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Revolutionary worlds

Legitimacy, violence and loyalty during the Indonesian War of Independence

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Wolter Mongisidi, a prominent resistance leader in South Sulawesi, distributed a pamphlet in 1946 in which he explained, roughly a year after Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta's proclamation of independence, how much the Dutch reoccupation of the Indonesian archipelago had spurred Indonesians to action. Indonesians 'are still seriously wounded', Mongisidi wrote. 'The Japanese occupation brought even more pain! And now the Dutch NICA are rubbing a wound that was already very serious!' That wound could be understood quite literally: soldiers from the Dutch army and the Royal Netherlands Indies Army (Koninklijk Nederlands-Indisch Leger, KNIL) electrocuted, stabbed, beat and murdered so brutally – 'beyond the tortures' of the Japanese – that they drove many Indonesians onto the path to revolution. '[Not] a single force' could stop the Indonesian people, Mongisidi decided, now that the Netherlands was weakened and the Republic was getting stronger and stronger.² If we go by Mongisidi's words, the Re-

Protest slogan for independence: 'Freedom for all nations', Cas Oorthuys Jan-Feb 1947.

Source: Nederlands Fotomuseum.

public and its representatives could count on support at any time, anywhere – for all Indonesians supported the revolution and the war against the Netherlands from the outset. The reality, however, was considerably more complicated.

The image that Mongidisi sketched in 1946 lives on to this day in the public culture of remembrance in Indonesia. This is also the case in the Netherlands, where the image of one war – against the Republic and its army – has lingered. As stated above, though, the reality was rather more complex. Not only were there, in addition to the Republic and its army, many other combat groups involved in the war, but the Indonesian Revolution was also multifaceted in itself, with political, religious, social and regional differences being fought out partly by force, sometimes in parallel with the war against the Netherlands and sometimes as a part of it. These developments and their consequences are best studied at the local and regional level, which also opens up other perspectives – the perspectives of social movements, local communities and individual citizens, with their own ideals and fears, in situations where strategic and sometimes existential choices were unavoidable.

REVOLUTIONARY WORLDS

In order to investigate the plurality of the Indonesian War of Independence, the *Regional Studies* project was set up: a collaboration between Indonesian and Dutch historians enabling an exchange of knowledge and historiographical perspectives by means of workshops and discussion meetings, including one on terminology. In some cases, researchers from other projects were involved as well.

The explicit aim of the project was not to systematically compare different regions or the Dutch and Indonesian use of violence, but rather to reveal the layered nature and complexity of the developments. In the course of the research, the title that connected all the different themes emerged: ‘Revolutionary worlds’, as a reference to the myriad experiential worlds, collective but also individual, local and national, organized and disorganized – worlds populated and inspired by diverse groups and individuals in Indonesian society, in a time of major and sweeping changes, all with their own interests, views, expectations and ideals. In order to be able to show something of these worlds, we chose to work with case studies that focus on various themes and aspects in different regions: West, Central and East Java; South Sulawesi; Bali; and North and West Sumatra. We believe this paints

a good picture of the revolution as a complex of divergent processes and realities, which, although intertwined, were nevertheless shaped by different actors in different ways.

In this chapter we want to provide an impression of the findings of this joint project and thereby to touch on the different regions and themes from the sub-projects, in more or less extensive form, as illustrations. It does not lie within the scope of this chapter to provide a complete picture of all the contributions; these can be found in the collection *Revolutionary Worlds. Local Perspectives and Dynamics during the Indonesian Independence War, 1945-1949*, edited by Bambang Purwanto, Abdul Wahid, Yulianti, Ireen Hoogenboom, Martijn Eickhoff and Roel Frakking.³

This is not the first time that developments in the years since 1945 have been viewed from a regional perspective. One groundbreaking study in this regard was *Regional Dynamics of the Indonesian Revolution* from 1986, edited by Audrey Kahin. The focus was not, as is usually the case, on the centre of power – Java – but on revolutionary movements in other regions and the question of how the national revolution in different regions took on a form of its own, a process that was described by a critical Taufik Abdullah during a seminar in the late 1980s as a ‘franchise model’.⁴ The insight that in these revolutionary years there were different, competing forces at work on the Indonesian side is not new, either. In fact, the tensions were already clearly visible in this revolutionary period and were used, for example, by the Dutch colonial administration, including the armed forces, in its fight against the Republic. In the historiography, this theme was also addressed at an early stage, starting with *Om een rode of groene merdeka* (‘For the sake of a red or green merdeka’) by Henri Alers from 1956, in which ‘green stands for the feudal, conservative, colonial and religious forces, and red for the forces of the social revolution and the Sukarnoist tendencies’.⁵ And in the Indonesian historiography, similar themes were addressed decades ago by the eminent historian Taufik Abdullah.⁶

This project builds on these insights and at the same time opens up a perspective that offers plenty of room for other themes, movements, voices and experiences, away from the prevailing Indonesian representation of the revolution, but also away from the prevailing Dutch image of the war as a linear history, an image that leaves little or no room for heterogeneity. In this research, the focus is mainly on the *agency* – the ability to act in a purposeful manner – and the experiential world of various groups. A thorough approach offers a clearer view of the various processes that took

place – sometimes far from the Dutch-Republican front lines, literally and figuratively; in short, of the rich diversity of ‘revolutionary worlds’, and the friction and clashes that resulted from them.

LEGITIMACY, VIOLENCE AND LOYALTY

In August 1945, and even thereafter, few had a clearly defined idea of what ‘the’ revolution should look like. That the pursuit of independence was widely supported is beyond dispute, but how to proceed was by no means clear. As Taufik Abdullah has observed, Republican and other military and civilian leaders did have certain *notions* of their end goals, such as independence and the character of the new state, but the precise details and the path leading to it were still open. The same was true for individual Indonesians who were (or became) politically engaged. They too tried to shape ‘the’ revolution by taking advantage of the opportunities that such a period of upheaval offered.

Many took advantage of these opportunities to fight actively for the Republic, for example by joining armed groups; others saw opportunities to engage in more or less criminal activities, while some communities – such as the Chinese in Medan and elsewhere – organized themselves to protect their own groups. Many – perhaps most – also tried to remain aloof, at least from the violence: survival was their primary motivation.⁷ They sought connections with rulers or authorities more powerful than themselves who could protect them from violence and give them access to food or clothing. In return, they provided political support – or at least they tried to give that impression – and shared intelligence with them or offered fighters a hiding place.⁸

In this situation of competing forces, it was crucial for the warring parties to gain the support of the population: that support was essential for them to survive, to gain legitimacy and to create stability, sustained by a functioning administration.⁹ In order to obtain this support, the parties had many means at their disposal, ranging from the use of traditional, hierarchical relationships and material incentives, to propaganda and, above all, violence. Violence played an essential role, not only to acquire or expand territory and drive out other rulers, but also, in the case of violence against civilians, to enforce that support if necessary, and subsequently to protect them from the violence of other parties.¹⁰ The violence in all its gradations, including the threat of it, was thus in many ways ‘functional’ — except that the difference between functional and dysfunctional violence mattered little to those who were subjected to that violence.

In practice, this meant that the different parties sometimes suppressed and at other times rekindled certain political preferences and ethnic, regional, religious and class differences. After all, the goal was to develop their own ideas regarding the constitutional arrangement of the future Indonesia.¹¹ The use of violence against civilians became – especially, but certainly not only, when there was no natural connection with the population – a fixed and widespread aspect of the revolutionary war: the end justifies the means; necessity knows no laws. Or the law was reinterpreted or amended.¹² At the same time, the boundaries between and within the various parties involved turned out to be fluid. Although there were two dominant opponents – the Republic and the Dutch colonial administration – there were also many other parties and movements of different bents and functioning at different levels, from local to national – not to mention the regional and local rulers, who often had no clear political plan. And even this distinction is still too schematic, because within the different camps there were different groups, factions and organizations that sometimes even came to be diametrically opposed to each other.

Research at the local and regional level is ideally suited to show this intricate and layered dynamic in the struggle for power, recognition and loyalty and the pursuit of state-building. Three connecting themes are used here: legitimacy, violence and loyalty or affiliation. All parties to the conflict sought recognition of their authority – that is, legitimacy – in the territory they had claimed, for this legitimacy was a prerequisite for building a state and making it function. Violence and the threat of violence served as a crucial means to enforce authority and to obtain the support of local populations where this was (still) lacking. The term loyalty refers to the attachment of citizens to a party or to those in power; in addition, loyalty could also be read as ‘affiliation’, which in turn can be understood as a *factual* and often *temporary* attachment, even if the *heart* lay elsewhere – a tension that often occurred when political relations were reversed, as we shall see.

In all this, it is important to realize that the people, who were faced with the efforts of the various parties to obtain their support, were not just ‘passive objects’. As demonstrated by the different sub-projects, many developments were actively supported and fostered by large sections of the population. This could vary from sympathizing with the pursuit of independence and the leading role of the Republic to direct participation in or support for the armed struggle. And even when an enemy party was in power in a particular territory, the people still had countless ways to withdraw their support in whole or in part.

A MULTIFACETED REVOLUTION

After the declaration of independence by Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta in August 1945, the Republic quickly assumed a more solid form in many places in Indonesia. At the central level, the Republic was embodied in representative organs, ministries, a constitution, and gradually an army, which in large part grew out of militias created during the Japanese occupation and was eventually renamed Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI). Republican governors were appointed, who together with the *pamong praja* (the traditional Indonesian civil service), the regional branch of the Komite Nasional Indonesia and the army made up the regional administration. Locally, the Republican government was often assisted – and sometimes monitored – by in particular the youth combat organizations, *pemuda*, which had emerged early on as militant defenders of independence.¹³

This new state was immediately confronted with many acute problems. For example, some Japanese military leaders, whom the Allies after the capitulation had made responsible for maintaining the status quo, had proceeded to expel Republican officials and combat organizations from the cities. And in the context of the repatriation of the Japanese troops and the former prisoners of the Japanese internment camps, the Allied and Dutch troops did the same in the following months, where necessary by force.¹⁴ But the Republic was determined not to allow itself to be pushed aside. The military and Republican officials very quickly began operating from the countryside rather than cities like Jakarta or Makassar. It was not for nothing that Republican leaders had sworn – in the words of Sulawesi Governor Sam Ratulangi – that they would ‘defend every [inch] of Indonesia against the greed of our enemies who want to recolonize our country.’¹⁵

The Republic faced opposition on several fronts. A number of other parties also claimed authority and legitimacy, particularly in areas that were far from the heart of the Republic, which was located in and around Yogyakarta in Central Java. Meanwhile, the Dutch colonial authority was working on the realization of its plans for a federation, forged in collaboration with moderate Indonesian nationalists who wanted to achieve independence and autonomy in a non-revolutionary way. In different parts of the archipelago, the Republic also faced competition from groups, movements and local leaders who opposed the politics of the Republic for various reasons, sometimes out of self-interest or to maintain local power themselves, often also out of regionalism or dissatisfaction with the course of the revolution, especially with regard to radical social reforms. Local combat organizations

and politicians sometimes felt that the Republic did not go far enough in its revolutionary plans. For example, the Republic sided with traditional, feudal Indonesian landowners where this group would otherwise be wiped out by *pemuda*.

Such tensions also arose in the territorial heart of the Republic in Yogyakarta. There, too, the leadership of the young state constantly had to deal with opposition, which in the context of revolution was vociferous and was often organized, such as in the case of young people and women. An important source of inspiration for these groups was the ideal of popular sovereignty – *kedaulatan rakyat* – which was also included in the Republic's constitution. The point of contention was the actual implementation of this ideal, understood as the pursuit of a radically different social and political order.

Such interpretations of the revolution, however, were at odds with the aspirations of the Republic's political leadership. Sukarno and Hatta attached great importance to the building of the state and to diplomatic negotiations; they wanted to demonstrate to the world that Indonesia could be a well-ordered, functioning and modern state.¹⁶ That attitude led in all sorts of ways to tensions, both with socio-political movements and militias and with parts of the army, because the choice to negotiate, as army chief Abdul Haris Nasution wrote more than fifteen years later, came at the expense of the establishment of 'a clear, outspoken, phased [guerrilla] programme [and] the creation of a chain of command in Java and the regions where [the revolutionary youth] were moving'.¹⁷ 'Struggle or diplomacy' – a dilemma in which those who demanded '100% *merdeka*' clashed with more moderate nationalists – remained a source of sometimes sharp internal conflict at all levels until the end of the war.

How the new state was designed and the visible and invisible tensions that accompanied it can be told on the basis of the history of Yogyakarta, the revolutionary capital of the Republic from the beginning of 1946 to the end of 1948. In many ways, the city formed a vibrant microcosm in which many developments came together, as evidenced by the research carried out by Farabi Fakhri in the context of this project.¹⁸

Yogyakarta served for almost three years as the symbolic centre of the Republic, and was exactly what a capital should be in the eyes of the Republican leadership. In a speech on the occasion of the relocation of the seat of government from Jakarta to Yogyakarta, President Sukarno said that 'no nation state can last without centralism. Russia has Moscow, America has

Washington, England has London, Majapahit has Wilwatikta'. With that last reference, he implicitly portrayed the Republic as the heir to an illustrious precolonial empire that encompassed the entire Indonesian archipelago. In practice, not all of the central institutions of the young state were actually located in Yogyakarta. On the contrary, they were scattered across Java. For example, from its base in Purworejo, 60 kilometres west of Yogya, the parliament organized meetings that took place in alternating Republican cities. The Foreign Ministry and the Prime Minister's Office had initially remained in Jakarta, while other ministries had moved into buildings in surrounding cities, such as Surakarta and Klaten. The military headquarters were also located elsewhere, in two major centres – one in Bandung and the other in Central Java.

Yogyakarta may have been a capital without modern state power, but according to Fakhri, the city functioned as a symbolic centre, as a stage on which the revolution and independence were shaped in various ways – just as Sukarno had outlined. It was a theatre that was also open to the rest of the world, to diplomats, journalists and other visitors, so that they could convince themselves of the right of the young nation to exist. Yogyakarta, with its modern hotels, shops, restaurants, busy streets and evening entertainment, represented modernity and nationalist élan, displayed through nationalist rallies. But above all, the city was a symbolic hub, as part of the movements of government officials, diplomats, left-wing pemuda from the social elite, Islamic spiritual leaders (*ulama*) and their followers, artists, professors and students, on their way to their diplomatic or religious meetings, theatre performances and art exhibitions, and conferences for youths, women and workers.

This performative, nationalistic use of Yogyakarta's streets and spaces was intended to strengthen the Indonesian nation both inwardly and outwardly, Fakhri explains. Dutch journalists may have derisively called the city a mirage, Sukarno's model republic or dream city, but the fact is that Yogyakarta was presented as the centre of the Eastern reflection of Western Enlightenment values. In his autobiography, Sindu Sudjojono, considered by many to be the father of Indonesian modern painting, explained the strategies artists used in making nationalist posters. There were no posters full of violence,

Female member of the provisional parliament, the KNIP (Komite Nasional Indonesia Pusat), singing during the Fourth Plenary Session in Kota Malang, East Java, 1947.

Source: Cas Oorthuys, Nederlands Fotomuseum



but prints that had to chime with the most refined sense of culture in the Western world, referring to great writers and philosophers, to the French Revolution, the American War of Independence and the spirit of William of Orange. 'We were in a dialogue with them,' Sudjojono said.¹⁹ A left-wing Dutch student who was visiting the city in 1947 with a communist international youth group and had attended an artists' exhibition, exclaimed: 'I didn't know you had time for this!'²⁰

However, the revolutionary world created in Yogyakarta also had its limitations, according to Fakhri: '[i]n order for the play to become a reality, it was also important for the state to convince the rest of the Indonesians to adopt the same development-oriented values that had inspired Republican nationalism'.²¹ In other words, the people had to be taken into account in this ideal of civilization; they had to be convinced and disciplined, starting with the pemuda, the youths, who were the embodiment of the nation's fighting spirit and the promise of the new man.

But it was precisely these young men, who embodied the undisciplined zeal (*semangat*), who mocked everything that the 'official' Republic saw as respectable. As long as they did not come from the elite, young people distinguished themselves in their characteristic fashion – loose hairstyles, bare feet in boots, samurai swords carried like canes, *bambu runcing* – a sharpened bamboo stick – carried like a gun, headbands worn in blood red, the ammunition belts worn crisscross across the bare chest. The Indonesian politician and diplomat Ali Sastroamidjojo wrote in his memoirs about his first trip to Yogyakarta:

There were many pemuda with long hair, carrying weapons. Their clothes often hung in tatters. Their attitude and manners were like those of fighters who have just won a war. They feel victorious, brave and strong enough to face the enemy who opposes their state and nation or... in fact opposes them and their groups. These long-haired pemuda, armed fighters without a name, with their reckless behaviour, are the strength of our Revolution. Without them, the history of our country's independence would have looked completely different.²²

The leadership of the Republic tried, both in word and in concrete deeds, to create a new generation out of these youths – a new generation with a new morality – and to dispense with what it considered to be non-modern and undisciplined forces. Fakhri concludes that the enlightened elite failed

to bridge the gap with the pemuda and other communities and to realize its modernist ideals.

Yogyakarta's revolutionary microcosm was not only open to social and cultural change, it also provided space for ideas about women's equality, as Galuh Ambar Sasi shows in her contribution to this research.²³ In the traditional Indonesian historiography of the Indonesian revolution, women are often portrayed as primarily being involved in soup kitchens, the Red Cross, women's organizations or women's congresses. However, her contribution, based among other things on newspaper research, shows that from the beginning of Indonesian independence, women were not merely relegated to a subordinate or subservient position. Many women in Yogyakarta, who came from all walks of life, did not submit to the male initiative, but instead decided for themselves which revolutionary steps to take.

They founded organizations such as Persatuan Wanita Indonesia (Perwani), a group that aimed to revive the national Women's Congress. The first congress was held in December 1928 and was attended by more than a thousand women, making it a broad-based and important platform. The next congresses were held in 1935 (Jakarta), 1939 (Bandung) and 1941 (Semarang); the Fifth Indonesian Women's Congress, which was to take place once again in Semarang in 1942, was cancelled due to the Second World War. Perwani wanted to organize that meeting in 1945, but this time in the context of an independent state. As a result of British air raids on Yogyakarta on 25 and 27 November 1945, the location of the congress had to be moved to Klaten. The bombing thus perfectly linked the emancipation efforts with the struggle against the British and Dutch attempts at recolonization.

This last observation fits well with the findings of Mary Margaret Steedly. In her study *Rifle Reports. A Story of Indonesian Independence*, she concluded that the activities of many women in the context of the revolutionary struggle, although relatively traditional and gender-conforming, were given an emancipatory, revolutionary élan by the context in which they were carried out.²⁴ The desire for emancipation, according to Sasi, manifested itself in various ways and often gave rise to conflicts and clashes, both within the family and outside it. Everyday tensions thus acquired a collective, revolutionary connotation.

For Chinese women in Yogyakarta, the revolution not only brought revolutionary fervour, it also revealed their vulnerable position as a minority. Liem Gien Nio, the owner of restaurant Oen, for example, changed the work clothes of her waiters and waitresses into a new uniform similar to

that worn by Sukarno: a white shirt, trousers and a black *peci*. In this way she expressed her identity as a citizen of the new republic. She nonetheless had to deal with negative stereotypes and was mocked as *Cino loleng* (crazy Chinese).²⁵

RIVALRY

Just how high the tensions in the Republican camp could rise became clear after the Renville Agreement of January 1948. That agreement followed lengthy negotiations, after Dutch troops had captured much territory during Operation Product, including the richest parts of Java. The agreement forced the Republic to recognize the lost ground as Dutch territory and to withdraw its army from East and West Java – to the displeasure of many of the soldiers, politicians and popular leaders involved. In addition, the army leadership had announced that it wanted drastically to reduce and reorganize the armed forces. Militias in West Java blamed the leadership of the Republic for having forsaken the principles of the struggle for independence by negotiating with the Dutch, an indication that they had insufficient faith in the power of revolution.²⁶

In East Java, it was not so much separate militias as Republican army units that turned against their leaders in Yogyakarta – and with success, as shown in research by Gerry van Klinken and Maarten van der Bent.²⁷ Their study focuses on what they call a ‘revolutionary war’, to use sociologist Charles Tilly’s term: a struggle between ‘multiple sovereignties’ in the same territory, the outcome of which was determined by coalitions of sometimes competing parties. They demonstrate how Indonesian radicals exerted a decisive influence on the course of the revolution, a prime illustration of which being the life of Colonel Sungkono (1911-1977) and his actions in East Java. His life story is a perfect example of how radicalism and conformism could interact and alternate with one another during the Indonesian War of Independence, especially in the phase after ‘Operation Product’.

Sungkono, the son of a tailor, played a leading role among the young men who fought in the Battle of Surabaya in November 1945. He was then commander of a coordinating body called *Badan Keamanan Rakyat* (BKR, Organization for the Safety of the People), the forerunner of the Indonesian armed forces TNI. Haven risen in the hierarchy of the TNI, Sungkono understood all too well in early 1948 that the army had to be reduced and rationalized, in line with the wishes of the leadership of the Republic and the army command (which itself was not of one mind), but as a revolution-

ary he went along with the indignation felt by his men. The rationalization order meant a substantial reduction of the Republican force and was ultimately aimed at the army's future inclusion in a federal armed forces led by the Netherlands – or so he thought. Sungkono organized protest rallies among like-minded people in East Java. On 28 May 1948, he even declared that General Spoor and Prime Minister Beel had suggested the rationalization plan to Nasution in the context of the Renville Agreement. In response to this accusation, the authorities in Yogyakarta suspended Sungkono; an 'honour council' headed by Nasution convicted him of insubordination and demoted him.

The resistance from military units that, like Sungkono, were determined to maintain a massive people's army, was considerable, but this was by no means the only concern of the government in Yogyakarta. Its authority was also being challenged by other parties, starting with left-wing radicals and populist armed groups, who were initially stationed in Solo and had retreated to Madiun in East Java in September. Although these groups were included in the Indonesian armed forces in name, they had their own leaders and ideology. On 18 September 1948, the *Front Demokrasi Rakyat* (FDR, Democratic People's Front) – an alliance between the *Partai Sosialis*, the communist PKI, the socialist youth organization *Pesindo* and the important trade union federation *Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia* (SOBSI) – decided to occupy the local government offices, a move that Yogyakarta regarded as a communist coup in the heart of Republican territory. The government, which in the words of Van Klinken and Van der Bent 'did not have enough men to suppress the radicals they did not know, [thereupon] made peace with the radical it did know': Sungkono. They appointed him as military governor of East Java and instructed him to assist the Siliwangi division in the bloody crushing of the so-called Madiun uprising – which he did.

Sungkono established himself in a tiny village on the rugged northeast slopes of Wilis volcano, between Madiun and Kediri. His military controlled the black economy there. For example, coffee plantations were handed over to local farmers in exchange for a share of the proceeds; there was also trading in opium and weapons. Van Klinken and Van der Bent add that it was a situation that did not last long. In the course of 1950, people in East Java became increasingly dissatisfied with this military control. The press described Sungkono as a 'warlord'. In the end, he was given an office job in Jakarta on 6 June 1950.

In West Java, meanwhile, a completely different process had taken place. After Dutch troops had occupied that area, the Sundanese aristocrat Musa Suriakartalegawa declared – at the instigation of Van Mook, by his own account – the federal state of *Pasundan* in the spring of 1947. This did not last long, either; the state had already effectively collapsed even before the first Dutch offensive – only to be given new life in February 1948, immediately after the Renville Agreement. This was possible because the Republican troops were to withdraw as stipulated in that agreement – which they did, at least formally speaking.²⁸ The administration of Pasundan was weak, however, and proved unable to bring under effective control the entire area that the Republican troops had given up, even with support from Dutch

Colonel Sungkono (right, with flower in lapel) during a meeting with Republican troops at Kediri, September 1949. Source: Nationaal Archief/Dienst voor Legercontacten.



troops. In the process, a third party presented itself, the Islamic movement *Darul Islam* (DI, House of Islam), which aimed to establish an Islamic state in the archipelago. The DI took advantage of the weaknesses of the other parties and the prevailing discontent, but also of the diplomatic negotiations between the Netherlands and the Republic. All of this led on 7 August 1949 to the DI proclaiming its own state, *Negara Islam Indonesia*, in the middle of territory over which the Pasundan, the Netherlands and the Republic claimed control. Its army soon captured parts of West Java and from there fought against the Republic as well as against the Netherlands and the Pasundan government.²⁹ This put the population in these areas in an extraordinarily precarious position: where should their loyalty lie, and how should they act?

VIOLENCE, SUPPORT AND LOYALTY

Shifts in power relations, as described in the previous paragraph, led to complicated situations and coerced choices. People were confronted with rival authorities – potential and actual – that each laid claim to a political future and to power and legitimacy, and thus to control over communities. Where one authority ruled, another was excluded. The Republic, for example, refused to recognize states as part of a possible future federation and dismissed them as ‘puppets’ of the Dutch.³⁰

When different authorities clashed, it was the local communities that often suffered. Revolutionary wars, as the Indonesian-Dutch conflict can be called, are sometimes referred to as ‘wars among the people’ – at stake was their support and loyalty.³¹ In reality, however, the war also *targeted* people, whereby the differences between the various perpetrators of violence and their ultimate goals were often not clear to many people. This was particularly true of the border areas, where different spheres of influence collided or overlapped – areas and places where the battle for the people was often waged by potential rulers using all available means.

For all sides, violence was the perfect way to enforce support. Threatening with and using violence against civilians had a function: simply put, they were used, successfully or not, to create the desired order within the chaos. Violence – directed against individuals, village chiefs, Republican and Dutch administrators and fighters, and even entire (ethnic) communities – offered nascent rulers the opportunity to solve pressing problems, for prisoners, the starving, the expelled and the dead did not pose a threat, while doubters could be converted into supporters – if only for the sake of appear-

ances.³² Republican fighters were able to use their armed presence to threaten doubters, oust suspects and persuade sympathizers to participate in active resistance. Dutch violence, in all its varieties, mainly had a dampening effect on the political preferences and ideals of the people and could even (temporarily) eliminate them – just as well as Indonesian violence, which served the opposite aim. Both parties operated from the conviction that they knew best what was good for the people, whether that was Dutch protection or casting off the colonial yoke.³³

Thus, all warring parties deliberately used violence, often against civilians, to demonstrate who was in charge in a certain area. Against this background, it can be argued – perhaps somewhat cynically – that the mass murder of more than a thousand Chinese in Tangerang (West Java) by revolutionary militias should be seen not only as a dramatic, local ethnic cleansing, but also as an affirmation of the primacy of pemuda over the more traditional authority in this city. The Chinese were considered accomplices of the Dutch colonial regime, and their elimination symbolized the success of Indonesian independence.³⁴ Similarly, the visible heinousness with which local Indonesian leaders – up-and-coming or otherwise – slaughtered Indo-Europeans in the first months of the Indonesian revolution, which has become known in the Netherlands as the '*Bersiap* period', underlined the same thing: that the period of Dutch oppression was over. The violence moreover created a bond between leaders and followers.³⁵

A similar dynamic characterized the Dutch violence during the Indonesian War of Independence. That violence was by definition colonial and repressive. Violent action – and the threat to use violence – marked a return to, or confirmation of, the old order and dampened possible expressions of resistance to it, including political activities in favour of the Republic. Violence in the public sphere had a deterring or intimidating function: for example, corpses of alleged perpetrators were hung alongside the road or not removed after they had been shot. In one notorious case, the head of a resistance fighter was impaled on a fence at the local market.³⁶ After Westerling and the Depot Special Forces had left a trail of death and destruction through Sulawesi, there was a sharp decline in large-scale and organized anti-Dutch resistance. On Bali, brief but very intensive violence paved the way for Van Mook's plans for a federal Indonesia – an effect that Westerling's violence in South Sulawesi also had.³⁷ This terror was effective, purely from a utilitarian point of view, although it could ultimately backfire.



The bodies of c. 30 Indonesians, arrested and shot by the Depot Special Forces (Depot Speciale Troepen) in retaliation for an attack on the prison and homes of two Dutch officials in Kampung Baru, South Sulawesi, early January 1947. Shortly hereafter, another 24 prisoners were executed. By order of the commander, the bodies remained on the ground for half a day. Source: H.C. Kavelaars, NIMH.

Whenever ‘friend’ and ‘enemy’ were difficult to separate – a characteristic feature of guerrilla warfare – all of the parties involved used violence more often and more intensively. As a result, many villages fell prey to Dutch patrols and units, which often unceremoniously shot civilians. On the other hand, in early 1947, for example, the *Laskar Pemberontak Turatea* (Laptur), a combat group in Turatea, South Sulawesi, murdered – in the name of the revolution – large numbers of villagers who had collaborated with the Dutch authorities, on suspicion of anti-revolutionary behaviour.³⁸ In these cases, too, the violence was far from ‘useless’: on the contrary, it was the result of an internal logic that implicitly legitimized its character.

An apt illustration of the way in which various parties used violence to get the population on their side were the events after the Renville Agreement, in January 1948. As indicated above, this agreement stipulated that the TNI withdraw from East and West Java, behind the demarcation line, in the direction of Yogyakarta. In addition, a plebiscite was to be organized, to allow the people to speak in favour of autonomy within the federated state of Indonesia that was being pursued by the Netherlands. Although the TNI seemed to adhere to the commitment to withdraw, plenty of pro-Republican armed groups remained throughout West Java to put pressure on the people in order to influence the atmosphere around the plebiscite. In turn, Dutch soldiers made extensive use of violence to make it clear to villagers how they should behave.

The extent to which the people could be crushed between the various parties became clear in late January 1949 in the vicinity of Sukabumi. Four days after a Red Cross truck hit a land mine planted by the guerrilla forces, killing two soldiers and seriously wounding another, a full-scale revenge operation took place: paratroops from the special forces (Korps Speciale Troepen) shot 116 residents, including elderly people and children, in various villages and destroyed 90 houses with mortar fire.³⁹ The village leaders from the area then turned to the head of the federal state of Pasundan asking for justice, drawing a comparison with German and Japanese war crimes. The village leaders acknowledged that there were people who had ‘embraced a [certain] political trend’ that the Dutch did not like, but that this was no reason to ‘cleanse’ the villages.⁴⁰

Following these complaints, the Dutch administration initiated an investigation. It found that there had been no question of revenge, but ‘that there were many fatalities due to a lack of understanding back and forth between

the local military power and the people, without putting the blame on one side or the other'. The army command therefore decided to let the matter 'rest' – although the handling of this case left a somewhat bad taste in the mouth for army commander Spoor. However, even before the case was settled, the same Red Berets had committed another massacre in the same area, resulting in 77 deaths, five rapes and 177 cases of theft.⁴¹

And there are countless examples of violence – from the 'cleansing' of villages to executions without trial and mass internment – that served primarily to force the people into support or cooperation, on the part of all parties involved and not infrequently (on the Dutch side, at least) by invoking 'military necessity'.⁴² The same claim of 'necessity' also led on the part of the revolutionaries to increasingly loose interpretations of target categories, and to violence quickly acquiring a revolutionary character. Uniformed fighters could rob village leaders for no particular reason.⁴³ Those who held administrative positions in territory occupied by the Netherlands were collaborators who could be murdered.⁴⁴ Indonesian managers of Dutch plantations were kidnapped or murdered as traitors, sometimes together with their families.⁴⁵ Where their political sympathies truly lay made no difference.

In Depok, near Jakarta, Europeans and Indo-Europeans were targeted in late 1945 because of their 'strong commitment to Dutch colonial rule' and their high economic status as major landowners, as shown in research by Tri Wahyuning M. Irsyam.⁴⁶ Although the violence that descended on the inhabitants of Depok in October of that year – resulting in more than twenty deaths – was perpetrated by Indonesians decorated with 'red and white symbols', it was the vulgar desire to strip these landowners of their wealth that seemed to prevail. The perpetrators 'took valuables, looted' and threw away everything without value, 'so that the roads on the private estates were strewn with possessions'.⁴⁷

REACTIONS AND LOYALTIES

Faced with the violence used by rival parties to occupy an area and bring the population under control, local and regional administrators – and sometimes even entire communities – fled *en masse* for shorter or longer periods of time. When Republican violence came too close, they slept in rice fields or sought refuge at night in cities controlled by the Netherlands or even at Dutch posts.⁴⁸ Residents fled before and also during attacks, which led to huge refugee flows – if at least we can go by newspaper reports, with

the possibility that events were exaggerated or downplayed for propagandistic reasons. For example, thousands of Chinese left Tangerang in mid-1946 when the disturbances began there.⁴⁹ People fled Subang when Dutch troops advanced towards the city during the Dutch offensive in the summer of 1947.⁵⁰ In Sumatra, fighting also prompted evacuees to flee, victims of the TNI's 'scorched earth' strategy. Displaced in Republican territory, tens of thousands tried to return to their homes, which were now in Dutch occupied territory.⁵¹ Entire villages were sometimes found virtually deserted, such as Wonosobo in Central Java in January 1949.⁵² According to Dutch sources, some 3,000 people tried in March 1947 to move from Republican territory to Dutch territory in search of work.⁵³ As a result of these itinerant crowds, many camps arose on Java where refugees, both Indonesians and Europeans, had to be fed and clothed. All across Sumatra and Java, people roamed in search of safety, both on Dutch and Republican territory, and sometimes moving between them.⁵⁴

If one would-be ruler radiated authority in a convincing way, this had a 'pull effect', causing that ruler to gain more and more support. Individuals and groups entered into a new affiliation with the strongest party in an area, at the expense of their previous commitment to another party. In cases where Dutch troops ruled in a credible manner, it could happen that members of the people's militias (*laskar rakyat*) laid down their arms. Military-political supremacy could generate support; this happened at different times and moments. When the federal state of Pasundan in West Java seemed strong enough, Republican officials came to report for work, as happened in Bogor in May 1947.⁵⁵ With the Dutch show of force during the capture of the city of Sukabumi in August 1947 still fresh in their minds, Republican officials understood all too well how they should interpret the Dutch request for cooperation.⁵⁶ In numerous areas occupied by the Netherlands, Republican shadow administrations or administrators were active. But when, in turn, the Republic and its representatives seemed strong, the reverse happened and Indonesians who collaborated with the Dutch secretly sided with the Republic, sometimes even by committing acts of resistance.⁵⁷

Taking sides in response to shifts in front lines and power relations was one thing; it was quite another when a community was in danger of being caught between two or more parties. In such cases, the villagers were forced to divide their attention between those in power. For example, village leaders and their followers in the middle of Dutch territory signed

statements that they supported those resistance cells that had stayed behind.⁵⁸ Not infrequently, powerful signals were also sent out: in September 1947, for example, TNI soldiers murdered sympathizers of the federal *Daerah Soematra Timur* in Tebing Tinggi, North Sumatra, so that other inhabitants knew where their sympathies should lie; at least that is how it was recorded in Dutch sources.⁵⁹ For many villagers in the state of Pasundan, where the 'official' authority was not effective, the precarious balance of power meant that in 1949 they also started supporting the fighters of Darul Islam.⁶⁰

For the Chinese population, the situation was particularly dire in many areas. For example, the Chinese communities in and around Medan, North Sumatra, tried to break free from traditional interest representation through Dutch channels, but Indonesians distrusted them, despite their sympathy for the revolution.⁶¹ In order to protect themselves and their possessions from revolutionary violence, in January 1946 the Chinese in Medan organized a security corps, the *Pao An Tui* – first under the British flag, and later under the Dutch flag.⁶² Divisions of this corps also cooperated with Republican authorities, but it was not long before pemuda and Chinese clashed.⁶³ In the end, the Chinese in Medan looked to Dutch authorities for more protection; the *Pao An Tui* was then incorporated into the Dutch security system.⁶⁴ Similar patterns emerged on Java and Sumatra.

Just how complicated relations could be at the regional or local level is clear from Taufik Ahmad's micro-historical study of the Polombangkeng region in South Sulawesi in the years 1945-1949.⁶⁵ Ahmad investigated the role and position of the different groups in this region, the alliances they entered into, and their relationship with the changing authorities. The revolution and the Dutch attempts to restore its colonial power created a new arena for political competition between elites, which also involved the lower layers of the population. Banditry, which was deeply rooted in society, played a crucial role in this.

This power struggle can best be understood through an analysis of the history of the toloq in Polombangkeng. These toloq are a social group consisting of fearless, strong people of distinction who did not hesitate to break the law in order to achieve their goals. The term toloq refers to astute and dedicated leaders of thieves and is therefore often associated with banditry.⁶⁶ During the upheavals in South Sulawesi, these toloq were confronted with various choices: to join pro-Republican alliances or the Netherlands

East Indies Civil Administration (NICA), or to remain elusive. Also playing a role were their diverse relationships with the local nobility, who were divided amongst themselves. The NICA took advantage of this and succeeded in persuading some of them to take its side. Importantly, the royal family of Bajeng – the name by which Polombangkeng was originally known – explicitly positioned itself as a supporter of the Republic of Indonesia. Subsequently, the state of East Indonesia (*Negara Indonesia Timur*, NIT) was formed – a construction that on the one hand was interpreted as an attempt by the Netherlands to maintain its power, but on the other hand seemed to offer a way out of the dilemma of choosing between a pro-Republican or a pro-Dutch stance. For the different toloq, this intricate power constellation created space for new alliances, shifts in alliances, and/or opportunities to strengthen old alliances. In doing so, they used violent practices: raids, theft, setting fire to houses, and executions of alleged opponents and ‘spies’ – NICA supporters in the case of pro-Republican toloq, and Republicans in the case of pro-Dutch toloq.

As elsewhere, the dividing lines in Polombangkeng were not tightly defined. A remarkable aspect of the revolutionary alliances was that it was quite common for someone to cooperate with the Dutch but for his children to help fighters who were supporters of the Bajeng family, for example, by providing food and shelter. On the other hand, it could also happen that a family member who had joined the Bajeng fighters was cared for in the house of a pro-Dutch relative.⁶⁷

There are countless examples from all the regions and all the parties that show that borders and loyalties in these years of war and revolution were often fluid. This also applied to the relationship between the state of East Indonesia (NIT) and the Republic. Despite the mutual violence, at times these parties were not as fiercely opposed to each other than thought, and certainly than the Dutch regime would have liked. For many politicians, participation in the NIT stemmed from a strategic choice, self-interest or opportunism, or a combination thereof, while at the same time their ideals were not far those of the Republic, as Sarkawi B. Husain shows in his study of Eastern Indonesia.⁶⁸ Some even saw the NIT primarily as a means of building bridges – which is why they advocated using the red and white flag and the national anthem ‘Indonesia Raya’, the symbols of the Republic, for the NIT as well. According to pro-Republican NIT politicians, singing a shared national anthem and hoisting one national flag would promote peace throughout the archipelago.

By 1949, as it became clear to more and more people that the Republic would win, it became easier for some, but more necessary for others, to show their true colours. Republican ‘shadow governments’, some of which had been active for years, emerged in West and East Java and Sumatra, while numerous federal politicians and administrators sided with the Republic without much fuss. The same also applied to paramilitaries and police officers in Dutch service on Java and Sumatra, many of whom had already deserted *en masse* in the course of 1948, if not out of political conviction then out of fear of being attacked, kidnapped or murdered. Officials from the state of Pasundan left with the Dutch troops and administrators, only to return a few weeks later to rally behind the Republic.⁶⁹

CONCLUSION

An important goal of the research programme was to situate the actions of the Dutch armed forces during the Indonesian War of Independence in their historical, political and international context. That context was primarily shaped by the revolutionary developments in Indonesia – and it is these developments that have been the subject of this chapter.

That context was considerably more complex and layered than the image that has remained in the public culture of remembrance in the Netherlands, but also in Indonesia: the image of a single war between the Republic and the Netherlands. That depiction is, of course, itself a product of history – nurtured in the Republic, promulgated in the words of Wolter Mongisidi, with which this chapter began, and then repeated and sanctioned time and again. In the Netherlands, the one-dimensional image that is perpetuated in the public culture of remembrance – not so much in the historiography – emerged only later. During the war, the divisions and chaos of the Indonesian nationalists were emphasized – obviously to justify the Dutch reoccupation.

In this chapter we have tried to give an idea of the layered nature and complexity of the Indonesian revolution by focusing on regional developments and movements, not only around the theme of violence, but also in the political and social spheres. And that yields a very diverse picture: there were grand and compelling ambitions – complete independence for Indonesia, a social revolution, a new generation – but there was also a complex daily reality in which some, simply to survive in times of war, engaged with various small, sometimes even personal ideals, which together led to ‘the’ revolution.

Out of the various sub-projects in this research project emerges a picture of rivalry, but also of fluidity and ambiguity with regard to the boundaries between parties and the loyalty of citizens. This fluidity even applies to the categories of perpetrators and victims. Indonesians, Chinese, Dutch, Indo-Europeans and others were not just victims or perpetrators, precisely because the violence in this revolutionary war acted as a means to bind locally or regionally present communities – Indonesians, Chinese, Indo-Europeans – to a certain programme, to force them into loyalty and support, and thereby to undermine the position of other parties. The non-combative individuals and communities were often at the end of the chain of violence and soon became victims of the mutually exclusive parties that were fighting for power and legitimacy. Dutch soldiers and Indonesians or Chinese fighting under the Dutch flag were involved in this as perpetrators, but also pemuda, soldiers of the Republican army or – for example – communist or Islamic-oriented groups.

The authority of the Republic was also not undisputed in its own territory. In different areas, the Republic was confronted with rival parties, such as the Darul Islam movement and left-wing revolutionaries – which continued to agitate even after 1950. The heterogeneous nationalist youth movement, collectively referred to as pemuda, demanded a forward-looking, uncompromising attitude from the Republic, based on *perjuangan* (struggle) and one hundred percent independence. This clashed with the ambitions and strategy of the leadership in the political heart of the Republic, Yogyakarta; and that rivalry also regularly escalated into violence.

In areas where more than one of these nascent authorities operated, often in border areas, the people were confronted with multiple parties, each demanding support and trying to enforce it by force if necessary. That was a particularly risky position. Local communities developed a strategy of shifting and multiple loyalties in the hope of escaping the violence that almost inevitably followed if they failed to offer support, but also to gain influence or access to food and clothing themselves.

When one authority was able to assert itself in a certain area for a longer period of time, loyalty to other authorities usually decreased or even seemed to disappear altogether. Such a demonstrative transition marked obedience to the new authority and prevented revenge for previous ‘collaboration’. For the Dutch administration and the Dutch armed forces, but equally for their Republican counterparts, such shifts in loyalty often came as an unpleasant surprise, because they thought they had a ‘grip’ on the population. In the

end, the Republic finally prevailed. It was only at the end of the war that it became clear how much the balance had tipped against the Netherlands: while support for the Republic had only grown, local support for the colonial government had largely evaporated.

