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Indonesia

## THE TEN COMMON-MENTS: Some Experiences From Indonesia

[ THOU SHALT NOT HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME ]

So Indonesia became a republic that upholds monotheism. It sounds odd, especially when we imagine that these green and lush tropical islands, settled three thousands and some years before Moses, decided to embrace the concept of a single god in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Right after the proclamation of independence at the end of World War II our founding fathers were faced with a decision concerning a crucial issue: the foundation of the new state. While the Islamists groups advocated the *sharia* law, at least for the country's Moslems, the nationalist faction was of the opinion that it was enough to mention a “belief in God,” in addition to humanism and social justice, as the state's foundation. The Christian minority from the eastern islands gave notice of their secession if the *sharia* was to be mentioned in the principles. As a compromise they decided to add a cluster of adjectives to god. So, the first principle of the state foundation *Pancasila* [read: Pan-cha-see-la] was formulated roughly like this: The Belief in One and Only God. Thus Indonesia was born, a state which is neither theocratic nor secular. And, please be advised, the new state does not acknowledge Judaism. A prominent writer, Linus Suryadi, was once accused of blasphemy against Islam when he said that circumcision was originally a Jewish practice that was embraced by Islam.

Children born in the independence era learn from their beginning years that monotheism (minus Judaism) is one of our common values. This was also what Saddam Hussein Learned.

This Saddam Hussein was born in Pekalongan, Central Java. The Javanese do

not have family names. His name was Saddam Hussein, full stop, even though he was not the son of Mr. Hussein (in Indonesia, one can find Muammar Ghadafi, Kissinger, Polpot, Mussolini, or Hitler; I believe soon there will be Usamah or Osama, but not Bush). People would call him Saddam, not Hussein. *Pak* Saddam, not *Pak* Hussein.

Like other children, Saddam learned state ideology and the history of his nation at school, as well as religion and some other things. He learned that the Republic of Indonesia was established on 17 August 1945, after 350 years of the Dutch colonization and 3.5 years of Japanese occupation. Unlike India and Malaysia whose independence was granted by the British, we Indonesians fought for ours, with blood and tears. We are proud of it. We are taught to be. And what was it that united the 13.000 plus islands? It was, as mentioned in the textbooks, a common history shared between people of different cultures and ethnicities living on those scattered pieces of land. It's that we've had a lingua franca. But what does unite us is a common history. In a not-too-impressive expression: the people living on those islands at the end of World War Two were coincidentally colonized by the Dutch rather than by the British or by some others.. [Yet] for the Indonesians this common history is both heroic and romantic. It refers to a glorious past of the Majapahit kingdom and projects a glorious future under the Republic of Indonesia. For a scholar like Benedict Anderson this nation is just a construction. In his formulation, it is not the romantic “great nation on the tropic of emerald, united

by a common history” but, more plainly, an "imagined community”. An imagined community has no celestial basis.

One of the imaginations of this imagined community is the state foundation on which it aims to grow itself: *Pancasila*, meaning 'five principles.' The first of its five principles is, again: The Belief in The One and The Only God.

And this expression is the very proof of the monotheists’ failure to coexist with different values. Before the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the time when Java's interior kingdoms weakened and Islamic power coming in from the island’s northern coast surged, Java and parts of the archipelago had been under Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms. The adherents of Hinduism, Buddhism, and local beliefs live there until now. Each of these groups has a concept of divinity completely different from the monotheistic concept of god. Monotheistic religions tend to fail, not only in understanding the others’ concepts, but more fundamentally in appreciating that such beliefs and practices have their own spiritual and divine dimension. And this certainly is not a trait limited to the Moslems. Travelogues of the first Catholic missionaries to India show the same failure--failure to see Hinduism as a religion, and, worse, failure to see that these 'not-religions' could possibly assume the same divine status.

Our common values were thus set up on the failure to coexist fully. I am here talking about Indonesia. Every child that learns history knows tacitly that the common platform was arranged after a set of negotiation. In the case of the state's foundation on *Pancasila*, the Islamist group gave in (note that this group does not necessarily represent the majority of Moslems—sum up close to 90% of Indonesian population—who have never been supportive of an Islamic State of Indonesia). The Christians got what they wanted, as their objection was granted. The Hindus and the

Buddhists, having been the most underrepresented during the formation of the republic, gave in the most. In schools, teachers tried to explain non-Abrahamic religions in monotheistic terms. The Hindus have three gods, the Trimurti--Vishnu, Brahma, and Shiva--but beyond them is the one absolute entity, the Sang Hyang Widhi. In an effort to put the difficult fact of plurality in accordance with the state's principle of monotheism, schoolteachers invariably use simple talk when it comes to Balinese Hinduism. Please don’t expect them to talk about the Upanishads, or about any Hindi texts opening the possibility of god's nonexistence.

Half of the globe is, or was at one time, influenced by monotheism. The area covered by the missionary religions has spread to the five continents. Moses, depicted as bringing the tablets of the Ten Commandments, may be the most ancient icon we share in common. Monotheism is the first rule of the commandments. It is also the rule that creates the most problems when it comes to co-existence and identity. The political dimension of the three branches of monotheism influenced the drawing up of the world map since the time of the Crusades, by way of colonization, the two World Wars, and the War on Terror these days.

What can be said about Indonesia's experience? Monotheism may be the prototype of the problem stemming from the effort to find some common value--particularly when it comes to values related to identity. Common values are a project, a construct, and Saddam Hussein from Pekalongan knew this first rule: common values have always been constructed with the help of hegemony and through the exclusion of other. This is the first thing to remember: there is always something and someone excluded when we list a set of things that we hold in common.

[THOU SHALT NOT TAKE THE NAME OF THE  
LORD THY GOD IN VAIN]

The history of colonization is the common history of the world. Modern nation-states all relate to colonization in one way or another, directly or not; most of them, however, relate directly. Indonesia thus used to be the Dutch Indies.

Among Indonesia's Dutch inheritances is its legal system. There is a group of notorious articles in the criminal code known by its Dutch expression *baatzai artikelen*, the 'defamation articles'. One cannot find these clauses in the Dutch criminal code in the Netherlands. They were initially used to suppress critical voices in the colonies. These articles are preserved since the independent Republic of Indonesia retained the law books in their entirety. We call these articles 'rubber articles' for they can basically include any critical opinion as slander. As the government got more authoritarian, the more it used the *baatzai artikelen* to send activists and opponents to jail.

In addition to a set of modern tools of suppression introduced by the colonial power, we certainly also have to mention, as a matter of historical fact, the transmission of ideas through colonization. In the case of the Dutch Indies, the natives—that's us, Indonesians—were exposed to modern-western education, particularly after the political reforms in the Netherlands at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The liberals defeated the conservatives in Holland, and decided to introduce what they called 'Ethical Policy' to 'enlighten' the natives in the colonies. Modern schools opened. Native boys were sent to study in Holland's universities. This initiative introduced modern ideas and ideologies such as liberty, republic, democracy, human rights, socialism, as well as

communism to the Indonesians. Postcolonial studies mention, endlessly, that it is through the language of the colonizers that the colonized comprehend themselves in the new world.

Saddam Hussein spent his childhood in the thick of the Islamic tradition, as most of Pekalongan children did. The northern coastal town was one of the first Arab settlements in Java; the Islamic tradition, usually referred to as the *santri* culture, is dominant there. As Saddam grew up he began to read leftist ideas as well. Socialism and communism were forbidden at that time. The Suharto military regime was a Southeast Asian 'dear colleague' of the US during the Cold War. Before the systematic demolition of the Indonesia's Communist Party between 1965-68, there had been some efforts to reconcile Islamic teachings with communism. In that spirit, Indonesia's first president Sukarno, a fiery anti-US politician, had formulated a slogan: *Nasakom*= *Nasionalisme-Agama-Komunisme* (Nationalism-Religion-Communism). Even though his successor General Suharto, a cool anti-communist, subsequently black-painted communism-cum-socialism as mere atheism, efforts to syncretise Islam and the leftist ideas lingered on among many students-activists. Despite his strong Islamic background, Saddam Hussein joined the anti-government movement through a nationalist as well as a leftist group. He was close to the nationalist Indonesian Democratic Party, a suppressed opponent to the ruling party, as well as to the underground Democratic People's Party. Later, many proponents of this movement were sent to jail under the *baatzai artikelen*.

In 1998 the military regime collapsed. Ironically the new government, elected through a democratic election, forgot to invalidate the undemocratic articles of the law book. Or rather, they did not forget it. They benefited from it. Already in the *era reformasi*, Saddam was arrested following a demonstration in his hometown. He was tried

with that very same defamation article, and sentenced to some three years imprisonment. The government he was critical of used to be the opposition party he had earlier supported.

So Saddam entered jail. A formal state prison, the Pekalongan jail is not as notorious a house as Guantanamo or any of the secret detention houses in Indonesia. Yet it was not a comfortable place. During the military regime when I worked as a journalist I had friends who were jailed. We thought we fought for the freedom of the press but unfortunately the court had a different opinion. Using the defamation articles, the judges sent my colleagues to three to four years in jail. We used to visit them in the men's detention house and prison in Jakarta, bringing with us the special food they were craving. As long as we kept friendly with the guards and did not forget to offer the necessary lubricant, we even threw birthday parties, with wine and beer, cakes and jokes. The prisons for women and children are usually harsher, as they contain fewer political prisoners. In the men's prisons, the guards were usually on familiar terms with the visitors--who, in many cases, had themselves once been prisoners, or were prospective prisoners-to-be. One day a guard asked a visitor, whom it was he was visiting this time. Laughing, the activist answered that this time it was he himself who had been sentenced. Whenever the guards turned strict and unfriendly, we knew an inspection was taking place.

Personal relationships developed between the prisoners, the guards, and the visitors. The visitors, comprised of family and friends, became the main source of strength, a backbone for the prisoners during their term. But this time Saddam was unlucky. The closeness among activists that could be relied on in the past was now waning away as the political situation was changing. It's not a good excuse, I know. For reasons that could not easily be forgiven later, he was neglected by friends and family. Fewer and fewer people visited, or cared about his condition.

Neglected by those who were supposed to be closest, and victim of the unhealthy condition in the prison, he died of malnutrition and other complications.

After his death, his colleagues organized a protest again, demanding that the prison take responsibility.

Saddam Hussein's tragic story of is only one of the millions of stories in the wake of colonization. His name was inspired by a global hero. Whether we like it or not, in his time the real Saddam Hussein was a hero for some Indonesian Moslems for he rose up, roaring against the West, envisioning the prospect of Pan-Arabism and thereby giving many people, certainly his family in Pekalongan, the family of Saddam Hussein, hope that there is a great Arabic center of world power, one that would compete with the West.

But the young Saddam knew that any authority, including the god of the Ten Commandments, dislikes when people make jokes in its name.

[ REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY, KEEP IT HOLY ]

Soon after the military rule collapsed in 1998, here comes a new old problem. Fundamentalism. The state ideology teachers used to warn schoolchildren of the latent danger of communism. I remember that this was how I was introduced to the word '*laten*' in Bahasa Indonesia, meaning latent. But it now appears that we are facing the resurrection of the latent danger of fundamentalism.

Maybe it was a coincidence that the regime crumbled toward the end of the era when the socialist-communist rules were falling everywhere in the world. But it was no accident that it toppled after having been hit by the winds of capital flight and the Asian monetary crisis. During his reign General

Suharto was supported by the US; in the Cold War, he was its dear ally. When it came to the accumulation of personal wealth, the US was Suharto's dear ally. In 1998, worth around 15 billion US \$, Suharto was number 74 on the Forbes richest list (note: his property could not really be distinguished from that of his family-- nor, probably, from that of his nation). When he stepped down, his enemies, namely socialism and communism, had already fallen apart. But after the general and the communists have withered away, here come the religious zealots.

But wait. Don't say that we see only the emergence of Islamism. On the other side of the story, outspoken liberal groups within Islam are also emerging. During the military rule they weren't so obvious either. One of them is the Network of Liberal Islam, a circle of Moslem intellectuals who broadcast their ideas through radio programs, the web, traditional print media, and a series of traveling discussions. They believe that, as with any other religion, the Islam that can be discussed is only Islam within human experience. In this world, Islam always comes with an adjective. The Liberal Islam groups call the fundamentalists "the textual Islam" team. The so-called textual groups do not believe that revelation comes with any context; they want to reenact in this recent world what they perceive as Islamic reign in the time of the prophet. One of their priorities is to draw up ordinances based on *sharia* law. Unfortunately this approach touches only upon issues on morality and lifestyle in public places--never on poverty or eradication of corruption.

The public space is the place of the battle. Some times the battle is really silly.

Let's assume this is a story about the public space. In his last term, the governor of the capital city Jakarta--a general, as has always been the custom--took a decision that should have been taken a decade earlier: to develop a humane public transport, the TransJakarta

Busway. Up till then, the public bus system had no schedule, often no bus-shelter, and if the bus did stop briefly in the middle of the street, there was at least one pickpocket on board. Or a whole group. The second-class unfortunate passenger was showered by the tropical rain while waiting for the bus, then had his pockets cleaned by pickpockets on the bus, arriving late for his meeting with neither money nor credit cards; at his destination it was sunny and unbearably hot. If he was lucky, everybody else was also late--which was rather common. It was always like that; because public problems were never settled at a public level, individuals tried to fix them at the level of the individual. The car became the personal priority list. The growth of streets could never match the growth of vehicles. Jams were everywhere. Governor Sutiyoso decided to provide a busway.

He was a bit different from most of his predecessors. He said he gave up smoking, and proved he defends old trees. A hundred-year old banyan stood where a junction was supposed to be built. The tree was on the government protection list. The general agreed that the bus lane should give way to the tree. This would never have happened earlier.

But now a group of textual youth read the decision with one-eyed glasses. Having been trained to read any text literally, according to their interpretation, they concluded that Jakarta government's decision to keep the tree was a superstitious act and, worse, equal to belief in gods other than The One God. The contractor must have believed in the gods of the banyan tree. This is against the state foundation. Remember, the first principle: Belief in One and The Only God. true, some people do practice older local beliefs by giving offerings to certain trees. There are days considered holy, like the concept of Sabbath. There are places considered sacred. Old trees are like your great-great-grandmother: surely you'd pay a visit and give an offering if she still were growing.

The gang of one-dimensional textualists cut down nearly all of the tree, leaving only the roots and a meter of the trunk. The only reason they didn't dig out the banyan down to its root was that they didn't have tools strong enough to accomplish the dirty job. Their view of the public space is: they alone are the public.

Other cases were more serious: attacks on properties and members of Ahmadiyah, a group considered by the mainstream *ulemas* as an unforgivable deviation from Islam. Or, the effort to attack the office of the Liberal Islam Network. One of the worst cases, as this involved the local government, is the introduction of a regulation banning women from going out after 7 pm unaccompanied by a male family member.

What is happening here is an effort to monopolize interpretation. Who owns the copyright of the Holy Book? Revelation, as well as ideas, is supposed to be shared, owned, developed in common.

[HONOUR THY FATHER AND THY MOTHER]

With a high rate of infant mortality, and life expectancy of around 65 years, Indonesia's population has reached 220 million. It is the fourth most populated country in the world. The third, the US, has reached 300 million. But in the US this is related to the fact that people live longer. In US it is not because more babies are born; it is because fewer grannies die. In Indonesia, grandpas and grandmas pass away at the same pace as before. The production of babies is high.

I was the youngest of five siblings. My parents decided I was the conclusion, as it also was the year the government stopped giving subsidies to the civil servants for more than three babies. This new rule didn't apply to me since I was manufactured during the old regulation: until I turned seventeen, I still qualified for subsidized rice. The year I was born was the year General Suharto introduced

a Family Planning Program. When it was first launched, it encouraged no more than three children. The policy was a success. At least in my family. My mother, a devout Catholic, decided to take on contraception without much hesitation. In 1970 the population was 112 million.

Only once in my life time did I experience the limit of natural resources—during a drought which forced my family to line up for water at a small and not all too clear spring. During that time I also liked to have little adventures at the back of our house. There were small canals and patches of trees. I could see what each household pumped out from a pipe into the canal. If the water ran, the formless stuff would be sent to the river. But most of the time the canals were blocked by garbage. Children have not developed the sense of disgust yet—they take that up later. Only when I was older did I think of how filthy the area must have been. At that time people were not familiar with septic tank—not the middle nor the upper class either. And even until now, cities still don't have integrated sewers to process human waste. Again, when public problems are not settled on a public level, people try to settle them on the level of the individual. The middle and upper classes build their own septic tanks. In fact, this private resolve was what most scared a diplomat's wife from one Eastern European countries whom I happened to meet at a dinner party. She was distraught to imagine that beneath every garden of every household there is a bunker filled with human waste. And in her garden is her own waste. Meanwhile, the poor still use the common drainage and river.

There are a lot of other, more sophisticated reasons, but it was the memory of the household waste that was enough to make me not too keen on seeing too many people in the world. Global warming is the latest warning for humankind, the only flock responsible for having caused it. I have

decided not to split my cells, the maximal form of family planning.

Family planning is the one achievement of the military regime I truthfully appreciate. The authority had a centralized body and a budget to carry out the programs. Starting with a ‘three children’ campaign, the government planned to reduce the number step by step. In the end of 70s, the slogan was already ‘Two is enough, girl or boy is the same.’ There were, however, reports of coerced contraception which made human rights advocates as well as women’s rights activist opposed to the program. Many women do not have autonomous control over their bodies—they are forced either by the state or by their husbands. I think that to be forced to have two kids by the state is still better than to be forced to have ten kids by any husband.

Now, as the regime has gone, family planning is no longer popular. The state no longer has either a central body or a budget anymore. It probably lost its popularity for two reasons. First, it might remind people to the military era. Second, the mainstream (or common?) view is slanting to the right these days. Coerced contraception is against human rights. Coerced pregnancy too. However, it is easier to put one’s finger on the first as contraception is usually administered in public clinics, while coerced pregnancy happens in private rooms.

Indonesia might well expect a population explosion in the near future. The Justice and Prosperity Party, one of the most modern parties—meaning a political party basing its existence on its networks and programs, not on charismatic leadership—is in favor of polygamous marriages and encourages big families. This is a party led by highly educated people; and most of its leaders got their PhDs from western universities. A not-so-impressively-educated group is, for example, the Front of Islam Defenders. This is a paramilitary organization that has often been involved in attacks against cafes and pubs, as

well as against groups whose view of Islam is different from their. In an interview one of them, Fauzan by name, said happily that he has four wives from whom he has twenty children surviving until now. He’d had thirteen others who did not survive. They did not resign; they died. (The word ‘resign’ was used by a polygamous man who said that one of his wives resigned from the marriage(s), as she was not strong enough to bear the job). At twenty, Fauzan is still not enough to fight against the US. So he fights the US by, umm, making not love but children. As for the children’s education and healthcare he is not worried at all; God will provide the way.

Even though we don’t know each other personally, Fauzan and I share the same world, the same country, the same city (when he is visiting his Jakartan wives). But, to be frank, I don’t know if I am able to put him and me in the same box called “us” when we are trying to find answers to questions about what it is we do hold in common. This may sound politically incorrect but perhaps the problems lie not in what the common is, but rather in who we are. Because the commons is defined by who we are, but who we are is also defined by what we hold in common.

[THOU SHALT NOT KILL; THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; THOU SHALT NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST THY NEIGHBOUR]

Now it’s time to look at the brighter picture rather than just ponder problems that arise when we try imagine what the common could actually be.

There is, for instance, at least one thing that I have in common with Imam Samudra, the mastermind of the Bali bombings who so far hasn’t expressed regret for his deeds. The bombings killed more than three hundred people. In Samudra’s laptop the police found out that he had, apparently, been familiar with adult sites. When the press conference

made this public, many people thought it was not relevant to the case. They thought it was the police's smear campaign. Later the police explained that those porn sites could actually be manipulated to cover up correspondence between the terrorist groups. I really don't know how it worked technically. However, at least Imam Samudra and I do open porn sites sometimes, albeit for different reasons. I can assure you that I open those sites for, umm, my cultural studies, or pop culture studies, or a because I need to gather as much information as possible about pornography in order to be able to contribute to the public debate since the parliament is now drafting an anti-pornography-pornoaction bill intending to send people who french-kiss in public to five years' jail.

The cyber world and virtual sites have become the newest media we share in common. I remember I heard about the internet for the first time in 1995. It was still during the military era and we didn't know that their power would last only three more years. Some colleagues had been arrested. Many journalists were fired from their offices and blacklisted from the business line. I was one of those who lost her job. Our underground group, established by mostly young journalists, focused our effort on how to break government censorship and to exchange information as widely as possible. That was the time when we started to know about the internet and the digital camera. Both were very tempting. Digital cameras need no films. Soldiers and the low-ranking policemen whom we often had to face in the fields did not know about the new technology. They usually confiscated celluloid rolls inside our cameras if they thought we had taken forbidden pictures. Now for risky situations we would bring two cameras. One digital. One analog, for a decoy. Meanwhile, we could send the stories and the pictures quickly through the internet.

At that time the process was still a bit too complicated for ordinary people. We had

never heard about browsers or websites. The commercial browser Mosaic started to operate only in 1993 and there were only around fifty websites on the globe. It was still so new a development that we didn't think to create our own website that people could have access to. At that time, for security reasons, our emails had to use an encoding and decoding program.

To our surprise, three years later the regime collapsed. The euphoria of reformation happened simultaneously with the euphoria of www, which was a consequence of the global dot-com boom in the end of the 90s. The government was a lame tiger now. Some years later we know that it is not only the freedom-lovers, the democracy-believers or the porn-junkies that are connected to the web. Imam Samudra and his terrorist club did the same thing. As long as one can read abc, theoretically one can read the texts on the net. This virtual world is for all.

Today we understand that as far as its substance goes, the www does not have an ideology. But it was not like that during its creation. The concept of world-wide-web was developed by a British computer scientist, Tim Berners-Lee, who struggled to maintain it as an open system, free and without ownership. He constructed a network of virtual world that is accessible for everybody. The www was born out of ideas aiming to democratize knowledge. The virtual infrastructure was later welcomed by communities and groups with the same ideology. They developed computer programs that are free and open to modification. This is one of the latest developments that now make our world now flat, according to Thomas Friedman in his new book *The World is Flat*

One of the most phenomenal www inventions is the Wikipedia, initiated by Jimmy Wales, head of a new internet company Bomis.com. To imagine an encyclopedia which is accessible for everybody to read and to edit would sound like a crazy idea, but only



until the effort started to bring fruits. Wikipedia was activated in 2001 with articles from a collection that Wales kept from the previous free encyclopedia project. In Wikipedia he invited every visitor to edit and to add to the collection. In the first year the collection added up to 20,000. In 2005, they have reached more than 800,000 articles; some of them have been translated to different languages, including to Bahasa Indonesia. The collection is growing even as we are reading this sentence. This free encyclopedia now is one of the most visited websites, and one of the most used references. Even though Wikipedia has an editorial team, it is not proof from false facts, or even defamation. However, the idea to create a common encyclopedia where everybody is allowed to participate freely as a reader or as a writer is nevertheless one of the brilliant ideas of this century.

From one vantage point this system might remind us of practices in traditional societies, in which contribution toward “common work” stays anonymous. But then, here is a modern subject and modern context. Where traditional societies work with myth, Wikipedia pretends to work on information, if not facts. While a traditional society has one site everyone fully trust, modern society has unlimited sites that no-one one can trust fully.

[THOU SHALT NOT STEAL]

The world of the web seems very sophisticated. But where is it located? It is a virtual world, the world of ideas. I nearly forgot about its location until an earthquake shook Taiwan and wrecked the underwater cables that connected internet providers in Asia. Aha, the virtual world is in fact to be found in the earth.

The cyber world is a world of intertwining cables. Physical cables. I remember a friend. He worked for a financial daily. Secretly he

supported our press freedom underground movement. He had to do it in secret so he would not lose his job. This guy had many ideas and he was a bit mysterious in some way. Though we needed to make contact with international organizations such as The International Federation of Journalists, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the like, our group didn't have any financial support. Phone tariffs were very high as the service was monopolized. But this peculiar friend told us of a way to make a free international call. He invited us to make the telephone contacts from his house in the outskirts of Jakarta. So, we filed reports or send faxes via his house phone, all for free. We were curious but he said he got a special deal for it. Anyway, the situation was good for our side so we didn't ask too much. Later we found out that he managed to double the public phone's cable from the booth nearby and pull out one to his house. A couple of months later, the telephone company closed that public phone. A couple of years later, I read in the newspaper that a boy, the son of this very friend, was kidnapped by his former business partner.

I realized how mixed-up the concepts of common, public, and state ownership are. Who own the public phones? State monopoly on the telephone network produced bad service, high tariffs and public disappointment. In turn, people perceived public phones as state facilities, to which they targeted their dissatisfaction.

I had a journalist friend who once had a side work selling telephone cards. A hilarious young man. One day he offered an unlimited time call card to another friend, a British man who contributed reports for Amnesty International. Keep in mind that this phone card can only be used to make a call, not to receive one. Never to receive a call. She forgot the prohibition and she took someone's call. After that, she could not use the card anymore. She could not contact the guy either. He reappeared again one day,

when it was too late to complain. Sad story. Years later, he was shot dead by a police squad in front of his house. The police said that he tried to escape when they were arresting him for his alleged participation in fencing stolen cars.

Freedom of the press is fought not only by saints, but by thieves too. The two stories show how telephone connection is not something you can take for granted here. I have yet to get fixed the cable phone at my home, in the center of Jakarta. Six months ago now I submitted the registration and still no news. A mobile phone is very easy to get these days, but they are much more expensive and their connection is not satisfying. With a dial-up modem, internet connection is not too cheap and with mobile modem it is neither cheap nor smooth as we hope. Once again, the world of ideas needs the infrastructure. The virtual world needs the cables. The common is about access.

[THOU SHALT NOT COVET THY NEIGHBOUR'S HOUSE, THOU SHALT NOT COVET THY NEIGHBOUR'S WIFE, NOR HIS MANSERVANT, NOR HIS MAIDSERVANT, NOR HIS OX, NOR HIS ASS, NOR ANY THING THAT IS THY NEIGHBOUR'S.]

A group of student from a prestigious art school in Bandung held an exhibition. They showed some pieces of work made up from collections of pop culture merchandises. The key message lied not in the form, but in the process. They obtained the merchandises from the internet sales. Not through a proper transaction, but from fraud transactions using fake credit cards. They called this e-buying without real paying "carding". They had manipulated the broker's trust or his lust to sell. The exhibition was their response to a global culture.

In another student town Yogyakarta, there are also groups of young people who spend times

in internet cafés to do the carding. They like to buy things that they cannot personally use—humidity conditioning machine for factories, for example; I don't even know the exact name—just to try how far they can go.

How those things could affect not only the brokers, but also me? Soon, more and more dot-coms, including Amazon or Barnes & Noble, punished every Indonesian. Today I cannot not order books from the internet with my Indonesian credit card and an Indonesian address.

There is a limit. In the end, the inability of the net to connect with, and recognize, each individual causes a communal sanction.

In the end, our identity is defined by a group, a territory. This situation is best shown by a document we call 'passport.' It is true that not everybody needs passport. My mother, for example, doesn't need to cross the border. That's the requirement for not having a need to own any passport. So far, it's only smoke from forest fires which doesn't need papers to cross the border. As for the rest, thousands of people face the discrepancy between their hopes and whatever their passports grant them. Like the internet, passports give people equal formal status, only with substance and consequences that defined the difference, sometimes a hundred and eighty degree difference, between individuals or groups. Passports fold us into certain groups and at the same time also exclude our group from an other. It is in this situation that we are groping for what it is we can hold in common.

"The common's seems like a concept based on an internal contradiction. It includes as well as excludes. But, there is optimism in it, as there was optimism when some scattered islands in Southeast Asia decided to be Indonesia. I would like to paraphrase Ben Anderson here, that the thing we are looking for is nothing but "the imagined commons."

What about if we start with, umm, Bob Dylan? Or, maybe he's too old already?