

THE HISTORY OF SUBUD PROJECT

The History of Subud is an international Subud project. Its aim is to provide Subud members with what Bapak referred to as a “*kejiwaan* history of Subud”. He wanted it to show how Subud come into the world, and how it spread, not by human planning, but through the agency of the Roh Ilofi, which he translated as “the Holy Spirit”.

Bapak wanted this history to be properly researched, and based on documentation. It should contain no theory. He told Harlinah that she should work without a committee to advise her because her own receiving was sufficient to guide her.

Bapak first mentioned Harlinah and the history of Subud, in 1979. The International Subud Committee - in the UK at that time - wanted someone at Wisma Subud with whom they could communicate, who would then explain their concerns to Bapak. They also wanted more background information about what Bapak, from time to time, advised. They asked Harlinah to find a volunteer who would do this job. They asked her because she had already been helping the previous ISC. So, with the help of Bapak’s granddaughter, Ismuwati, (Muti), a list of possible people was drawn up, and submitted to Bapak. Harlinah and Muti thought that if Bapak chose someone, that person was more or less certain to “volunteer” for the job.

Harlinah’s name was not on this list because she was already working full time for the Subud bank, and because testing during a talk by Bapak some two years earlier, had shown that she should become a specialist in history. Although, at the time of the testing, she, (and others), had felt that she should write the history of Subud, she thought this might be just imagination. So instead of thinking about Subud history, she started to study the Stone Age. The Subud bank, plus the Stone Age made her far too busy to volunteer for anything else.

When Muti submitted the list to Bapak, he glanced at it and said: “Harlinah!” “But Grandfather” Muti replied, “Harlinah is working in the Bank, and she is studying history...!” She got no further because Bapak interrupted: “If she works for ISC now, later she may write the history of Subud!”

So now Harlinah was the ISC Liaison Officer at Wisma Subud - a position she continued to hold until after Bapak passed away. She had so much to do that her Stone Age library remained on a shelf - and she looks at it today as a monument to not following your receiving. And even though the bank and the work for ISC caused Harlinah to see a lot of Bapak, nevertheless she did nothing about the Subud history.

In 1983 Bapak suddenly said to Sharif Horthy: “The Subud history! Why hasn’t someone started to write it?” Sharif immediately told Harlinah, and, feeling very guilty, she had an interview with Bapak. During that interview, Bapak asked her to test Bapak’s life span - and then he told her that the latihan was now in her thinking, and then he explained how she should write the history of Subud.

Harlinah was trained as a journalist, and had worked for North American newspapers in London. She had also worked for the Society of Antiquaries of London, where she had had the unusual opportunity to hear some of the Western World’s top historians, discussing the latest books, as they drank their morning coffee around her desk. She sat among them like the dormouse in Alice in Wonderland. (Perhaps it was the Roh Ilofi who provided this unique kind of training.) However to write history is not like writing a novel. To write a valid history, one has to have appropriate source material, and in 1983 very little of any use to a Subud historian had actually been collected.

For the first ten years of this project, Harlinah collected material for use in the books she would write. This became an archival collection in its own right, and in addition to this, she created what she called "The Clipping's Library". With the help of many visitors to Wisma Subud, all English language Subud periodicals (except those of North America) were photocopied, sometimes several times, and these were then cut up and pasted, story by story, onto sheets of paper which could be filed by subject ready for her use. The American periodicals were also on the list to be done, but Harlinah left Indonesia before there was time to do them. Of course this was before the days when scanning was quick and easy - so this method was what was usually used for press libraries prior to easy scanning.

And then Harlinah started to write. Varindra Vittachi and Lorenzo Music wanted the History written in the kind of volumes now published, though Harlinah, herself, had actually thought of producing much smaller (and cheaper) books on specific subjects. (After she has finished Vol. 1 Book 3, it may be more convenient to revert to that original idea.) She accepted Varindra's wishes on this subject because, when she started the project, she received an honorarium from ISC derived from the fundraising undertaken by Lorenzo and Henrietta Music. After about eighteen months, however, Harlinah received that by accepting an honorarium she was subject to too much influence, and so the honorarium was stopped at her request. Since then she has not received any personal financial benefit from this project.

Over the years enough source material was collected to enable her to complete Books 1 and 2, and most of Book 3 currently being compiled and written. Over five hundred hours of interviews were either done by Harlinah, or given to her by others, and most of these were transcribed by a small but dedicated band of transcribers. Until the death of her Mother (also in Subud) in 1991, most long distance travel was paid for by Harlinah's family because it could be integrated with increasingly frequent journeys from Indonesia to England as her Mother's health declined in old age. Since then, travel has been paid for by ISC. The international organization has, from the start, paid most of the other production costs - usually, but not always, including equipment such as computers.

Harlinah was opened at Coombe Springs in early September, 1959. She lived at Wisma Subud, Jakarta, from early 1970 to October 1994, when she moved to Australia. She now lives in the Federal Capital, Canberra, and three rooms in her quite large house, are filled with the History of Subud Project. Currently she is working on Book 3, having just spent a year preparing a Second Edition of Book 1. Book 3 covers the 1958-59 period, and is about Subud in no less than twenty-one different countries - all requiring research. It means a lot of work! About the first third of the book is now in draft. More source material is still arriving! All the books contain some extracts from Bapak's talks, and most of the reminiscences from Subud members, are given in the words of the person telling us what happened. Perhaps it is not surprising that reading these books often gives the reader a latihan experience that they are certainly not expecting.

The laughs and the inspiration is all there for those who come after us, and of course it is also there for the older and younger Subud members of today. Subud is not ours to give, but how truly wonderful it is if we are lucky enough to receive it.

Harlinah Longcroft,
Canberra: February 2009