

# JAVA AND THE MAKING OF THE NATION\*

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## 1. Introduction

Java, one out of 13.000 islands in Indonesia, is the most densely populated island. Compared to those of outer islands, the soil of Java Island is the most fertile one. It is due to the availability of mountains which provide ash to the soil and the availability of rivers which spread all over the island. This geographical condition is associated with the fact that Java was and is the centre of human activities or socio-economics, as well as political and cultural dynamics not only in Indonesia but also in Southeast-Asia (The description of this chapter is based on the account of Ricklefs, 1981; Anwar Harjono, 1997; Aqib Suminto, 1985; Kuntowijoyo, 1991; Usman Tampubolon, 1991; Deliar Noer, 1988; Korver, 1985 except exclusively stated).

The Dutch who come to Indonesia during the period from the 17th until 18th century, did not make any significant change because they were basically to follow the activities of local traders, namely the Javanese, Madurese, Bugenese, as well as other Sumatranese who were actively sailing traditional sea-route connecting towns and cities located along coastal areas of the islands of Sumatra, Java, Smaller Islands (Sunda Kecil), South Kalimantan, Sulawesi and Maluku (Sartono Kartodirdjo, 1987 see also van Leur, 1955; Meilink-Roelofs, 1962; Day, 1966; Furnivall, 1939). In this period, Java seems to be the centre of not only political activities to the traditional rulers in Indonesia, although there were also traditional rulers in other

islands such as in Makasar and East Sumatra, but also to the European powers namely the Dutch and British.

The degradation of local rulers in Java was marked by the penetration of interference of military units of the Dutch. Through the implementation of the policy the so called to divide and rule (*divide et impera*), the Javanese people were exploited and impoverished. In the process of mobilization and exploitation of any resources available in the colony, local rulers were also used as mediators. Consequently the backwardness and poverty occurring in the colony was caused by the exploitation carried out by the colonizers as well by the condition of traditional socio-economic structure.

Apart from the basic human right based on Islamic teaching, the backwardness and the poverty existing in the majority of the people in Indonesia was the main issue raised by the initiators of nationalist movement in the early period. In the process of the development of national awareness among many sectarian organizations there were many factors that could be associated with, namely the common suffering shouldered by the majority of the Indonesian people for so long period of time, the common interest namely the ultimate goal of obtaining independence from the colonizers, and the same in common in the territory as a basis in building a nation (Abdullah, 1966).

The paper will discuss the process of socio-economic, political and cultural

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change occurring in Java prior to the 20th century which played an important role as a foundation for the development of nationalist movement in the following decade. The process of multiaspect change occurred during pre-nationalist movement certainly contributed to the development of the so many sub-ethnics with their own socio-economic-cultural identities to be a nation with so many things in common which enabled them to declare themselves as a group of people with a similar nation, language, and motherland, namely Indonesia in 1925 and 1928.

### 2. Java and Islam

Speaking of Javanese culture, one could not omit Islamic values since in the formation process of Javanese culture Islam is the most predominantly important element. As we know, the elements of Javanese culture as well as other culture, in Indonesia comprise native elements, namely animism and dynamism, the Hindu and Buddhism elements. From the 7th until the 13th century the Arab traders who come to many parts of Indonesia spread Islam in many parts of Indonesian areas.

The spread of Islam was made possible by using the existing sea-trading activities. Arab traders and other South Asian traders such as Indian and Persian traders actively took part in these trading activities. They used to stay several months in a certain city situated along the coast of the islands in Indonesia. They went to the east when the western wind blew between Oktober and April, while on April to October they sailed to the west when eastern wind were blowing. Because they have to stay in the islands for quite some times, they were able to make not only economic contacts with traditional rulers and their families but also other social contacts such as marriage, for example, Malik Ibrahim of Persia who was not only given a daughter of Sultan of Demak as a wife but also assigned as a ruler in Cheribon by his father-in-law.

The strength of islamic influence on the Javanese sultanate was found in Denmak and lasted until which began in the 11th century the 15th century. Islam was able to perform itself integrative element which was

able to incorporate the economic, political, as well as religious aspects in the sultanate. As stated by Priyono (in Kuntowijoyo, 1991:27) the islamization of the people of Indonesia had accelerated an integration process among middle class moslem traders with international trading centres, so that the process played a basis for the emergence of the new political institution.

One of the interesting questions to be raised is why islam religion was so fast adopted by the people and was able to attract the interest of the people in all over parts of Indonesian Islands, so that it happened to their own way of life and cultural identity? According to Kuntowijoyo (1991:147), one prominent historians of Gadjah Mada University, the concept of egalitarianism in Islamic teaching is the main attractive elements of this religion because the concept of social stratification in Hinduism (namely the caste system) was not able to attract the middle-class traders and small manufacturers which had been developing in the cities situated in the northern part of coastal area of Java. Islam was able to provide the middle class traders and small manufacturers with an ideology to oppose class system practiced in Hindu tradition. The fall of Majapahit and the emergence of Demak as the first moslem sultanate in Java at the end of the 15th century reflected the victory of the trading class and of maritim sultanate over the aristocratic and agrarian Kingdom of Majapahit.

Until the 16th century, Islam was still regarded as strange values. Even after the fall of Demak sultanate and the shift of the centre of political power to the inner region of Java with the birth of Pajang Sultanate which was Islamic by nature, this religion was still regarded as strange culture. The lasted until the end of the 16th century, when Pajang Sultanate was defeated by Mataram which caused the slowing-down of the spread of islam in the inner part of Java. This situation ended at the end of the 18th century, when the supremation of socio-political forces of Mataram significantly decreased due to the the internal conflict. Consequently, the socio-political problem caused the cultural impoverishment and the

inability of Mataram to hinder the spread of Islam.

One could argue, however, whether what actually happened was either the process of Javanization of Islam or the Islamization of Java. But the only fact is that Islam had been internalized in many aspects of socio-political as cultural life not only in Java but in Indonesia as well. It could be seen, among others, from the fact that most of the traditional rulers were fond of calling themselves a Sultan, Sayyidin, and Kaiiratullah. Moreover, many administrative positions as well as many building facilities were also set-up in the traditional bureaucratic structure which reflected the interest of the traditional rulers to the Islamic issues.

### **3. The Javanese and the West**

The conquer of Malaca by Portuguese in 1511 marked a new development in the relationship between the Javanese and other sub-ethnic in Indonesia and the European. The ruler of Demak tried to regain Malaca, the trading centre of the merchants coming from South Asia, East Asia as well as from many cities and islands of Indonesia. This attack was not successful. This failure is a reflection that Demak, as a maritim sultanate which had been participating in international trading network and was able to open trading cooperation with so many trading centre in the region at that time - somewhat symbolizing the high stand or position to the moslem communities, could be defeated by Portuguese. The defeat marked the end of international trading era which was pioneered by Demak. From then on, the people of Nusantara Island gradually lived under the occupation of Portuguese, Spaniard, the Dutch, the British, and the Japanese.

One interesting question one might ask is why the people of Nusantara could be occupied by foreigners for so long period of time? One of the possible answers is that, according to the late Vice President Muhammad Hatta (1902-1980), the people of Nusantara prior to the coming of the European was living under the condition that they had no spirit because the patrimonialistic traditional administration domi-

nated all aspects of the life of the people. For centuries, the power was in the hand of the royal family members. Majapahit as reported by Muhammad Yamin was able to expand her territory covering Malaca and the Philippines. But the fact shows that to maintain such a wide territory without the participation or support of the majority of the people is impossible. To conclude, Hatta mentions, when Majapahit fell the Javanese who did not have organization and spirit of independence became masterless and fell to other power. The colapse of patrimonialism gave birth to colonialization.

In exploiting the resources available in the colony, the European implemented a policy which unity among the local people. The Dutch for example, implemented a policy in dealing with natives, that the islamic law was recognized while at the same time the traditional law was also recognized. In this case, the islamic law could be implemented when it had been absorbed in the traditional law or adat law. The implication of this policy is the implementation of islamic law by its followers is hindered.

The educational policy implemented by the Dutch colonial government was able to create animosity between the two groups in the moslem community namely, the intellectual westernized group and the *santri*. The intellectual westernized groups was those who had finished from the Dutch educational institution. They were willing to accept western culture, including the separation between the educational life from the religious life. While the *santris* is those who were not able to enter the western education system due to their own awareness or due to their social status. To most of them, the educational institution available is *pesantren*. Generally *santri* were not willing to cooperate with and reactive toward anything coming from the West. The cleavage between the two groups was retained by colonial administration so that in the real life in the society one could find two antipodes namely the *mutihan*, namely the devoted *santri* and the *abangan*, those converted to islam but having not practiced the *syariah* Islam yet.

Consequently, the existence of this social cleavage in the real life in the society

had its implication in which the two groups will face each other in dealing with any issues related to the lot and the life of the nation. The emergence of youth organization in the beginning of the 20th century, for example, could also be regarded as the reflection of this distinction.

#### **4. Factors associated with the process of integration**

The economic activities in Indonesia for centuries had connected cities, towns, and harbours located in coastal areas in the islands. In activities, Nusantara had developed in a such a way that among the sub-ethnics in these areas they were able to interact each other, to get to know their habits, customs, and tradition. During the easterly wind blowing season, the traders from East Indonesia region such as Maluku, Makasar and Sumbawa sailed to Surabaya, Gresik, Jambi, and Malaka. They sold goods produced by their regions such as cloves from Maluku, rice from Makasar, and sandalwood from Sumbawa. Rice and teakwood, the main product from Java, were also sold by Javanese traders in Malaka. While they were trading, they stayed in the harbors for several months until the westerly wind blew in the beginning of April.

The trading activities enabled the process of integration among the sub-ethnics in Nusantara so that they no longer regarded his neighboring sub-ethnics as a strangers. The role of Malaca as a meeting place to this process was significantly important. In Malaca, apart from Chinese and Urdu, Malay was one of the official language spoken by traders working there. As we know, Malay is a language spoken by a minority group living in a small island situated in Malay Straits. On the other hand, Javanese as a language spoken by the majority was not intended to become an official language. But rather, the Javanese as other sub-ethnic groups in Indonesia preferred to accept Malay which was more practical and had been spoken by most of the traders in Nusantara as a common if not a national language.

The construction of road by Daendels in 1810-1816 from Anyer to Panarukan was innitially intended as a means to defend

Java from the British invasion. But what was beyond Daendels imagination was that the road enable the people of the community living along the road to interact, to make a living by conducting many activities such as trading and the like. In other words, after the construction of the Daendels road the Javanese communities which were formerly isolated from each other became integrated and gradually merged into a community, a Javanese community. This process was intensified when transportation and communication networks was constructed by the Dutch government and Dutch private enterprises working in practically all over parts of Java. In 1870, a limited railway network was constructed in Central Java. The project is continued along with the development of plantation economy in Java (See Soegijanto Padmo, 1994, 1999).

Apart from educational facilities, transportation and communication networks, the European also introduced mass media, namely news paper. As early as 1744, a Dutch newspaper *De Bataviaasche Navelles* was published, and then followed by *De Locomotief* in Semarang and *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* in Batavia published in 1852 and 1885 respectively (Sartono Kartodirdjo, 1988:112). *Bramartani* which was published in Surakarta was regarded as the pioneer to the native news paper. In the second half of the 19th century the native pers experienced a significant development. It was indicated by the emergence of Malay newspapers such as *Pemberita Betawi*, *Sinar di Jawa*, and *Oetoesan Hindia*.

The function of the mass media in disseminating critical attitudes such as the development of critical masses in the society, collective awareness, and public solidarity. In this regard, newspaper had its own role as communication channels which penetrate beyond face to face communication but also beyond social, sub-culture, primordial boundaries, so that it could overcome the segmentation-locking. The existence of Malay newspaper was the expression of the significant development, namely the flourish of democratization and at the same time Indonesianization. In this respect, the communication between upper layer and lower layer of the community,

between inter sub-groups, inter sub-ethnics was made easier.

The significant contribution was played by newspaper not only to deliver information, to enhance communication intensity, and to fasten the circulation of ideas, but also to open the horizon of the people. All of those aggregately supported the mobilization of the people to participate in the emancipation movement, progressive movement, and at the end national movement in many ways.

### **5. The christalization process**

The poverty and backwardness suffered by the natives especially the Javanese are believed to be the main accelerating factors to the emergence of national movement. The traditional patrimonialistic social structure practiced by traditional rulers in all parts of the country are characterized by oppression and exploitation for the benefits of the few and the suffering of the mass.

In responding to this situation, few enlightened moslem scholars raised the problems of the importance of regaining human dignity. According to the teaching of Islam, human dignity is the inherent right to any human being, so that any oppression by certain people over the others is regarded as against the God's will. Serikat Dagang Islam (SDI) founded by Haji Saman Hudi in Solo, was believed as the pioneer of nationalist movement. According to him human dignity is similar to nationality, so that the effort in regaining the human dignity more or less is meant to be the struggle to obtain nationality (Mansur Suryanegara, 1989).

In 1908, few years after the SDI was organized, an exclusively Javanese in nature, Budi Utomo, was organized. Budi Utomo was set up by educated Javanese youth, Wahidin Sudirohusodo and Sutomo. The member of this organization is limited to the Javanese and the objective is to help the poor in obtaining educational opportunity in terms of financial assistance. Similar local cultural and regional organization were commonly found in Indonesia in the first decades of the 20th century. This situation reflected the fact that the primordial

orientation was still predominantly important element that could be found in the views of majority of the people. Regional oriented organization such as Yong Sumatranen Bond is the youth organization for the Sumatran youngsters, Yong Java is an organization for the youngsters of Java island. Yong Ambon is an organization for the youngsters from Ambon, and Yong Celebes is an organization for the youth from Sulawesi. While other organizations with their basis on religion are also in existence such as Yong Islamieten Bond, an organization for the youth who already converted to Islam.

Although the primordial orientation could be easily identified from the so many local organizations at that time, it seems that the value of Islam was able to bridge the dissimilarity among cultural and sub-ethnic groups. As reported by Anwar Haryono (1997:21) that SDI then it became Serikat Islam (SI), was the most influential organization in the beginning of the 20th century. Its achievement, among others, is that this organization had succeeded in diffusing two elements in her body organization, namely Islam element and nationalism element. With this specific character, SI was able to attract not only the moslem but also the prominent figures from non-islam circle. The founder of Taman Siswa, Ki Hajar Dewantara (1889-1959), an *abangan* scholar stated:

"It is sufficient to remember that there are so many nonmoslem people (among others is E.F.E. Douwes Dekker, the Indo Dutch pro-Indonesia) supporting SI not only because its populist and radical in nature, but also its ultimate goal to achieve the independence for the people in the island of Indonesia, to free from the domination of colonial regime" (See Anwar Harjono, *ibid.*)

This sentence many be too long and seems unclear. It may be a good idea to split into two or three separate sentences. In accordance with the statement of Dewantara, Natsir also stated that the Islamic movement had been the pioneer in opening the path toward independence in the country, whose its early step was to disseminate the seed of unity for Indo-

nesian and at the same time to put aside regionalism and provincialism, and at the beginning also to enhance the spirit of brotherhood with those burden similar suffering all over the world with the spirit of Islam (Deliar Noer, 1988; Furnivall, 1967).

The wave of the development of national movement in the following decades in the 20th century was marked by the emergence of political organization which was initiated with the penetration of communist ideology. The organization of the socialist democratic in the Netherland Indies took into account of Serikat Islam as a powerful organization to be utilized. After conducting effort for several years this socialist organization was able to take over SI. As a consequence, SI became the pure SI or white SI and socialist SI or red SI. This last faction later became Indonesian Communist Party, which was together with other aggressive political parties such as Indonesian Nationalist Party founded by Soekarno and Indonesian Islam United Party or PSII contributed substantial role in carrying-out efforts through hardships and suffering in mobilizing Indonesian people in confronting Dutch administration, and then Japanese military forces in 1945, and finally in obtaining political independence at the end of 1949.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on what had been described in the previous part of the paper several thing could be mentioned as the following:

- a. The Island of Java had a unique role in the process of assimilation of the elements of culture coming to the island. In this process the attitude of tolerance which had been a dominant characteristic could be found in the Javanese communities.
- b. The diversity of Indonesian culture and the regional differences as well as the provincial narrow-mindedness which are the predominant characteristic could be found among Indonesian. In narrowing the gap of dissimilarities among the groups, the cosmopolit values in Islam utilized by solidarity maker was performed by the moslem prominent national leaders such as Muhammad Hatta, a Sumatran, later the first Vice President.

While in the mobilization of the masses in the political movement it was performed by the prominent political organizer namely Ir. Sukarno, a half Javanese and a half Balinese, later the first president of the Republic of Indonesia (Feith, 1962). They were able to make the concept of a unity in the diversity come true.

- c. The emergence of political parties in the 1920s reflected the stronger intention of the people in gaining the ultimate goal namely the independence from the Dutch colonial administration. In the process, Islam values contributed a significant role in disseminating the idea of national, humanistic, and cosmopolit values.

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