

Daniel S. Lev and Ruth McVey, Editors

MAKING INDONESIA

Essays on Modern Indonesia in Honor of
George McT. Kahin

Contributors:

Benedict R. O'G. Anderson

Fred Bunnell

Barbara Harvey

Mary Somers Heidhues

Daniel S. Lev

Ruth McVey

Rudolf Mrázek

Geoffrey Robinson

Takashi Shiraishi

CORNELL
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Editorial Board

Benedict Anderson
George Kahin
Stanley O'Connor
Keith Taylor
Oliver Wolters

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But this is a people robbed and spoiled;
they are all of them snared in holes,
and they are hid in prison houses:
they are for a prey, and none delivereth;
for a spoil, and none saith, Restore.

Who among you will give ear to this:
who will hearken and hear for the time to come?

Isaiah 42: 22-23

For George Kahin
Who has always heard

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FOREWORD

In more than one sense, most of the essays in this volume, and much else, would not have been written without George Kahin. As a founder of the Cornell Southeast Asia Program, as scholar, and as educator, he has made an extraordinary difference. Rather than dwell on these contributions, we have chosen the book's dedicatory lines to reflect on the moral character of his work, which has been informed consistently by an unequivocal concern for both truth and justice. This commitment, evident in his research on the Indonesian revolution and on the intervention of the United States in Viet Nam, Indonesia, and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, has provided his writings with a clarity of purpose that lends them continuing immediacy.

Kahin exercised his sense of justice at a time in American history when having one was not easy or rewarding. Having grown up in Seattle, in his early twenties when the Second World War broke out, he was one of few who went to the assistance of persecuted Japanese on the west coast. Between his undergraduate years at Harvard and graduate studies at Johns Hopkins, he served in the army, where his interest in Indonesia took root. The forty years between 1948, when he first went to Indonesia to do research on the revolution, and 1988, when he retired, coincided almost exactly with the Cold War. It was not the best of times either for impartial studies of politics or courageous stands of principle. Kahin did both, paying the heavier dues required of dissenting voices. Early in his career Washington denied him a passport for a time, while years later Jakarta, in a classic case of ambivalence, blacklisted him with one hand and gave him a distinguished medal with the other.

A sense of justice and scholarship do not always go well together, for one easily subverts the other. It never happened with Kahin. He neither sacrificed truth to a cause, nor refused to talk with those whose policies he criticized. Either inclination requires some arrogance, of which there is no trace in Kahin's character. Similarly, as a graduate teacher, unlike so many others, he never insisted that students espouse his political issues or moral values, any more than he imposed a set of analytical or methodological dogmas. But the standards he set by example are compelling. Kahin's scholarly vocation has led him to respect detail and balanced analysis, as his public engagement is marked by respect for the options actually available to decision makers. If he is an idealist committed to making a better world, he is also a realist fully aware of how the world is.

As much as Kahin has contributed to extant knowledge of Southeast Asia, he never meant his work to circulate only among academic specialists. Rather he has tried to explain a complex region of the world to all those who hardly know it or know it only through a fog of ideology, myth, and prejudice: among them the United States policy makers with too much power to remain safely ignorant and a public that, with fuller knowledge, might put a brake on them. Never, however, has he talked up to power or down to others, not in the United States, nor in Indonesia or elsewhere. Whether testifying before a Congressional committee or offering an inter-

pretation of political history, his arguments are balanced and attentive to other views with a scrupulousness that he has tried to convey to students and colleagues.

Kahin's vision of scholarship liberated him from the petty rivalries and pretensions of academic life. As a graduate teacher he was not interested in clones, but respected his students' imaginations, curiosities, and intellectual bents. The essays written for this book, reaching as they do over more than a century and a diversity of topics, nicely reflect Kahin's own concern to broaden, not narrow, the range of research on modern Indonesia and to ask new questions, not impose preconceived answers. His own questions have always been unencumbered by the implication that they have definitive answers or are the only questions worth asking. Believing that knowledge ought to be shared, Kahin has always been generous with his own, and above all he has kept intellectual doors open, research honest without pretense, and scholarship responsible without posturing.

With Lauriston Sharp, John Echols, and Frank Golay, George Kahin shaped Cornell's Southeast Asia Program. He built the Cornell Modern Indonesia Project into the principal center of Indonesian studies, imbuing it with an understanding of scholarly community and purpose that has attracted a constant flow of students from around the world, not least Indonesia itself.

From his work the contributors to this volume benefitted greatly as students, colleagues, or visiting scholars. We wish to acknowledge our debt by offering this collection of papers devoted to one of his principal research interests, the evolution of independent Indonesia.

BUILDING BEHEMOTH: INDONESIAN CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE NATION-STATE

Ruth McVey

The nation-state is a chimera; the hyphenation betrays its origins in two not quite compatible principles. The nation involves collective commitment; its impulses are egalitarian, its foundation is sentiment. The state, however, presents itself not as ideal but as fact. It is hierarchic, suspicious of mass energies; its element is stability, and its desire is for control. Yet in the last century this ideological odd couple has made itself into a particularly powerful focus of organization and thought, the institution which much of mankind now considers to be its proper source of social identity and centre of loyalty, the apex of nearly all hierarchies, the almost unquestioned locus of power.

Indonesia's experience in the making of nation and state is particularly instructive, for the archipelago had no common identity prior to its incarnation as the Netherlands East Indies. And, since some parts experienced less than half a century of foreign rule while others were deeply transformed by centuries of colonial exploitation, the experience of Dutch dominion divided local populations as much as it brought them together. Yet the Indonesian state was not simply a shell bequeathed by colonial administrators: independence was wrested from the Dutch by revolutionary force. Something therefore had engaged the imagination of a significant portion of the populace, making it willing to follow new leaders in the name of a quite new idea, that of a collective Indonesian personality.

Moreover, after the war of independence the country remained remarkably resistant to separatist tendencies in spite of great cultural, economic and ideological disparities and the near-collapse of central power. Even the "regional rebellion" which shook the state in the late 1950s was, at the level of those who led it, about who ruled in Jakarta rather than whether Sumatra or Sulawesi should have sovereignties of their own. It is therefore worth contemplating the things that went to make up Indonesian nationalism and the ways in which Indonesian leaders used, re-shaped, and suppressed these elements in their efforts to transform a desire for the future into an instrument of rule.

The seminal source on Indonesian nationalism and the making of the Indonesian nation-state is still George Kahin's *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*, first published in 1952. Kahin, observer and historian of the Indonesian revolution,

pioneered the investigation of Indonesian nationalism's sources in the social, economic and cultural experience of the archipelago's people under colonialism. This volume gathers together some of the reflections of scholars stimulated by his work. Some of these studies are large-scale, others small, some concern the beginning of this century and others the end; but all deal with the mentalities that have inspired and shaped the Indonesian nation-state, the opportunities, constraints, and revisions created by its process of becoming. Although their interpretations differ, reflecting what various scholars have made of Indonesia as well as what Indonesians have made of themselves, they show, I think, some striking continuities which are useful for understanding the dynamics of Indonesian nationalism and state-building. On the following pages I will attempt to draw these out, and also to provide a historical setting in which readers unfamiliar with recent Indonesian history may locate the action of the individual essays.

Central to the force and direction of Indonesian nationalism and to the character and legitimacy of the Indonesian state has been, it seems to me, the idea of achieving modernity. At the turn of the century this was a condition foreign to the peoples of the archipelago but visible to them via the colonial experience as the possession of wealth, power, and mastery over nature. Their civilizations had been defeated by European masters of modernity, leaving them without a sense of what they were but with an image of something totally different that they might be. If at first this prospect seemed to many unattainable or unacceptable, it gradually became the only imaginable future.

As Anderson's essay makes clear, the Western inventions and ideas that massively confronted Indonesians—especially in Java and the plantation areas of East Sumatra—from around the turn of the century brought about a revolution in indigenous thought patterns. Time became imagined as linear, evolutionary; cosmic centers became mere stops on a railway line. Truth was no longer to be found in royal utterances but in the marketplace; it was not what was sacred but what was useful.

The new verity was located especially in the journals and pamphlets that contained "news" and discussed the meaning of the changed world. For the great part these were written in the Malay patois that had been the archipelago's trading language and had been adopted by the Dutch colonial authorities as the standard vehicle for communication with their indigenous subjects. This incipient national language, together with the spread of modern schooling and the development of a native-staffed civil service whose members were transferred about the archipelago, brought about a consciousness of a new arena of action and belief, an "imagined community," as Anderson has elsewhere described it, which saw the Netherlands East Indies not as an agglomeration of Dutch conquests but as the embryonic nation-state, Indonesia.¹ But this concept emerged only gradually, as the idea of a territorial focus of loyalty came to seem real to Indonesians; indeed, the idea of "Indonesia" as a particular place was first broached not by indigenes but by Europeans and then taken up by the colony's Eurasians.

Since very few Indonesians enjoyed any modern education, and fewer still had careers that took them into archipelago-wide networks, Indonesia remained for some time the notion of a very small group. But many more were affected by the sense of civilizational dislocation, and they sought explanation and succor first of all in uni-

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

versal ideologies. To them, the whole world and not just their particular part of it seemed to be in motion, and global explanations seemed most likely to contain the meaning of this.² Religious modernism and Pan-Islamism was one such source; Communism was another, thanks partly to the involvement of radical Dutch socialists in the nascent Indonesian labor movement and partly to the way in which some of its notions fit with indigenous ideas of social justice.

Freedom—*kemerdekaan*—was in the air, and by this was understood not just liberation from colonial rule but also the older, indigenous meaning of freedom from the exactions of the state, landlords, social superiors. The new age promised not only equality but prosperity, as the new technological wonders were mastered and applied to the needs of society. The movement to be *merdeka* was thus as much to seize modernity as sovereignty from the Dutch.

Indonesian nationalism proper was born of this ferment, of its excitement and its failure. The early exuberance of the national awakening profited from a reforming optimism on the part of colonial rulers, impelled since the turn of the century by a new Ethical policy which encouraged native strivings for modernity on the assumption that this would attach them to their Dutch mentors. In the 1920s this gave way to suspicion that Indonesian freedoms would be gained at the expense of Dutch interests, and that the colonial rulers' first task was not enlightenment but control. In the new climate of oppression, the mass of the politically mobilized populace quietly withdrew from leaders who no longer seemed capable of bringing great change; others participated in an abortive, Communist-led (but also Muslim) rebellion in 1926-27.

The revolt's failure left on stage a small, highly educated group drawn largely from the lower rungs of the indigenous elite of Java and Minangkabau (West Sumatra). Their common language and much of their thinking was Dutch, but their loyalties went neither to the culture of their birth nor of their education. Rather, they saw themselves as the rightful rulers of the nation-to-be, Indonesia; to colonial officials they were final proof that the Ethical policy of enlightenment had been a mistake. Though the new generation of nationalists posed far less a threat than earlier leaders in terms of following or rebellious intent, the more popular and radical among them were one after another removed from circulation. The Ethical policy's humanist optimism was replaced by a technocratic mystique which held that only the European masters of modernity possessed the economic administrative, and scientific know-how necessary to further the population's welfare; only after a long period of tutelage and apprenticeship could indigenous leaders hope to assume the archipelago's management.

The 1930s saw the nadir of the Indonesian movement, with political activity so restricted as to be meaningless to the populace. Those who wished to improve the lot of the common man sought this in non-political ways: through cooperatives, educational programs, the foundation of welfare organizations. As for those who overstepped the bounds, they found themselves in a world that was both isolated from and central to the latter-day Netherlands East Indies: the world of prison and exile.

Rudolf Mrázek's contribution describes the epitome of this alternative society, the concentration camp at Boven Digoel, New Guinea. It was a curious world, for it

² See especially Takashi Shiraiishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java 1912-1926* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990). *Doenia Bergerak* [The World in Motion] was the name of a well-known radical journal of the day.

contained at once the denial of the Ethical policy's attempt at rapprochement through enlightenment and the last consistent effort to realize it. The inmates were given, within the bounds of their isolated world, more freedom for reading, teaching, and expression than they could expect outside, and they enjoyed better health and housing provisions as well. Digoel was to show how well-run, how prosperous things could be if only the people would cooperate; it was not Dutch lack of good will, not the abandonment of Dutch standards of civilization that had led to repression, but the refusal of misguided or prideful indigenes to acknowledge the need for tutelage before modernity could be achieved and they could stand as equals to the Dutch.

By no means all of Digoel's inmates concurred in this game; as Mrázek shows, they were divided into those who went along and those who refused to have any more to do with the system than was necessary for survival. Those who were closest to the Dutch in education and culture were often among the least cooperative; Mrázek describes two of them, Sutan Sjahrir (who would lead three Republican governments during the revolution) and the future Indonesian vice-president, Mohammad Hatta. People like these had less to lose by not cooperating, for as high-status intellectuals they had privileges ordinary prisoners (and warders), did not enjoy. But a principal reason was also their anxiousness about the boundary between collaboration and resistance, modernity and assimilation. Their habitual language was Dutch, their references were to European civilization, their goal was a modernity which was difficult to imagine except in Western terms. Where, then, did an Indonesian identity lie? Not in any particular local culture; these they saw as "feudal" or primitive. Indonesianness must rest in something that was new, modern, yet close to the people. But how to communicate with a populace that was as far from them culturally as it was geographically during their imprisonment? At the time, the question may have seemed academic, but within a few years Japanese invasion would make it real.

During World War II, Hatta, with Sukarno, constituted the duumvirate that represented the Indonesian population under Japanese rule; in August 1945 the two leaders became vice-president and president of the newborn Indonesian Republic. Sjahrir, as the principal politician to have refused collaboration with the Japanese, was brought in to serve as a prime minister acceptable to Allied opinion. None of these leaders had been elected, of course; as instruments of control they had little more than their superior education and the personal followings accumulated during their years of political involvement. Of the three, only Sukarno had the actor's temperament and the cultural expansiveness that enabled him to persuade the common folk that he spoke with their voice.

But how to play on popular sentiment when an even more pressing need was to convince an incoming Allied force that Indonesian leaders who had been Japan's collaborators were also the ones they should deal with? For at heart, even Sukarno was a conservative, doubting the ability of mass action to overcome all obstacles. Indeed, when he and Hatta had been confronted with the vacuum of power that marked Japan's surrender, they had hesitated to declare Indonesia's sovereignty, doing so only after militant youth kidnapped them and forced the issue. Indonesia's declaration of independence, instead of the high ceremony and ringing statement of goals that we might expect of a revolutionary state, was a bare announcement read before a few people, under the reluctant gaze of the Japanese.

And yet it marked a time of extraordinary expectation and mobilization. Much has been written of the revolutionizing impact of the Japanese period on the Indonesian population—the humiliation of the Dutch, the nationalist rhetoric and mass mobilization, the emphasis that what mattered was not expertise but will. All this suddenly brought freedom and modernity within the reach of ordinary Indonesians. With willpower, daring, and sacrifice they would seize these treasures from the colonialists. But how? The first weeks after the Japanese surrender became known as the *Bersiap* period—the Time of Preparedness—after the youthful revolutionaries who raced about the streets calling out that they were “ready,” and summoning everyone to prepare as well. Ready for what they did not know, but they were sure that they were about to embark on an adventure of peril and infinite possibility, the realization of a new nation and a new self.

The ensuing effort to prevent a Dutch return saw a division between those Indonesians who advocated *perjuangan*—struggle, all-out confrontation with the colonialists—and those who preferred the more gradual course of *diplomasi*. The sides in this dispute were not fixed; depending on the perceived desperateness of the domestic situation, the balance of international power, and the raw calculations of personal rivalries, leaders shifted from one pole to another during the course of the revolution. As Barbara Harvey’s contribution shows, there were many reasons why Indonesia’s revolutionary leaders remained much more divided and heterogeneous than Viet Nam’s, and their geographical and international contexts further widened these differences.³

In one sense, the Indonesian leadership’s argument over struggle versus diplomacy was another version of the division between “cooperators” and “non-cooperators” in the oppressive final decades of colonial rule, and between the *werkwilligen* and *naturalisten* at Boven Digoel. How much should one accede to unjust and demeaning conditions in order to gain a minimal opportunity for action? Is the clarity of an absolute stand and the inspirational value of political martyrdom worth more for the future than what is gained by present compromise and humiliation? At what point does the realistic acceptance of constraints become collaboration with the oppressor?

Such considerations were now complicated by the fact that the Indonesian leaders were no longer only speaking as those who demanded but also as those who controlled resources. They therefore had to bear in mind what effect an intransigent or compromising stance might have on what they had gained. Those who came from elite families—and almost invariably the highly educated stemmed from at least the lower levels of traditional elites, from families that had taken service in the colonial regime—they had to think of the consequences of releasing the mass energies which had boiled to the surface of the revolution. In the localities where these had escaped they had all too often directed themselves against established local elites, in the name of Islam and/or Communism.

³ We might also note that there is another point at which the Vietnamese experience might usefully be contrasted with the Indonesian—namely the period in which Vietnamese intellectuals were considering whether to focus their national movement on Viet Nam itself (or Annam, Tonkin, or Cochin-China) or on the wider world of Indonesia. Indonesian leaders, though they continued to debate right up to the eve of independence the virtues of cultural claims that would include Malaya and possibly drop new Guinea, generally found the boundaries of the Netherlands East Indies their ‘natural’ focus; but Indochina was to remain a place insufficiently imagined.

National leaders also had to think of the consequences of pushing aside the administrative and social-economic hierarchies on which rested the running of the state. The Japanese occupiers had found it convenient to maintain these, and any attempt to present the Republic as a state worthy of international recognition would also necessarily rely on this unique source of connections and expertise. So, what for some was a singular opportunity to achieve the goals of the world-in-motion, to destroy every trace of colonialism and “feudalism” and realize freedom and social justice, opened for others the danger of anarchy, collapse, and a new enslavement.

The dispute between *diplomasi* and *perjuangan* thus also came to appear as a struggle between the modernizers and the masses; Kahin’s *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* was written from the viewpoint of the former and Anderson’s *Java in a Time of Revolution* from the latter. As Harvey points out, these were not the only elements that entered into the matter, but the formulation is important because it is widely shared by Indonesians and lies at the heart of the question of what independence was for and what the Indonesian nation-state should be about.

Because generation (youth’s greater sense of possibilities, the training and inspiration of young men by the Japanese) and geography (location in areas whose social orders had been most deeply compromised by colonialism) were as important as education and class in determining popular sympathy for *perjuangan* or *diplomasi*, there was a conflation of youth/Java/anti-Westernism/social radicalism as opposed to older generation/Outer Islands/gradualist/conservative that was to have a powerful influence on the way Indonesia was viewed—and Indonesians viewed themselves—in the generation following independence. As we shall see in Mary Heidhues’s description of the revolution in Bangka, the actual line-up of forces in almost any specific locality was far more complex and shifting; yet it contained enough of the general pattern to endorse it as a stereotype and thus to confirm Java and the Republic as the locus of freedom and modernity.

As in Digoel, some of the most westernized Indonesian leaders were also the most intransigently opposed to compromise with colonialism. This was notably true of those who as students had (like Hatta and Sjahrir earlier) gone to the Netherlands, where they had found in Dutch radical leftism a congenial Western but anticolonial ambience. Together with locally educated modernizers, these returned students assumed the leadership of the Left Wing coalition that dominated Republican governance for the first years of the revolution. Increasing disillusion with the results of *diplomasi*, together with the pressures of Cold War polarization, led them first to a breach with those who were committed to compromise—Sjahrir chief among them—and then to all-out intransigence. They now argued that true independence could only be realized by fully engaging the revolutionary impulses of the people. In the increasingly desperate circumstances of the embattled Republic, this was both a popular position and a socially explosive one. The radicals, who now proclaimed themselves openly Communists, had little control over the mass action they had endorsed, and in September 1948 they found themselves following rather than leading a revolt against the leadership of the Republic.

The “Madiun Affair” of September 1948 was swiftly crushed, evidence not only of its own disorganization but, more significantly, of a broad consensus within the Republic as to where legitimate leadership lay. Indeed, outside the rebellious core areas of East and Central Java, many Communist party organizations refused to join in the revolt. For a future generation of Communist leaders this would be proof that