Voluntary participation, state involvement: Indonesian propaganda in the struggle for maintaining independence, 1945-1949
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CHAPTER 2

Promoting State legitimacy and
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Following its proclamation of independence on 17 August, 1945, the most immediate tasks facing the Republican authority were the establishment of legitimacy and the mobilization of the masses. Success seemed highly improbable. The public had to be convinced that Indonesia was from now on a truly independent state. Many Indonesians prior to and shortly after the independence proclamation had no clear picture of what merdeka (freedom) actually meant. Some people interpreted it as a condition in which they were free to use public transport or seize property, whereas the civil servants (pangréh pradja) were of the opinion that merdeka implied that the Japanese surrender would be followed by the arrival of the Allies as the new ruling authority. This led to confusion, conflicting rumours, and uncertainty, as now literally everyone was freely and arbitrarily defining the word merdeka. In the face of a power vacuum, the Indonesian authorities had to convince the people to accept and support them as the new government even while the Japanese still held important positions in preparation for the Allied landing. The situation worsened when the Dutch Indies government in exile and their supporters in Australia began to promote a view of the Republic as illegitimate, stressing repeatedly that President Soekarno, Vice President Hatta, and their associates were Japanese collaborators, implying that the independence they had declared was simply a Japanese stratagem, and that they deserved harsh punishment as war criminals.

In connection to legitimacy and independence, nation-state building was a major problem. Republican authorities wanted to form what they
called an ‘Indonesian nation’ and an ‘Indonesian state’, yet they faced difficulties. The seventy million people living in Indonesia in 1945 was extremely heterogeneous. They comprised hundreds of ethnic groups who spoke completely different languages. The entrenched social disintegration in Indonesian society worsened the situation. Indonesian society was still in the main segregated along racial lines via the racially-based policies imposed by previous regimes. There was much violence, not solely against foreigners but also among Indonesians (for instance between local gangsters and those considered feudalistic) and against Indonesians of foreign descent (in particular the Indonesian Chinese and Eurasians). The Indonesian perpetrators often claimed that the violence was necessary for the sake of independence.\(^1\) The return of the Dutch made some Indonesians believed that the Dutch would put the native at the bottom of social pyramid again once they had gained power. The term ‘Indonesian nation-state’ was only well-known among politically aware Indonesians, such as nationalist activists and journalists. Their numbers were small in comparison to the politically inactive majority. Political unity seemed a distant prospect considering the divide between older and younger political activists. Given the situation mentioned above, the nation-state building project was a major task of the Republic. Propaganda was the key tool in this task.

Garnering immediate popular support was a difficult problem as well. As a matter of fact, various groups within Indonesian society at

\(^1\) For the violence perpetrated by local strongmen against the old (village and subdistrict officials) in rural areas, or so-called ‘social revolution’, see Anton Lucas, *One Soul One Struggle: Region and Revolution in Indonesia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1991). In Jakarta and surrounding areas, local government officials who had previously worked with the Dutch and then the Japanese, and Chinese landlords and peasants, were the targets of local gangsters who immediately emerged after the decline of public order following the Japanese surrender. They claimed to be the voice of the poor, fighting against corrupt and anti-revolutionary officials and the economically powerful Chinese. The Chinese were robbed and murdered and the officials were deposed and, in many cases, also killed. See Robert Cribb, *Gangsters and Revolutionaries: The Jakarta People’s Militia and the Indonesian Revolution* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), pp. 50-53.
the time had different, even opposing, interpretations of the events following the declaration of independence. The pemuda called for a radical takeover, if necessary by means of what they called a ‘putsch’ (coup). Civil servant groups who had previously worked with the Dutch and now worked with the Japanese preferred to wait until a new regime came definitively into power, rather than to immediately declare support for the Republican government. Popular support for the Republic was hampered significantly by the Allied order that the defeated Japanese troops should maintain law and order until their arrival as well as the Allied prohibition of public meetings.

In the midst of this extremely challenging situation, which jeopardized the nascent state, the newly established Indonesian propaganda authority had to find a concept for raising public confidence in the legitimacy of the Indonesian state and garnering wide popular support for the Indonesian Republic. In this chapter I explain that propaganda was an instrument by which the Republic’s leaders expected to both ensure its legitimacy in the eyes of the public and to mobilize the masses. I pose the following questions: 1) How was the idea of independence viewed, contested, and spread among Indonesians? 2) How did the Republican government campaign for the legitimacy of the Indonesian state and for the nation-state building project in the midst of a huge lack of popular trust due to their backgrounds as Japanese collaborators? 3) How did Indonesian propaganda mobilize various groups within Indonesian society to support the Republic and contribute to the new state? 4) How was each group approached?

**Legitimacy as a Newly Independent State**

Indonesian President Soekarno used his first radio speech, on 23 August, 1945, to convince his fellow countrymen that the existence of the Republic of Indonesia was necessary not just for the Indonesian
people, but, more importantly, for the world. He was certain that Indonesia could only contribute to world peace if it was independent. He stated that the only aim of the Indonesian nation was ‘to live peacefully and happily’, and that Indonesian independence meant Indonesia had contributed to the peace that had just been established all over the world with the ending of the War.²

The Indonesian press maintained that, given the fact that the independence was initiated and declared by Indonesians, it was in essence the will of the Indonesian people as a whole. Surabaya’s Soeara Asia, for instance, which was led by Abdoel Wahab, the journalist who later established the city’s nationalist publication Soeara Rakjat, published a story on 22 August about native teachers in Surabaya who were thankful to God for independence. The writer assured his readers that independence was ‘their lifelong wish’.³ Yogyakarta’s Sinar Matahari even claimed that independence was the materialization of ‘centuries of national dreaming’ and that independence ‘belonged completely to the Indonesian people because the proclamation of an Independent Indonesia was declared by Indonesia’s own people’.⁴

The educated and politically aware pemuda, in particular those headquartered in Prapatan 10 (which consisted mainly of Jakarta’s medical students and was closely connected with the city’s nationalists) promoted another source of legitimation, namely ideas rooted in Western history, in particular the ideas of democracy and liberty. They wrote, in English, various slogans adapted from what they knew about the struggle for independence in other countries, especially the United States. Such slogans were scrawled on trams, walls and

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³ ‘Allahu akbar! Seroean menjamboet Indonesia Merdeka’, Soeara Asia, 22 August, 1945. For Wahab’s profile see Soeara Asia, 2 June 1942.

posters to spread the word: ‘We fight for democracy, we have only to win’, ‘Indonesia never again the “life-blood” of any nation!’, ‘For life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness’ and ‘For the right of self-determination’ (see picture 2.1.).

![Wall painting with a pro-independence slogan drawn by the pemuda](image)

Picture 2.1.
Wall painting with a pro-independence slogan drawn by the pemuda

To mark these English texts as distinctly revolutionary as well as Indonesian, iconic Indonesian cultural symbols were added such as drawings of an ornamental dagger (kris, see picture 2.2.).

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5 *Lukisan revolusi rakyat Indonesia.*

6 *Lukisan revolusi rakyat Indonesia.*
Newspapers were employed in the effort to promote the Indonesian state to wider audiences. Darmawan Mangoenkoesoemo, a nationalist since the 1920’s by way of his membership of an Indonesian nationalist student group in the Netherlands, Perhimpunan Indonesia (PI), claimed that the Republic of Indonesia’s qualifications rendered it a legitimate newly independent country. In an interview with a Soecara Asia journalist who sought his opinion about the declared independence, he stated that according to international views, an independent nation required three elements: people, government, and authority. He claimed that in Indonesia ‘the first and second requirement already exist’ and that only the last requirement was lacking. He therefore implicitly concluded that, seen from an international perspective, Indonesia as a new state almost met the requirements and that the last one was only a matter of time.

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7 *Lukisan revolusi rakjat Indonesia.*

This line of thinking was seconded by the Republican government, which used booklets to comprehensively explore the idea about Indonesian state. Not long after the proclamation, the Kempen issued a Pepora (Pendidikan Politik Rakjat, People’s Political Education) booklet entitled ‘Apakah Negara Itoe?’ (What is a state?) in which it explained the requirements of a modern state and how it differed from a monarchy, the political system used previously in most of Indonesia. The Kempen advocated that people should abandon old-fashioned ideas about undemocratic kingdoms of the past and replace such concepts with a model of the modern democratic nation-state. It denounced those who thought state was equal to king as ‘old-fashioned’ (kolot) because this thought ‘did not fit with the age of airplanes, the age of electricity, the age of radio, etc.’. It posited Indonesia as a modern state, similar to other states on earth, particularly Western states. According to the Kempen, ‘nowadays, a country can be defined as a state if it meets requirements already acknowledged by administrative science as common requirements in the international world’. These requirements were ‘absolute’, meaning that if they could not be met, a country could not be a state.

The ministry stated that the requirements for a country to be considered a state were: 1) people, 2) territory, 3) government, and 4) sovereignty in the eyes of the international world. Regarding the term ‘people’, it used Switzerland and the United States as examples, because these countries had people, although they did not all originate from one place, one society, or one culture. What determined a nation was ‘history or fate mutually shouldered by those who live in such a society’. Concerning ‘territory’, the Kempen wrote that modern states, for instance the Soviet Union and Monaco, have territory but the

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9 Apakah negara itoe? (Jakarta: Kementerian Penerangan, 1945).
10 Apakah negara itoe?
11 Apakah negara itoe?
Jewish people would not qualify, because ‘a territory-less nation could not establish a state’. According to the ministry, ‘a territory-less nation is as someone who has no house’. As for ‘government’, it equated government with ‘the headquarters of the army’, which was responsible for regulating society. It also acknowledged ‘local governments’, each of which held responsibility for its own region but was under the control of the central government. The Kempen claimed that this kind of governmental system was ‘common in modern countries, and called decentralization’. This explanation clearly implied that Indonesia could meet most of the requirements of state mentioned above. The Kempen thus assured Indonesian readers that the newly-proclaimed Indonesian nation deserved to be considered a state.

References to American principles of independence were made by Americans sympathetic to Indonesian independence. One example is K’tut Tantri (born as Muriel Stuart Walker), a UK-born US citizen who had lived in the Dutch Indies since the 1930’s and who had come to support Indonesian independence through her connection with Indonesian nationalist activists. She was arguably the only native English speaker who sided with the Republic in its early days. Republican leaders approached her and employed her as a writer for a Republic-initiated English-language magazine The Voice of Free Indonesia and as a broadcaster at Bung Tomo’s Radio Pemberontakan (Rebellion Radio) in Surabaya. The main audiences of the magazine and radio station were Allied troops and the foreign journalists who accompanied them. The Allied troops in East Java called her ‘Surabaya Sue’ in an effort to liken her anti-Allies radio propaganda to ‘Tokyo Rose’, a well-known Japanese American female propagandist who during the Pacific War ceaselessly broadcast anti-Allies sentiments. Despite this mockery, foreign war correspondents in Java listened to her broadcasts nightly, as she was the only native English speaker inside the guerrilla circles in East Java.  

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12 See Timothy Lindsey, *The Romance of K’tut Tantri and Indonesia: Text*
One of the main concerns of the Republican leaders regarding foreigners’ views about the birth of a Republican government in Indonesia was that it might be seen as a product of social revolution or, even worse, a Japanese puppet government. They entreated Tantri to tell the English-speaking world that what had happened in Indonesia was neither of these. Moreover, they asked Tantri to remind the Americans and the English, including the British troops arriving in Surabaya, that they had during the last great war promised, in their wartime addresses, independence to nations all over the world. Tantri was expected to interpret what had happened in Indonesia by framing the story in the context of the Atlantic Charter and the Charter of the United Nations.¹³

Soon, K’tut Tantri had created pro-independence banners and posters, which were distributed by the revolutionaries in towns and villages all over East Java. In her effort to appeal to the British and Dutch troops arriving in Surabaya, who could all speak English and were certainly aware of the contents of US wartime addresses, she used quotations from great US thinkers concerned with the rights of the individual, democracy, freedom and equality, such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, etc. She used, for instance, a phrase well-known to Americans: ‘Abraham Lincoln walks again’. This referenced the title of a 1914 poem composed by American poet Vachel Lindsay (1879-1931), ‘Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight’, describing the 16th President of the USA, Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), who led the United States in the American Civil War and who abolished slavery, rising from his grave and walking again in the streets of Springfield, Illinois, because he was saddened by the calamities caused by wars in Europe involving both kings and

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peasants.\textsuperscript{14} This was adapted to the Indonesian cause, rewritten by Tantri as ‘Abraham Lincoln walks again in Indonesia’, in red ink on a white banner.\textsuperscript{15} Knowledgeable readers familiar with this poem and American history would, upon encountering the Indonesian version, consider that Indonesia’s right to independence fell within the scope of Lincoln’s devotion to the rights of the oppressed to freedom and peace—slaves in the case of America, peasants in Europe, and colonized people in Indonesia.

An unprecedented element in the propaganda aimed at legitimizing the indepedence was reference to nature. Freedom was seen as an inherent right of all creatures on earth. This right guaranteed all living things, all over the globe, freedom from any kind of cage or hindrance to move freely. A bird that wanted to be free from its cage was comparable to a nation aspiring to be released from foreign colonialism. An editorial in Yogyakarta’s \textit{Sinar Matahari} several days after the proclamation compared Indonesian independence with the release of a bird from its cage.\textsuperscript{16}

Sources of justification for independence went even further when it was portrayed that Indonesian independence originated from God. Several Republican leaders considered the independent Indonesian state as coming from God as it was essentially ‘God’s grace’ (\textit{ni’imat Tuhan}) or ‘Allah’s gift’ (\textit{pemberian Ilahi}).\textsuperscript{17} In Islamic tradition, ‘\textit{ni’imat Tuhan}’ and ‘\textit{pemberian Ilahi}’ meant a pleasing prize given by God

\textsuperscript{14} Several phrases of the poem read: ‘Yea, when the sick world cries, how can he sleep’, ‘Too many peasants fight, they know not why’, ‘The sins of all the war-lords burn his heart’, and ‘He cannot rest until a spirit-dawn/Shall come;—the shining hope of Europe free’. The complete poem can be found in ‘Abraham Lincoln walks in midnight’, \textit{The Advocate of Peace (1894-1920)}, Vol. 80, No. 11 (December, 1918), p. 324.

\textsuperscript{15} K’tut Tantri, \textit{Revolt in paradise}, p. 186.


\textsuperscript{17} ‘Sjoekoer’, \textit{Soeara Asia}, 22 August, 1945.
to those He chooses because they have prayed to Him or performed good deeds toward human beings. This meant that independence could be granted by none but God and that the Indonesian state derived its authority from a divine source. Propagating this idea was clearly an effort to avoid criticism regarding the source of legitimization of Indonesian independence, which in the preceding few months had been derived from Japanese authority. M. Ghoefron Faqih, an Islamic leader from the Nahdlatul Ulama, an Islamic organization closely connected to nationalists during the Japanese occupation, when asked by the press to comment on the proclamation, stated ‘I am thankful to God who has granted independence to us’. Therefore, he called upon the people of Indonesia to ‘have an Independent Indonesia and properly carry out [our] responsibilities’. By citing independence as a gift from God, he implied that the state of the Republic of Indonesia, which had declared its independence, was also part of said gift, and thus deserved credibility.

Legitimating the Self-appointed Revolutionary Government

The Indonesian government needed convincing strategies to assure the Indonesian people that the Republican government should be considered the lawful authority in Indonesia despite the fact that it was self-appointed and lacked the approval of the Japanese authority or the Allies, the victors of the war. The government did not refer to any personal ambitions the Republic’s leaders might have to be the leaders of the Indonesian people after the end of Japanese occupation, but instead to ‘the desire of the Indonesian people’. One day after the proclamation, the government issued an edict in which it claimed that the establishment of an Independent Indonesian State was ‘desired by the whole of the people at this time’. In order to further assure the

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people that the government was reliable, it stated that the establishment of a Republican government was supported by ‘several forces who are heroic [and] responsible to the people’. The government hoped to boost confidence by claiming that all necessary things ‘are being carried out and will be accomplished in a short period of time’.19

In another edict on the same day, the KNI backed up the government’s claims about fulfilling the will of the people by emphasizing that the proclamation ‘was gladly welcomed by all Indonesian people’, meaning that the government had fulfilled the wish of the entire population.20 Pro-Republic newspapers agreed. Semarang’s Sinar Baroe stressed that the base of the Republic was people’s sovereignty, which meant that the government managed Indonesia ‘in the name of the people and for the people’. Thus, ‘the current government is the Indonesian National Government, which is mutually owned by us [the people]. Consequently, we are not only necessary but also have a responsibility to love it, preserve it, and hold it up on our heads’.21

Moreover, pro-Republic leaders stressed that the Indonesian leaders were fully capable of managing the country, aiming to convince the people that after the Japanese surrendered and even though there was a power vacuum, the self-appointed government was qualified to take over authority. A nationalist activist, Soemardi, expressed to the press several days after the proclamation his belief that a state completely managed by Indonesians would function well ‘considering the intelligence and experience of our leaders as well as the civil servants in general’.22 He convinced the public that

19 ‘Makloemat kepada seloeroeh rakjat Indonesia’, Soeara Asia, 20 August, 1945.


most of the Republic’s leaders had had the modern education and their experience as administrators during the Japanese period was a guarantee that Indonesia would become a success state.

Republican propaganda emphasized the ability of the government to work quickly. A Republican leader claimed that the people desired prosperity after their past suffering, and he was sure that this wish would be granted by the government. To the press he stated that the people should rely on the government and support them because ‘our leaders now carefully arrange all things necessary to guarantee the welfare of all people’.  

The issue of avoidance of disorder following Japanese capitulation was another element in convincing the people why a Republican government was legitimate. Indonesian people should support the existence of the Republican government, Soekarno said, in particular by unifying under the leadership of the Republican government. Otherwise, according to the president, Indonesian people would face the danger of dispute, chaos and disorientation. Thus, Soekarno importuned, ‘I request all Indonesian people now to unite completely, [and] stand behind the leaders...In this very critical time, the only attitude that can save the [Indonesian] state is unity, unity, and once again, unity!’ What he meant with unity was obviously a unity under his government’s leadership.

*The Republic and Japanese Collaborators*

During the days following the proclamation of independence, the legitimacy of the Republic of Indonesia was heavily questioned abroad. The Dutch Indies Government in exile in Australia prepared a body

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23 ‘Samboetan para pemoeka dan kaoem terpeladjar’.

for rebuilding the Dutch Indies after the Japanese surrender: the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration (NICA). NICA broadcasted from Australia that Indonesians who had previously cooperated with the Japanese were regarded as war criminals and would be brought to justice. It also claimed that Indonesian independence, proclaimed as it had been by those who had collaborated with the Japanese, was illegal. As the Japanese had declared surrender, and were now only in Indonesia to maintain the *status quo*, any political change in Indonesia was considered unlawful. The Dutch radio station located in Australia called on Indonesian people not to stand behind Soekarno and Hatta because the independence they had announced was merely Japanese ‘deceit’.\(^{25}\) Another Dutch radio broadcast stated that the proclamation of independence was just ‘the will of one or two persons’, suggesting that majority of Indonesians did not approve of Soekarno’s proclamation.\(^{26}\)

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\(^{25}\) ‘Kita sudah menentukan nasib djadi bangsa merdeka, tak mau didjadah lagi’, *Sinar Baroe*, 31 August, 1945.

\(^{26}\) ‘Pertemoean pengoeroes Komite Nasional dengan para kepala djawatan negeri’, *Asia Raya*, 4 September, 1945. An Indonesian-language, NICA-sponsored newspaper published in Melbourne and run by former political exiles during the colonial period, *Penjoeloeh*, did not, however, specifically refer to ‘the traitor’ in Indonesia; on 27 August it reported news about the plan to bring natives of the Philippines, who ‘cooperated with the Japanese or betrayed their homeland’ to trial. See ‘Pengchianat2 Philippina dimoeka hakim’, *Penjoeloeh*, 27 August, 1945. This news obviously reflected how the Allied forces and NICA viewed natives working for the Japanese and it implied that Indonesian leaders could also face the same treatment. From an international point of view, the legitimacy of the Indonesian state was also problematic in many places, especially in Europe. In the month of August, 1945, people did not just talk about rebuilding war-torn Europe, but focused also on bringing those who collaborated with the Axis countries (Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy) to the war tribunals. It is therefore understandable that the Indonesian state, declared by those who had cooperated with Asia’s Axis country, Japan, was questionable in the eyes of the international world. *Penjoeloeh* was first published in August, 1942, and was sponsored by officials of the Indies government-in-exile in Australia, including Ch. O. van Der Plas, a former Dutch Indies official who used to approach underground communists in the Indies and ask them to fight against the Japanese. The main readers of this newspaper were the Indonesian community in Australia, especially hundreds of Indonesian activists interned in Papua since
The issue of collaborators with the Japanese as well as the use of a stronger term which could bring about juridical consequences, ‘war criminals’ (pendjalahat perang), remained central in Dutch propaganda. The first official Dutch viewpoint appeared in the last week of September when a former Indies administrator and NICA official Charles Olke van der Plas explained before the press that nobody in Indonesia would be punished on the basis of their political choices during the Japanese occupation, as long as they were not war criminals. When he was asked whether his use of the term ‘war criminals’ applied to Soekarno, his answer was ambiguous: ‘It depends on circumstances in the time to come’.27 He later gave indications, however, that Soekarno might qualify as a war criminal; he stated that he ‘would not hold negotiations with Soekarno’ as he felt that the Republic’s president ‘used fascist and terroristic methods’.28

NICA’s accusations concerning Japanese collaboration in the backgrounds of Indonesian leaders definitely troubled the

the late 1920’s and later transported to Australia. Penjoeloeh’s publications in the early days of the Japanese defeat focused mostly on the Japanese defeat, the role of the Allies and the Dutch therein, and the preparation for the re-establishment of the Dutch Indies government. See, for example, Penjoeloeh, 20, 23, 27, and 30 August, 1945.


28 ‘Soekarno pada masa jang akan datang’. During October, Dutch propaganda about Japanese collaborators continued. Van der Plas eventually issued a clearer statement about Soekarno’s status when he said that the government of the Netherlands considered Soekarno to be a ‘war criminal’. See ‘Belat-Belit “Brewok Besar”’, Warta Indonesia, 9 October, 1945. Meanwhile, J.A.A. Logeman, Dutch Minister of the Colonies stated that Soekarno was ‘not a democrat’ and was ‘a traitor and a defender of the Japanese’, and he said his intelligence was merely ‘provocative speeches’. Logeman also felt that Soekarno and his fellows ‘directly followed and supported Japanese ideology’. In another part of his speech, Logeman explained that Indonesia would be given a democratic government and deserved an equal position with other nations within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. He said that Indonesia might also be the given widest independence, but not at that time because ‘the Indonesian nation had neither power nor potency, nor the intelligence, to run an independent government’. See ‘Dijika soedah ada kemoengkinan, Indonesia merdika. Tidak ada peroendingan dengan Soekarno’, Penjoeloeh, 11 October, 1945.
Indonesian authorities. Given that the cooperation between leading Indonesian politicians and the Japanese was irrefutable, the Republican authorities acknowledged the Japanese role as one element in Indonesia’s struggle, but at the same time they also stressed that this role had been extremely limited. In his first radio speech on 29 August, addressing NICA’s propaganda both to Indonesian listeners and NICA’s supporters in Australia, Vice President Mohammad Hatta gave credit to the role of Japanese ideas and policies in promoting the independence of the occupied countries, including Indonesia. He said, ‘we have known what was recommended by Dai Nippon [about the right of every nation to be independent] and we have used it as the foundation of our struggle to secure the independence of our nation and homeland: Indonesia’. He clearly believed that pro-independence Japanese propaganda— despite the political intentions of the Japanese behind it—was to a large extent in accordance with the aspirations of the Indonesian people; therefore, the idea of independence was neither new nor originally created by the Japanese. He further underscored that the idea of independence in fact rooted in Indonesian society, and that was why it was widely accepted by the Indonesians.

Hatta stressed that the Japanese were not the sole source of the Indonesian struggle for independence. This implied at least two ideas: that the Japanese role in Indonesian independence was insignificant, and that there was nothing wrong with cooperating with them because the Japanese conception of independence was also an Indonesian idea. At one point, the Republic’s vice president addressed the idea of the right to self determination itself. He quoted the Atlantic Charter which included the passage concerning a guarantee for every nation to choose its preferred form of state. Hatta showed that the Netherlands was isolated in its view regarding Indonesian independence.

29 ‘Kita sudah menentukan nasib djadi bangsa merdeka, tak mau didjadjah lagi’, Sinar Baroe, 31 August 1945.
According to Hatta, the Indonesian struggle for independence was already 40 years old, indicating that the several years of Japanese occupation comprised only one small part. Hatta recognized that the Indonesian constitution had been drawn up under Japanese auspices, but he stressed that it was in fact based on the ideals of the Indonesian people and that its contents were rooted in the nationalist struggles of the 1930’s, when nationalist activists promoted the importance of popular sovereignty and collectivism in the creation of an Indonesian state. He also stated that Indonesia did not follow all Japanese advice, instead choosing the paths preferred by the Indonesians. In conclusions, Hatta, argued strenuously that the independence was in fact a far cry from a Japanese orchestration.

Soekarno also felt it necessary to explain that he and Hatta had been summoned to Vietnam to meet General Hisaichi Terauchi, the Japanese high commander in Southeast Asia stationing there, only days before the proclamation, which had understandably raised suspicions about the Japanese role right up until the last moments before the proclamation. In his speech before the members of KNIP—later published in the newspaper—on 29 August, 1945, Soekarno said that he had returned to Indonesia from his 9 August meeting with Terauchi with three ‘stamps’: his appointment as head of the PPKI and that of Hatta as vice head, the mandate to begin the organization’s work on of 15 August, and an explanation of the role of the organization in determining the expected results. He continued, ‘if there was no change in the situation (Japanese capitulation), it was believed that Indonesian independence would be approved by Dai Nippon on 24 August.’ But, because the Japanese capitulated, ‘on 17 August at 4 o’clock in the morning we took our own initiative to proclaim Indonesian independence as the Unitary State of

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30 ‘Kita sudah menentukan nasib djadi bangsa merdeka, tak mau didjadjah lagi’.

31 ‘Kita sudah menentukan nasib djadi bangsa merdeka, tak mau didjadjah lagi’.
the Republic of Indonesia’. Soekarno stressed that the Japanese authorities acknowledged and appreciated the proclamation. He related the story of his meeting with Japanese officials in Jakarta, where he was told that the Japanese would hand authority over to Indonesian leaders.32

In addition to radio broadcasts, the Dutch also challenged the Republic’s legitimacy by dropping pamphlets from airplanes in Java in early September, 1945. This extended the reach of Dutch propaganda into areas not covered by radio networks. Local Republican leaders reacted. The Chief of KNI Semarang, Wongsonagoro, denied Dutch allegations about the impurity of Indonesian independence by pointing out that ‘the entire Indonesian nation has been mobilizing and fighting to seize Independence for our nation from the grip of the Dutch who held Indonesia for hundreds of years’.33 He further accused the Dutch of dropping the pamphlets with the aim of ‘confusing people’s minds’ and he therefore urged people to ‘never pay attention to the contents of the pamphlets’.34

The issue of Japanese collaborators was often trumpeted by foreign journalists able to meet with Indonesian authorities. The Indonesian government used interviews with these strangers to advocate Indonesian independence. In September, 1945, several Western newspapersmen, possibly Americans, who arrived in Jakarta with the British troops, conducted an interview with Soekarno. The two most important questions posed were, ‘You were a Japanese collaborator, is that right?’ and, ‘How is it that in your speeches, which we’ve heard on the radio, you have repeatedly stated that you would smash the Allied Forces from the shores of Java?’. Without

32 ‘Satoe Bangsa, satoe tanah air, satoe tekad: tetap merdeka!’, Asia Raya, 30 August, 1945.

33 ‘Repoeblik Indonesia merdeka ialah negara bangsa Indonesia’, Tjahaja, 4 September, 1945.

34 ‘Repoeblik Indonesia merdeka ialah negara bangsa Indonesia’
specifically using the term ‘Japanese collaborator’ or referring to the question about his hostile speech, Soekarno answered by focusing on the benefits to the Indonesian side of cooperation with the Japanese:

In ’42 we were untrained and I felt the smart tactic was to have the Japanese fight our battle for us. Now it is ’45 and we are trained and ready to fight our own battle. Check the gains on both sides and you will find that Soekarno got much more out of the Japanese than the Japanese got out of Soekarno.\footnote{Cindy Adams, \textit{Soekarno}, p. 226. However, it was not known how the foreign journalists responded to this answer.}

In his radio speech of 29 August, Hatta, responding to Dutch accusations, made it clear once more that rumors that the independence was brought about by the Japanese and did not represent the will of the Indonesian people were entirely unfounded. He said that despite dwindling trust in the Japanese-founded PPKI due to high levels of Japanese intervention, the organization essentially represented ‘voices from all over Indonesia’; its members consisting as they did of envoys from all parts of the Indonesian archipelago and from the various groups which made up Indonesian society. These were, according to Hatta, not just members of the PPKI, but also representatives of the Indonesian people.\footnote{‘Kita sudah menentukan nasib djadi bangsa merdeka, tak mau didjadjah lagi’.} He presented further evidence: the text of the proclamation was signed by Soekarno and himself ‘on behalf of Indonesian people’, indicating that the text was not drafted by any Japanese-backed party.

On 4 September, a Dutch radio broadcast from Australia accused Soekarno of acting unilaterally and without ‘national will’ regarding independence. The editors of an Indonesian government-backed newspaper, \textit{Berita Indonesia}, published a list of reasons why such allegations were wrong:
1) They [the Dutch] close their eyes about the history of Soekarno’s movement. [They] Forget that Boeng Karno’s actions were a continuation of the Indonesian nationalist movement, which had been in continuous operation for the preceding 40 years; 2) Did they know that Boeng Karno now had 70 million Indonesian followers?; 3) They forget that the form which the [Indonesian] independent state shall take will never follow the trail left by the Japanese or reflect their wishes.  

In late September, 1945, two Australian journalists put to Soekarno the question of who had the initiative to proclaim Indonesian independence on 17 August. He replied by relating stories of localized strife in many places throughout Indonesia, particularly during the 19th century, such as the Java War, the Padri War (West Sumatra), the Aceh War, and other anti-Dutch skirmishes in Bali and Sulawesi, which, he asserted, ‘firmly reflected the palpable will of the nation of Indonesia to be free from colonial exploitation of any character’. He added that such strife had modernized with the political movements of the early 20th century. He eventually concluded that Indonesian independence was neither made nor suggested by the Japanese, but was instead based on the longstanding will of the Indonesian nation.

The majority of the questions and accusations surrounding Japanese collaborators came from abroad, yet the same claim was voiced by Indonesians as well. One of the most cutting propaganda attacks on Indonesians who cooperated with the Japanese was launched by Sjahrir, a socialist pemuda leader, who between the proclamation and early November stayed out of government for the most part, assessing popular support for independence and amassing followers.

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37 ‘Komentar’, Berita Indonesia, October, 1945.

38 ‘Indonesia merdeka adalah tjiptaan bangsa Indonesia sendiri’, Warta Indonesia, 29 September, 1945.

39 Born in Padang Panjang, West Sumatra, in 1909, and raised in Medan and Bandung, Sjahrir took part in the nationalist movement in the 1920’s by
Such internal criticism reflected not only the re-emergence of nationalist, anti-Japanese politicians and intellectuals, driven underground by the occupation, but also the uneasy public climate. Indonesians were troubled by residual signs of the Japanese occupation, and the general mood destabilized the government. On 10 November, 1945, Sjahrir produced a political booklet entitled ‘Perdjoeangan Kita’ (Our Struggle). It conveyed his considered opinion and critical analysis of ‘several key, important points for our struggle now’, and was written ‘with calmness and a cool mind’ to ‘perfect the struggle in which we are engaged’ and ‘to reinforce the foundations of our struggle’.40 One focal point of this booklet was Sjahrir’s disappointment in Indonesians who were influenced by and cooperated with the Japanese authorities. Youth, he said, were far too affected by Japanese propaganda. Sjahrir believed that the youth, trained by the Japanese to hate White people, still clung to this hatred despite the Japanese surrender, reflected in the various crimes and acts of cruelty evident in the first months following independence. Sjahrir declared this hatred ‘useless’, ‘fascist’, and ‘reactionary’. Sjahrir’s opinion about Japanese collaborators in the Indonesian government seemed to confirm foreign propaganda. Nevertheless, while foreign claims primarily stressed the illegality of the Indonesian government,

establishing an organization, Jong Indonesia (Young Indonesia). During the Japanese occupation, he and other pemudas organized a clandestine anti-fascist movement. See Sjahrir’s biography in Rudolf Mrázek, Sjahrir: Politics and Exile in Indonesia (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1994).

40 ‘Kata Pengantar’ in Soetan Sjahrir, Perdjoeangan Kita (Palembang: Perdjabatan Penerangan Karesidenan, 1945). For a complete picture of Sjahrir’s political background and the context surrounding the pamphlet, see the English translation of the booklet and introductions by George McTurnan Kahin and Benedict R’OG Anderson in Soetan Sjahrir, Our Struggle (New York: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1968). This booklet was also published in the Netherlands in 1945 by the Indonesian student organization Perhimpoenan Indonesia there, established in 1908, which produced many of the leaders of the Indonesian revolution including Hatta. See Soetan Sjahrir, Onze Strijd (Amsterdam: Vrij Nederland, 1945).
insisting that an Indonesian state had never existed, Sjahrir’s criticism accepted its reality. He saw a need for a purification, rather than an elimination, of both the state and the government, through what he called ‘cleansing’ (pembersihan) of ‘political collaborators’ (politieke collaboratoren).\footnote{Perdjoeangan Kita, p. 24-25.}

**Indonesian Independence and Political Unity**

News in the second half of August, 1945, especially about the Japanese defeat and Indonesian independence, sparked optimism among nationalists wanting an end to the Japanese occupation and the dawn of a new era, but there was also uncertainty about the meaning of the *merdeka* and its potential consequences. While the text of the proclamation referred only to the announcement of Indonesian independence and said that a transfer of authority would be carried out soon, no further explanation was forthcoming. Outside Jakarta, political developments and personal or group interests had led to myriad interpretations of and reactions to independence. *Pangréh pradja*, particularly those working for the Japanese with little connection to nationalist political circles in Jakarta, were unmoved by the notion of independence, and preferred to wait for the arrival of the Allies as their possible new patrons. When the youth regaled them with pro-independence sentiments, they reacted with indifference and took a wait and see attitude. Additionally, the *pangréh pradja* were sure the Dutch would soon return and grant Indonesia self-governance as promised by the Dutch Queen Wilhelmina in December, 1942.\footnote{Anton Lucas, “The Tiga Daerah Affair: Social Revolution or Rebellion?” in Audrey Kahin (ed.), *Regional Dynamics of the Indonesian Revolution* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), p. 27 and 68.}

Former members of a Japanese-instigated paramilitary organization in Java, the Peta (Defender of the Homeland), were afraid;
a rumour was circulating, naming them traitors during the Japanese occupation, for which they could face arrest and punishment. In Surabaya, talk on the street had it that independence meant the abolition of taxes. Others interpreted independence as freedom to do anything previously forbidden, such as buying tickets for public transportation or stealing. Unsurprisingly, such interpretations led to chaos, crime, and general lawlessness.

The Republican leaders recognized that conflicting arguments and interpretations were naturally inevitable, but they importuned that such differences not lead to disorder. In his 29 August radio speech, Vice President Mohammad Hatta acknowledged the differences in viewpoints among Indonesians on how best to arrange state matters, but he emphasized that this was normal and should not be exaggerated. What was important was finding points of similarity.


45 Andi Suwirta, Suara dari Dua Kota, p. 54. The militant youth interpreted independence as a moment to launch a direct takeover of authority from the Japanese, by force if necessary. This notion was reflected by the youth’s endorsement of strong anti-Japanese words in the proclamation—refused by Soekarno and other nationalists—and a trial conducted by the Peta members in Cirebon on 15 August to overthrow the Japanese authority. See George McTurnan Kahin, Nationalism and Revolution, p. 134-135. One youth leader, Sukarni, even attempted, prior to the proclamation, to convince Soekarno and Hatta that there were 15,000 armed youths ready to enter Jakarta and seize power from the Japanese. When the independence was announced and word of it spread, the Japanese authorities realized that Indonesian leaders had acted without their approval, and bloodshed seemed just a triggering event way. The Japanese responded the independence harshly, among other things by removing pro-independence posters. They also ordered Peta members to return their weapons, but the latter refused, and fought to take more arms from the Japanese as well as to defend the Republic through actions such as defending the red-and-white flag from Japanese who were trying to lower it. This often led to bloody clashes.

46 ‘Kita sudah menentukan nasib djadi bangsa merdeka, tak mau didjadah lagi’.
Indonesian authorities were concerned about those who took independence to mean something different. These included Indonesians who took action, in the government’s view, ‘based their own understanding’, such as ‘calling for a sacred war, capturing Dutch and Indo-European [Eurasian] people, and decreeing their own laws to punish everyone, whether a national or foreign, considered guilty of crimes against the Republic of Indonesia’. Indonesian authorities stressed that they ‘understood people’s anger’ and that such interpretations and actions were just defensive responses. The authorities also underlined, however, that they ‘forbade people to act independently upon their own understanding’ because it was in fact ‘anarchy which would bring about the end of our Republic’. 47

Slogans like ‘reaching independence’ and ‘we want to be independent’ were still being used by Indonesians. Soekarno, in a meeting about security on 30 August, declared that these two slogans ‘were completely erroneous’ because Indonesia ‘was already independent and wanted to stay independent forever’. 48 Soekarno described these feelings—‘already independent’ and ‘insistence to be independent always’—as ‘a desire of the people as a whole’ (collectieve opgehoopte volskwil). 49

Soekarno called upon the Indonesian people to interpret merdeka as what he called the purpose of Indonesian independence: the safety and wealth of the Indonesian people through the establishment of peace, not by waging war. 50 According to Soekarno, peace should not

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47 ‘Makloemat Pemerintah Repoeblik Indonesia kepada seloeroeh rakjat’, Berita Repoeblik Indonesia, 17 November 1945.


49 ‘Hanja satoe toempoean kemaoean rakjat Indonesia dimasa ini!’, Sinar Baroe, 5 September, 1945.

50 This speech was considered very important, especially for pro-independence nationalists outside Jakarta, because this was the first time Soekarno explored
be established just in Indonesia, but throughout the world. This was clearly rhetoric to appeal to the global community. Soekarno argued that Indonesia was adopting what the world was struggling for after the end of the war: peace. But he also emphasized another requirement for world peace, namely recognition of Indonesian independence. Soekarno quoted the preamble of the Indonesian Constitution: ‘Independence is the right of every nation, therefore every form of colonialism must be erased’. He stressed that the Constitution made it clear that ‘the aim of Indonesia is to establish an independent nation, not to wage war or to disturb the world’.

This interpretation was backed by local Republican leaders via the KNIP. Niti Soemantri, a member of a local branch of the KNIP, KNI of Priangan (West Java), emphasized the same notion of peace. Speaking before distinguished local leaders, Islamic teachers, police, and government officials in the town of Cimahi, West Java, she divided Indonesia’s struggle for independence into three stages, the first during the Dutch colonial period, the second during the Second World War, and the last phase ‘our struggle now, in the age of peace’.

Hatta’s radio speech on 29 August focused more on the political unity between the youth and the people as a whole. He was sure the youths’ brimming enthusiasm would motivate a vast number of

the independence in depth. This was an answer for the locals who had awaited opinions and instructions from their leaders in Jakarta. The text of this speech was copied and spread by the local National Committees, for instance KNID West Java, to remote areas outside Jakarta. The aim of this was, according to the KNID, ‘so that we would understand more about our position as an independent nation in this critical situation’. See ‘Pidato presiden kita’, Tjahaja, 31 August, 1945.


52 ‘Pergantian zaman tak mempengaruhi perdjuangan kebangsaan kita’

53 ‘Keboelatan tekad dibelakang Presiden Repoeblik Indonesia’, Tjahaja, 4 September, 1945.
people, creating a potential source of great power for Indonesia’s fight. He indicated that the youth must take the initiative in this process. He said that the fate of the Indonesian state was now in their hands. He believed in their potential because ‘I am not disappointed with the spirit of the youth, nor with their strong determination and bravery. Indonesian youths are ready to die for [their] nation and homeland.’ In addition to readiness to die, they ‘must also be ready to live on with, and fight with, common people so as to bring about the ideal of the state of the Republic of Indonesia.’ After praising the Indonesian youths’ qualities, Hatta called on them to work closely with the people by stressing that the youth ‘must approach’ the heart of the people, must know how to get to the soul and feelings of the people’ and ‘educate and discipline themselves in order to understand the kerakjatan [populism]’.  

In addition to solidarity among Indonesians, the authorities also encouraged unity between people and the government. However, while the people related to each other from positions of equality, this could not be said of the relationship between the government and the people, which was in the view of the Indonesian authorities typified by a hierarchical bond. Oto Iskandar Di Nata, a former member of BPUPKI and PPKI who was later appointed State Minister, apparently found this type of bond necessary as, in his speech in Bandung on 26 August, 1945, he called upon people to ‘stand totally behind the leaders and have complete trust in them. Only with unity between our Great Leaders and the common people can the security of our state be maintained’. In his speech inaugurating the members of KNIP on 29 August, the head of the executive committee of the KNIP, Kasman Singodimedjo, suggested that unity was the primary condition which would allow Indonesian independence to

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54 ‘Kita sudah menentukan nasib djadi bangsa merdeka, tak mau didjadjah lagi’.
be realized and recognised by the international world. He further described his definition of this unity: ‘all people should stand behind the Government of the Republic of Indonesia, all people must unite within and without, all people must unite with the President’.  

M.I. Sajoeti, a pemuda leader, in his 28 August radio speech, which was directed specifically at the ordinary people and nationalist activists, agreed with many aspects of Soekarno’s speech, including the call to the people to stay calm. He conveyed, however, a slightly different idea about the requirement to await the leaders’ orders. He argued that those ‘who had a fighting spirit and a spirit of

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56 ‘Satoe bangsa, satoe tanah air, satoe tekad: tetap merdeka!’, Asia Raya, 30 August, 1945.

57 NL-HaNA_2.10.14 inv. nmr. 5465.

58 ‘Pidato-pidato radio penting’, Tjahaja, 28 August, 1945; ‘Sekarang tiba
independence’ should always be ready to fight ‘upon receiving orders or not’.\textsuperscript{59} He conveyed that a personal decision was not unimportant: ‘Am I saying that [we] should blindly follow [the leaders]? Just follow, even when the direction is unclear? Just follow, as goats pulled by their goatherd? No, my fellow, no! What I mean is that you all are following with understanding. Following by learning what you follow’.\textsuperscript{60}

![Image](image.png)

Picture 2.4.

A pamphlet depicting a small Dutch armored vehicle being unable to destroy a huge Indonesian armored vehicle\textsuperscript{61}

The Indonesian authorities had to address spreading doubts among Indonesian Muslims concerning the religious aspects of being obedient to the leaders of a secular political entity like a state. They called for a stricter interpretation of Islamic law in connection to Muslim devotion to leaders, for clearer guidelines as to which leaders


\textsuperscript{60} ‘Rakjat djelata toelang poenggoeng dan oerat sjarafnja kemerdekaan’, \textit{Tjahaja}, 31 August, 1945.

\textsuperscript{61} ‘Verzameling Republikeinse pamfletten en vlugschriften’, KITLV, 1947-1948.


\textsuperscript{60} ‘Rakjat djelata toelang poenggoeng dan oerat sjarafnja kemerdekaan’, \textit{Tjahaja}, 31 August, 1945.

\textsuperscript{61} ‘Verzameling Republikeinse pamfletten en vlugschriften’, KITLV, 1947-1948.
the Muslims should follow. A member of KNI Semarang, A. Gaffar Ismail, reacted to this immediately. Ismail delivered a clarifying speech to Islamic leaders from two well-known Muslim organizations in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah, rooted in the merchant, educated, and middle classes, and Nahdlatul Ulama, which originated from traditional, village-based Muslim life.

Ismail expected the Islamic leaders to interpret the government’s view about solidarity between people and leaders in a way which satisfied many Indonesian Muslims. He stressed that Indonesian independence did not only mean independence for Indonesian people, but also for Muslim people, because Indonesian independence ‘has been the desire of Muslims since long ago’ and also because Indonesian independence consisted of ‘freedom of performing religion’. Additionally, he presented Islamic elements which contributed to the establishment of an Indonesian state. He assured listeners that ‘in the introduction of the constitution of the Government of the Republic of Indonesia, it is stated that an Independent Indonesian State is established under the guidance of God Almighty. This means that Islamic law is glorified and elevated’.

As for Muslims’ need to listen to and follow Indonesian leaders, Ismail provided religious validation confirming Soekarno and Hatta as the leaders of the Muslims by interpreting a Quranic (Islamic holy book):

According to Islamic law, it is legitimate for all Indonesian Muslims to be obedient to those two Great Leaders [Soekarno and Hatta], because both of them come from you. This is consistent with Quranic law that decrees: Be obedient to Allah and Prophets, and to government leaders (oelil-amri [Arabic: leaders]), which come from you (Muslims). I am the witness on this occasion that both our Great Leaders are Muslims, who believe in the singularity of Allah and that Muhammad is a prophet. [Therefore they are] Legitimate and proper Leaders of State and are to be obeyed by Muslims according to Islamic law.62

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62 ‘Kewadjiban kaoem Moeslimin dalam mempertahankan merdeka dan
Indonesianness amid a Segregated Society

Indonesian society experienced segregation and unity alike throughout its history, but the five decades prior to independence, in particular, experienced rapid changes in this area. The government of the Dutch Indies had placed the Dutch at the top of the social pyramid. Under them was those who received semi-European status because of their association with the Dutch through occupation or legal position, particularly the Christianised Ambonese, Menadonese, and Timorese. The rung thereunder was occupied by the Foreign Orientals (Chinese, Arabs, and Japanese), and the natives formed the lowest stratum. Higher status was granted to Indonesians when the Japanese, particularly as the war’s end approached, frequently referred to the natives as Indonesians and their country as Indonesia. When the Japanese surrendered and left a power vacuum, social sentiment among the social groups reemerged, and each ethnic group needed some time to decide which stance they would take in responding to the proclamation and the return of the Dutch. Some were obvious about their support for the Dutch, or at least about their impartiality.

In this atmosphere of rapidly changing affiliation, Republican authorities were hard-pressed to garner support from several social groups. Whereas the Dutch colonial regime categorized its people based on racial lines, the Republic defined ‘people’ differently. There was only one people, namely Indonesian people, or Indonesian citizens, which was in the making and which comprised natives and Indonesia-born foreigners (Indonesian Chinese, Arabs, and Indians). In addition, the Eurasians were called ‘new citizens’ (warga negara baroe), because they were considered to have little in common

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with the other two categories but might wish to adopt Indonesian citizenship. This re-definition of ‘people’ was an effort to erase all discriminatory things connected to the Dutch and to establish shared solidarity among different societal groups.

At the beginning of the revolution, the Ambonese and Menadonese, close prewar associates of the Dutch, were re-approached by them. Some then chose to side with the Dutch, participating in the establishment of NICA’s position in Ambon in September and the presence of NICA’s troops in Jakarta in the following month. From Australia, Penjoeloeh called upon the Ambonese and Menadonese to support the coming of the Dutch, reminding them of their supportive participation in Dutch national ceremonies like the the Dutch Queen’s birthday and through artistic expression, for example in the form of poetry.65

Nevertheless, there were also Moluccans who sided with the Republic, including Johannes Latuharhary, a former member of PPKI who in 19 August, 1945, was appointed governor of the Moluccas by the Indonesian government. He tried to appeal to the Ambonese by stressing that the future of Ambon lay in the Republic of Indonesia. In order to enhance his persuasion of the Ambonese, especially those living in Jakarta, he established the Angkatan Pemuda Indonesia Ambon (The Ambonese Indonesian Youth, API Ambon). This group launched their propaganda with press releases and pamphlets emphasizing the support of the Ambonese to Indonesian

65 ‘Perayaan hari kelahiran Seri Ratoe’, Penjoeloech, 17 September, 1945. For instance, in a poem published by the Penjoeloech newspaper, there was praise for the bravery of the Ambonese in fighting against the enemy of the Dutch, the Japanese. Titled ‘AMBON’, the poem said: ‘Ambon ‘lah bebas diwaktoe sekaran’ (Ambon is now free)/Moesoeh disana ta’ bisa temberang (the enemy could no longer boast)/Barisan Nippon hantjoer diserang (The brigade of the Nipponese has been attacked and destroyed)/Orang di Ambon berani berperang (the people of Ambon are brave)/Nippon dioesir, rakjatpoen girang (Nippon is expelled, and the people are happy)’. Please note that the first letters of each verse, when merged, become: AMBON. See Penjoeloech, 1& September, 1945.
independence and their inclination to defend such independence shoulder to shoulder with other Indonesians. They also warned those Ambonese who had joined the Dutch military about Dutch manipulation. They proclaimed that the security of all Indonesians, including the Ambonese, was warranted by the Republic of Indonesia. Ignoring this call, according to one of the pamphlets, would threaten the lives of thousands of Ambonese in Java and Madura.66

From the Republic’s point of view, a major problem in appealing to the Moluccans hinged upon the fact that they were privileged during the colonial period, due to their association with the Dutch. This troubled the Republic, which sought a way to persuade the Moluccans to fight the Dutch now, instead of cooperating with them. What Latuharhary did was use the history of the Dutch-Moluccas conflict as evidence that the ancestors of the Moluccans had actually been anti-Dutch. He referred to the Moluccans’ past as ‘glorious history’ and added that it was in those times of strife with the Dutch that the Moluccans’ ‘national heroes’ were created, heroes such as Kapitan Hitu Kakiali, Kapitan Hitu Tulukabessy, and Thomas Matulessy (Pattimura). In closing, he underlined:

Do we want to become traitors to our ancestors and country? Certainly not, because we would thereby sin. WE DO NOT WANT TO BECOME TRAITORS BECAUSE, WHATEVER ELSE MAY HAPPEN, THE LOVE OF OUR PEOPLE AND COUNTRY CONTINUES TO BURN IN OUR BREASTS.

Therefore, I ask all my brothers:

STAND TOGETHER BEHIND THE REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA, STRUGGLE SHOULDER TO SHOULDER WITH THE OTHERS PEOPLE OF INDONESIA TO DEFEND THE FREEDOM OF THE INDONESIAN PEOPLE AND STATE. TRUST ME THAT THIS

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The Republican authorities were also disturbed by widespread rumors generalizing all Ambonese as pro-Dutch. In Surabaya in the first half of October, 1945, some Ambonese openly showed their pro-Dutch attitude. A rumor was disseminated in the city in reaction to this, stating that the nationalists in the city would drag them off the city’s public transportation in retaliation. The city’s Republicans forestalled any violence, however, by approaching both sides; they once again urged Ambonese (and Menadonese) to support the Republic while they simultaneously convinced the populace that the Ambonese were not universally pro-Dutch. The pro-Republic Soeara Rakjat newspaper stressed in an editorial that ‘you all [Ambonese and Menadonese] should understand that now the British and the Australians are in charge in Indonesia, not the Dutch’. The editor underlined that the Dutch had persuaded the Ambonese and Menadonese to side with them because Dutch power to occupy Indonesia was extremely limited, as there were ‘not more than 300,000’ of them, among whom ‘perhaps only 60,000 were available men’, wanting to ‘conquer 70,000,000 Indonesians’.

The newspaper’s editor opined that the Dutch would arrange for the Ambonese and Menadonese ‘to help them [the Dutch], to become their tools, to be ordered to fight your own brother from the nation of Indonesia, and they would hide behind you’. The editor provided a list of examples of poor attitudes held by the Dutch, including the way they fled rather than fought when the Japanese came in 1942, leaving the Ambonese alone on the battlefield. The list also addressed the

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inequality in salary and housing facilities between the Ambonese and the Dutch. The Ambonese and Menadonese were requested ‘not to sell your energy and heart for a few cents [of Dutch financial support] and betray your homeland and nation’. 68

In another issue of *Soeara Rakjat*, M. Sapija, a notable pro-Republic Ambonese in Surabaya, pleaded for continued unity among the Indonesian people. He re-iterated that ‘not all Ambonese are pro-Dutch’ and that several Ambonese ‘died as knightly heroes in the struggle to maintain the independence of the Indonesian homeland’. 69

Indonesian authorities confirmed that Ambonese and Menadonese cooperation was inevitable in the struggle for independence. Vice President Hatta, in his *Makloemat* (*Edict*) on 1 November, for example, stressed that both Ambonese and Menadonese ‘are in fact also our people’ (*sebenarnja bangsa kita djoega*). 70

Republican propaganda was not very effective. Indonesian authorities addressed Ambonese and Menadose who had already taken the Dutch side, or in their words, ‘those already deceived by the NICA agents’ (*mereka jang telah kena tipoe moeslihat agen-agen Nica*):

Turn your heart—turn the handle!! We know that you now regret your mistake, you see now that NICA only deceive, and they are unable to attain their greedy and despotic goals. We know that you suffer in [Dutch] barracks. You sleep on tiles, eat and drink in a queue, a report has it that there is even a queue when you want to go to the bathroom.

You are of one Indonesian blood with us. If Motherland Indonesia asks the blood of strife of all Indonesian sons, you should know how to decide who is friend, who enemy.

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If you act for the glory of Homeland and Nation, you will not be regarded as a traitor, but as a real hero.\textsuperscript{71}

A.A. Maramis, a Manadonese who in August, 1945, served as a member of the political section of the Indonesian National Party and was later, in September, 1945, appointed as Minister of Finance, brought forward solutions to the question of unity among Indonesian people regardless their ethnic origins. He coined a term, ‘Homo Indonesiensis’ (sic). He further explained,

In order to establish total solidarity, it is necessary to turn ourselves into ‘homo Indonesiensis’ which no longer means Ambonese, Menadonese, Minahasanese, Sumatranese, Javanese, Borneones, Buginese, Makassares, Celebes, etc. The way to this is through national education.\textsuperscript{72}

Republican propagandists also addressed the religious background of the Ambonese. Around November, 1945, a story was spread among Muslims, generalizing all pro-Dutch Ambonese and Menadonese as Christians. This rumor was based on Islamic propaganda from the Masyumi Party that same month, which had stressed that Muslims who died defending religion and nation against the Japanese and the Dutch-NICA ‘were martyrs, as put forth in Islamic law’. Masyumi was an association of several modernist and traditional Islamic organizations during the Japanese period, and was later, in early November, 1945, transformed into a political party. This idea was interpreted by some Indonesians as meaning that ‘the [Ambonese and Menadonese] Christians are hampering our independence’, apparently because some Ambonese and Menadonese were on the Dutch side. Republicans felt the urge to respond to this rumor as it could, according to them, ‘endanger the power of Indonesian unity’.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{71} ‘NICA mentjoba mengacaukan masjarakat Indonesia’, \textit{Soecara Rakjat}, 13 October 1945.
  \item \textsuperscript{72} ‘Kita harus mendjadi “Manoesia Indonesia”’, \textit{Soecara Indonesia}, 4 September, 1945.
\end{itemize}
The ministry of information, whose minister, Amir Sjarifoeddin, was a Christian himself, called this situation ‘saddening’ and said that such ‘suspicions and views’ were ‘completely wrong and arose from a lack of understanding and awareness’. The ministry encouraged Indonesians to understand that ‘Indonesian Christians, both Protestant and Catholic, have declared that they stand behind the Republic of Indonesia, and not just in words and by suggestions, but also with deeds: serving as state leaders, in militias, in the people’s army’. The ministry therefore asked Islamic leaders in villages to explain to the people that no Indonesians will become our enemies solely because they are Christians. Muslims and Christians are the sons of Indonesia and share a similar fate and have the same responsibility to establish and maintain our Republic. If somebody among the Muslims and Christians is guilty, it is because of his guilt that he is punished and not because of his religion’.  

Another complication in building an Indonesian nation was the position of the Chinese community in Indonesia. In the early days of the independence, the Chinese, both locally and foreign-born, were the target of violence perpetrated by criminal gangs and revolutionaries. This was out of resentment toward the alleged superior economic status of some Chinese, which was a product of their distinguished professions and close connection to the Dutch, and because of their cooperation with the Japanese in suppressing the native peasants. Some Chinese were pro-independence; others remained indifferent, while the rest opposed independence.  

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73 ‘Oemmat Kristen Indonesia kawan seperdjoeangan kita’, Soeara Rakjat, 6 November 1945.

74 According to Twang Peck Yang, in 1945 economic issues, such as the nationalization of business enterprises and the exclusion of Chinese entrepreneurs in independent Indonesia disunited the Chinese community and Indonesian nationalists. As a consequence, some Chinese preferred to adopt Chinese nationality. Others, however, supported Indonesian independence because they believed that the Chinese would get an equal position to the natives in independent
who remained indifferent with regard to the proclamation had thereby rendered themselves, alongside the Dutch and Eurasians, valid and vulnerable targets in the eyes of the armed youth and thugs. Such violent acts toward the Chinese as homicide and plundering were widespread, and they were frightened. On the one hand, the pro-Dutch press continuously exposed the misery of the Indonesian Chinese, in particular within Republic-held territories. On the other hand, Republican leaders and pro-Republic newspapers mentioned their woes, but said they were caused by the Dutch rather than by the Indonesians.

The Republican authorities’ propaganda, thus, was concerned with securing Indonesian Chinese support for the Republic at a time when the Indonesian Chinese were unsure about their future in a society which labeled them as henchmen of the Dutch. President Soekarno, convinced that mainland China actually supported Indonesian independence, appealed to the native Indonesians to treat the Chinese kindly. He saw this as an important move in cementing China’s backing of the independence. In September, 1945, he asserted publicly that he had learned from an international radio broadcast that ‘the Government of the Republic of China has acknowledged Indonesia’s right to independence’. The exact contents of said broadcast were unknown, yet it was construed by Indonesian authorities as a declaration of support from a country many of whose people lived in Indonesia. He called upon ‘all Indonesian people’ to show more sympathy to the Chinese in Indonesia. In his mandate of 27 September, he stated:


Mary Somers Heidhues, ‘Anti-Chinese Violence in Java during the Indonesian Revolution, 1945-49’.
Due to the importance of a good and close relationship between the Republic of Indonesia and the Republic of China, which share many similarities, it is advised that all Indonesian people be hospitable to Chinese nationals, whether in towns or villages.

Do not do things that could harm the good relationship between our State and the Chinese nation. We also encourage the Chinese population in Indonesia to continue their good relationship with the Indonesian nation.²⁶

In early October, 1945, Indonesian authorities called on the Chinese to side with Indonesia, not just because this was the aspiration of the Indonesian people, but, more importantly, because this was the desire of the first president of the Republic of China, Sun Yat Sen:

What Indonesian nationalists want is in accordance with Dr. Sun Yat Sen’s purpose, which he elaborated in Sum Bin Tjoe Gie [San-min Chu-i, or Three Principles of the People], as well as with Chungking government’s wishes at the San Francisco conference, namely the independence of all colonized [countries].

Therefore, all Chinese in Indonesia who uphold Dr. Sun Yat Sen and his principles and the Chungking government’s purpose, must, instead of being worried that they would be harmed by an Indonesian nation, devote themselves to helping the Indonesian nation’s movement.²⁷

Calls for unity between Indonesians and Chinese were voiced by the Chinese themselves, and published by pro-Republic newspapers in an apparent bid to increase the credibility of the appeal, particularly among the Chinese readers. Some Chinese who sympathized with the Republic were identified by their organizations’ name or their locations in the newspapers. But the others were simply depicted as ‘the Chinese community’ (pendoedoek Tionghoa), probably to show readers that

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²⁶‘Amanat presiden kepada rakjat Indonesia’, Warta Indonesia, 29 September, 1945.

²⁷‘Kepada pendoedoek Tionghoa di Indonesia’, Soeara Rakjat, 2 October, 1945.
the whole of the Chinese community in Indonesia shared one opinion: pro-Republic sentiments. In other words, there was no dissenting opinion about Indonesian independence among the Indonesian Chinese. One edict of ‘the Chinese community’ was as follows:

What will benefit the Indonesian nation will benefit all Asian nations.

According to the principle of the Atlantic Charter and the words of Dr. Sun Yat Sen, [we should] fight [in solidarity] with oppressed nations.

We, the Chinese nationals, should help achieve Indonesian Independence.

Let us unite, Chinese-Indonesians!

_Federal State and Nation-State Building_

On 15-25 July, 1946, the NICA, under Lieutenant Governor General Hubertus Johannes van Mook, held the Malino Conference in Malino City in South Sulawesi. Van Mook assembled 39 representatives, mostly local rajas and aristocrats, from Borneo and Timur Besar (De Groote Oost or the Great East, including Sulawesi, the Moluccas, Lesser Sunda Islands, and Bali) and three islands in Sumatra, Bangka, Belitung, and Riau. At the end of the conference these native rulers declared their support for political cooperation with the Dutch and the establishment of a federation called the United States of Indonesia.\(^{79}\)

\(^{78}\) ‘Seroean pendoedoek Tionghoa’, _Soecara Rakjat_, 3 October 1945. See also ‘Bangsa Tionghoa di belakang Repoeblik Indonesia’, _soecara Rakjat_, 3 October 1945.

\(^{79}\) This state should comprise Java, Sumatra, Borneo and the Great East, or, in short, the entirety of the former Dutch Indies. The results of Malino Conference can be found in _Kesimpoelan2 dan Kepoetoesan2 Moe’tamar di Malino_ (Malino: Komisariat Pemerintah Oemoem Borneo dan Timoer Besar, 1946). See also A. Arthur Schiller, _The Formation of Federal Indonesia, 1945-1949_ (Den Haag and Bandung: W. van Hoeve Ltd, 1955), p. 22 and ‘De conferentie met de buitengewesten’, _Limburgsch Dagblad_, 26 June, 1946.
This alternative form of state, federalism in cooperation with the Dutch, was warmly welcomed by the local rulers in east Indonesia.\textsuperscript{80} It obviously contradicted the Republic’s idea of a nation-state, however, which indicated a unitary state free of Dutch intervention. It was against this backdrop of competing conceptions of nation-statehood that Republican propaganda played a key role in convincing pro-Dutch local rulers and the population of east Indonesia, as well as the minority groups, to support the Republic-initiated nation-state project.

Republican supporters saw the Dutch-initiated federalism as a dirty trick to exploit local leaders, and therefore, they said, it should not be valued by the people (see picture 2.3.).

\textsuperscript{80} These rulers, just like the Republican leaders, aspired to political independence and the cessation of colonialism, but this is the point at which their similarities with the Republic end. These local rulers felt that Indonesia was not yet ready to be a state, as it was still far behind other states. Therefore, Indonesia must cooperate with the Dutch to eradicate colonialism, to establish the United States of Indonesia, to prepare a transition period, establish state bodies, and finally to reach the point at which an Indonesian state could handle state matters by itself. See Kesimpoelan\textsuperscript{2} dan Kepoeoesan\textsuperscript{2} Moe’tamar di Malino.
Vice President Hatta objected strongly to the conference because, according to him, it was held ‘at the point of a bayonet’. A pro-Republic newspaper, *Rakjat*, employed sharper commentary by

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81 NL-HaNA, 2.10.14, inv. nmr. 5465. A letter from Luitenant J.L. Heldoorn, Commandant of the troops in West Java, to various Dutch military institutions, including the Military Contact Service and NEFIS, entitled ‘Pamfletten’, 31 October, 1947. Pamphlets were included with this letter.

cynically dubbing the representatives of the outer islands attending the conference, mainly local sultans and aristocrats, as ‘despicable people’ and ‘favorite children of the late Dutch Indies government’. 83

Republican authorities intensified the tone of their propaganda by casting it as a Dutch charade slated for disaster, not just for the Republic, but, more importantly, the Indonesian people as a whole. Authorities in Yogyakarta instructed pro-Republic representatives of the outer islands to appeal to those whose regions were represented at the conference. Radio was used to widen the reach of the appeal. Speaking on Republican radio in Yogyakarta, the Republican Governor of the Moluccas, J. Latuharhary, stated that the Dutch intended to bring Indonesia back into ‘an unjust, uncivilized, and inhuman situation’. He also claimed that Indonesian people in the NICA-held territory still ‘wanted to remain independent’ from the Dutch. Other speakers from the Moluccas, Borneo and Sulawesi repeated the above condemnations, adding that the Malino Conference was actually ‘a grave of imperialism, dug by the Dutch themselves’. The Indonesians who took part in the conference were labeled ‘misguided followers of the Dutch’ who were brought by the Dutch into ‘hell’. 84

A propagandistically similar tone was used by the Republicans against the so-called Pangkal Pinang Conference (1-12 October, 1946), held by the Dutch to, they maintained, absorb the aspirations of the various groups within Indonesian society, encompassing the natives, the Dutch, and the Indonesians of Arab, Indian and Chinese descent. 85 The Pangkal Pinang Conference was seen as detrimental


84 ‘Belanda menggali koeboernja di Malino’.

85 Their main purpose was to create federal states in the islands of Bangka and Riau, thereby affirming the federalism idea previously stipulated at the Malino Conference. Indeed, a number of representatives of minority groups did attend the conference. See Oey Hong Lee, War and Diplomacy in Indonesia, p. 97.
by the Republic, as it could engender more popular support for the Dutch. To appeal to minority groups, Republican propaganda concentrated on the Dutch tendency to disunite rather than unite the Indonesian archipelago. The Republic implied that whereas it was working to unite Indonesia, the Dutch, by way of the conference, were trying to disintegrate it.

The Indonesian news agency Antara paid a great deal of attention to the conference. A careful reading of all Antara reports from the period (1-10 October, 1946) shows that it only published reports beneficial to the Republic, particularly those showing anti-Pangkal Pinang Conference sentiment among the minorities, and deliberately ignored the fact that the conference also attracted a number of representatives from these same groups. Antara reported about mass rallies and meetings attended by the natives and minority groups in order to condemn the conference and reject its federalist mission. In early October, 1946, for instance, Antara even claimed that ‘the population of Arabs, Chinese and Indians all over Sumatra reject the Pangkal Pinang Conference’. 86

When the Indonesian government appointed an Indonesian Chinese, Tan Poo Goan, as a minister on 1 October, 1946, Antara praised this while condemning the conference. According to Antara, this appointment made the Indonesian Chinese ‘very pleased’ as it was ‘a noticeable step by the Government of the Republic of Indonesia in uniting the Chinese and Indonesian nationalities’. In other reports, Antara used interviews with well-known Indonesian Chinese to support the idea that the Indonesian Chinese as a whole liked the way the Republic treated them. According to Antara, Liaw Law Tjin, an Indonesian Chinese leader in Ciamis (West

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86 ‘Golongan Arab, Tionghoa dan India Diseloeroeh Soematera Menolak Pangkalpinang’, Antara, 1 October, 1946.
Java), was ‘thankful’ that ‘the Chinese as Indonesians citizen have a representative in the cabinet’. 87

To further sway the public into a belief that widespread anti-Pangkal Pinang sentiment within the minorities was not merely Republican propaganda, Antara quoted Dutch sources too. On 9 October, 1946, Antara reported that the Dutch-language newspaper published in Jakarta, *Het Dagblad*, had published an editorial which mentioned that the newspaper as well as the Dutch people themselves were disappointed with the conference because ‘among the Chinese there are those who support the Republic’. 88 All of the Antara reports above implied that almost no one among the minority groups stood behind the Dutch and instead pretty much everyone preferred the Republican government’s nation-state project. 89

Pangkal Pinang Conference supporters also used the Quran, the Islamic holy book, to justify political cooperation with the Dutch. One man of Arab descent who elected to participate in the Pangkal Pinang Conference was Moehammad Alamoedi from Surabaya. He called on others of Arab descent to follow his lead, arguing that this was what

87 ‘Tentang Pengangkatan Mr. Tan Poo Goan: Pendapat Kalangan Tionghoa’, *Antara*, 3 October, 1946. Yap Tjwan Bing, the chief of Chung Hua Tsung Hui (CHTH), an Indonesian Chinese organization of Java and Madura, commented on the appointment of Tan Poo Goan, as reported by Antara, ‘really pleasing to our hearts, but not surprising, because we had previously thought that there would come a moment when the wise Republican Government would appoint skillful and honest persons in appropriate positions, even if such persons should originate from minority groups. See ‘Mr. Tan Poo Goan sebagai Menteri Negara: Pendapatan Orang2 Tionghoa Terkemoeka di Jogja’, *Antara*, 4 October, 1946.


89 See also other Antara reports which have similar pro-Republic tone, for instance ‘Tidak Mengakoei Perwakilan Alamoedi c.s.’, *Antara*, 30 September 1946; ‘Resoloesi Partai Rakjat Djelata’, *Antara*, 1 October 1946; ‘Tentang Pengangkatan Mr. Tan Poo Goan: Pendapatan Kalangan C.H.T.H. Magelang’, *Antara*, 4 October 1946; ‘Kawat C.H.T.H. Seloeroh Djawa/Madoera kepada P.M. Sjahrir’, *Antara*, 4 October 1946; ‘C.H.T.H. Memberi Selamat kepada Mr. Tan Poo Goan’, *Antara*, 4 October, 1946;
Islam suggested as right action under the prevailing circumstances. He quoted a Quranic verse which called upon Muslims to take part in peace talks if the enemy side requested them.  

Indonesian propaganda leveled accusations that this verse had been manipulated. A pro-Republic Arab writer, Awod Alkasadi, challenged this notion in his article in Merdeka newspaper. Alkasadi labeled Alamoedi’s propaganda as public deception based on personal interests. He questioned why Alamoedi did not emulate the majority of Arabic people and Muslim communities throughout the world, which at the time supported Indonesian independence.

The peak of the Dutch effort to attract the native rulers and minorities to federalism was the so-called Denpasar Conference in Bali of 7-24 December, 1946. This conference was attended by 70 representatives from Sulawesi, the Moluccas, and the Lesser Sunda Islands, and delegates of such minorities as the Dutch, Indonesian Chinese and Indonesian Arabs. At this conference the Negara Indonesia Timoer (The State of East Indonesia, NIT) was established. The NIT, and the fact that it was backed by the Dutch, posed a serious threat to the Republic as it meant there were now three existing authorities in Indonesia: the Dutch, the Republic of Indonesia and the NIT.

Republican propaganda attacked the Denpasar Conference by emphasizing two key points: 1) that the conference received little support from the population, even from the Dutch and 2) that this

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90 ‘Memperkosa ajat firman Allah’, Merdeka, 1 October, 1946.

91 See ‘Memperkosa ajat firman Allah’.

conference, just like the two previous, was purely a Dutch charade to
disunite Indonesia. The very fact that the NIT was supported by a
considerable number of native rulers and that it functioned as a state,
just like the Republic, was deliberately overlooked in Republican
propaganda as it was incompatible with the two points above.

Pro-Republic newspapers purposefully published news
undermining the importance of the conference. *Merdeka*, for example,
on 2 December, 1946, stated that even the representatives of the
Dutch and the Protestants in South Sulawesi were unconvinced and
requested postponement.93 The Indonesian Ministry of Information
sent several pro-Republic journalists to the Denpasar Conference, not
only to observe the conference, but also to influence the native rulers
attending. These journalists distributed a pro-Republic publication
entitled ‘*Indonesian Life*’ to the native delegates at the conference. In
it, the Republic attacked the Dutch policy through both caricatures
and texts. A caricature showed how the Dutch used both violent
actions and diplomatic measures to subdue Indonesia. In an article
entitled ‘A Call to the Indonesian People’ (*Seroean oemoem kepada
segenap ra’jat Indonesia*), all Indonesians were requested to defy
any Dutch attempt to disunite Indonesia because it was only with
solidarity that ‘we would no longer be cuffed and curbed, which tied
up us for tens of years’.94

Spreading such anti-Dutch propaganda at a Dutch-held
conference was obviously daring and risky. How native delegates
reacted to reading such propaganda material is unknown, but it
was the Dutch officials who got angry. The head of the conference,
W. Hoven, considered such propaganda as an infringement on
the mutual respect stipulated in the Linggadjati Agreement, and
as an impolite act by the journalists. He took strong measures; the

94 ‘Lain Loeboek Lain Ikannja’, *Pandji Ra’jat*, 17 December, 1946.
Republican journalists were ejected from the conference and ordered to return to Jakarta immediately.\footnote{\textit{Lain Loeboek Lain Ikannja}.}

In 1949, the federalism issue appeared again. The Round Table Conference (RTC, 23 August-2 November 1949), which was held in Den Haag, stipulated the establishment of a union between the Netherlands and Republic of the United States of Indonesia (RUSI). The RUSI, with Soekarno as president and Hatta as premier, consisted of sixteen federal states including Republic of Indonesia.\footnote{The fifteen states were: East Sumatra, Bangka, Biliton, Riouw, South Sumatra, Pasundan, Central Java, East Java, Madura, Bandjar, East Borneo, Great Dayak, South East Borneo Federation, West Borneo, and East Indonesia.} The Netherlands would transfer the sovereignty of the Dutch East Indies to the RUSI on 29 December of the same year. The status of Irian (Dutch New Guinea), however, remained unresolved pending further negotiation, whereas the RUSI must take over the billion Guilders of East Indies debt accrued by the Dutch.

Previously, the Republic’s propaganda against federalism had focused primarily on the Dutch federalism policy as an effort to disunite Indonesian nation. The focus shifted after the RTC, given widespread pro-Republic sentiments among the federal states. Although the Republic finally joined the Dutch-initiated federalism, the RUSI was not criticized within the Republic because of its disuniting tendency, but rather on how far the Republic wins or loses against the Dutch through the RTC’s results. The Republic appeared to believe that federalism was a political fact and that being part of the RUSI was unavoidable. Republican authorities touted what they saw as a victory, instead of a loss as claimed by the dissatisfied parties, to the public at large, declaring what the Republic had just achieved in the RTC. Put another way, the type of state (federalism) should not be a problem for the Republic and its supporters anymore if the Republic gained what it saw as the
ultimate victory: independence and a formal transfer of authority. There was a feeling among political parties within the Republic that the agreement was inevitable in the current situation and that this was the best the Indonesian Republic could expect. In other words, this agreement was seen as the final victory as far as Indonesian independence was concerned, as it meant the confirmation of recognition and the end of foreign rule.97

The Republic’s Kempen disseminated a book explaining the Republic’s viewpoint regarding the RTC, ‘Perdjuangan di Konperensi Medja Bundar’ (Struggle at the Round Table Conference). The Kempen highlighted that the RTC was proof of considerable diplomatic progress in Indonesia’s struggle for independence because ‘the RTC must cease at once all disputes and conflict with the Dutch side in all state fields: political, social, economic, and cultural, because the Kingdom of the Netherlands would at once transfer her sovereignty over all Indonesia’.98

97 The PSII (Indonesian Islamic Association Party) announced publicly that it accepted the RTC and emphasized that the end of RTC meant that Indonesian people faced a new point of departure in their struggle to form the independent and sovereign RUSI. However, the PSII also called for the reinstatement of KNIP members so that it would be representing all groups in the society. Only by this renewal, according to the PSII, could the ratification of the RTC be done. The PKRI (Catholic Party of the Republic of Indonesia), declared that, despite some disappointing points in the agreement, it accepted it, because ‘there is still an opportunity to solve the disappointing points as soon as possible’. PNI also confirmed its acceptance by stating that ‘PNI approved this peaceful solution, although it is, understandably, not 100 % satisfactory for both parties’. Gatot Mangkoepradja from the PNI highlighted that the PNI supported the RTC ‘with a desire to repair all the things in this critical situation’. The Partai Buruh Indonesia (Indonesian Labor Party), also requested the renewal of KNIP before the RTC was ratified, and furthermore demanded that all of the documents relating to the RTC be disseminated first to political parties and organizations. Masyumi also agreed to the RTC because, according to a Masyumi leader, ‘what we achieved [in the RTC] is closer to the Republic’s concept than the Dutch concept’. See in Kementerian Penerangan Republik Indonesia, Perdjuangan di Konperensi Medja Bundar, pp. 141-6.

98 Kementerian Penerangan Republik Indonesia, Perdjuangan di Konperensi Medja Bundar, p. B.
The increasingly acerbic disapproval by communist and Marxist-nationalist groups, including the People’s Democratic Front (FDR), the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), and the Murba Party, in the second half of November, 1949, was responded to by the Republican government by reinforcing the view that, when seen from the angle of the consequences of the conference, Indonesia had actually scored a major success.\(^9\) In his speech before the BP KNIP in Yogyakarta in 25 November, 1949, which was then made public by Antara, Hatta persistently answered the accusations directed at the Republican government. Those unsatisfied with the RTC, according to Hatta, were because ‘tounge has no bone’ (an Indonesian proverb, meaning that someone often talks without thinking deeply). Hatta contrasted this kind of people with himself and his colleagues, who, according to him, bore the greatest responsibility in the fate of the nation on daily basis.\(^10\) He emphasized that every struggle must consider and eventually find a balance between ‘space and time’ and ‘idealism and reality’.\(^11\) Hatta stressed that the RTC was satisfactory for the Republic of Indonesia since it was ‘the best that could be achieved in this time’.\(^12\) The Republican authorities experienced, nonetheless, a feeling of loss after the RTC. Sjafrroedin Prawiranegara, RUSI’s finance minister, revealed what he saw as losses for the Republic of Indonesia in the RTC, namely: 1) there was no specific date given for when the Dutch

\(^9\) These groups, whose main power had been cut off due to the communist exclusion in the cabinet and parliament as well as by government military operation against the communists in 1948, refused the agreement on a variety of grounds such as ‘the struggle never depends on the RTC’, ‘this is the result of a compromistic policy’ and ‘the independence that we reached was only 40 %’ because via the RTC Indonesia’s position had not even reached the status of a dominion, let alone complete independence. See *Aneta*, 17 November 1949, quoted in Kementerian Penerangan Republik Indonesia, *Perdjuangan di Konperensi Medja Bundar*, p. 144; ‘Sikap aliran2 komunis di Republik terhadap KMB’, *Antara*, 24 November 1949;


\(^11\) ‘Dasar politik pemerintah Republik Indonesia’.

\(^12\) ‘Dasar politik pemerintah Republik Indonesia’,
troops would be withdrawn from Indonesia, 2) Irian was still under the Dutch authority one year after the transfer of sovereignty, 3) the RUSI must pay an extremely high debt incurred by the Dutch Indies before the Japanese occupation in 1942, and 4) Dutch ships were still being used by the Indonesian troops until the RUSI could establish its own navy. At first glance, it seemed that these were disastrous defeats, but Sjafrroedin assured the public that the most important thing that the Republic of Indonesia had got out of the RTC actually surpassed it: ‘the sovereignty is formally transferred’.

Mobilizing Popular Participation

The reaction of the majority of Indonesians to the end of the Japanese occupation was, arguably, indifference. Many Indonesians, who had suffered during the occupation, tended to adopt a wait-and-see policy, as apparent control of public facilities and evident authority concerning law and order were in the hands of those who possessed weaponry, which during second half of August still meant the Japanese, and later in September, the Allied troops. The Republican authorities encouraged their people to participate in state matters, in particular in the establishment of pro-Republic leadership at the local level. Republican propagandists employed speeches and literature to approach the masses. The latter, literature such as poems and short stories, was particularly important because it allowed the propagandists to use down-to-earth, non-elite persuasion.

The problem with the common people, according to Republican propagandists, was their passivity: during the Japanese occupation they had merely been the subject of Japan’s mass mobilization. This may be useful for a fascistic regime like Japan was at the time, which looked

103 Kementerian Penerangan Republik Indonesia, Perdjuangan di Konperensi Medja Bundar, p. 163-164.
for the common people’s total submission. This would be problematic for the Indonesian state, however, seeking as it did personal initiative in supporting the new regime, not just forced obedience.

In one of his speeches, Soekarno called upon the Indonesian people to ‘vibrantly do what we have ordered and what we are about to order!’. His first request was to establish local KNI branches ‘encompassing as wide a group of nationalities as possible’. Soekarno stated that this organization was in fact a chance for the people themselves to be involved in state matters. He portrayed the committee as ‘the embodiment of the determination of the aims of the Indonesian nation to create an Indonesian independence based on people’s sovereignty’. He also pointed out who was eligible to join the committee, which should ‘encompass all groups, ideologies and layers. Civil Servants, Islamic leaders, movement activists, youth, merchants, etcetera’. For the people who joined the committee he illustrated the many good deeds it would accomplish, including voicing the people’s aspirations to be an independent nation, to unite people from different groups and occupations, and to help maintain peace among the people. He also provided a solution for those still deliberating whether to join: those who could, should ‘assemble’ in the committee; for those who could not, ‘helping’ the committee in one way or another was sufficient.¹⁰⁴

The members of KNIP and local KNI’s, acting as representatives of the state before the people, stressed this issue of popular mobilization. Semaoen Bakry, a former member of Djawa Hookookai who later became a member of KNIP, published an article on 30 August, 1945, in Asia Raya, entitled ‘Hikmat Pengoerbanan’ (Wisdom of Sacrifice). He quoted a story rooted in Islamic tradition, about the travels of Prophet Musa with his teacher, Chaidir, in search of knowledge and

wisdom. In the story, Chaidir agreed that Musa could become his student under one condition: that Musa would not object to anything he did. Musa agreed. Chaidir then acted three times in ways which Musa considered wrong: destroying a fisherman’s ship, killing a child, and ruining a broken home (but he shortly after built another one). Musa protested these actions, but Chaidir reminded him that he had agreed not to object to anything Chaidir did.

Musa was angry, but it was only after the third action that Chaidir finally explained his reasons: he destroyed the fisherman’s ship so that the man could not go fishing, because otherwise he would have encountered pirates; he killed the child because he knew that in the future the kid would damage the lives of his pious parents; he ruined the broken home because it was necessary before building a new one to protect the orphans who lived there with treasure left by their parents, as otherwise the treasure would have been looted by evil people. Bakry concluded that Musa gained ‘hikmat’ (wisdom). He then linked the story in his article to the recent situation in Indonesia, by noting that this had conveyed at least three pieces of wisdom to the Indonesian people:

1. It is sometimes necessary to sacrifice a small part of one’s property to protect the larger part, 2. It is sometimes necessary to sacrifice a few souls in order to protect society as a whole, 3. It is sometimes necessary to renovate something broken to secure its hidden treasure until it is appropriate to build a new one.

Bakry’s conclusion called upon his readers to sacrifice property and lives as necessary for the sake of the greater good, namely the interests of society, and, subsequently, of the state. He unambiguously advocated the rejection of selfishness and an increase in personal contribution. At the end of his article, he wrote, ‘goenakanlah ia mendjadi pedoman dalam zaman Baroe jang hendak melaksankan Kemakmoeran Bersama diantara masjarakat kita!’ (please use this story as a guideline in the New Age so that we
may establish Common Prosperity in our society!\textsuperscript{105} By ‘New age’, he meant the age of independence.

In another publication, Bakry’s view was complemented by his colleagues who promoted sincerity rearding the people’s participation. KNI Malang counseled that all participation in building the country should be hearty. Via its official publication, \textit{Djiwa Repoeblik}, it cautioned: ‘If one moves out of expectation of praise, this attitude is despicable’ (\textit{Orang bergerak ingin dipoedji, lakoe demikian sangatlah kedji}).\textsuperscript{106}

Indonesian propagandists employed a compassionate, down-to-earth style to stimulate public involvement. M.I. Sajoeti, in his radio speech on 28 August, 1945, referenced \textit{wajang koelit} (a Javanese puppet show), in order to cultivate his Javanese listeners, undoubtedly the largest group of radio listeners in Java at the time. This was contrapunctal to the frequent use in propaganda by the Japanese of their own traditional puppet shows. He alluded that everyone was like a character in the \textit{wajang koelit} and, therefore, everyone should appear on the screen and not be left inside the box. He stated:

No energy should be scattered and left behind. Jokingly said, it is like \textit{wajang koelit}, nobody should be left inside the box, his energy unused. It is time to leave the box, stand in line in front of the screen, and fight. My brothers in arms! Leave the box, strive! This is the time to move together. Strive, strive! This time one slogan will truly prevail: Independence, it is independence which will determine Indonesia’s fate.\textsuperscript{107}

Although Sajoeti used \textit{wajang koelit} in his speech, he translated it differently than was the common understanding. Sajoeti equated the \textit{dalang} (the puppeteer) with the leaders and the \textit{wajang} (the puppets) as the people. In every \textit{wayang} show it was the \textit{dalang} who decided who

\textsuperscript{105}‘Hikmat pengoerbanan’, \textit{Asia Raya}, 20 August, 1945.
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Djiwa Repoeblik}, 27 October, 1945.
should appear on the screen, based on the script. But Sajoeti interpreted the \textit{wajang} differently, in a way likely to be looked upon with disfavor by all \textit{dalang}: the \textit{dalang} and the \textit{wajang} were equally important, and the \textit{wajang} should not always wait for the \textit{dalang} before moving. The \textit{wajang} was no longer passive, but voluntarily active, participatory. Sajoeti seemed to be encouraging the common people to make their own decisions about what role they could play. Sajoeti’s view was apparently typical of the youth group, which often held different opinions to the older leaders. In this case, thus, propaganda was no longer an instrument of the government, but a bottom-up form of propaganda in which the government-advocated issues were re-interpreted, even challenged, without the fear of governmental punishment.

Picture 2.6.
A pamphlet calling upon older leaders to act as guides\textsuperscript{108}

Pro-Republic poets took similar initiatives, calling for people’s participation through their expertise in creating vibrant and touching wordscapes. The involvement of these poets (like Chairil Anwar [1922-1949]) and other artists, such as prose writers (for

example Pramoedya Ananta Toer [1925-2006]) and painters (like Affandi [1907-1990] and Sudjojono [1913-1985]) increased in the revolution period, as many of them saw that art could contribute to the course of independence. One poem may best illustrate how artists thought about independence and the ways in which every Indonesian should participate in defending it. H.B. Jassin, a Gorontalo-born poet who during the occupation took part in a Japanese-sponsored center of culture, Keimin Bunka Shidoso, and who had frequently published poems, essays, and articles about literature in various publications, published his poem in Asia Raya four days after the proclamation. Titled ‘Kewadjiban’ (Duty), it did not refer directly to Indonesian people, but to ‘manusia’ (mankind) in general. Its contents, however, were clearly intended to call on the readers to participate in a movement to establish ‘world and mankind’s happiness’. This happiness could be loosely translated into the age of peace Indonesia enjoyed after the end of war. The poem was used to engage the readers’ artistic senses as well as to raise social awareness of the responsibility of an Indonesian man in contributing to his nation.

Another literary form which endorsed the theme of personal contribution for the state’s sake was the short story. One story, titled ‘Toentoenan’ (Guidance), written by Darmawidjaja, a Sundanese writer who had published short stories and articles on history and literature


110 For Jassin’s brief profile, see ‘Riwajat ringkas H.B. Jassin’, Djawa Baroe, 1 July, 1944.

111 I lie down quietly/listening as time goes on/heart tap beats the rhythm/safe, satisfied, I am floating inside time/ until doomsday comes.../Just like a caterpillar on a leaf?/or a worm within soil/helplessly waiting for death?/No! No!/I am a human, created by GOD/I have a power, will and a sense of justice/[This is] the duty which I need to carry out/for the happiness of the World and Mankind!! See ‘Kewadjiban’, Asia Raya, 21 August, 1945.
for years, perfectly represents the call for people’s participation.\footnote{112 For works of Darmawidjaja, see for example ‘Sangkoeriang’, \textit{Pandji Poestaka}, 3 October, 1942 and ‘Ranamanggala’, \textit{Djawa Baroe}, 15 November, 1944.} Published in the same edition of the newspaper as the poem above, this story told of an Indonesian man named Soemarna, who had been working for two months in a new place in a town located in a mountainous area in Tanah Pasoendan (West Java). One day, for the first time, he had some free time, which he used to ride his bicycle to a nearby village. He met an old man who had just returned from selling ‘oebi’ (tubers) and had rested and now prepared to perform the noon prayer in a hut, also used as a small mosque.

They conversed, discussing the history of the hut. The old man said that in the beginning the hut was a \textit{tadjoeg} (local name for a small mosque), used by travelers or merchants to rest and pray. Then the Dutch came and built a house close to the \textit{tadjoeg} where crowds began to assemble, often playing music. Later they tore down the \textit{tadjoeg}, which incited anger among the villagers. When the Japanese arrival was imminent, the Dutch set up a fortress and cannons there, but the cannons were never used and the fortress was destroyed by the Dutch themselves. Upon hearing about this destruction, Soemarna said, ‘Just like in other places, what they did was only destruction’.

After the Dutch left the area, the villagers rebuilt the \textit{tadjoeg}. Soemarna guessed about how the \textit{tadjoeg} was rebuilt: ‘mutual assistance’ (\textit{gotong rojong})? ‘Yes,’ the old man answered. When the old man left to take a bath and perform the noon prayer, Soemarna, who felt in his heart moved to perform the prayer, which he had not done for a long time, also found in himself another feeling: a motivation to join in the struggle for his homeland. The author described the emotional landscape within Soemarna at the story’s close:

\begin{quote}
His heart beats, the nerves in his entire body stretch in reaction to the flow of the blood of strife. Yes, carry out the struggle, and do whatever
\end{quote}
he can do, for his Homeland and nation........under the Guidance: 

ALLAH IS GREAT!. 113

The above story focused on one thing: the contribution of an Indonesian to his homeland and nation. This was, however, worked through several layers to make it relevant to many Indonesians. Firstly, the sequence of events in the story is obviously intended to reflect the common experience of many Indonesians: the good old times, the coming of the Dutch, the problems which then appeared and the anger of the natives, the presence of the Japanese, and the re-takeover of the natives’ properties from the Dutch. Secondly, the story taught how Indonesians with a shared historical experience should react to the current situation. The author made it clear that a native should act and contribute with whatever he or she could for the benefit of all Indonesia. Thirdly, the author assigned the title ‘Guidance’, and it was apparent from his story that he was promoting two kinds of guidance, religious guidance through prayer to God and social guidance through mutual engagement with fellow Indonesians.

Public Participation in Security

At the end of the Second World War, Japanese authorities in Indonesia, charged with maintaining law and order, continually called on the people to stay calm and to maintain security. Through newspapers they issued ‘warnings’, forbidding people to engage in ‘crime, [and] hamper security’, ‘spread false news that might confuse people’s thoughts’, and display ‘arrogance, or insult others’. Those who broke these rules faced ‘harsh punishment’. 114 This announcement was reiterated in the second half of August by various Japanese institutions. The Japanese also disbanded and disarmed

113 See ‘Toentoenan’, Asia Raya, 21 August, 1945.
Peta, Heiho, and other Japanese-founded youth paramilitary groups. However, the result was inconsistent with Japanese expectations: the youth had been disbanded, but many declined to surrender their arms and, influenced by the widespread mood of liberation, even sought more weapons from their Japanese superiors.\textsuperscript{115}

Some of these military-trained young men wandered among the cities and villages and committed a variety of crimes. The Republican authorities felt it necessary to utilize these men in the state’s army. President Soekarno began mobilizing candidates. A decree was issued and tens of thousands of copies made and disseminated throughout Jakarta and other cities, especially in areas where former members of Peta and Heiho gathered.\textsuperscript{116}

In his 23 August radio speech, Soekarno stated:

We have decided to establish Badan Keamanan Rakyat [the People’s Security Body, BKR] throughout Indonesia to help maintain security. There is a lot, really a lot, of power to carry out this task. Former Peta, Heiho, and Kaigun, troops, those youngsters full of developmental spirit, they are all are fine elements of power. I hope all of you, former Peta and Heiho troops, and navy, and other youngsters as well, will join and work for the BKR. Trust me, there will come a time when you will be called to become troops in an Indonesian National Army.\textsuperscript{117}

The president’s appeal was distributed by the KNI. For instance, R.M. Ronggo, a member of KNI Cirebon, West Java, held

\textsuperscript{115} Japanese policy and implementation at the local level was itself highly inconsistent ranging from opposing to supporting independence. It depended on local circumstances, in particular the level of strength of nationalists and the arrival of Allied forces. See William H. Frederick, ‘The Aftermath’, in Peter Post et. al. (eds.), The Encyclopedia of Indonesia in the Pacific War (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2010), pp. 46-60.

\textsuperscript{116} Sidik Kertapati, Sekitar Proklamasi 17 Agustus 1945 (Jakarta: Jajasan Pembaruan, 1957), p. 105.

a public speech on 27 August, in which he linked the town’s security with global security. From the Republic’s perspective, security did not solely mean protecting the common people from crimes; more importantly it meant protecting the state from any harm that could weaken its position. Ronggo stated, ‘the entire populace is expected to help maintain security in Cirebon, which means that [we] will take part in the struggle to actualize security throughout the world’. In Bandung, representatives of KNIP visiting KNI Bandung stressed that the BKR should ‘maintain inner and outer security’ and said that it expected that ‘this organization, flooded with former members of Peta and Heiho, and youth in general, could become an unarmed people’s army’. Aroedji Kartawinata, a member of KNI Priangan, echoed this view in his public speech on 2 September: ‘The President has declared: we must maintain security, because this affects our honor [as] an Independent Indonesia. To all youth, ex-Peta, Heiho, Kaigun! Prepare [your] power to guarantee tranquility’. When Allied forces and Dutch troops arrived in September, 1945, and skirmishes between them and armed Indonesians began, the Republican authorities upped their propaganda campaign to recruit more youth. On 5 October, the BKR rebranded itself as TKR (‘T’ stands for tentara, or army), reflecting the militarization of politics. The TKR’s Information Department then addressed both its soldiers and the Indonesian people, stating (in response to various clashes in October and November, 1945) that ‘The TKR has been established. Every day it becomes more apparent, every day it becomes more perfect, and, most importantly, every day it becomes stronger’. The

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118 ‘Ketenteraman rakjat jang berdjiwa kemerdekaan’, Tjahaja, 30 August, 1945.

119 ‘Rapat2 kilat Komite Nasional dan Badan Keamanan’, Socara Asia, 1 September, 1945.

120 ‘Dengan rakjat dan oentoek rakjat kita membangoenkan Negara Repoeblik Indonesia’, Tjahaja, 3 September, 1945.
TKR’s mission was described: ‘guarantee the security of the state’. It was not, they stated, ‘a tool to steal others’ rights’ or ‘a tool to perform acts of insolence’.

Similarly to other Republican organizations, the TKR assured the common people that they were partners in the upcoming struggle. ‘This is not,’ they announced, ‘an army that oppresses its own people, but an army which will raise people’s spirits in order to develop the State of the Republic of Indonesia’. Contrasting it with the Dutch-founded army during the colonial period strengthened the favorable image of this army: ‘We are not like the army of the Dutch age, we are not an army to oppress people, we are not kompeni [the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army] to maintain colonialism—we are the TKR, the protector of the people and the State, standing against any danger regardless of its size and direction’.

In addition to calls to join the security forces, there was also an appeal to the general population to back them. Public participation was indispensable but did not need to be limited to actual involvement in the security forces. The increasing violence in society led the Indonesian government to call for active participation by the common people, to address security issues at a local level. Security in cities and villages was enforced by various elements, such as police, youth groups, and neighborhood associations. Some locals appreciated the patrolling groups, who maintained vigilance late into the night, and according to a newspaper report, provided them with, ‘seats, cigarettes, cigars, coffee, sugar, and tea’. This report of good relations between the night guards and those common people who wanted their belongings protected but could not be involved directly as guards was used to raise awareness. In one of Sinar Baroe’s editorials, the author appealed to people’s deepest emotions with this rhetorical contemplation:

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Try to think, ladies and gentlemen: you, ladies and gentlemen, with your children, sleep in comfortable beds. You lock your doors securely. You, ladies and gentlemen, sleep pleasantly. In the meantime, nearby, there are guards who voluntarily maintain security! Think: when midnight comes, the weather turns cold. The mosquitoes come. Nevertheless, our youths perform their duties with joy. [...] You, ladies and gentlemen, must feel that there is merit in appreciation and delight in helping them. And yes, it is appropriate! [...] Ladies and gentlemen of all nations [i.e. ethnic groups], whose security and peace are nightly protected by these guards, please try to treat them with support [facilities, food, drinks, etc.]. This is mutual assistance, is it not?¹²²

Conclusion

Convincing both the Indonesian people and the international community of the legitimate character of the newly founded sovereign Indonesian state was the most important issue for the Indonesian government immediately after the independence proclamation. Propaganda was indispensable to achieve this purpose. The Republican leaders emphatically contradicted Dutch accusations that the independence had been initiated under Japanese supervision and that those who had proclaimed the Republic had collaborated with the Japanese and in the worst cases were war criminals. They focused on linking the independence to the long struggle by Indonesian nationalists to be free of foreign oppression. They reinterpreted local conflicts against the Dutch in the 19th Century as Indonesia’s nationalist struggle, and they underlined the importance of the nationalist struggle in the early decades of the 20th Century.

Also of immediacy was the need to nurture and enhance the sense of ‘Indonesian nationality’. Therefore, the propaganda theme in the early phase of the struggle for independence was also

concerned with emphasizing a sense of Indonesianness. Thus, they tried to provide a common national identity in a society comprising people of a variety of ethnicities. This had to be achieved against a historical background of inter-ethnic tension due to segregation during the colonial and Japanese periods. Whereas Indonesian propagandists treated large groups of natives as ‘Indonesians’, they gave special emphases to minority groups, whose support was indispensable. These minorities were at the time extremely divided; some were still hesitant to take sides in the conflict, whereas others supported the Republic. Several groups were indifferent, and the remainder aided the Dutch.

Propaganda focussed on treating the Indonesian nation as a unity, and on encouraging solidarity with politically active Indonesian nationalists, in particular the youth and the army. Propaganda was tailored to be relevant to the issues unique to each minority group. Republican propaganda ensured the support of these minority groups by stressing that supporting the Dutch meant a return to oppression and injustice, whereas supporting the Republic meant prosperity and security.

Legitimacy and popular mobilization were significant subjects in Republican propaganda at the beginning of the revolution. The focus on legitimacy was pivotal because it was the nexus for the Republic to convince various groups in Indonesian society, as well as the international world, that the Republic was an independent, legitimate, and authoritative state. This strategy was necessarily far-reaching, as the masses were still politically inactive out of fear of retaliation by the Japanese, who remained in Indonesia in the months following the proclamation, and were poised to crush any movement that disturbed the status quo. Republican leaders used propaganda as an instrument to promote its legitimacy, continuously pointing out that Indonesian nationalist sentiment had roots stretching back to long before the coming of the Japanese.
The Republic approached various groups in Indonesian society, with mixed results. It was important to approach each group with individualized messages, due to differing past experiences with the Dutch: whereas the majority of Indonesians were oppressed by the Dutch, certain groups such as the Ambonese, the Menadonese and the Indonesian Chinese had enjoyed a better life thanks to their collaboration with the colonial government. Each group was therefore approached with propaganda targeted to specific issues, indicating that the Indonesian government considered all of them to be fellow Indonesians and wished to provide everyone with a good future within the Republic of Indonesia.

Such techniques were crucial because the Dutch were simultaneously targeting the same audiences with the aim of securing popular backing for their presence in Indonesia. The Indonesian government stressed the discrimination against natives by the colonial regime and pointed out that one of the most respected figures among the Chinese people, Sun Yat Sen, advocated the right of self-determination for each country. The government promised that in the Republic of Indonesia, such discrimination would no longer exist because the Republic and the minorities were all fellow Indonesians in an equal society, contrasting the hierarchical and racially-based colonial society that had been officially adopted by the Dutch.