not suffer in any way, he doesn't mind if I put aside money for tuition from the household budget he gives me. Usually, I am able to do some extra work and put aside that money so that my studies are not a burden to my family.

I am really proud to be a UT student because this way I have the opportunity to increase my knowledge. Even though I am already old like you, I am still able to study. I never could before because of money problems. One thing I wish is that I could attend the tutorials, but my days off from work are Saturday and Sunday and the tutorials are never held on those days. So, if I run into difficulties, I must ask my friends who are also studying at UT, or friends from other universities. Actually, because my friends and I live

in a rural area, it really is impossible to get help from the regional center, it is so far away. So my friends and I formed a study group and we ask for help from friends who have already taken the courses. My husband's friend already has a degree and he often explains to us how to study and offers us his theories for making the studying easier.

What would really make things easier for students like myself is if the tutorials could be organized at least at the *wilayah* (district) level. This would allow those of us who live far from the UPBJJ to attend tutorials. As it is now, we can not attend even one tutorial! If there were even some kind of branch offices where students from several districts could have some face-to-face communication; we could receive information, attend lectures, that sort of thing. Because that is a problem, a difficulty for those of us who really live in the *daerah* (rural areas)...the lack of face-to-face communication.

And since you asked, there is one more thing which would really be helpful for us students. In the rural areas, we don't have enough reading resources. If we want to buy some books, it is expensive. In the city, you know, there are libraries and second-hand booksellers. We want to read, we want to buy books, but they are so expensive. So we formed a book borrowing club with friends who have already taken the courses. The real obstacle is books, study resources. Since many people are sharing just a few books, we only can absorb maybe 75%. The problem is our available time for study collides with the time left in the semester. After registering for the courses and searching for materials, often there is not enough time left for mastering the material before the exam period. That is the main obstacle; that and the lack of libraries in the isolated rural areas. It sure would make it easier on housewives and working women like me if UT would make library facilities available.

Probably that is not a problem in Canada. Maybe your research could show a comparison between here and there so that we could have some improvements here. So what are the obstacles for women studying at UT in Canada?

*Up at five to work on transcribing the interviews from yesterday. Alhamdulillah!! (Praise be to God!!) I just finished translating and transcribing the first interview--only took me (groan) ten hours. But I am feeling much more confident now. The first trial by fire of conducting four interviews in one day and actually coming away with great stories of these women's experiences has made me feel giddy. I know this high probably will not last but I will enjoy it while it does. Except for the occasional Javanese phrase, the transcribing and translating is not as difficult as I feared. At least I am finding this to be the case with one particular woman, Ibu Suminten. I found myself feeling really drawn to this woman during our interview. Maybe it is because we are so close in age--she is only a couple of years younger than I am. I noticed too that she always answered "kita" (we) to questions about herself--somehow that made me feel more included in her experiences. Or maybe it was because she tried so hard to help me when my language and/or tongue just would not do what I wanted. She also asked me all about the situation in Canada--so intensely curious about how other women were living their lives--our common ground of interest.*

*Already I seem to be hearing echoes of common experiences. The barriers, as I knew before in a relatively 'removed' way, are everyday reality for these women: the obstacles of time and money, women's multiple roles, lack of materials, the real difficulty of studying alone. The overarching barriers inherent in a tropical, still developing country seem to be invisible, or perhaps a better description would be taken-for-granted, in the women's stories. But, to my ears, the common ground also lies in the efforts all of these women make to find ways over, under, around, and sometimes through the obstacles they face. They get up in the early morning hours to study, they form study groups, they form book-borrowing clubs, they share modules, they even work together on their exams! I feel a real kinship now with these women as I too expend enormous amounts of energy in finding ways to overcome the barriers I encounter in my research. (September 12, 1995)*

### Malu

Malu is a 26 year old married woman who lives in a village rather far from Yogyakarta.

"Do I have to fill out this personal data form completely?" I heard these quiet words as I was frantically trying to recreate my first interview of the day. "Great way to start!", I was thinking ruefully to myself. "My first participant doesn't want me to tape

the interview and now this one doesn't want to fill out a simple basic information sheet!" Behind my irritation, I knew that, if I were truly committed to a free and open interview method, I would have to honor each woman's wishes. Somehow, however, I had not ever really entertained the idea that anyone would refuse to be tape-recorded or be reluctant to give me any information about herself. This may explain why my heart sank when I looked up and saw my next interviewee standing shyly in the doorway.

Marshalling all the grace I could at this point, I replied, "Just fill out the parts you are comfortable with. *Tidak apa-apa* (no problem)." As I listened to Malu answer my first question, I felt even more discouraged. "I wanted to study at UT so that I could increase my knowledge and understanding of the complicated contemporary situation in Indonesia...the social problems, the political problems," she said these words as if she had carefully memorized and rehearsed her answers beforehand. I proceeded with the interview, attempting to make a connection but feeling that I was not really hearing what Malu was saying.

"I enrolled here at UT because the tuition is lower here than at conventional universities and because there are no attendance requirements. Most important to me is that I take care of my home, my kids. I must take care of my husband, my responsibility as a mother. Then there is work. After I finish my work, well...maybe I rest awhile and then study." Malu spoke hesitantly, often nervously clearing her throat and looking around.

Soon after the interview started, her answers began to come out abruptly and almost grudgingly. Malu did continue to answer my questions, however, despite her obvious reluctance. I felt more and more that she was only being "*sopan*" (polite). Although this was only the fourth interview I had conducted in Indonesia, both her manner and her answers left me feeling confused and dissatisfied. At first, I tried different approaches to find some way to connect with her. Rephrasing an earlier question about obstacles, I asked Malu whether she found it difficult to study independently. Her answer came unexpectedly, "If I say it is difficult, it is difficult. If I say it is easy, it is easy.

Basically, it is just so-so." I felt rebuked, as if Malu thought that my topic, in fact, my whole research project was trivial.

In the end, I found myself struggling just to get through the interview and I thanked Malu for her cooperation with mixed feelings.

*One thing I have not yet really learned is to deal with life here as it comes. By this, I don't mean to just passively "terima" (accept) everything that happens, but to just meet the challenges, big and small, which each moment here presents me. By big challenges, I mean things such as actually doing this research: living here alone, making all the decisions with no one with whom to consult, decisions both big and small. Like this morning when my interview with Malu just did not seem to be flowing at all. I just wanted to tell her that it was okay, she did not have to answer any of my questions. I felt like saying that I had no right to ask her any questions at all. But strangely enough, I felt that who I am was not her problem (if she had a problem...it could be just my problem). Just one challenge out of what seems like hundreds I have to face each day-big and small--crucial and trivial. (September 11, 1995)*

12 September 1995

With respect,

I write this letter to Mrs. Mimi Harvey to give you news. May Mrs. Mimi Harvey be under the protection of the one God, Allah. I want to say thank you after I talked with you yesterday at the regional center. I hope you were not disappointed in your friendship with Indonesia.

Mrs. Mimi, I wanted to tell you about my deception. Actually, I prepared my answers yesterday because I was told to represent the women students of UT. So I answered like I did yesterday.

In secret, Mrs. Mimi, I truly am in dire straits and ask your help. In such difficulty as this, I hope it is alright to ask for your help. I don't know if you are ready to help or not, but I hope you are willing to help me. I would ask you to find me any kind of work. I am willing to wash dishes at your house. You must know that Indonesia certainly is not able to provide work for all its people, not to mention a secure job with the government.

I hope if you receive this letter, you will read it and reply. I want to say again, I am truly in deep difficulties and I am sincerely asking for help from you. I apologize if this letter is not polite.

From Jemilah

*Feeling like I have been blindsided, or perhaps just plain blind. There was a letter waiting for me at my room when I came back earlier this evening from watching the fire-eaters on Jalan Malioboro. At first, I did not know*

*who it was from because I had already come to think of her as Malu. As I read her letter, several thoughts went careening through my mind. The first thought was to wonder who had told Malu that she had to represent the women students of UT? My previous misgivings about contacting potential participants at the regional centers rose up again. And there is no way to find out the truth without seeming rude. The second thought was really more of a feeling of helplessness. I wanted very much to have more than a researcher-researched relationship in my interviewing but I had no idea how to respond to this desperate appeal for help. The other, less welcome, feeling I had was one of relief that it was not some lack of sensitivity or perception on my part. I had known that something was odd about the interview with Malu. Here was an explanation, but what could I do to help this desperate woman? (September 13, 1995)*

## Eko

Eko is a 35 year old married mother of three children. She works as a pharmacist's assistant in the government-run *rumah sakit* (hospital) in Wonosari, a small town about two hours by bus from Yogyakarta. She is studying at UT for her *sarjana satu* in Economic Management.

*As I was awakened before the crack of dawn by the call to prayer, I thought I would just take a taxi to Wonosari, the town where Eko, one of my participants, lives. I knew from Eko's interview that Wonosari was rather far from Yogyakarta but when I heard the taxi driver say 40,000 rupiah (\$25CAD), I decided to try my luck with the bis umum (public bus). It was only 500 rupiah and Eko had said that she rode the bus in to the regional center in Yogya several times a week so how bad could it be?*

*Anyway, I did take a taxi to the bus terminal. The driver told me just to wait by the side of the road for the Wonosari bus. What he neglected to tell me was that it would already be full when it left the terminal! So, with a sinking feeling, I climbed on board an already overflowing bus and was immediately jammed between the sizzling engine casing and the smeared windshield. I spent the next few minutes imagining the experience of being thrown through the windshield in what seemed like an inevitable head-on collision. I was, however, soon distracted from such morbid thoughts by the incredible kaleidoscope of life outside the bus windows.*

*The mist-shrouded rice paddies shimmered in the gentle wash of early morning light. Shiny gray, velvet-skinned water buffaloes moved slowly and gracefully through the ankle-deep water as they have for centuries,*

*small birds perched absurdly on their massive shoulders. In one yard I glimpsed a mother and child standing under a fruit tree heavy with ripe mangoes. They held a beautiful batik sarong stretched out between them to catch the fruit that another child, clinging high up in the tree, shook down to them. The whole scene was aglow in the golden, still cool, morning sunlight for the briefest of moments and then was gone from my sight.*

*Suddenly becoming aware of the blistering casing, I tried to shift away; unfortunately, a move which brought me into rather too intimate contact with several young men. By this time, however, there was precious little room to maneuver so I concentrated on making myself small (like a Doberman Pinscher we used to have). In the next half hour, we picked up another dozen people, including ancient, sarong-clad women with woven baskets the size of satellite dishes and bags full of lively chickens. Finally, we came to a desa (village) where at least ten people waited to board this particular bus. I thought it would be obvious to everyone that it was impossible...but squeeze on they did...and soon we were careening along pot-holed roads through the mountains, packed tighter than the squawking chickens in the old women's sacks.*

*For the next half hour, I slowly lost my sense of humor and I guess it showed on my face. Suddenly, miraculously, a sliver of space appeared on a chewed up vinyl cushion over the engine casing and I eased myself into the crack. I mused on how malleable the human body can be...and on how drastically one's criteria for comfort can be altered. My sense of well-being restored, I almost enjoyed the rest of the trip—perhaps because I could only occasionally glimpse the on-coming traffic and precipitous drop off the shoulders of the road.*

*As I sat jammed in this steaming, careening bus, I thought of the woman, Eko, who had insisted I visit her in Wonosari. Several times a week, after getting up to study at four o'clock in the morning, looking after her husband and three children, and then working all day, Eko boards this bus (or one just like it) for the 1 1/2 hour bus ride to Yogyakarta, often only to find that the tutorial is not being held for some unknown reason. She told me that when this happens, she goes looking for a professor or lecturer who will answer her questions, paying him for his help. After searching for, and occasionally finding, help she must ride a city bus, with its threat of pickpockets, to the main bus terminal on the outskirts of the city and then board another crowded bus for the hour and a half ride back to Wonosari—arriving home, if all goes well, around 10:00 p.m. (September 17, 1995)*

Still struggling with my feelings about the morning interviews, I looked up into Eko's smiling face with a lifting heart. Although Eko was almost 10 years younger than I, there was the sort of instant connection between us that I can always recognize and seldom explain. Before I could even finish asking my first question (why was she studying at UT), she was leaning towards me and answering earnestly.

"Certainly the first reason dates back to when I graduated from pharmacist's assistant secondary school. I really wanted to continue my education but at that time the curriculum for vocational high schools was different from the academic high schools. So, I went to work and got married. After that, I was too interested in earning money and having babies and I forgot. When I went back to work after the children were getting older, I thought to myself that if I only have a high school diploma, I will be left behind in the future." As she spoke, I thought to myself that, except for a few minor details, Eko's story could be the story of many women throughout the world.

Hearing that Eko had several children and a full-time job, I next asked her to tell me a little about how she managed her time and responsibilities. Again she leaned forward and spoke as if she were trying to convince me of something rather than just telling me about her life. "Honestly," she began, "I am not a complainer. It is quite true that it is difficult for me to divide my time, but because I think I have this responsibility to be a good student, I am active in attending tutorials. The first thing is if I only study at home alone, I don't feel that I absorb as much. And the first issue is related to the second issue. For example, if I want to study, it must be in the morning. So I wake up early in the morning to study, from around 4:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. Then I myself get the children ready for school, you know? Honestly, I am already exhausted when I return home in the afternoon from the hospital pharmacy where I work. In the evening, I help the children with their homework. See, I must make time for studying in the early morning and, in addition, I must attend tutorials."

Eko became quite agitated in describing her schedule, so I next asked her if she felt she was managing her time well, if she felt she had been successful so far in dividing up her time. "*Anuu* (hmmm)," she began to answer uncertainly, "I certainly still feel that it is difficult. That's the first difficulty. Then there is the second obstacle--honestly, Bu Mimi--the tutorials here in Yogyakarta especially are rather *tersendat-sendat* (choked off again and again). Sometimes there are tutorials, sometimes there are not any. I often have to look by myself for a professor to approach, a professor from outside this regional center and pay for their help myself. *Terus-terang* (honestly) there are many obstacles to studying at UT."

Eko then fell silent with a far-away look in her eyes. Hating to interrupt her thoughts, I tentatively asked, "What kind of support do you get for your studies from your husband and family?"

Immediately becoming animated again, Eko leaned closer and grabbed and held tightly to my hand for the rest of the interview. One of the cultural norms, which is disconcerting, at first, for Westerners, is that the amount of acceptable and expected physical contact between members of the same sex is far greater in many parts of Asia. This holds true for Indonesia. I had already become comfortable with the easy physicality of my Indonesian women friends, both in Canada and on previous trips to Indonesia and, in fact, missed such familiarity amongst my Western friends.

"It is like this: I want to talk honestly, may I?" she asked anxiously.

"Of course, it is my hope that we will talk honestly with each other!" I replied with what I hoped was an encouraging smile.

She then seemed to relax and began to speak, "So, it is like this, honestly, my husband, before, didn't support my going back to school. At first he told me that I already have a family and I could not make my family my number two priority. So, with an obstacle like this, I decided--what's the phrase? '*Apa dari dalam hati saya sendiri* (what comes from my own heart)'. The main thing is I must finish, I must be able to be

independent. I must show my husband that I can go to school at UT without putting aside or neglecting my family. So I study alone."

"What about your parents, do they support you?"

"*Anu*, my parents, it just so happens that my parents are both from educated backgrounds, so they expect that all their children, if they can, will get degrees. That is my parents."

*On the way back to my room in Yogyakarta, Eko and her family took me to visit her parents who live in another part of town. We drove from Wonosari in what appeared to be a borrowed government kijang (minibus) through the seared, dusty landscape. As we came over the mountain range, the verdant rice paddies surrounding Yogyakarta were a welcome sight. Eko seemed quite excited for her parents to meet me. After introductions (accompanied by the admittedly gratifying surprise which always follows the announcement that I am 'totally fluent in Bahasa Indonesia'), I was left alone with her father, a former joint Indonesia-Canada development project leader, while Eko and her mother cooked lunch in the communal kitchen.*

*I listened to Eko's father speak proudly of his two sons who had both graduated from university; I was shown a book which the eldest son had just published on his speciality. The pride and satisfaction in this man's voice was evident, but I found myself wondering when he was going to get around to mentioning (with the same pride) his only daughter's educational struggles and, more importantly, her accomplishments. I waited in vain for any mention of Eko's studies. In fact, he never once even mentioned her, although he knew that I had interviewed her in my research of women studying at Universitas Terbuka. I struggled with the need to hear some praise for Eko's efforts from him. Unfortunately, by the time I had figured out the most polite way to ask how he felt about his daughter's educational achievements, the opportunity was lost. I felt like I had let Eko down in some vital way. (September 17, 1995)*

My next question was, "What are the attitudes or opinions of your friends or workmates towards your studies at UT?"

"Well," she began thoughtfully, "I think, in my social circle, there are those who think it is great and there are those who don't. There are discordant voices--"Why, if you

already have a job and already have a family, why must you go to such trouble to study more?' But there are other voices which support me--'That's great, it means you still want to be progressing, developing personally!' " Eko smiled and shrugged her shoulders as she spoke.

After hearing about how others felt about Eko's studies, I asked her how she felt about being an UT student. Her face lit up and she again leaned towards me to answer. "First of all, I am happy. I feel happy. What I mean is that up to now, whatever I wanted, I got. Up to now, it could be done. However, I would have to say that it is not a place that young people these days would call 'in', you know? But still, I am proud. I am content."

When Eko had finished her answer, I felt like ending the interview there, on such a high note. I wanted to hear more of this wonderful, enthusiastic voice, however, so I continued with my next question.

"Are you sure you will be able to finish your studies?" I asked this question already expecting the usual response to such questions about certainty--"*Insha'allah* (if Allah wills it). I was once again surprised when the smile disappeared from Eko's face.

"You know, Mimi, because of all the things I have already told you...the many obstacles. What I mean is that I am not alone now and my husband from the beginning did not support me. Of course now, he can accept it, but still he doesn't fully support me. So I have not yet been able to aim for the completion of my studies. I can only imagine that it will be six or seven years maximum...I must finish...I must...because I also work." Eko's large, dark eyes were filled with tears and I felt mine well up in sympathy.

*The almost unbearably hot, long bus ride finally came to an end when I just decided to get off in this village called Siyono. I thought I remembered the name from Eko's interview and, anyway, I had reached the end of my line. It is still rather rare for people in the more rural areas to have telephones, so I was unsure of what I should do. As there was a Sunday goat market happening across the street, I decided to wander over for a look while I considered my options. I am repeatedly dumbfounded by the speed and efficiency with which news travels here so I was surprised to*

*see Eko and her family drive up the dusty road soon after I began my stroll through the goats.*

*Eko's three children are lovely, gentle and lively, very much like Eko herself. I could see Eko's obvious pride in them and I found myself thinking that surely her husband could see that the last thing that Eko would ever do would be to make her family second priority. I soon found myself with the opportunity to tell him this myself. At breakfast (it had been a really early bus trip), there was suddenly a lull in the pretty much one-sided conversation I had been having with Eko's three children. I would ask questions about their school, their interests, hobbies and hopes in Indonesian. After the waves of giggles had passed, one of the older two would answer my questions (with urging from Eko to use English) in rapid Indonesian. Throughout this breakfast talk, Eko's husband had sat silently watching.*

*Suddenly, Eko leaned over and grabbed my arm in both hands. "Tell my husband about how your husband supports you in your studies, in following your dreams. Tell him how he even supported you in your desire to come here to Indonesia to do your research. Tell him all about it; tell him how it is in the West. Tell him how he should support me," she implored me. Fighting an impulse to jump up from the table, I found myself carefully explaining 'how it is' for me. There seemed to be a little voice in my head telling me that I had no right to come into this man's house, into his life without even asking him to let me in. At the same time, I could see Eko's dark, pleading eyes on me and I looked around the table as I spoke to see Eko's two daughters and eldest son listening carefully to my words.*

*So I told Eko's husband about my striving to learn, my strong belief in life-long learning. I tried to explain my commitment to education as the one of the best ways of bettering all people's lives but especially women's lives. I offered him my view that educating a woman was often educating a community. I commented that, contrary to his fears, it appeared to me that his family was, in fact, enhanced by Eko's learning.*

*I guess we seldom know with certainty what the effects of our words will be or even have been, but I felt that Eko gained confidence in her journey even if her husband remained unmoved by my words. I have felt this already in my interviews--that there is some intrinsic value added which my participants are gaining purely from the knowledge that someone else is interested in their stories. Several times already, the women have been*

*surprised and happy to know that there are other women in the world who not only are studying through distance education institutions not unlike their own UT, but also that these unimagined women are often experiencing the same struggles, obstacles and internal conflicts over self and family, and are using similar strategies to both deal with and overcome them. The whole issue of what does what I am doing do to me and to others is very real for me in this research. What gives me the right? What will what I do here do? (September 17, 1996)*

### Sumaryatun

Sumaryatun is a 27 year old teacher studying at UT for her *sarjana satu* (B.A.) in physics. Her home village is 80 kilometers, or 2 hours by bus, from Yogyakarta, where she teaches physics at a junior high school. The government does not yet require junior high school teachers to have *sarjana satu*.

Mimi: Are you studying for personal reasons or are you required by the government or your superiors to upgrade your education level?

Sumaryatun (Tun): For personal reasons.

Mimi: Given that, why did you decide to enroll in courses?

Tun: Why, huh? First of all, I wanted to broaden my knowledge because I saw that there certainly are many women in Indonesia today who are still rather weak. So I wanted to be an example for those women who are still in weak positions. The second thing is that there is the motivation which comes from the view here in Indonesia that if the education level of civil servants like me is low, our advancement will be slow and our salaries will automatically remain low too.

Mimi: So then, why did you choose UT?

Tun: First of all, because my place of work is far away. I wanted to take courses in a regular program but I could not make the time available. Secondly, the tuition was cheaper. Thirdly, rather than just reading the newspaper at home to get new

knowledge ...which wasn't very useful. Well, it was useful but I much prefer to read textbooks.

Mimi: Where did you learn about UT?

Tun: Actually, where did I? I guess I knew about UT since it was first established. But before this, I took regular classes, I studied at IKIP (teacher-training college). At that time I wanted to continue my studies but I didn't yet know what courses or what goals I had...I didn't know yet. After graduating from IKIP, I felt disappointed because I had only gotten that far. So I continued my studies at UT. I knew about it from magazines and newspapers.

Mimi: Do you have friends who have taken courses through UT?

Tun: Now, after enrolling in UT, I do...but only a few.

Mimi: What do you expect (hope for) from your studies here at UT?

Tun: I had wanted there to be tutorials, face-to-face meetings. But in all this time, I haven't had any.

Mimi: This is an obstacle for you, a difficulty?

Tun: A difficulty, yes. The thing is, I am taking physics courses. Here physics--maybe it's the same in Canada, the study is rather difficult. Then there aren't many people I know who are taking these courses. There aren't any classmates from before, any classmates from previous classes, or other classes. So, even if there were tutorials, the numbers would be small.

Mimi: There are no tutorials yet...?

Tun: Not yet, that's right.

Mimi: Could you please tell me a little about how you divide your time during a typical day? How you fulfill your responsibilities as wife, mother, teacher and UT student?

Tun: As for me, maybe it's included. Well, maybe it includes more than other women's "busyness" (responsibilities). I teach far from my home, around 80 kilometers from my home. I wake up every morning around 4:00 to cook. I must prepare food for

my two children. My oldest is five and goes to kindergarten. The second child is just two years old. I take the children and their food to their grandmother's house. After that, I go to work to teach at a middle school. At school, I always carry my books, my UT modules. If I am explaining lessons to the children, I do not study. But if the students are making notes and I have a free hour, I study the UT module. At home, when I arrive home, I straightaway pick up my child and breastfeed him, bathe them both and put them to bed. After that, if I still have time, I wash clothes, iron, lots of work. I have no servant.

Mimi: So if I understand, you have to study at school. You have no time to study at home.

Tun: No, I have no time to study there. However, when there is an exam, I force myself to get up in the middle of the night.

Mimi: I almost can not imagine. I think that I am busy, but I am not as busy as you.

Tun: The thing is, I look after the kids myself. I have to cook by myself, wash clothes by myself, iron myself...

Mimi: Your motivation must surely be strong...

Tun: That is what is wrong with me. I have really strong motivation.

Mimi: I admire that. Are there other obstacles aside from the limits of time and the responsibilities you have already told me about? Are there any obstacles associated with UT or the study materials or tutors?

Tun: Yes, the obstacles are these: the library, here I see that there is no library. Then there is also the tutorials. There aren't any face-to-face meetings, you know, with professors. Then there's the management of the grades. We just cannot do everything in one place. What I mean is, aside from the post office, the registration must be done here at the UPBJJ. Then, if there is an obstacle, any problem or whatever, I must send a letter to the central campus in Jakarta. My wish is that everything could be done here.

Mimi: A kind of decentralization of services?

Tun: Yes, decentralization, if it could be done, would be better. Like this, I have an obstacle right now. I have not yet received one of my grades. I already sent a letter to Jakarta, but it has not yet been received. Here I can do nothing. So I will need help.

Mimi: Are there any other obstacles?

Tun: Yes, it is really far from my home.

Mimi: What about the support you have been given by your family, by your husband while you have been an UT student?

Tun: As long as I don't neglect my family and home, it's "go ahead". It is good.

Mimi: Is there anyone to help you with the household responsibilities?

Tun: Just my husband helps with the housework.

Mimi: So he is willing?

Tun: Yes, if he is not too tired, sometimes, sometimes...

Mimi: Because you are studying for personal reasons, you must pay the tuition yourself, right? I would like to know if this is a burden for your family?

Tun: Up to now, not that much. Not too much of a burden. Maybe because my determination is so strong, I give it priority over other things.

Mimi: Are you confident you will be able to finish?

Tun: *Insha'allah*, hopefully, if God wills it. It seems I am pretty certain, although I have heard that there are those who study physics who have taken the comprehensive exam eight times and have not yet been successful in graduating. I'm not optimistic, you know?

Mimi: In total, how much time will you need to finish your program?

Tun: Because I started from a Diploma III to obtain my *sarjana satu*, my program will be three years altogether.

Mimi: Three years, three more years?

Tun: Two more years.

Mimi: What does being an UT student feel like?

Tun: Just so-so. Nothing more. I think, for me, it's already routine, just normal. Even though maybe for women here in Indonesia, maybe it is still rare, but for me, from my perspective, it's just normal.

Mimi: What about your friends? What are their opinions about distance education like here at UT? Are they supportive, positive?

Tun: They are supportive. The problem is, I work far from my home. All my time is taken up at the office, in the school. If, in the afternoons, I want to take courses, I really don't have time. They are supportive enough...as long as it doesn't interfere with my work at the school.

Mimi: Have you ever attended tutorials?

Tun: Not yet...there haven't been any tutorials yet.

Mimi: Suppose there were tutorials, would you like to attend?

Tun: Oh, I would like to, although it is so far if I had to come here. Oh yes, I would want to, really want to. Surely that is what I would like. See, all this time...I would work on the problems in the book. I'm certain that I probably only got 75% of them because I wasn't able to completely solve them. There is the possibility that they are all correct, but in my opinion, just 75% are correct. How happy I would be to know it all, if the professor could give me assurance that it was 100%!

Mimi: So if you experience difficulties, you have to solve them yourself or ask your friends?

Tun: Yes, I ask. It happens that my younger sibling majors in Physics at UGM (Gadja Mada University), so there are some people who can help but not much because they are busy.

Mimi: Since you have been a student of UT, have you met other students?

Tun: Yes, but just at exam time, you know. You will meet friends, the same group each exam time, like that. Here all the students study at UT and work at the same time.

Mimi: In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of studying through a distance education university?

Tun: The advantages are saving energy, saving time, saving money. Not having to chase here and there can save time. As for the advantages, we can save all these things. The disadvantage is...if my older sibling was able to graduate from here, it should mean that I am sure to graduate. But it is not certain that I will. When I work on an exam problem, I am not sure if it is correct or not. I can not be sure if there is no feedback. An advantage would be if there were tutorials every month that examined the problems in the modules. I would be more certain that I will be able to obtain my degree, more certain, self-confident that I can finish the program and I am certain I can.

Mimi: If you had friends who were interested and asked you about enrolling in UT, what sorts of things would you tell them?

Tun: I would tell them about the difficulties. At UT, for example, we can't solve problems, it is an obstacle there. We have to look for ways on our own and it is difficult. Then, I would tell about all the savings. Then I would tell how everything must be handled by the student alone. You can not rush things, for example, to graduate in two years. The problem is that often the exams overlap. You can't take a large number of semester credits like in conventional universities. The exams are held on only two days here at UT; for regular universities, there is a whole exam week. Here many people work and study at the same time. It is difficult to study for many exams in only two days.

Mimi: What should UT be providing for its students?

Tun: Books, study materials, professors, tutorials, library books.

## Jakarta

*Back from Yogya and things seem to be lurching along at UT-I do find Pak Djali's conclusions and observations rather provocative. He really seems to believe that the only thing which is an obstacle to women is their own low self-esteem--and he seems to believe that this is "just the way women are". I am not sure if something subtle is lost in his translation into English, but he has a pretty good grasp of the language so I don't think that is it. We have had the same conversation twice now--at his instigation--about how great the situation is for women in Indonesia generally and at UT especially. Sometimes it feels like pretty obvious attempts at shaping my research. Today he was telling me about the laws of 1945 which guaranteed that women had equal rights and opportunities. He believes then that the opportunities are, in reality, exactly the same for men and women...and that it is women's problem if they don't take advantage of these equal opportunities. He feels that the "fault", if you will, lies in the women themselves. Somehow I find this a disturbing attitude which I keep circling back to in my reflections.*

*I do not want to be deaf to the truth that might be there. I guess that it seems to discount the power of the attitudes of men who are the majority in most public areas of any influence. Equal opportunity is one issue..access is another altogether. It is an issue which is influenced by the attitudes of those in power positions, whether in the public context or in the family context. I am thinking of Eko and several other women who are studying through UT--who must deal with the pressures of proving that they can do it all. This whole issue is complicated, of course, by several other issues--pembantus and cultural issues such as the 3 Ms of Javanese cultural expectations for women: melahirkan (giving birth), mengasuh (raising children), menghiasi (being decorative). Also Bu Noenok was telling me about the five isteri (wives) that women must be: Isteri one, partner to her husband; Isteri two, additional income provider; Isteri three, provider of offspring; Isteri four, principal caregiver and teacher of the children; and Isteri five, contributing member in good standing of society. On the other hand, the husband has only one responsibility, to earn a living for the family. There are other aspects of Javanese culture which are a part of this--the father is supposed to be distant and must be accorded great respect and honor.*

*Another aspect of opportunity and access can be seen in the many articles which are being published in the newspapers right now because of the Beijing Conference. The articles about women's rights all seem to equate feminism with neglect of children, husband and family, rather than enrichment of the environment of the family and fulfillment of the woman's*

*potential. Also, I have heard from many sources, including Desti Murdianto who runs the only safe house for abused women in Central Java, that there is endemic sexual harassment and many, many cases of sexual abuse of girl children. Very complex issues surrounding the status of women—certainly here in Java—what is put forward as "the way things are" by the official voice of Indonesians--newspapers, government officials, Pak Djailil, amongst others--seems not to match what I have been seeing and reading with my own eyes and hearing with my own ears. (September 25, 1995)*

*The demands of this undertaking are considerable, but I am doing alright, I think. It is a constant reassessing process. I must remind myself that I do not need to live with this research every waking minute. If I were doing research in my own community, I would not be living it every minute of the day, every day of the week. I do not have to live constantly in this research. In some sense, no matter what I do, I am living in the research, so a distraction now and then is perfectly acceptable.*

*The letter from Canada that I received today was just what I needed--it reminded me of several things. It reminded me of who I really am, what I am really like. It is such a different environment here and one in which I am required to act in pretty circumscribed ways. It is easy to lose touch with the 'genuine' me. That letter just flashed through my being and I laughed in delight and a sense of relief--'I ' still exist! I am just in a kind of suspended state for now. It is similar to the way I felt with Shanti in Yogyakarta; I was being me in a way that I can never completely be with my Indonesian friends and acquaintances. This is an interesting aspect of living in another culture and speaking another language. The authentic self has to struggle to stay intact. Sometimes I feel lonesome for myself! I miss my humor; I miss who I am in my own culture. I am almost bored or impatient with myself...quite strange really. Sometimes I am even afraid that I have 'lost' my authentic self, that I will forget how to be me. It may be what being mentally ill is like--being in a different culture and being afraid of never being the same, or being like one was before. But I am not mentally ill; in fact, I am quite strong mentally these days. I know I have been through the worst of it and, believe you me, it was bad. Now I can look back on those days not so long ago and feel admiration for myself in generally staying within the boundaries and not letting go completely.*

*I wish I could have brought more of my 'reference' reading material with me. It is difficult to maintain my 'edge' at such a distance from the 'sources' which inspired me in the beginning. The difficulties of studying alone at a distance, right? (October 9, 1995)*

*The see-saw of emotions is exhausting...sometimes I feel like a timebomb, waiting to explode. I realize that all my life I have had day-to-day relationships which constituted the majority of my reality. What I mean is, my consciousness, my being in the world has been largely in terms of my relationships--not in terms of my inner life...not with myself. Even when I was here before, it was for comparatively short periods of time and I remained almost totally embedded in my family self back home. This time is different. My 'home' is no longer intact. My loved ones are still there, fortunately, but even they are in different situations. I will not be 'going home' to my family; they will be coming here. We really have no 'life' here; we will be travelling together for five months.*

*In my research, too, there is no firm 'home' ground. This time right now feels like time in which I am not doing anything. The transcribing and translating is work which must be done and all methods of research have work like this. So I am not wasting time; I am still doing my research. Soon I can start 'living with the data' (as if I am not spending every waking and most sleeping moments living with this data). I have written this in my journal before, but it remains a constant thread. It is difficult to do this work in isolation--far from my sources of inspiration and guidance--far from the support of fellow students and far from my professors. This is truly a parallel of my study. I am full of questions about whether I am proceeding along the 'right' path, whether my data is 'good enough', whether I should be doing something else, something different, something more...and there is no one to consult. I am alone in this and it is bloody difficult. Even the discipline is difficult. Although I do not have any other real responsibilities here, that in itself is sometimes difficult. I do not have anything else to distract me, to give me a chance to 'passively reflect'. I mean that often reflection takes place on another level of consciousness and shifting focus away from the research, reading other things, talking to other people about their interests, their lives, their research--these 'other' activities give time for making connections, for the webs to become visible, for new insights to emerge.*

*One of the unforeseen difficulties of my inquiry is that I am virtually cut off from these valuable sources--I have only my own experience, the one or two books I was able to bring with me, the one book I have found in the UT library. This is all I have in the way of input other than my own experience. It is difficult to switch on and off with the mode of inquiry I am undertaking--as I have written before, people here generally do not do much reflection. They do not talk much about the same things that I am thinking and wanting to talk about. The ideas of heartwork, or reflection,*

*or finding voice--these just are not talked about here. All I can do is keep writing, keep being aware, keep making connections. (October 17, 1995)*

## Bandung

Bandung is a three-hour train ride south and east of Jakarta, on the island of Java. The UPBJJ-UT (regional center of UT) is in a senior secondary school which is far outside town. I was told before I went to Bandung that it is nearly impossible to get to the regional center, often the taxi drivers will refuse to take you there as they do not know where it is. I was also warned by my Indonesian friends that it was dangerous for a woman, especially a *perempuan orang asing* (foreign woman), to go so far out of the city alone. After listening to all the admonitions, I was determined to try my luck at obtaining interviews there.

*I arrived Saturday afternoon in Bandung with a blistering headache so I decided to grab a taxi up to the top of Dago hill where my friend, Shanti, lives. It began to dump baskets of rain at the top of the hill, so with fear and trepidation, I hired one of the grinning motorcycle drivers who make a little money by hiring themselves out (called ojek). So strange and yet so Indonesian to trust your life to a perfect stranger on a absurdly small but terrifyingly fast motorcycle. I arrived breathless and grateful to be alive at Shanti's locked gate. Standing there, soaking wet with a two-ton pack on my back, I could see a note stuck on the front door with my name in big bright blue letters. Unfortunately, the rest of the note remained a mystery and the gate remained locked.*

*As I stood there in the tropical monsoon, both wondering whether the note was telling me that Shanti had gone away for the weekend and questioning my sanity, a voice came through the downpour, "Come on up out of that rain and get dry!" I looked up the path in the direction of the voice to see a Western woman beckoning from the doorway of another house perched precariously on the hillside. I gratefully trudged up to her door and was graciously invited in to her disorderly living room. Laura, an English language teacher, had just moved in but managed to find me a towel and a cup of steaming Javanese coffee to dry and warm me up. The Indonesian spirit of gotong-royong (mutual cooperation) is contagious.*

*I am now staying high up on the side of a valley in the tea-growing countryside of Bandung which spreads out in and on hills and valleys ringed by higher mountains. The walk up here from the city finishes as a dirt foot path at an impossible angle up to Shanti's gate. One is, however, repaid for the effort by the view: a Dutch-era hydroelectric plant with a*

*pipeline running straight down out of the mountains both to the plant and to the river which tumbles increasingly brown and clogged with garbage through the valley floor. The disposal of garbage is a choice between two evils--burn it further on down the hill or let the pembantu (servant) dump it in the river. It seems this choice only causes anguish for the handful of orang putih (white people) who live here in this kampong (village).*

*Many of the kampong houses here do not have running water and therefore there is a public pump area where people come to get their water and to bathe. There is definitely a lack of privacy in kampong living. The houses are built onto each other and the houses climbing up the hillside are connected by narrow stairs and pathways which are constantly in use. Everywhere there are families--of people, of chickens, of cats, of dogs and of birds. Despite this teeming hive of living creatures, it is surprisingly quiet and peaceful here.*

*As I sat on Shanti's verandah with my face turned up to the sun this morning, I was thinking that many, if not most, UT students live in similar kampongs without running water, telephones, or paved roads. When the rains come, as they do like clockwork every day, you are suddenly knee-deep in a brown-mud river. The electricity goes out regularly and, even when it is on, I have yet to find a room with sufficient light to read by after dark. The most available lightbulbs are 15 watts!!My eyes are suffering mightily. These obstacles would seem to form a baseline of difficulty upon which individual situations would then build.*

*Had another confused, 'don't know what is going on, don't have control' dream last night. I am wrestling with the problem of doing interviews here in Bandung. On the one hand, one of the reasons I came here was to do some interviews. On the other hand, now that I am here, there are several unanticipated obstacles that I am not sure I am up to working at overcoming. For example, the UPBJJ really is way outside the city which, given that it is the rainy season and I am afflicted with a worrisome cough, probably means an expensive taxi ride out there and back--at least \$20 US for one trip. Because Shanti (like most Indonesians) does not have a phone, I would probably have to go out there to present my letter to the kepala UPBJJ (the regional center director) and to attempt to arrange for the interviews. Then there is the likelihood that I would have to go back out there to conduct the interviews (another \$20 trip, at least). I feel right now that the expense and difficulties of simply going to the UPBJJ makes it an unproductive undertaking. I have to make these decisions on my own. I have to listen to my own voice. (November 7, 1995)*

*This morning, I attempted to call the UPBJJ from the Wartel (public telephone and telegraph office) but it appears that the telephone is out of order. I do not seem to be able to give up on this just quite yet. Shanti asked the secretaries at her language institute if any of them knew both where the UPBJJ was and how to get there. Lo and behold, one of them did and drew me an absurdly complicated map to get there by public angkot (city miniwrecks). If the women in Bandung who study at UT can get there, surely I can too. I figure I might as well give it a try. Who knows? I will try tomorrow if my cough is not any worse and if it is not raining too hard. (November 8, 1995)*

*Woke up with fever and a steel-banded chest to a classic tropical downpour. I must have been delirious because I decided to try to get to the UPBJJ anyway. Unfortunately, there was no one to talk me out of this and off I went, armed with the wrinkled, almost illegible 'map' the secretary had drawn for me. I managed to get on the right first angkot but did not manage to get off at the right exchange spot. Ended up riding it all the way down to the market terminal where the driver made me get off. I trudged miserably through knee-deep water until I came to a corner I recognized and then rode another jampacked angkot defeatedly back to Shanti's house on the hillside. It was already dark when I got home and I would have given my right arm for a hot bath. I settled for a hot cup of sweet Javanese tea and then fell exhausted into bed to chronicle today's events. Hope my cough doesn't get worse after today's misadventure. I have five more days here, so it is still possible for me to get some interviews. The question is whether or not I am physically able to do so...(November 9, 1995)*

In the end, I was not successful in getting to the UPBJJ-Bandung, much less obtaining any interviews. The obstacles of transportation, communication, personal health, and safety were too much for even my determination to overcome.

*I can not help reflecting on the connections between the failure of my own efforts to do what I came here to Bandung to do and the failure of so many UT students. They fail courses regularly. (Who could pass courses in which the study materials of the course do not arrive until just before exam time, if they arrive at all, and for which there are no tutorials or the tutorials are cancelled without notice?) Students who are sponsored must pay just like the swadana (self-funded students) for repeat courses. They also fail and then drop out of their study programs at a rate far above fifty percent.*

*Although I did not interview any women studying here in Bandung, both my personal experiences here and the experiences of women I have already interviewed, such as Eko and Malu, lead me to believe that there is an unavoidable truth to the reality of defeat and failure amongst UT students. Some obstacles defy even our best, most 'heroic' efforts to overcome them. (November 14, 1995)*

## Ujung Pandang, South Sulawesi

South Sulawesi is part of a larger island consisting of the provinces of South, Central and North Sulawesi. It is across the Sulu Sea from the island of Java. Ujung Pandang is the capital port city on the southern tip of South Sulawesi and is home to many of the strong descendants of the infamous Bugis pirates of the South Seas. As well, there are Indo-Chinese, Tanah Torajans from Central Sulawesi, and a smattering of other peoples living in this sprawling, dusty city.

There are basically two ways of getting from Java to Sulawesi, by plane or by ship. It is approximately four hours by plane and forty-eight hours by ship. The busiest travel time in Indonesia is prior, during, and after Ramadan, the Muslim fasting month as even the poorest people in the cities scrimp and save all year to return to their villages for this biggest of religious holidays.

*Twenty four hours on the Kerinci--our ship to Ujung Pandang--twenty four hours to go. I went out on the deck for our departure from Surabaya--there are now people covering almost every square inch of deck and hall space. They have woven mats, or just old newspaper to sit, eat and sleep on. Their belongings are tied up in bundles and used to mark off a bit of space, and as pillows and tables. It was cool out on deck last night, and we were heading out into open sea overnight. The deck was already awash in water from the rain and from the upper decks. Even those 'lucky' enough to grab some space in the halls and stairwells were constantly in danger of being stepped on.*

*I felt many conflicting emotions as I made my way back to our cabin. I felt a kind of humbleness that I have been and still am so lucky in my life. I have never lived in these kinds of conditions--I have never had to. Chances are I will never have to. My other thoughts were of safety and comfort, and the differences between people in their basic orientations to life. If we can find an inch of common ground, we are doing well. More and more I am coming to a reluctant acceptance of the truth in that statement. Not only between peoples of different countries, but also between people within one country--there are thousands of examples in every country in the world today. Canada is no exception: look at Quebec. And it is not just racial or linguistic or cultural differences I am talking about. The differences between people from different economic levels*

*within one society are so great—differences in mores, manners, worldview, behavioral standards, goals—that inch of common ground must be searched for and valued if this old world is going to keep on spinning.*

*Is this what I am doing, looking for that inch of common ground in the experiences of women distance education students here in Indonesia? An inch of common ground between women from different parts of Indonesia, different economic backgrounds, different life circumstances? An inch of common ground between women distance education students throughout the world? Or an inch of common ground between myself and the women I am interviewing? (January 4, 1996)*

*Driving along Jalan Sunu looking for number 131C (the only address I could get for the regional center here in Ujung Pandang) at 9:30 on a Monday morning. All the buildings on the right side of the street are numbered even numbers and all the houses on the left side are numbered G something. We craned our necks to try to locate number 131—but there was no 131A, B, or C to be found. Large, stinky trucks blared their horns at us and tried to pass in the midst of dozens of becaks (Indonesia's bicycle-powered answer to the rickshaw), bicycles, small trucks and taxis when we slowed down to squint at the numbers. I finally suggested that we stop and ask for directions at a small shopping area. While I unsuccessfully attempted to get directions from a wrinkled old tukang becak (rickshaw driver), my friend Mega, who grew up here in Ujung Pandang, talked to a group of high school students who were lounging on the steps of the store. As it turned out, we were on the right road to the UPBJJ and we were not very far from it.*

*The Regional Center-Ujung Pandang was located at the end of a muddy, potholed road right next to a high school, near the now-abandoned site of Hassanudin University. I gulped when I saw the building surrounded by huge puddles of muddy water and knee-deep grass. After gamely bidding my driver farewell, I picked my way gingerly towards the door (my imagination working overtime with visions of snakes and crocodiles). I was somewhat encouraged to see a UT kijang (minibus) parked in back and, sure enough, there were several UT staff inside the building. But that was about all that was inside. I approached the first person I saw and explained who I was and what I was there for. The woman explained that they were moving from that office to new temporary offices in town. I had just happened to arrive as they were packing up the last of the office things. The woman offered me a ride to the new offices and I gladly accepted, thinking, "What would I have done if I had arrived five minutes*

*later? Nobody here, no way to find out where the office had been moved to or what the telephone number was?" My karma remains strong, I guess.*

*The new temporary offices are more centrally located than the ones in the middle of the swamp. The kepala UPBJJ-Ujung Pandang said that these buildings belong to IKIP Ujung Pandang (the teacher-training institute here in UP). Pak Ali Yahya, the kepala, said that they hoped to get a new building soon. Unfortunately, I have the insider information that this regional center is not slated for new buildings for a long time. Pak Yahya seemed happy to help me with my research. His wife, Bu Ani, was called and she began to arrange for interviewees right away--tomorrow morning at 9:00. I wish I could have found a way to contact women students independently of the regional center staff so that I could be more confident that the women were not being 'coerced' into agreeing to participate. I must be realistic, though, and admit it would have been much more time-consuming and costly to have tried to do it any other way.*

*At one point in the flurry of arrangements, Bu Ani sat down close to me and whispered that most of the students who pay by themselves are women. The men are all in projects paid for by the government. Bu Ani seemed to think that this was important for me to know. (January 8, 1996)*

*I arrived here at the UPBJJ at 8:15 this morning. There was no one around so I went across the street to a small supermarket to look for something to eat and drink. I think I am suffering from sleep deprivation, poor nutrition and the difficult living conditions here in Ujung Pandang. This place is, by far, the most difficult place I have been to here in Indonesia. It is the last few weeks before Ramadan, the Muslim fasting month, and the mosques seem to be trying to outdo each other in both volume and quantity. The calls to prayer go on way into the night and begin again at 3:00 in the morning. There is no way to sleep through them, even with ear plugs and pillow. I find myself wondering how people maintain their sanity here.*

*Back to my research. I was told by Bu Ani to come to the UPBJJ to interview three students at 9:00 a.m. I was given a little corner of a desk in one of the overcrowded offices for conducting these interviews. I hope the noise from both inside and outside the office does not drown out the women's voices. I am not happy with this location but feel awkward about asking for more private space in these crowded, borrowed offices. Maybe I will ask tomorrow if I am able to do some more interviews.*

*It is now 10:30 and no one has shown up. I hope I can do at least one interview today...I need that. (January 9, 1996)*

I had just about given up the hope that I would be able to do any interviews that first day at the UPBJJ-Ujung Pandang when Rusni was ushered into the crowded office where I was to do the interviewing. She looked rather harried and I hoped she had not been coerced into agreeing to the interview. I find that I am often frustrated by having to rely on UT staff to gain access, make contact with my participants. I was aware from the beginning that this would, in some ways, limit my access even as it facilitated it.

The realities of the difficulties of communication in an archipelagic, still developing country with huge gaps in its infrastructure constitute basic obstacles to doing qualitative, face-to-face research. These obstacles mirror those faced by my participants: difficulties in arranging face-to-face meetings with professors and tutors, difficulties in communication, difficulties in meeting with others involved in distance education, difficulties in dealing with unwieldy bureaucracies. I find myself doing as the women I have been listening to do. I continually search for strategies and solutions; making do with what I can, stretching myself to the limit.

### Rusni

Rusni was the first woman I interviewed at the UPBJJ-Ujung Pandang, and she was very much like many of my participants in many ways. She is an elementary school teacher who is taking the DII program to upgrade from her teacher-training high school diploma. She is required by the government to upgrade, and she is also studying "*atas kemauan sendiri*" (because of her own need/desire). Indeed, every single woman I have talked with answered the question, "Why are you studying at UT?", with almost the exact same words, "*atas kemauan sendiri*". Many of the women, like Rusni, are also required to take the Diploma II in order to keep their positions as teachers, but I have been struck

with the strength of purpose reflected in their emphatic answers that they are, all other aspects aside, studying at UT because of some strong internal desire to learn.

*In reading through the transcripts and translations of all of the interviews I have done to date, I find myself reflecting again and again on the phrase, 'kemauan sendiri'. My intuitive sense of this phrase makes it difficult for me to translate it into English. I just spent the last hour going back and forth between my English-Indonesian dictionary and my Indonesian-English dictionary. In the latter, 'kemauan' is defined as 'wish, desire, will'. I have been translating the phrase, 'atas kemauan sendiri' (rather awkwardly, I feel) as 'for personal reasons' or, alternatively, 'for my own desire'. After hearing many women's stories of their efforts to learn, I feel that a deeper meaning can only be conveyed by the translation, 'my own will'. Yes, there is wish involved and yes, there is desire too. But it is the willful nature of the women's efforts which keep shining through for me.*

*Perhaps it is because I too am willful in my efforts to learn. I continue to do everything I possibly can to learn about these women students of UT. I have had to will myself to take those first steps, those next steps, to find a way, to overcome obstacles in this learning. Yes, I am 'required' to do a piece of research in order to complete my graduate program, but I am willfully undertaking this particular research and its concomitant learning; it is my own will. (January 9, 1996)*

Although similar in some ways to many of the women I had been talking with, Rusni is different. She is 55 years old and already a grandmother. She had finished her teacher training 36 years ago, raised five children and has been teaching for nearly 20 years. And now the government is requiring that she upgrade both her credentials and her knowledge.

"I expect to prosper, and to add to my knowledge, to increase my insight. Because, you know, elementary school teachers are very limited in their knowledge, their thinking." Rusni threw her head back in laughter as she made this comment. Charmed by her high spirits, I felt my own spirit begin to rise. Although my fatigue interfered with my fluency, Rusni continued to answer my questions with good humor and patience.

Unlike many of the women elementary teachers I had talked with, Rusni did not have child-raising responsibilities in addition to her teaching and studying responsibilities. She did, however, have time obstacles in common with her fellow women students.

"Usually, I can make less than one hour a day available for study. Any more than that is too much. Teachers must prepare lessons, you know. We must divide up our time. I have no free time at school and it would not be possible anyway."

I next asked Rusni about obstacles she faced both in studying at UT and in finishing quickly as she had indicated she wanted to do. She momentarily lost her smile, and her confident answers changed to furtive whispers. I found myself wishing for the thousandth time that I could have found a different, yet do-able way of meeting women students. "At the regional center, the grades arrive too late, too late. When the following semester is ready to start, the grades from the previous semester have not yet arrived. That is a real obstacle. Also, the modules usually arrive too late. Even though the material is complete, it arrives too late. Usually, when there are just a few days left before exams, that is when the modules arrive. It is really difficult. I hope to finish this semester but the grades from semester five haven't arrived yet. I must know if there are some which have to be repeated. If there are courses which must be repeated, it eats up more time. As I am paying my own tuition, this is also a financial burden on my family. It is expensive." The smile reappeared as Rusni continued, "*Alhamdulillah* (praise be to Allah)! It was my husband who suggested that I do this program, so his support is good enough."

"So, what do you do when the modules do not arrive?" I asked.

"I must borrow the module from a friend. Also, if I can attend a tutorial, there is usually a summary of the material. But now there are no tutorials; there have been no tutorials since last August. My grades were better when I was able to attend tutorials. Now, my friends and I have formed our own study group. We meet once a week at the school because it is close. We study in a group and help each other with the difficult parts." Rusni smiled at me as she answered. I am touched over and over again with the

resilience and quiet determination I hear in the stories these women tell of their efforts to learn.

*A community of learners...I hear, not these exact words, but stories of efforts by nearly every woman I have talked with to find this community of learners. When there are no tutorials, the women seek out other learners and form their own study groups. When tutorials are available, women make great efforts to attend them. They look forward to the exam periods because they will see the same people each time and, although they never see them in between, they feel supported and re-motivated just by the contact. This is an inch of common experience for almost all adult learners—the search for a community of learners, fellow sojourners in the quest for knowledge. (January 9, 1996)*

When I asked Rusni what advice she would give to friends who might want to study at UT, she leaned forward and answered me in a strong, "motherly advice giving" voice. "The foremost things are bravery and perserverance. You must be brave in facing it because, in addition to household responsibilities, there are our duties to improve our expertise in our jobs as teachers...not to mention our responsibilities as students. We must be clever in dividing our time. Discipline. Diligence. We can, as teachers, practice what we learn here and put it into practice also in our classrooms. If we have goals, certainly we will want to go here to UT."

### Mediatrix

Mediatrix came into the crowded office and, as I looked at her face, I realized that I was already able to recognize the distinctive facial features of the Tanah Toraja people from central Sulawesi. Like many of the Tanah Torajans, Mediatrix is a member of the Catholic minority in Indonesia. As I found out later, all of the three women I interviewed on that first day at the UPBJJ-Ujung Pandang were teachers at a nearby Catholic school. Unlike the public elementary school teachers, some of whom are sponsored by the government, teachers in private schools (often referred to as *yayasan*, or institutes) are urged strongly by their institutes to upgrade to the Diploma II but are rarely sponsored.

I also noticed from a quick glance at the personal data sheet I had each participant fill out that she was 36 years old and had a daughter who was 23. Although we were not that close in age, the similarity in our daughters' ages seemed to give us an instant bond. As the interview progressed, albeit haltingly at times due to my extreme fatigue, I began to relax and enjoy Mediatrix's thoughtful and forthright answers. There was an easy rhythm to our conversation which left me feeling refreshed despite the oppressive heat and crowded discomfort of our surroundings.

Mimi: Are you studying for personal reasons or are you required by the government or your school?

Mediatrix (Medi): Along with my own will to study, my institute also suggested that I do this.

Mimi: What caused you to decide to enroll in this program?

Medi: Because we thought it was important for our educational foundations, for the children, the background is important.

*Although I am familiar with the inclusive, 'group-oriented' nature of Indonesian social interaction, I still occasionally find myself jarred by the use of kita (we) in reference to an individual self. There is such a group identification, especially strong in women here, that often every answer I hear in response to a personal question is posited in the group plural, kita. Indonesians rarely do anything or go anywhere alone if they can avoid it. I think I often confuse or hurt my Indonesian friends when I set off alone anywhere. I usually get offers to accompany me even if it is only to the kamar kecil (bathroom), corner warung (food stall), or for a mind-clearing walk. And yet there are women I have interviewed, in Jakarta, in Yogyakarta, and here in Ujung Pandang, who value the opportunity to study alone and who choose not to attend tutorials even if they are held because 'many of the people just want to omong-omong (socialize).'*  
(January 13, 1996)

Mimi: So then, why did you choose UT?

Medi: I felt it was very important for me because I already felt like I was left behind. So with this program, a program like this at UT...not to mention that I was required. What I mean is, it isn't really that I am required, but I was given the strong suggestion that it would be better if I enrolled in this program. It is like that, you know?

Mimi: Hmm, how did you find out about the Universitas Terbuka Diploma II program?

Medi: It was the foundation which gave me information about UT. And I already knew about UT from the television and the newspapers.

Mimi: Is paying the tuition and fees yourself a burden for you and your family?

Medi: Ya, maybe for someone like me, for sure it is a burden, but really, you know, it is not too bad. I only have one child and she is already married and lives in her own home. So, you know, it is only the two of us in the house. Maybe it is not too much of a burden.

Mimi: What do you hope to gain from attending UT?

Medi: I hope to be able to be more professional in the classroom. Most importantly for my child, my grandchildren...even though it is only UT. What I mean is that I can feel more on the same level, I can feel that I am part of the development process.

*I keep hearing indirect indications that, even after 11 years of operation, UT continues to have a public image problem. Nuri in Yogyakarta, Mediatrix here in Ujung Pandang, and others have made oblique (and sometimes direct) references to the 'second class' status of UT. This is common ground for all distance education institutions and seems to be a difficult perception to alter in every society. Although the status of being an UT student is not as high as that of being a conventional student, many of the women I have been speaking with have felt happy and proud to be UT students. They often feel that the quality of their education is better than that of the 'regular' university students because the outcomes, the learning depends on their own efforts...it seems to me they feel that they own the learning. (January 12, 1996)*

Mimi: What are your feelings about being an UT student?

Medi: As an UT student, I feel proud because I can take these courses while I am working as a teacher. Even though the courses are not routine like for other university students. I like being a university student even though my grades are still not good enough but I am proud to be a student. I enjoy it. It doesn't matter where I am, I usually argue with my friends...I say it's like this because I am a university student!

Mimi: What sorts of obstacles have you faced as an UT student?

Medi: It is usually like this at UT, the way it is right now. The books haven't yet arrived, the modules haven't gotten here yet. Perhaps sometimes this happens because if we are a study group, we all must register at the same time. And usually we are all too busy. Also, sometimes there are tutorials; other times, there are none. Only now, for example, in this semester--for this exam period, there have been no tutorials. The tutorials really help my grades.

Mimi: When there are tutorials, where and when are they held?

Medi: They are usually held at the regional center at 3:00 in the afternoon.

Mimi: Is the regional center far from your home?

Medi: Not that far. Only the thing is I have to teach before the tutorial. Then I have to go home first. If I rest first, sometimes it is too late to attend. Actually, it often is like that. I really want to go every time there is a tutorial, I always want to attend. Only it depends on my time and energy. Usually when I arrive home, I am already tired. I want to rest. Sometimes, I fall straight to sleep and forget about the tutorial. When I wake up, the time for the tutorial has already passed.

*The common ground I am seeking is there in all shapes and forms. I too am already tired. I want to rest. Sometimes, I want to fall straight to sleep (impossible here in Ujung Pandang now)... wake up in my own bed in Victoria and forget about this research. Perhaps the common ground is small in area and fathomless in its depth. (January 9, 1996)*

In common with the other teachers I talked with, Mediatrix told me that the greatest advantage UT offered her was the chance both to obtain the necessary Diploma II and to become more professional in the classroom. She then began to talk about the disadvantages. "The disadvantage is that maybe it isn't smooth--the study isn't smooth. Each time we take exams, it is the first chance we have of meeting with the professor. The three months before the exam, there are no meetings with anyone. It is our wish that it would be better if we could meet two or three times a week with a tutor. It would be better. But first and foremost, the module...most importantly, they must work towards getting modules to arrive so that, before the following semester, they are available. That would make us really happy. Like now, we are taking a course, but there are no modules. It is really an obstacle for us."

"What sort of support do you receive from your husband and family, from your friends? What are their attitudes towards your study?" I then asked.

Mediatrix' face brightened again as she began to answer. "As for my husband, in fact, he has told me that, after I finish my program at UT, he wants me to continue my studies. He is that way, he supports me. It is me who prefers to be lazy!" Medi laughed as she said this and then continued.

"From the beginning, my parents were suggesting that I take courses but I had never taken action on their suggestions. Then later, when UT was available, I enrolled. My parents were happy...even though it was only UT."

The interview was going so well that I thought I would ask a question I had not asked before in the interviews. "Do you think that there are personal characteristics that are necessary if an individual wants to be successful at UT? And, if so, what would you say they are?"

Medi gave me a look of incomprehension, so I tried re-phrasing the question, "Well, for yourself, which characteristics have been most useful to you in your studies, in your successes here at UT?"

Medi frowned and then asked again, "Could you give me an example?"

I offered some of the characteristics I had heard other women mention, "Diligence, discipline, a strong desire". Medi's face brightened and she immediately began to answer emphatically, "Oh, the most important...you must work on discipline. You must be disciplined." Then she paused for a moment before continuing, "Only...sometimes I want to be disciplined but the everyday situation, you know, maybe because I have a family...so I can't fulfill my goal of being more disciplined." She stopped, looked away from me and finished her answer wistfully, "But I still have this strong desire for discipline. Truthfully, we have the will. My friends and I want to form a study group, but sometimes, because they have children, they are not able...they are blocked. As for me, I would like to. Only it depends on the others--if they want to or not. Generally, my classmates want to, but because they must take care of their children and their husbands, what can they do? It is always the reason. So they really want to, and I want to even more. Sometimes I am the coordinator for our study group, whenever we can meet, depending on when and where...", Medi's voice trailed off into silence.

### Choresty

Choresty is still an anomaly in Indonesian society--she is a single (separated, not divorced) mother of three children, aged 17, 12, and 4. She is also a Catholic and, like my first two participants that morning in January, an elementary teacher at a Catholic school in Ujung Pandang. The sense of desperation enveloping her was palpable to me in my stretched-thin, hypersensitive state. I realized as I opened my mouth to ask my first question that I was dangerously close to tears. When Choresty began to speak, I could clearly hear the edge of tears in her voice as well. Mercifully, a general lethargy seemed to have descended with the intense, humid heat of mid-day, and everyone else had abandoned the airless office for the relative relief of the covered verandah. We were alone together.

Fighting to control my voice, I asked whether Choresty was studying "*atas kemauan sendiri*" or because she was required by the government. With dark, moist eyes fixed on my own, she began to tell me her story.

"When I started at UT, it was certainly because of my strong will to do this. At that time, I had no money for tuition so my institution had to agree to pay the tuition. At that time, I was a teacher in the big Catholic school. Now I am part of a government-funded project and the tuition is paid for by the government. My will to do this is great. I really want to finish this program. I would want to continue to study, but only if it were still like this project--if this project had a next stage. But I heard that if you finish your DII, the government will not pay anymore later. My desire to continue is great...but probably I will not have the money for tuition." The great sadness in her voice made me think of how little the tuition amounted to in Western economic terms--perhaps \$150 per semester.

When I asked Choresty to describe how she managed her time and responsibilities in a typical day, her face brightened. She began by describing her children with pride. "My children go to a Catholic school, so they already know discipline. They all walk to school. I will only rent a house that is close to their schools and to the school where I teach, so they can walk to school and home again. Actually, this is an obstacle to my study at UT because I have to move from one rented house to another. Sometimes, because of money problems, I have to contemplate renting a house which is far away, or moving back in with my parents. If that happened, I would not have the money for day-to-day expenses so I try to rent a house as close as possible to the school so my children can walk to school." By the time Choresty had gotten this far, she was rummaging in her bookbag for a tissue. Finding a package, she wordlessly handed me a tissue as well as taking one for herself.

When she had composed herself, she began again without any prompting from me. "Right now, I am working as the organizational secretary as well as teaching so I must get up before 4:00 in the morning. I wash the children's clothes, clean up the house, and cook

before I leave the house in the morning. There is no money for *pembantu* (servants). I usually get home an hour or so before the children, so I try to study before they arrive. After they get home, I take care of their clothes and food, and help them with their homework. That's the way it is. I take what time I can. Managing my time is an obstacle for my study."

"Are there any other obstacles you must overcome to be successful in your studies here at UT?" I asked.

"Only the obstacle of the tuition. You know, I am not with my husband and my parents live far away. I must cope with all my children and all the expenses by myself. But I am glad to have the opportunity to get my DII through UT because it doesn't interfere with my main job and, in fact, it helps my teaching methods at school. That's the advantages of UT. I can still have enough time at home to care for my children. In the mornings, I can still care for my children and then, in the afternoons, take care of my studies. But, the disadvantage is that the modules are often late. In fact, the modules for this semester have not arrived yet and the exam period is in less than a month. So we have to spend money for photocopying the modules. But for me, usually I do not get photocopies because I have to think about my children..." Choresty looked at me pleadingly, "How can we study if we don't have books?"

- How, indeed.

*As I listen to the tapes of the interviews from today and yesterday, I find myself wrestling already with the difficulty of conveying in written form all that I am privileged, not just to hear, but also to experience. If these interviews were in English, I might just have an 'aural' thesis, an aural/oral presentation. How else to tell the stories, to make immediate the context, the texture of the experience of these interviews? Will the English sound harsh, unnaturally removed from the lovely sing-song of spoken Indonesian with its backdrop of the cacophony which accompanies life here in Indonesia? Maybe I should record an hour or two of background noises just to give the proper depth to my telling of these women's stories. But if I did that, then I would have to include all the other senses: the overwhelming smells, the rush of visual images, the feel*

*of the scorching sun and the cooling breeze created by the ceiling fans on my fevered body. I guess I will have to come to terms with the inadequacies of rendering such rich experience through words alone...perhaps this is why we tell and retell the stories of our lived experiences...trying to find the words for the indescribable, trying to recreate in words alone what we have experienced with all our being.  
(January 10, 1996)*

## Denpasar, Bali

After several attempts to contact the UPBJJ-Denpasar by telephone, I decided to try my luck at just going there. This proved more difficult than it sounded despite the fact that I had an address for the regional center from the central administration office in Jakarta. When I arrived at Udayana University, the address I had been given, the security guard told me that the regional center had moved to a different address several miles away. Behind a flooded soccer field and an abandoned archery range, I finally found a small cluster of buildings. There was a small sign, partially obscured by jungle creepers, which proclaimed these buildings to be the UPBJJ-Denpasar.

*I am preparing for my first interviews here in Bali (hopefully). As I am preparing myself for this, several thoughts are spinning through my agitated brain: 'I must find the common ground'; 'This isn't Kansas, Toto'; and 'How can I concentrate my attention solely on the research tasks at hand?' Impossible, I think to myself. Just like most of my interviewees, my thoughts, time, consciousness, attention, focus, and emotional energy must always be divided between my family, and anything and everything else. There is no other way. It is not just because my family is here with me; I spent many of my waking (and sleeping) hours alone with thoughts of them when they were back home in Canada. This is a constant in my life. An obstacle? Only if I let it be one; only if I perceive it to be one.*

*I must compose this life of mine. If it only had major chords, it would not be so interesting and beautiful--albeit possibly more easily 'played'. This too is what many of my participants do in their lives and with their studies. It is a kind of gamelan music for them. The underlying melodies are somewhat chaotic to others' ears and it is difficult to sense order and predictability in the music. However strange and unfamiliar the music, there is a beauty to be appreciated. For Balinese women, for all Indonesian women, perhaps it does not seem so random and difficult. It is what they have always known. It is the music from which they compose their lives...and most of them seem to be able to make it beautiful.*

*Today is a Hari Raya (a holy day). The Ibu of the house has spent hours and hours and probably tens of thousands of rupiah to make offerings for the Balinese/Hindu gods. She has been up since five preparing the baskets of offerings. I have been writing up here on the second storey terrace and watching her carry the baskets on her head. Back and forth, back and*

*forth, she has gone from her kitchen to the temple at the back of the complex--small steps caused by the tight ceremonial sarong she is wearing. I struggle to find the radical openness to understand, to find the common ground. Still I wonder--why do you leave the care of your young daughter completely to an illiterate, superstitious country woman who does not even keep the child clean while you spend your time making these elaborate offerings which the wild dogs will destroy in minutes? (January 31, 1995)*

*First interviews at the UPBJJ-Denpasar, Bali today. Last Monday, Brian and I went to the UPBJJ to introduce ourselves to the kepala, Pak Merta. Although I introduced myself as a researcher from Canada and Brian as my husband who was accompanying me, Pak Merta directed all his comments and questions to Brian. Brian would then defer to me and remind the kepala who was there to do the research! I gave him my letters of introduction which explain the focus of my study and he seemed eager to help. He suggested that I return today, Wednesday, to conduct some interviews and offered to send his driver to pick me up. Thinking of the distance from the home we were renting to the regional center, I happily agreed.*

*This morning, when I arrived, the first thing the kepala asked was, "Where is Pak Brian?" In his office, Pak Merta complained that he had only 14 staff and over 6000 students. When I asked if it were possible to get some copies of my data sheets, he said that both the fax machine and the copier had been broken for over six months. I was then led into a classroom to meet my participants--four males! I was stunned for a moment as I know I was very clear that the focus of my study was women students. Anyway, I decided on the spot to go ahead and interview these men as they had already been waiting for almost an hour. But I asked Pak Merta, as politely as I could, to find several women students for me to interview as well. He expressed surprise that I wanted to interview only women students, but after a while, several women arrived. I am not at all sure what I will do with the interview data with the four male participants. I will have to talk to my supervisor about that after I get back to Victoria. (January 31, 1996)*

One of the interesting characteristics of the interviews I did at the UPBJJ-Denpasar was that all of the women I talked with were staff of the UPBJJ, self-employed, or unemployed; none was a teacher. I also felt a different air about the women I interviewed here in Bali.

*What is different about the women I have been interviewing here in Denpasar? The women here in Bali are definitely more assertive and 'take charge', as my father would say. Here in Bali, it is usually the women who do much of the actual work of making a living. Many are involved in small businesses of their own. Although all of the women I have interviewed had very practical reasons for studying, there seems to me to be a subtle, yet obvious, difference in the women of Bali. (February 6, 1996)*

Ketut

Most children in Balinese families are named by the order of their birth.

Traditionally, Balinese families have been quite large, and it is not an unusual sight to see a family with four or more children. Ketut, as her name indicates, is the fourth born child in her family. The vast majority of Balinese are Hindu, and Ketut is no exception. Twenty years old and "*belum kawin*" (not yet married), Ketut works as UPBJJ staff at the regional center in Denpasar.

In answer to my now standard first question, Ketut spoke emphatically, "It is like this, Bu Mimi, I study for my own reasons. There is absolutely no encouragement from my boss or my friends here."

Ketut continued before I could ask another question. "It is like this. First of all, I had friends in high school who I saw were going to state universities. I could not do the same. I really felt I had to go to university like other friends of mine, although I could not go to the state universities, like Udayana where all my friends go. Universitas Terbuka is also a state university. That was what encouraged me in the first place. Also, when I take courses at UT, I can work at the same time."

"Is that the only reason you chose to enroll in UT--so that you could work and take courses at the same time?" I asked.

"Well, I could manage my money and time so that I could enroll at UT. I have so little time available for classes. I heard about UT from my office mates because I work here at the UPBJJ. Also, I have friends who are civil servants who take courses here at

UT. If I had the money and time, though, maybe I would choose a conventional university like Udayana." Ketut lowered her voice as she answered, as if she were slightly embarrassed to admit this preference.

My next question was about expectations--Ketut's expectations from her studies at UT. "Well, first of all, I expect to increase both my knowledge and my experience. Also, if I study at UT, I can have the experience of studying independently. Of course it is very difficult, studying independently. Sometimes I study...and a minute later, I have forgotten what I read. I can't just directly read and understand the material. I can't. And there are no tutorials for the courses I am taking. If there were, I would want to attend them. If I have problems with difficult parts of the materials, I just open the book more often. What is more difficult is that, usually, I do not receive my books so I must buy old modules or borrow them from my friends. I want to start a study group, but my older brother's house, where I stay, is far from my friends' houses. The thing is, I can not ride a motorcycle and so it is impossible to get there." I found myself nodding in appreciation of the difficulty of getting around in the sprawling city of Denpasar.

"What about support or encouragement from your family and friends?" I asked.

Ketut grinned mischievously at me and answered, "Well, my family supports me because I haven't done anything to make them angry! I have been working here at UT since I graduated from high school so they do not have to support me. Also, since I am living with my older brother's family, I have to take care of his children when I am home alone. Usually, I have to study at night after the children are asleep."

We paused in our interview while another UT staff member delivered the requisite food and drinks which accompany any gathering of more than one person. Then I asked Ketut about the quality of UT compared to that of conventional universities. She leaned towards me, placing her hand on my arm before answering. "I feel that the quality is really good. For sure, time can be managed more easily. Also, the results of our work depends on us alone...there is no help. In other universities, probably there are places or people to

get help from but, for us here at UT, it is not possible to get help. If we really do not study, it is inevitable that all of our grades will be terrible. The grades we get are truly dependent on us alone."

"One other thing," she continued, "if we are in a conventional university, the number of courses we must take in a semester is already decided for us and we must, therefore, pay a set amount of tuition. Here at UT, the tuition is not such a burden because we can choose how many courses we will take, you know. We decide that ourselves. If we want to take many courses, we can. If we can only afford one or two courses, it is up to us."

"Are you confident that you will be able to complete your *sarjana satu* in Public Administration?" was my next question. "Well, in the beginning, I wasn't certain the first time I took courses at UT. I had to assure myself that I would be able to finish. Others have already finished their study programs at UT, why shouldn't I be able to finish? That is what I told myself and I think I can finish in five more years. So six years minimum altogether. That is the biggest advantage to studying at UT, you can often finish more quickly than you can at a regular university--if you can study independently. The most important thing, if you study at UT, is that you must be able to study independently."

*As I was transcribing Ketut's interview this evening, I was thinking about what she had said about the advantages of UT. When she said that one advantage is that a person can finish a program more quickly than at a conventional university, I began to reflect on all the Indonesians I know who are, or have been, studying at other universities. In Yogyakarta, I was told that professors at regular universities usually teach at several different institutions. They have no office at the university, not even a desk. There are often up to a dozen different lecturers in a single course. The lecturer comes in, reads from his notes, and leaves. The students are expected to copy down the lecture word for word--no questions, no answers, no discussion. The professors have no office hours (How could they? They have no offices!)*

*If, for some reason, a student must meet with a professor, she must go to his home and wait, sometimes for hours, sometimes for days. One*

*professor told me that a professor would never be caught in the library--it would appear that he did not know everything. The average time for completion of a sarjana satu is 7 or 8 years. The educational experiences of the majority of Indonesian students and those of most North American students definitely share little common ground.*

*The obstacles I have been hearing from my participants are certainly great enough to explain the high drop-out rate of UT students. What fascinates me, what does seem, as yet, inexplicable, is the question: What is the essential difference between those who are, understandably, defeated by the obstacles of studying at a distance here in Indonesia (or anywhere, for that matter) and those, like the women I am interviewing, who persevere, who surmount the barriers to pursue their educational goals...and who are successful? Is it that will to learn? "Atas kemauan saya sendiri"--by my own will...to learn. (January 31, 1996)*

#### Linda

Linda is, in some ways, similar to all of the women I interviewed at the UPBJJ-Denpasar. There is an air of confidence and determination about her. Possibly some of the difference is cultural. Many of the women I had interviewed in Java were, of course, Javanese--a culture based on *kesopanan* and *kehalusan* (politeness and gentleness). Balinese women, generally, speak with louder voices and are more assertive than women from other parts of Indonesia. Linda gave very emphatic answers to my questions and seems to have given the whole issue of women and education some serious thought.

My name is Linda Yupita. I am twenty-two years old, Hindu, married and the mother of a four year old. I am in the third semester of my Business Administration degree program and I also work in my parents' business. I want very much to own my own business someday.

I am the youngest of many children in my family and all my brothers and sisters are already well-educated. In fact, all my older siblings are still taking courses, although several already have degrees. So whether I wanted to or not, that encouraged me to equal them, at least. Maybe you need to know that I already took courses at a regular university

with its every day attendance requirement, but because I have many activities, including my work, I felt that there was not enough time for everything. Besides, it was not certain, even if I attended class every day, whether a *dosen* (professor) would show up.

Sometimes no *dosen* came. What's more, it was really far from my home to the university and I have no transportation. So, I thought to myself that it would be more appropriate for me to just switch to UT.

I had already heard about UT because my older brother, who already has an engineering degree, was interested in taking courses in a different faculty here at UT. Since I wanted to be able to provide for my child, I decided that UT would be perfect. You know, I think that the quality of education at UT is the same, or even higher, than that of other conventional universities because the grades and the learning depend on the student's own efforts, not on the professors.

I feel very good about being an UT student. I am both happy and proud, because I have already tried conventional universities and I know that whatever I do here depends on me. I have set my own goals. I must finish in five years. Oh, I know that, even here at UT, that is an ambitious goal, but I have to do it for my own pride. It would really help if UT had tutorials for all the courses, but we form our own study groups when we can.

You know, Bu Mimi, I keep saying to my girlfriends at my aerobics class, "Why not join me at UT?". But they are too lazy to think. To my mind, the most important aspect of studying at a distance is support from the family environment. I feel that it is the lack of support from the environment, both society and family, that keeps most women from pursuing an education. The family that is educated will encourage women to become educated themselves.

*A community of learners, support in facing the obstacles, in overcoming the difficulties...I continue to hear stories of women making great efforts to find, or form, such a community. Linda encourages her friends at aerobics class; other women tell friends, "If I can do it, so can you! We can help each other." I agree with Linda that there is precious little*

*support for women to continue their education. Aside from the elementary school teachers who are required to upgrade, women must have a strong will to learn in order to pursue post-secondary education. (January 31, 1996)*

*It is 7:00 in the morning on the day I will conduct the last interviews for my master's research. I have to 'stop' somewhere, sometime...and this is where and when. I feel both reluctant and relieved. I feel reluctant because there are so many stories out there still to hear. I will not get to Padang, West Sumatera as I had planned; it is expensive and right now, I have no will to go. I have over 20 stories which is twice what I had hoped to hear and yet I feel like I have just begun.*

*I feel relieved because I am long-term fatigued, and suffering that sort of 'unwell' feeling that many Westerners who live here for long periods of time experience. The physical and psychic demands of this country (not to mention the almost constant difficulties of dealing with the bureaucracy in its myriad manifestations) have left me feeling so scattered and unfocused at times that I have found it difficult to put my thoughts down in words, especially in English words. I know from experience that I would be better able to deal with the 'fractals' in my reality if I could just bring myself to put them down on paper. Perhaps when I finish the interview process today, I will be able to channel some of my meager supply of energy into putting more of this extraordinary experience into the written word. (February 5, 1996)*

*Well, I am here at the UPBJJ-Denpasar, waiting to conduct these final interviews, hopefully. I say 'hopefully' because it is 10:00 and there have been no women to interview yet. I wonder if I will be content to stop with the stories I have already heard. This morning, on the way to the UPBJJ, I was suddenly, inexplicably on the verge of tears. Is it just extreme exhaustion? It has been a long time--too long?--that I have been immersed in this inquiry. Time to return to the wellspring. Time to be enveloped in a familiar community of learners again. I feel sometimes that the common ground is precariously narrow and I struggle to hang on to it. At other times, especially when I am actually listening to, or re-reading, the women's stories, I feel safely grounded. The common ground may be narrow but it does exist. Hearing different voices, I find I can stand without fear upon this common ground. (February 5, 1996)*

## Nengah

The first woman I interviewed that day is also a staff member at the UPBJJ-Denpasar. Nengah is a soft-spoken 30 year old mother of two small children. In addition to her job at the UT regional center, she is studying towards a *sarjana satu* in Public Administration through UT. In a culture where customer satisfaction is not given high priority and accurate information about anything can be next to impossible to obtain, Nengah is, perhaps surprisingly, dedicated to improving the services of the UPBJJ-Denpasar.

"I decided to take courses at UT because knowledge is very important for me, for my children, for the country. In addition, those of us who are public servants must know how best to serve the people so that society can be strengthened. We must make sure that people have the information they need. With more knowledge, we can give better, more appropriate information." Nengah looked at me earnestly as she gave her answer.

In common with almost every mother I interviewed during my inquiry, Nengah faces the everyday obstacle of time management. Except for the particulars, her answers to my questions about obstacles and responsibilities could have been any one of my previous participants. One striking difference is that Nengah keeps a very detailed, written schedule of her week's activities, responsibilities, and study goals. She proudly showed the recent schedule to me before reading it out loud.

Nengah is unusual in another way. Her husband, a civil servant like herself, is also studying at UT. Nengah felt that her husband "very much respects what I am doing because, with my courses at UT, I can view the development process from the scientific point of view." She said that they support each other and often study together. When I asked her if she and her husband divide up the household responsibilities, she replied, "It is difficult to divide up the chores because my husband is also a civil servant. For example, I do the household work. I do the kitchen work--how could my husband do that?"

In response to my questions, Nengah related the now familiar litany of problems of UT students: delay in receiving course grades, no tutorials, difficulties in obtaining accurate and timely information (It is even difficult for a staff member here at the UPBJJ to obtain information about UT!). It is, however, her answers to my final two questions that continue to resonate.

I asked, "If you had friends who were interested in enrolling in UT, what sorts of things would you say to them?"

Nengah replied eagerly, "I would tell them about my own experiences, and those of my friends. It turns out that some of my friends were interested. They said, 'This mother who already has a family can study, can take UT courses. Maybe I can too!' I told them, you know, that I have a family and have been successful so far in taking courses too. That's what I tell them. 'What about you who are not yet married, you must have much more time for studying!' That is what I say. Then my friends are very interested. They want to hear about my experiences because it is me alone who does it all..."

"What should UT provide to help students like you, Nengah?" is my last question.

"If I look at my friends, there are some whose semester grades are good, but their comprehensive grades are a disaster. They have already taken the comprehensives, but not yet graduated. There is no concern for them. The poor things, they are not stupid people. Maybe it is just that there is a problem with the comprehensive exams." Nengah paused, lost in thought. She then continued with tears in her voice, "I have a friend who has taken the comprehensive exams six times, and has not yet graduated. The other day, she came to the regional center crying heartbrokenly. The poor thing. If they would, the administration really must give this problem some attention."

#### Ade and Mang

This final interview is, in fact, a tandem interview with two sisters who are ten months apart in age, 23 and 24 years old. They are like identical twins, each a classic

Balinese beauty. They said that they are both students of UT and preferred to be interviewed at the same time, so I gave it my best effort. As I could not always indicate, or distinguish, in the transcript which one was speaking, I use MA for the indistinguishable responses. Although it might be only one voice which is heard at times, each sister referred constantly to the other before and during the response. It was eerily like interviewing Siamese twins--two heads (and, in this case, two bodies) but one set of blended responses.

Mimi: Ade, are you studying because you are required by the government, or your office?

Ade: No.

Mimi: So is it for yourself?

Ade: Yes, for myself.

Mimi: What about you, Mang?

Mang: For my own desires.

Mimi: What were your reasons for choosing UT?

Mang: The reason is that, from elementary school, we were already familiar with studying at home, studying independently. There is an elementary program--*SD Pamong*--elementary school without teachers.

(There is a type of schooling available in Indonesia for rural children. It is basically distance education with occasional travelling tutors. It is referred to as Packet B.)

Ade: It is a system which uses modules just like UT does. So, for studying, since we began elementary school, we studied independently. It was perfect for us.

Mimi: So it was the same for you, Mang? Then that is the same reason you both wanted to take courses at UT--because you were already accustomed to that kind of system? Suppose you could choose, would you still choose distance education? Suppose you could go to Udayana University?

Ade: For me, yes, if I could, I would want to go to Udayana. I would want to take courses both at UT and at Udayana.

Mimi: And Mang?

Mang: As for me, well, you know, I already take courses both at a private university and at UT. So I already take both.

Mimi: So you are attending courses at two universities. *Rajin sekali* (You are very hardworking). Ade, where did you find out about UT?

Ade: From our own father. From Dad.

Mang: Well, our Dad had a friend...

Ade: A subordinate...

After whispered discussion, Mang began to answer while Ade nodded with approval.

Mang: Yeah, a subordinate who already studied at UT, at this regional center. A person who was getting his DII.

Mimi: Oh, so you already had a connection with UT. What do you both hope to get for the future from your studies here at UT?

Ade: Well, in Indonesia...for the future...To study at UT, I don't really have a motive, I only want to add to my knowledge by studying more. We are forced by the situation in Indonesia now to learn more...to deepen our insights.

Mimi: In order to find work?

Ade: In my opinion, it is not certain whether it will help in finding work.

Mimi: So if it is not certain, then it is solely to increase your knowledge?

Ade: Maybe it is like this...it is not yet useful for achieving salary equity in the workplace. A degree from UT is still not considered of equal value to a degree from a conventional university.

Mimi: Do you feel the same, Mang?

Mang: Yes.

Mimi: Your father has a *sarjana satu*. What about your mother?

Mang: Our mother finished elementary school, grade six.

Mimi: Do you have any siblings?

Mang: Eight. All of them have already been educated and are working. It is just us two who have not yet started working.

Mimi: Even the youngest?

Mang: Already working!

Mang and Ade grinned at each other and then at me.

Mimi: So, how long will it take you two to complete your programs?

Ade: Actually, we had a target. Truthfully, we would like to have finished in four years, but we had to retake several exams. This meant that we backslid. So it will take around five years.

Mang: Maybe for me, it will take a little longer. The thing is now, you know, I am taking two courses of study. For here at UT, that is too much. But for the other university, I have to take all required courses. It means I have to take courses here bit by bit. Maybe it will be a long time before I finish.

Mimi: Are you both certain that you will be able to finish your study program?

Ade: I have a target--I must finish.

Mang: Me too.

Mimi: What about the tuition, is it a financial burden?

Mang and Ade looked at each other incredulously and then answered my silly question in unison.

MA: Of course, what would one expect? If you want to go to school, you have to pay!

Mimi: What are your feelings about being an UT student?

Ade: Oh, I am quite self-confident.

Mang: Me too. For example, if someone asks where I am studying, I say, "At UT". Then, they ask, "What's UT?" So I answer, "IKIP". IKIP is something they know.

(IKIP is Indonesian for the teacher training colleges in Indonesia, institutions which, unlike Universitas Terbuka, are widely known.)

**Mimi:** It seems that UT still is not very widely known. What do you think that people's attitudes are about UT, about the quality of its education, the quality of a UT degree?

**Mang:** In my opinion, they...(whispered consultation with Ade). They feel positive about UT. The thing is, they think that the students are independent, that their grades are real. What I mean is that they know that the grades that UT students receive are their own grades--not dependent on professors, or on other factors. They believe that UT students are really, truly independent. The level of UT students is higher, compared to regular students.

**Mimi:** For the two of you, did your previous experience of independent study make it easier for you to study through UT? For example, easier for you to adjust to independent study than friends who went to conventional schools?

**Ade:** The thing is, in conventional schools, sometimes, as it happens, children are not able to learn at school. Sometimes the teachers do not show up. So the students are at a disadvantage, they lose out. But we already had the lesson packets at home. We could study whenever we wanted and it was no trouble.

**Mimi:** Is your family environment sufficiently supportive of your studying?

**Ade:** Oh yes, we are both encouraged by our father. For sure, it is our father's wish that we study at UT. He was the one who suggested it. Our older brother already studies at UT.

**Mang:** Yes, he is also in semester eight. He works for Telekom. His company just moved him to Kupang but he is still studying through UT now.

**Ade:** Yes, that is another advantage of studying at UT. Later, wherever we move, we can still study. For example, if we are sent to Irian Jaya, there is a regional center there and we could just continue our courses as usual.

The sisters smiled at each other at the possibilities they had just explained to me, and then turned expectantly towards me. I had struck a bargain with them, before the interview started, that I would answer their questions about Canada if they answered all of my questions. The ensuing conversation lasted almost as long as the interview itself. I was struck again with the strength of the need of all the women I have talked with to learn...about the world, about other realities outside their own. Looking, perhaps, for a community of learners as large as the world, they too seemed eager to hear different voices, to seek common ground.

**One more story...**

**both ancient and new...**

**both common and unique...**

**Tentri's story...**

The story of Tentrí is both a story of endings and a story of beginnings; a story of tradition and a story of imagination. It is a story told in a different voice, a voice that calls from the next generation of Indonesian women students. It is a story of a search for common ground, a story of that "instinctive craving for light".

This story of Tentrí can best be told as I remember it, in a series of visual images from a young girl's life.

### Image

*The first time I meet Tentrí, it is in her Grandmother's house in Ujung Pandang in early January. She is a beautiful young girl of twelve years, dressed like any pre-teen in North America: blue jeans, t-shirt, sandals--her blue-black hair pulled back in a thick braid which hangs down to the middle of her back. Unlike most young teens I have met in Indonesia, she is not shy when we first meet. Tentrí, in fact, immediately sets about practicing her near fluent English; telling me that, in fact, English is her favorite subject in school. She is so eager to learn about life outside her experience. She vamps as a MTV music hostess for our video camera. She holds my hand in both of hers and asks me if, someday, she might come to Canada to live with us and study. Looking down into her bright, eager face, I promise: Yes. Yes.*

### Image

*The next time I see Tentrí, several days later, she arrives directly from school. She is dressed in an ankle-length navy blue skirt, navy-blue tights and black tie-up shoes. Her lovely mane of hair is hidden beneath a flow of white djilbab (a Muslim veil) which covers her from head to thigh. But her face is there for all to see, albeit without the lovely smile of the previous visit. "Just a minute," she calls out as she runs to her Grandmother's bedroom. True to her words, just a minute later, she re-emerges in her jeans and t-shirt, smiling broadly. She asks her new "big brother" what he thinks about the djilbab. My son stumbles for the right words and then reverses the question. "What do you think, little sister?" he asks. We are all surprised by her vehement answer. "Well, my father says I have to start practicing to wear it...but I hate it!" We do not know what to say.*

## Image

*It is two months before I see Tentri again. She has been in my thoughts constantly. I have thought often of the promise I made to her--that she might, someday, come to live with us and study in Canada. When I meet Tentri again in her auntie's house in Jakarta, I must quickly hide my surprise. She is now dressed from head to toe in dark, heavy material. She is such a slight thing that I worry her strength will not be enough to support these drapes; for that is what her clothing resembles more than anything else. Her brilliant smile of joy at seeing me again cannot be hidden, despite the dark maroon djilbab which frames her young face. Tentri excitedly reminds me of my promise, saying it is now one of her dreams: to come to study at the University of Victoria, and to live with her Western bapak, ibu and kakak (father, mother and older brother). Tentri is in Jakarta with her own father, mother, grandmother, and uncle to begin the most holy of journeys for a follower of Allah. Tentri is about to 'naik haj', to fulfill one of the obligations of Islam. A Muslim is required, if he has the means and the health, to travel to the holy land of Mekkah, in Saudi Arabia, once in his lifetime. It was upon her father's return from his first haj that he declared that the women in his family, upon reaching puberty, must always be veiled. In the two months since I first met Tentri, she has reached puberty.*

## Image

*The next night, I sit alone at the dinner table with Tentri's father. I can not see Tentri, but I can see her shadow leaning over the upstairs balcony. She is straining to hear my conversation with her father. I have asked a simple question. Why does he require his wife and daughters to be covered from head to toe, to be constantly in the company of at least one male member of the family? His answer is long, colorful and dogmatic. He has finished criticizing the way women are allowed to live in the West, unprotected and allowed to move freely wherever and whenever they wish. He concludes with a most compelling argument, delivered in his resonant, imam (prayer leader) voice. "If you have something more precious than gold, would you not protect it by hiding it from the view of other men?"*

## Image

*The last time I see Tentri, we are walking arm in arm down the concourse of the Soeharta-Hatta airport in Jakarta in mid-April. The concourse is awash with people--it is said that there are one hundred well-wishers for every departing haji (title of respect for every person who has made the Haj). There are 8,000 Indonesians who will leave for Mekkah this day.*

*Tentri is one of them. In my mind's eye, I can see what an odd vision we must be to all of these people, many of whom have come from unimaginable places on their once-in-a-lifetime journey. So I understand the staring eyes, the gaping mouths, the laughter... and the frowns. I am a tall, blonde orang putih (white person), dressed in a knee-length skirt and short-sleeved blouse, walking arm in arm with a wisp of an Indonesian girl, weighted down by meters of dark maroon cloth. We are talking of all the things we might do, all the adventures we might have, if she comes to Canada. Tentri is looking up at me, laughing at some feeble joke I have tried in Indonesian when I see her eyes widen and I feel her hands tighten around mine. I turn to see what it is she has seen. Coming towards us through the patient crowds is a group of men from Iraq. This is not what has caused Tentri's eyes to widen--it is the black-draped figures, behind the men, who are being led down the concourse by their children. These women are being led because they can not see clearly enough to walk by themselves, blinded as they are by the veils which cover them head to foot, including their eyes. Tentri speechlessly watches them until they are out of sight down the crowded concourse.*

*I gather her in my arms and whisper, "You will realize your dreams, Tentri, you will."*

*"Promise?" she whispers back.*

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