

# Constructing the Nation: Ethnicity, Race Modernity and Citizenship in Early Indonesian Thought

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## **Abstract**

This article examines the ways in which some early twentieth-century Indonesian thinkers conceptualised the state they had so recently imagined, and particularly how they attacked the vast problem of accommodating ethnic difference within the framework of that new state. Notwithstanding the highly promising beginnings of Indonesian self-appreciation in the early twentieth century and an extraordinarily successful cooptation and, as necessary, subjugation of local and regional expressions of ethnicity to the notion of a united Indonesia, there developed at the same time the new and strange concept of an 'Indonesian race'. That concept represented a regressive reluctance to dispense completely with pre-modern notions of culture and belonging, and created a damaging feature of the understanding of Indonesian citizenship that endures to this day.

**Keywords:** Indonesia, nationalism, nation, ethnicity, modernity, citizenship

David Joel Steinberg once described the Philippines as 'a singular and a plural place'.<sup>1</sup> No matter how apposite his description, on the scales of singularity and plurality Indonesia must be accorded a higher rank than its near neighbour. Indonesia is a place of startling geographical diversity, its 18,000 islands spilling across vast seas from east to west. No less arresting is its ethnic and religious diversity. It was a daunting task to try to weld this difference into a single, united and purposeful state. Thus far, the attempt has been an astounding success, but one dogged by continuing contention about the nature of the new state, the principles upon which it should be based, and the nature of its citizenship. This paper seeks to examine the ways in which some early Indonesian thinkers conceptualised the state they had so recently imagined, and particularly how they attacked the problem of accommodating ethnic difference within the framework of that new state. It argues that, notwithstanding the

brightly promising beginnings of self-appreciation in the early twentieth century and an extraordinarily successful subjugation of local and regional expressions of ethnicity to the notion of a united Indonesia, a new and strange concept of an 'Indonesian race' rapidly developed. That concept represented a regressive reluctance to dispense completely with pre-modern notions of culture and belonging and created a damaging feature of the understanding of Indonesian citizenship that endures to this day.

## **The Emergence of the Idea of Indonesia**

'Indonesia', of course, has a history-as-concept that begins only in 1850, when George Windsor Earl determined that the 'brown races' of the vaguely defined 'Indian Archipelago' needed to be given a specific name. He fixed upon 'Indu-nesians or Malayunesians', though he much preferred the latter designation.<sup>2</sup> Thereafter, through the efforts of people such as Logan, Hamy, Keane, Dennys, Maxwell, Bastian, Wilken, Niemann, Pleyte, Snouck Hurgronje, Kern and Kruyt, the term 'Indonesia' was slowly developed and specified to denote the still vaguely defined geographical territory of what was rapidly becoming the Netherlands East Indies,<sup>3</sup> while 'Indonesian' came to represent the culturally similar 'indigenous' (Austronesian?) people living in that area. Only with the gradual development in the first two decades of the twentieth century of an indigenous concept of 'Indonesia' (first explicitly expressed in these terms only in 1917), and the concomitant growth of a desire for a political entity independent of the Dutch, did the question arise of the form and nature of that putative nation and state. Notwithstanding national historicist myths about the abiding existence of Indonesia, reflected, for example, in Sukarno's self-conscious evocation of earlier Indianised kingdoms in the archipelago (notably Srivijaya and Majapahit) as precursive manifestations of 'Indonesia', Indonesia owes its existence to the late-nineteenth-century creation by Dutch colonial power of a roughly united and relatively economically integrated Netherlands East Indies state. That state was characterised by horizontal reach and especially by a gathering vertical intensity, which was manifested in regularity of administration, heightened capacities to tax, unifying infrastructure and, gradually, a greater sense of sovereign independence from the Netherlands—something most strongly evidenced in the enhanced financial independence and 'legal personality' granted the Indies in June 1912.<sup>4</sup>

The traditional historiography of the trajectory of Indonesian nationalism puts things more simply and heroically, and expresses

them in evolutionary, ascending terms. That orthodoxy accords primacy to the establishment of Budi Utomo in 1908 as the moment of Indonesia's 'national awakening'. Budi Utomo was the organisation created by young students at the native medical school (STOVIA) in Batavia, but it was inspired by the enthusiasm and persistence of the Javanese reform-minded thinker and editor Wahidin Sudirohusodo. Budi Utomo used Malay rather than Javanese as its medium of communication, and decided to include among its membership not just ethnic Javanese but all the people of 'Javanese culture'—including the West Java-based Sundanese people, and the indigenous peoples of the islands of Madura and (later, in 1918) Bali. It toyed with the notion of 'assist[ing] the development of the Netherlands Indies as a whole, so that the Netherlands Indies can develop altogether and the inhabitants of the country be united'.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, Budi Utomo remained essentially a Javanese organisation devoted to the project of making the Javanese more modern and reversing their downward cultural trajectory.

Budi Utomo's putative successor, according to the orthodox view of things, was Sarekat Islam (SI—Islamic Association). SI was never a vehicle of nationalist imaginings; it was, rather, a 'great folk movement which linked Islamic revival with anti-colonialism',<sup>6</sup> and a manifestation of the deeply but still vaguely felt need to reshape Indies society. SI, remarked Abdul Muis, was 'a reaction to an already long digested feeling of backwardness, to a long-felt oppression and withholding of all rights, it is a movement of protest amongst the masses of the "little man" in Insulinde, it is a scream for rights, for rights, for rights'.<sup>7</sup> Neither of these important movements had developed a sense of the identity of nation in any but the broadest terms (SI, for example, convened 'national' congresses, but excluded Christians from its membership), and perceived of themselves in limited and often defensive ways. The political idea of Indonesia (that is, that there was now an archipelago-wide state run by Dutchmen, and that it might have other forms of existence than as the colony of a cold, wet little country facing the North Sea) remained undeveloped.

### **Who is a Citizen?**

Indies society at the turn of the twentieth century was deeply divided by race, with Europeans enjoying paramountcy, privilege and prestige out of all proportion to their numbers. Below them were ranked the Chinese and other 'Foreign Orientals', and below them again the 'native population'. It was no accident that the major early contribution to the development of thinking about the nation, its form and the nature of the community it might encompass, was

the work of a 'lively, romantic soul',<sup>8</sup> the Eurasian E.F.E. Douwes Dekker. He and other Indo-Europeans were increasingly marginalised in relation to Dutchness as the *totok* [pure-blood] Dutch population grew in numbers and power. Yet, thinking of the Indies as his true home, Douwes Dekker's conceptualisation of his land represented the first great breakthrough in Indonesian thinking about the nation and the shape it should take. He founded the Indische Partij (IP—Indies Party) in 1912 and, together with two lively, activist Western-educated Javanese aristocrats—the fiery and uncompromising Dr Cipto Mangunkusumo, 'perhaps the most sincere man that Indonesia has ever produced'<sup>9</sup> and Suwardi Suryaningrat—proceeded to lay the philosophical foundations of a state that was at once modern, multi-ethnic and secular.

Drawing on a developing but still inchoate sense of supra-localism, they made the first massive leap of imagining, conceptualising the societies of the Indian archipelago as a unity in a deeply political, and not just a geographic, sense and, necessarily, Indonesia's political subjugation to the Netherlands. On the occasion of the celebration of the centenary of Dutch independence from France in 1813, Suwardi penned a satirical pamphlet teasingly entitled 'Als ik eens Nederlander was' (If I were a Dutchman), the first article ever in which a Javanese used the Dutch language to assert his views on colonial rule.<sup>10</sup> Suwardi reflected on the good fortune of the patriotic Dutch 'to whom it is given to celebrate such a jubilee. For I am a patriot, too, and just like a Dutchman with pure nationalist intent loves his Fatherland, so do I love my own Fatherland, more than I can say'. He thought it unwise to hold the Dutch celebrations of freedom in the Indies; 'If I were a Dutchman, then I would hold no independence celebrations in a land where we deny the people their independence . . . First give that servant people their freedom, and only then recall our own freedom'.<sup>11</sup>

What gave the sustaining idea of Douwes Dekker, Cipto and Suwardi its force was not a oneness built on ethnic or even a broader racial solidarity, religious affiliation or even geographical proximity, but a sense of a shared experience of colonial subjection and the specific solidarity that flowed from it. There was, as well, the remembrance of a golden past that had been lost through that oppression: 'freedom, a peaceful existence, prosperity, a pleasant and free life', in Kartono's words.<sup>12</sup> All of that was coloured by the indisputable fact that the Indies now existed as a unity, in a form and shape that had never been the case before. Simply put, it was 'their' land, 'their' country, even if the original task of creation had not been theirs. That was why the provocative question put by the Javanese nationalist Sutatno Suriokusumo, 'Why have the

Phillipines [*sic*] or the inhabitants of the Malaka [*sic*] peninsula not been invited to attach themselves to the Indies or Native people?',<sup>13</sup> made no sense, or at least aroused no enthusiasm.

The contrast between a 'natural' community and a created one was usually made to belittle the latter category ('Holland, when all is said and done, is the creator of the Indies or Native people, while the Javanese People exist of themselves').<sup>14</sup> It was, in the end, a contrast between the world of tradition and the world of modernity, the world in which the Javanese kingdom, in both classical and Islamic clothing, had now been superseded by the imposed unity of the colonial empire of the Netherlands Indies. Douwes Dekker and his company were decisively choosing modernity. Equally, that was the reason why cultural constants such as Islam (suspected by such thinkers as a factor in Java's downfall from the sixteenth century onwards), shared understanding of language and broad racial similarity (superficially attractive but ultimately fragmenting of the given of Indies political unity), could not serve as national unifying forces, notwithstanding the success of bodies like SI. The Dutchman Muhlenfeld remarked that, 'Filipinos and Malays of the Straits and the Peninsula, though non-Indiers, are notably closer to the Javanese and Sumatrans than for example, Papuans, Alfurese and Timorese, who are Indiers'.<sup>15</sup> He missed the point that Douwes Dekker, Cipto and Suwardi had caught: that the stimulus towards national consciousness and nation-construction—'nation-ness', to use Anderson's term<sup>16</sup>—was a creation of the world of the modern, and that older, constant, even deeply primordial solidarities were no longer necessary nor even relevant. Cipto, for example, wrote in strongly world-historical evolutionist terms of what he labelled 'the Indies state' as a necessary advance upon smaller, culturally based entities such as the Javanese people:

It is a corollary, to be neither escaped nor prevented, that thereby all the people of the Indies archipelago will have to set aside what is peculiar to them, just as the Friesians have to do to be part of the Dutch political unity, and the Bavarians theirs in order to feel happy in the German state . . . Sembah and dodok [paying traditional obeisance] gradually become antiquarian, increasingly seldom displayed to the foreigner.<sup>17</sup>

The vehicle Douwes Dekker and his colleagues had founded in 1912 to promote their great idea, the IP, had as its goal 'to awaken the patriotism of all Indiers for the land that feeds them, in order to move them to cooperate on the basis of political equality [of all races] to bring this Indies fatherland to bloom and to prepare for an independent existence for the people [*volksbestaan*]'.<sup>18</sup> It 'pleaded the equality of all races, united in an indivisible nation'.<sup>19</sup> It had, consequentially, a short but spectacular existence before an alarmed government,

deeming it 'of a political character and threatening public order',<sup>20</sup> refused to grant it legal recognition and shortly thereafter dissolved it. But its imaginings were to strike deep roots and help lead to a sharpening of the focus of national identity. Douwes Dekker sought to express that sense of identity in a newspaper article in August 1913, when speaking of the retribution then being meted out by the Dutch to Suwardi and Cipto:

Finally we now feel that we stand not *against* each other, we, Indiers, not even *next to* each other, but *in* each other. It is with shock that we realise what has happened: their business is our business. Their suffering is our suffering! All at once everything has become so sharp and clear to us: We are brothers: we are one.<sup>21</sup>

Notwithstanding that the Indo-European portion of its membership outnumbered 'indigenous' Indonesians by a factor of five, the IP was crucial, indeed, in clarifying that sense of identity, the 'unity of all the people of the Indies',<sup>22</sup> and the associated irrelevance for that unity of claimed differences and hierarchies founded in race, culture, development and even morals. Douwes Dekker sought to bind his Indies together on the basis of a secular equality in humanity that was blind to national, racial, religious, intellectual or cultural difference. Thus he cited the examples of Austria-Hungary, Switzerland and 'the great American republic', where many nations lived in a transcendent national unity.<sup>23</sup> Curiously, such a view required an expansion and deepening of 'our cultural history': 'the greatness of our fatherland . . . the greatness of its sons . . . the heights of their achievements . . . the riches of their thinking and ideals'.<sup>24</sup> Even more, it implied the tearing down of the legal inequalities that underpinned Dutch rule, including differential access to rights and justice and the plural, privileging and conserving legal system refined by people like the famous codifier of *adat* [customary law], Cornelis van Vollenhoven, as well as the development of a unified, generally accessible, and expanded education system. It also made the first serious remonstrance against 'the lack of proper representation . . . the lack of an instrument through which the law can be reformed or recast where it is disadvantageous for us' and whereby the 'land can be administered for the benefit of the inhabitants of the land themselves'.<sup>25</sup> What the IP men wanted was the 'freedom . . . to be able to rule oneself by means of an Indies parliament'.<sup>26</sup> Notwithstanding its implicitly anti-imperialist and anti-feudal character, the idea foregrounded the unity of all members of the Indies rather than a division of Indiers by class. And its realisation would not be long in coming; 'It is just a matter of time, of a short time if one measures it in terms of the life of a people'.<sup>27</sup>

Douwes Dekker, Cipto and Suwardi had provided a vision of an ethnically pluralist Indies where commitment to the nation, as nation, alone qualified one to belong. The IP's political failure, however, left those ideas marooned, until they could be rescued and invigorated by a small, elite band of Indonesians on the other side of the world.

### **The Key Contribution: Indonesian Students in the Netherlands**

In 1908, a few of the tiny number of Indonesian students who had been sent to the Netherlands for advanced studies had formed the Indische Vereeniging (IV—Indies Association) to provide themselves solidarity, mutual assistance and news from home as they eked out their student existence in places such as Leiden, Amsterdam and Rotterdam. The students' sense of common origin, indeed, that they were 'fellow countrymen',<sup>28</sup> was a consequence of the social circumstances that pulled them together, as well as the new perspective on their land that distance afforded. It was reflected in the fact that a suggestion to establish a sub-branch of Budi Utomo had been overruled, even though IV's members were predominantly Javanese:

. . . and rightly so, because the association to be established should not be exclusively Javanese in its membership, but have persons of all kinds of nationalities of the Netherlands Indies, such as Sumatrans, Ambonese, Menadonese and so forth.<sup>29</sup>

In succeeding years, IV slowly developed a more sophisticated conception of the broad identity of the Indies as a single land, of its inhabitants as a single people above and beyond the ethnic groupings that comprised it, of their duty to serve that land and its people in their later careers and, at least implicitly, of their potential to travel a path that diverged politically from subjection to or even partnership with the Netherlands. IV also began to adopt a more broadly associationist sense of itself; thus Noto Suroto spoke of IV's role as 'the mutual enhancement of knowledge and respect, the striving for mutual understanding and cooperation between representatives of the East Indies and Netherlands peoples'.<sup>30</sup> In the main, however, IV remained a small, passive and moderate grouping, its numbers growing to 40 by 1911.<sup>31</sup> At the time Suwardi had penned his famous, furious brochure, the IV had discussed ways of contributing to Dutch independence celebrations.<sup>32</sup>

The arrival of the now exiled Douwes Dekker, Suwardi and Cipto in 1913 was the stimulus that gradually prodded IV along new and untried paths. At an IV meeting in November 1913, Cipto sought to

push the IV into taking a position in support of the emerging popular movements in the Indies such as SI.<sup>33</sup> It was Suwardi, however, who played the decisive role. By 1916, the membership of the IV, slowly recovering from a period of torpor, disaffection and decline under the leadership of the conservative loyalist/associationist Noto Suroto, had risen again to around 40 people, and was gradually embracing the notion that it had to be politically conscious, if not yet politically engaged, and more strongly connected with political and social organisations and ideas in the Indies.<sup>34</sup>

In March 1916, the IV had begun to publish a monthly journal, *Hindia Poetra* (Sons of the Indies), edited by Suwardi; a prominent advertisement in the first issue drew attention to the availability of 'brochures of the Indische Partij in limited supply', and Suwardi's contact address. It was to be a journal 'not only of the "Indiers" studying in the Netherlands, but also of prominent people in the Indies-native world'.<sup>35</sup> Suwardi's attachment to the concept of Indies-as-nation was expressed in his views on language: 'If we want one language for the whole Indies nation, there is no need to foist a European language on us, because we already have Malay, which is not only easy to learn, but which has already long served as the lingua franca of the East Indies Archipelago'.<sup>36</sup> It was, indeed, the pages of *Hindia Poetra* that carry the first recorded use of the words 'Indonesia', 'Indonesian' and 'Indonesians' by an Indonesian: the April 1917 closing address by R.M.S. Suryoputro at a welcoming function for the visiting Indie *Weerbaar* [the Indies able to defend itself] delegation in The Hague, which had come to the Netherlands to present to the Queen its endorsement both of a native militia and of a representative body in the Indies.

### **The Emergence of the Notion of an 'Indonesian' Race**

Suryoputro's words were genuine enough, and represented something of the developed sense of the concept of Indonesia that IV had done so much to develop, and which was later to be so influential at home. His discussion, however, served to move the terms of debate backward rather than forward, a regression from the pristine purity of the conception of citizenship so clearly enunciated by Douwes Dekker, Cipto and Suwardi. For his address conveyed an unambiguous sense of the ethnic unity of the Indonesian people [*een Indonesisch rasbesef*—an Indonesian consciousness of race] as a means both of identity and differentiation, even though it was still 'difficult to speak of an Indonesian national consciousness'.<sup>37</sup> His address made it clear that a developed sense of racial unity had inevitable political implications. Such an assertion was a seductive



departure from the notion of modern citizenship defined purely by modern commitment to the nation. What was now thought to matter was, rather, a specific ethnic or racial identity, that of 'Indonesianness'. A few months after, in a speech in Leiden to an association of Indology students, his colleague Dahlan spoke of Indonesians as 'the native population of the Netherlands East Indies'.<sup>38</sup> Throughout the colonial period and thereafter, the sense of what it meant to be Indonesian was caught in a tension between primordial and modern understandings of Indonesian identity. The poles of the tension set up an almost immediate conflict of ideals, apparently without there being any sense that these discourses were competing, and that their competition was incipiently dangerous.

The increasingly politicised vision of IV in 1918 soon saw it part of a new associationist grouping, the Indonesian Association of Students [IVS—Indonesisch Verbond van Studeerenden], established in Leiden in November 1917 by a group of Indonesian and Dutch Indology students who planned careers of service in the Indies. The new grouping sought, without regard to ethnicity or origin, to unite all organisations that had the same career aim, including the IV and Chung Hwa Hui, an association for Sino-Indonesian students established in Amsterdam in 1911. Suwardi, now co-editing with the Sino-Indonesian Yap Hong Cun and the Dutch student J.A. Jonkman, a reborn version of *Hindia Poetra* under the aegis of the IVS, made his message clear. *Hindia Poetra* was intended as 'the mouthpiece of all those who one day will have to give their capacities to the Indies. It is no accident that the editorial group of the coming magazine comprises a Chinese, a Dutchman and an Indonesian'.<sup>39</sup>

*Hindia Poetra* sought, as had its predecessor, 'the welfare of Indonesia and its people'. But now that vision had a politically hard edge. There was mention of an Indonesian 'commonwealth', born of collaboration and cooperation between the Indies and the Netherlands.<sup>40</sup> More specifically, remarked Suwardi, the members of the Association 'are all destined to cooperate in due time in the construction of the coming Indonesian state, which at the moment is still a colonial possession of the Netherlands'.<sup>41</sup> What Suwardi had in mind were the old ideas of the IP:

In opposition to the other political associations, which are exclusively Indonesian, the IP sought to understand by Indiër or Indonesian anyone who considered the Indies or Indonesia as his fatherland, irrespective of whether he was pure Indonesian, or whether he has Chinese, Dutch or general European blood in his veins. Whoever is a citizen of the Indonesian state is also an Indonesian.<sup>42</sup>

This was a restatement of the original and daringly modern IP leap of imagination, in a context where Eurasians were derided by pure-blood Dutchmen and the target of jealousy by Indonesians and where, as Scidmore put it, 'One easily understands the hatred that Dutch and natives alike entertain for these small [Chinese] traders, middlemen and usurers, who have driven out all competitors, and fatten on the necessities of people'.<sup>43</sup>

Suwardi's thinking was seminal and powerful. It contained two central messages. First, an Indonesian state politically independent of the Netherlands was an inevitable development. Second, the Indonesia that would emerge would be based upon humanistic national, not ethnic or religious, considerations. Under his hand, *HindiaPoetra* was to be 'the place, where the different elements of the future heterogeneous Indonesia shall meet. It shall be the task of the H.P. to make this differentness into a unity, for the welfare of Indonesia and its people'.<sup>44</sup>

His ideas deeply affected the thinking of many of his student colleagues, but they did not necessarily strike deep and uncontested roots. Cipto, after all, had remarked in 1918 that, 'What we mean by the Indies nation has still to be formed, that is to say, it does not yet exist. The first spade has just been put into the ground, the seed has still to be sown'.<sup>45</sup> Suryoputro had already intimated one of the two major problems facing the success of the notion of a pluralistic, secular and essentially modern notion of citizenship: the development of a concept of an Indonesian race, and the notion of culturally and ethnically defined Indonesian people. The success of this idea rested on a number of footings. Chief among them was the desire of Indonesians to create, develop and celebrate a sense of their own inner cultural strength as an antidote to the humiliations consequent upon their colonial subjugation. Associationist thinking was an inevitable victim of this tendency towards cultural independence since, according to Gunawan Mangunkusumo, it

entail[s] a collaboration of two unequal elements . . . as long as the Indonesian remains dazzled by Western civilisation and thinks of his own culture as having less worth; so long as the common view prevails that if one speaks of civilisation, one thereby means Western civilisation, there can be no talk of association. Under such circumstances, the thing that suffers is what is held in less regard, and brings at the very least the danger that the best sons of the soil are alienated in very sympathetic ways from the masses to whom they belong and to whom they shall have to devote their capacities.<sup>46</sup>

That sense of ethnic specificity endured. In mid-1918, for example, Suryoputro proclaimed that, 'The land possession of Indonesia must be given back again to *the Indonesian people* [my emphasis], who are concentrated in the Indonesian State that is

coming into existence . . . *Indonesian nationalism* is the goal of those who call themselves *Hindia Poetra* (children of Indonesia), and the *republic* is the form of State unity of the Hindia Poetras'.<sup>47</sup> That strain of thinking drew an immediate and hostile response from associationist Dutch members of the IVS who were wont to complain about the 'aggressive attitude of their brown co-members' at the association's congresses.<sup>48</sup> Racial tensions were, indeed, never far from the surface at such meetings. At the Indologists' Association conference that led to the formation of the IVS, a Dutchman inflamed the Indonesians invited to be present by defending the VOC [the Dutch East Indies Company], while an invited Indonesian Chinese, arguing that, 'Wherever there are Chinese, there is prosperity', inevitably drew the retort from an Indonesian speaker that, 'Wherever there is prosperity, there are the Chinese'.<sup>49</sup> Such deepening Indonesian aversion to associationism crippled efforts to revive the IVS in 1924.<sup>50</sup>

The second major problem, alluded to earlier in this paper, was the persistent consciousness of regional expressions of ethnicity throughout the archipelago and the difficulty of reconciling these notions with a single Indonesian identity. Here, Suwardi's influence bore more immediate fruit. One member of the IV, writing in response to another correspondent's contrast of the political behaviour of the Javanese as against Outer Islanders, apologised to his readers 'for the use of the words "Javanese" and "Outer Possessions"'. This distinction makes difficulties for me and hurts me. Better to say "Indonesian"'.<sup>51</sup> Another member, the Minahasan G.S.S.J. Ratulangie, noted the ethnic and cultural mix of Indonesia, but dismissed the idea of a functional apartheid: 'The social problem has but one solution: the greatest possible tolerance, general forbearance'.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, he found a better word, 'the brothering [*verbroedering*] of the nationalities, races, and mixed races of Indonesia'. According to another contributor to the journal, 'a Javanese is a Javanese, a Minahasan a Minahasan, and both are Indonesians'.<sup>53</sup>

## **Indonesian Thinking in the Indies: Race, Ethnicity and Modern Citizenship**

In the Indies itself—missing the pregnant yet simplified perspective of the sojourning students in the Netherlands—thinking about such matters among Indonesians themselves was less advanced and less sharp. The earliest recorded use of the word 'Indonesia' in Indonesia itself that I have thus far discovered was by a Dutchman, Dirk van Hinloopen Labberton in 1918,<sup>54</sup> and the earliest use by an Indonesian I have yet come across, by Cipto, only in the following

year.<sup>55</sup> As that thinking developed, something attributable in significant degree to the influence of students returning from their periods of learning in the Netherlands, the original purity of the ideas of Douwes Dekker, Cipto and Suwardi continued to wane. Race and ethnicity continued to play an important part in Indonesians' gathering sense of themselves, but in surprising ways.

In the first place, one might have expected that local senses of ethnic identity might have entered into fierce combat with the notion of a unified Indonesian nation. Indeed, the strength of religious, regionalist and ethnic sentiment was such that developing consciousness in the Indies tended to express itself through such categories in the late 1910s and early 1920s. SI, of course, was the supreme example of that tendency, but it also manifested itself in the plethora of regionalist associations that sprouted from around the second decade of the twentieth century. Perserikatan Minahasa [the Minahasa Union] was founded in 1912. Pasundan, formed in 1914 and in some sense a reaction to the Javanist orientation of Budi Utomo, sought to strengthen the identity of the Sundanese of West Java. Kaum Betawi was formed in the interests of the 'native' people of Batavia. There were similar associations of Sumatrans, Madurese, Timorese and others. In May 1920, the Ambonese journalist A.J. Patty founded Sarekat Ambon (SA). Jong Java [Young Java] and the Jong Sumatranen Bond [Association of Young Sumatrans] were regionally defined youth organisations, although region was broadly defined in both cases. Jong Java was inspired by the idea of a 'Greater Java', while a large proportion of the members of the Jong Sumatranen Bond resided in Java, notably in Batavia and the major cities of West Java.<sup>56</sup>

Attachment to region and local culture did present a daunting trial for the idea of a single Indonesia. Logan had remarked in 1850 that, 'Save in Java, each considerable river basin in the Archipelago has still so much that is peculiar in its history and present population, as to demand a distinct place for itself in the ethnography of the region'.<sup>57</sup> Scidmore had noted that a 'strong distinction—an extreme aloofness or estrangement—exists between residents of East, West and Middle Java, and between those of this island and of the near-by Sumatra, Celebes and Molucca'.<sup>58</sup> Yap, co-editor of *Hindia Poetra*, in 1918 remarked that, 'The separation between the population groups in Java is so great that each group still has its own life. The Indies forms no united state, at best it is a federation of population groups'.<sup>59</sup> Ratulangie remarked that, 'The Indonesian people is a mosaic of races and stocks; they display the same diversity if we use cultural criteria. The task is: how to keep this diversity in a unity with each other?'.<sup>60</sup> An article in a West Java newspaper asserted that, 'If

the Indies later becomes a free state, it will certainly comprise a federation. Then, the Sundanese, the Javanese and so on will have to send their representatives to put forward the interests of the different population groups to the Government'.<sup>61</sup> One Ambonese journal remarked in 1926 that, 'In newspapers we read that a number of intellectuals want all the peoples in the Netherlands-Indies archipelago to become one, mutually Javanese, Bataks, Dayaks, Timorese, Makasarese, Ambonese as well as Papuans have to be called "Indonesians" (whether they like it or not)'.<sup>62</sup>

And yet, the problem of ethnic diversity was never a seriously debilitating one for the Indonesia project, despite persistent Dutch efforts by people like Colijn to play up regional cultural differences and even the threat of Javanese domination.<sup>63</sup> The essentially transitional and non-proprietary nature of local ethnically based political organisations was strongly exemplified by Sarekat Ambon's history. It was established not in Ambon but in Semarang, and its initial membership mostly comprised Ambonese members of the Dutch colonial army quartered in that city; its founders sought also to incorporate the disproportionately large numbers of Christian Ambonese who had found white collar work in Java. Patty, strongly influenced by Douwes Dekker's ideas, promoted SA's goal as 'the material and spiritual uplifting of the Ambonese people', including the small Muslim minority in that society. It did not seek to break the political connection with the Netherlands, indeed, 'The Ambonese people wish to remain within that relationship'.<sup>64</sup>

Perserikatan Minahasa, essentially as an association of Christian Menadonese soldiers garrisoned in Central Java but later broadened to include Minahasan civilians in both Java and the Minahasa, was built along similar lines and had a similar point of view in relation to its support for Dutch rule, including 'the loyal striving for self-rule'.<sup>65</sup> Some Indonesians, including the Javanese Suriokusumo, thought that the unity that provided strength would best be found among those proximate in culture and space: 'Our neighbours must look after their own cultural development. The Indies is not one country, not one people with the same culture'.<sup>66</sup> He and other Javanese nationalists sought in the development of their specific ethnic culture not just a sense of enhanced identity but a political counterpoint to the dominance of the Western model of thought and organisation.<sup>67</sup>

Nonetheless, such expressions of localist ethnic identity could not conceal the fact that, as Haji Agus Salim noted, 'Under the Dutch ruler the Indies has become one, instead of being divided into hundreds of . . . little kingdoms . . . there is at present unity, through which the Native popular movement has been made more

powerful'.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, one of the most striking aspects of the thinking and actions of Indonesians in this early phase was their preparedness, indeed, their enthusiasm, to accept the notion of Indonesia and not to allow local senses of ethnicity to deflect them from it. It was as if the great majority of them realised, once they appreciated the idea of Indonesia, that it was an idea whose time had come.

Thus, addressing the 1920 IVS congress in the Netherlands, the crown prince of Yogyakarta spoke of himself as 'someone who to a certain extent represents the Javanese people, and thus also a part of Indonesia', and ended his address with the cry, 'Long live Indonesia'.<sup>69</sup> A contributor to a newspaper in 1919 wrote that, 'All inhabitants of the Indies must not forget the words "The Freedom of the Indies" [*Kemerdekaan Hindia*], for those two words raise the interest [*aanzien*] of the people . . . The Indies has about 50 million inhabitants, and it is ruled by a handful of foreigners. It is very derisory and humiliating'.<sup>70</sup> The Insulinde organisation, pre-dating in form but a successor in spirit to the IP, and now again under the leadership of the returned Douwes Dekker, tried to play down fears that ethnic identity would wholly disappear in a new nation and to combat suspicions that its hidden agenda was the political ascendancy of Indo-Europeans at the expense of 'natives' and Islam. One supporter at a meeting in Bandung in 1918 proclaimed, 'The intention is not to melt the various population groups in together, but to unite them politically'.<sup>71</sup> Another argued:

The goal of the Indische Partij now is . . . to do away with all that difference between Indo and Native, and to call all the children of the Indies Indiers, mutually equal as well as in respect of other races. A Javan thus remains a Javan, a Sumatran remains Sumatran—a person is no chameleon!—but all groups together form one PEOPLE, one NATION.<sup>72</sup>

Even formerly purely regionalist-inclined organisations fell under the spell of the idea. In 1927, the newly established Persatuan Minahasa called for 'the solidarity of all population groups of Indonesia'.<sup>73</sup> Jong Indonesia [Young Indonesia, soon to be given the Indonesian name of Pemuda Indonesia], established in Bandung in February 1927, was reborn in 1930 as Indonesia Muda, into which such regionally organised youth associations as Jong Java, Pemuda Sumatra and Jong Celebes dissolved themselves.<sup>74</sup> 'Indonesia-Muda', wrote a member of Jong Java, 'will become a shelter for our country, one in nationhood and one in language, that is, the nation of Indonesia'.<sup>75</sup> In a speech at the 1929 Pasundan congress, the chair, Oto Kusumasubrata, remarked that, 'The Sundanese form a people, not a nation; Pasundan is a component [*onderdeel*] of Indonesia, which comprises more than one people. The Indonesian

language serves as a bridge to the other peoples'.<sup>76</sup> The Dutch Adviser for Native Affairs was forced to admit in 1928 that, 'the idea of great-Indonesia is gaining ground'.<sup>77</sup>

But if the sense of local ethnicity presented no special threats to the development of a modern, mature sense of Indonesia, such could not be said for the advance of a racial sense of Indonesian identity-as-a-whole, itself a reaction to the racialised oppression of the Dutch. 'These were the years', Sukarno later remarked, 'when we were a humiliated race treated like the scum of the earth by our captors'.<sup>78</sup> Among the earliest expressions of this sense of Indonesian race was the hostility expressed between *sini* [us] and *sana* [them]. The radical Darsono, for example, remarked in 1918 that, 'Java is the land of our forefathers and we are the actual owners of the houses, but we are pushed aside by the guests'.<sup>79</sup> The Batak leader Manullang could speak of Indonesians as 'we natives of these Indian islands',<sup>80</sup> and contrast their fate with the prosperity and power of the white capitalists.

The equal rights programme of Insulinde, according to some newspaper reports, was a cause of suspicion among 'native' Indonesians, because they thought that it might provide the means to rob them of their legally ensconced and protected position, with the result that, 'One shall see, within a short time, that the land of the Javanese is in the hands of Europeans, Chinese, and Arabs'.<sup>81</sup> Another report asserted that, 'The Indo-Chinese supports Insulinde, naturally, for he tries to keep all the trade in his land . . . Insulinde, properly speaking a re-edition of the Indische Partij, wants absolute equality in everything for all those born here. What, then, will become of the Native?'<sup>82</sup> In the Volksraad, Abdul Muis remarked that, 'The final goal of the colonial Government must be the autonomy of the native people'.<sup>83</sup>

Some sympathetic Dutchmen encouraged this strain of thinking. Van Hinloopen Labberton remarked that, 'The Indonesian peoples [*volksgroepen*] who inhabit these islands, only with the exception of the Papuans in New Guinea, and perhaps a portion of the people of North Halmaheira, are of one and the same race', and that they would come to discover 'what great strength may be found in the Indonesian race'.<sup>84</sup> In 1926, an article in *Indonesia Merdeka* spoke of the growth of 'the idea of unity which has penetrated deeply in the various groups' and which was coupled with 'the attitude of rejection of everything that is white . . . Sharpening the contrast, marking out the border between white and brown serves to repel without and to unite internally'.<sup>85</sup> By the mid-1920s, that view had narrowed considerably in the thoughts of some. Hatta himself remarked in 1926:

We understand the word 'Indonesians' in its purest sense, thus only the original inhabitants of Indonesia who are now designated by the rulers by the term 'Natives'. We cannot possibly count Indos as our compatriots. As such they cannot enter Perhimpunan Indonesia.<sup>86</sup>

One implication of such thinking was to encourage the view that the Indonesian nation was somehow coterminous with what might be called 'Malayness'. Thus, remarked Mahmud Junus, editor of *Seruan Azhar*, the increasingly anti-colonial journal of the 'Jawa' [Malayo-Muslim] student association at the University of al-Azhar in Cairo, Jama'ah al-Chairiah, 'We recognize Indonesia and the Peninsula as one community, one people, with one adat, one way of life, and what is more, virtually one religion', and that they should best come together 'for the common good of their people'.<sup>87</sup> Kuncoro Purbopranoto remarked at the first Indonesia Muda congress in 1930 that, 'Indonesia is one country, with one race, from Madagascar to the Philippines'.<sup>88</sup> Another consequence was to strengthen the view—already a particular favourite of Sukarno—that Indonesia (and thus 'native' Indonesians) was not a modern, abstract, creation but had in fact always existed, albeit in earlier guises. 'From the ninth century', Sukarno later remarked, '... we were the Sriwidjaya Empire, through the fourteenth ... we were the Madjapahit Empire ...'.<sup>89</sup> The corollary, of course, was that there was an eternal Indonesian 'culture'.<sup>90</sup>

A much more serious implication was that those who made their homes and lives in Indonesia, but who were not of the 'Indonesian' race, would always encounter difficulty in finding acceptance as true Indonesians. Local animosity to these outsiders would persist. To cite just one example, an anti-Chinese riot in Kudus in 1918 resulted in the destruction of 43 homes and the death of five Chinese.<sup>91</sup> Such feelings, of course, went both ways; many Chinese felt a closer national attachment to a reviving China than to 'Indonesia', and other minorities such as the small but influential Hadrami population retained a firm sense of a distinctive ethnic identity and sense of their true fatherland in the Hadramaut.<sup>92</sup> One almost immediate consequence of the strength of such feeling was that, with the establishment of Sukarno's Partai Nasional Indonesia in 1927, only those belonging to the 'Indonesian nation' [*orang-orang bangsa Indonesia*] could be enrolled as full members, while those of mixed blood, such as Sino-Indonesians and Eurasians, could aspire only to associate membership.<sup>93</sup>

## Conclusion

A surprising and somewhat paradoxical conclusion of this analysis of the discourse of early Indonesian thinking about nation and citizenship is that regional expressions of ethnicity were not a



particular hindrance or inconvenience in the development of a sense of Indonesian unity. Indonesians themselves found no insuperable difficulties in adopting their new identity as Indonesians, while retaining at the same time a consciousness of regional belonging. The inner thinness of the idea of Indonesia and its lack of sophistication allowed everyone to board on the exciting journey to the vaguest of destinations (except in rare examples such as Ambon where nationalist demands required a significant sacrifice of privilege and identity), but inevitably a better one, at a very cheap price for most and, should a passenger so choose, anonymously.

At the same time, however, there developed a peculiar and tenacious sense of Indonesian race. The fact that it had no scientific basis made no difference to its vitality. Even in the 1930s, when a small number of *peranakans* of Hadramaut or Chinese heritage—such as the Hadrami Abdurrahman Baswedan, who created the Partai Arab Indonesia (Indonesian Arab Party) in 1934, and Lim Kun Hian and Ko Kwat Tiong, who had two years before established the Partai Tionghoa Indonesia (Indonesian Chinese Party)<sup>94</sup>—attempted to insinuate themselves into the body of ‘native’ Indonesians, their efforts met an often grudging and uncooperative response. Only a few like Sutomo and the conservatively inclined Sutarjo recognised the profound need to develop a new sense of Indonesian citizenship.<sup>95</sup> Most often, however, the outsiders remained marginalised and their efforts to engage the Indonesia of modernity were for the most part unappreciated and often the source of suspicion. ‘We value your efforts’, wrote one Javanese journalist to Liem, ‘but you are still Chinese’.<sup>96</sup> That problem would continue up to the present day to dog the effort to develop a truly modern, negotiable sense of what it might mean to be Indonesian.

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