

# The Making of Politically Conscious Indonesian Teachers in Public Schools, 1930–42\*

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This paper deals with the emergence of political consciousness among Indonesian teachers and students in public Dutch-Indonesian teacher training schools (*Hollands Inlandse Kweekschool*, HIK) during the last colonial decade up to the beginning of the Japanese occupation in 1942. Most of the Indonesian teachers and students, who pursued careers and education respectively in government schools, had initially embarked from personal expectations of upward economic mobility. Yet, in the course of the 1930s, they grew in deliberate willingness and perception to engage in a wider scope of social dynamics without limiting themselves to the area of power politics. In this paper, the manner in which these students and teachers gave meaning to their daily lives inside and outside of school is identified and analyzed as the factor that critically contributed to the emergence of political consciousness among them. Although the transformation that the teachers underwent in their view of school education was a radical leap when seen from the perspective of the Indonesia-centric historiography of the 1930s, it did not actually show a process of transformative pedagogy. The sense of citizenship that the teachers shared in the 1930s, albeit a dramatic shift from the motivation that had originally propelled them, did not reflect the notion of public education as an independent practice of cultural upbringing irrelevant to the state and state-formation ideology.

**Keywords:** Indonesian teachers, the 1930s, Critical Pedagogy, political consciousness

## Introduction

Existing studies on the relationship between Western education and changes in Indonesian society in the early twentieth century feature the education of schoolteachers in the

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frame of the making of indigenous middle-class elites (see, for example, Sutherland 1979; Kahin 1980, 179–180). In such a frame, the taxonomic category of schoolteachers falls into what Robert van Niel (1960, republished 1984, 2) calls functional elite, namely, “leaders who served to keep a modernized state and society functioning” by joining no organization, having no active political view, and engaging in no power politics. While such a frame of study affirms the analysis of colonial education as dominantly bearing the mission of economic reproduction (Furnivall 1939, 365–366), it misses the paradigm of education as a driving force in the process of social change (Giroux 1981; 2003). Furthermore, although a number of studies have examined the role of Western education in modernizing Indonesian society, they have hardly revealed the social orientation and political horizon of schoolteachers as critical agents in that process.

The aim of this paper is to outline the emergence of political consciousness among Indonesian teachers in public primary schools as well as students in public Dutch-language teacher training schools for Indonesian children (*Hollands Inlandse Kweekschool*, HIK) from the 1930s to the beginning of the Japanese occupation in 1942. “Political consciousness” refers to the deliberate willingness and perception of the students and teachers of HIK to get involved in a wider scope of the process of social change. The term has been derived from the concept of “engagement” in the Critical Pedagogy theory proposed by some thinkers, such as Paolo Freire (1970) and Henry Giroux (1981; 2003). According to the theory, as the political nature of teaching fundamentally changes across time, so also does “the importance of linking pedagogy to social change.” Schools have to connect “critical learning to the experiences and histories that students brought to the classroom, [and to] engage the space of schooling as a site of contestation, resistance, and possibility” (Giroux 2003, 6).

Niel (1984, 242) writes that in the context of the growing Indonesian nationalism of the early twentieth century, “being political” meant being involved in activities or organizations whose principal goal was to supersede the colonial power. Although in his study Niel does not go beyond the 1920s, his definition of “being political” or “being politically conscious” was still applicable to the education context of the 1930s but only with regard to students and teachers of unsubsidized private schools that the Netherlands Indies government categorized as “unofficial schools” (*wilde scholen*). This notion is well illustrated, for example, in the novel *Buiten het Gareel: Een Indonesische Roman* (Out of control: An Indonesian Roman) by Soewarsih Djojopoespito (1942, republished 1986).

For the many Indonesian students and teachers at government schools and subsidized private schools in the 1930s, most of whom had initially seen Western education as a personal ladder for upward economic mobility, becoming political or politically con-

scious in the context of the last colonial decade meant being aware of social roles and responsibilities that did not necessarily relate to the teaching profession for which they had been trained. For about three decades after 1900, Conservative supporters of the Ethical Policy had shaped Western education in the Netherlands Indies as adjuncts of the workplace. “Technocratic rationality upon the learning process” (Giroux 2003, 6) was imposed because there was a growing influx of indigenous children into Dutch-language schools (Veur 1969; Lelyveld 1992). The main motivation for such an influx was that Western education improved the employability, and hence the living standard and social status, of graduates (Verbondsbestuur PGHB 1930).

In the 1930s, such a right-wing construct and insight into schooling was dramatically altered. The changing economy and politics in the larger context of the Netherlands Indies stimulated a shift in the perception of Indonesian students and teachers about the education they had been enjoying and the roles they had to play in society. The Great Depression overthrew the dream these Indonesian generations had lived with, of the personal economic progress that their education would have promised them (Agus Suwignyo 2013). In addition, the radical movements of activists in *wilde scholen* provided them with an alternative perspective of what an education should mean for society at large, as the testimony of Djoko Sanjoto (1991), then an HIK student, reveals. Here, the Critical Pedagogy theory, in which school agents deployed an understanding of the structure of social relationships and responsibilities within society, applied. Through external and internal processes of learning, HIK students and Indonesian teachers at public schools began to deal with issues of class, race, and gender in order to “participate in the educational discourses, pedagogical practices, and institutional relations that shaped their everyday lives” (Giroux 2003, 6). Then, in the 1930s, politically conscious teachers did not limit their focus to such vertical-mobility issues as teaching professionalism and welfare, although these issues were still extremely important. Instead, they widened their worldview to include such “horizontal-mobility” issues as social and structural changes. Even though, for these students and teachers, being politically conscious did not necessarily mean being engaged in political activities or organizations, the shift in their political horizon and consciousness during the 1930s was a significant phase as it became the seedbed for a more radical sense of citizenship and a more active role in Indonesian nation-state building in the 1950s, in which many of them held key positions of decision making (Soegarda 1970). Unfortunately, the writing of Indonesian history has overlooked this critical phase of political shift and has not generally provided room for the roles that schoolteachers played.

The term “making,” in the title of this paper, stands for an “active process, which owes as much to agency as to conditioning” (Thompson 1963, 9). The process of emerg-

ing consciousness among Indonesian teachers, alumni, and students of HIK, although owing much to the period of Japanese occupation, was not confined to the period between 1942 and 1945. Shigeru Sato (2007, 159–189) has suggested that the wartime period in Indonesia should be looked into beyond the common time frame of the Japanese occupation. One of the implications of such a step is that, instead of being a prime cause, the Japanese occupation becomes a catalyst for the structural changes that occurred in Indonesian lives. This holds true if the school education situation is explored. For at least a decade before the Japanese military invasion of the Indonesian islands in 1942, the grip of the Western imperial ruler had been weakening in many respects; and therefore, in the field of school education and teacher training, the fall of the colonial state in Indonesia cannot be attributed to the Japanese occupation alone.

Toward the end of the 1930s, school education in Indonesia had been functioning more or less within the framework of a stabilizing economy, but in a destabilizing political milieu. The reopening of many schools in Java and Sumatra during the second half of the 1930s indicated a recovery from the enervating years of the Great Depression, as the Government Educational Report shows (*Algemeen Verslag van het Onderwijs 1936/1937* 1939). A reform of—and consequent progress in—education was in the offing, but the government “breakthrough educational reform” of 1939 (Wal 1963, 677) did not necessarily signal a reshuffle of the stratified school system, which had barred indigenous children from sharing equal access to different types of public schools.

At the end of the 1930s, teachers and teacher candidates at public schools remained only a thin intellectual layer in the indigenous community. Following the reform of the teacher training schools (*kweekschool*) in 1927, they had been exposed to an increasing degree of quality training that secured them a future status substantially different from the majority of the indigenous population (*Advies van den Onderwijsraad [Kweekschoolplan] 1927*). The social stratification based on education stood firm. It might even be said that the existing educational structure seemed to be moving toward a steady construction of a colonial *Indische* plural society, in which the various types of schooling would continue to reproduce members of the various ethnic communities with teachers as the role models.

Yet the Great Depression, followed by the changing political environment, began to rock the foundations of colonial society and upset the aspirations the students fostered for their future. Like an afternoon breeze in a humid tropical climate, the dream conception of “Indonesia” blended with heroic tales of the Japanese wars against Russia and China. News of German expansion plans and the Italian war in Ethiopia, as published in different volumes of *Persatoean Goeroe*, a teacher journal, also reached the classrooms and boarding houses of public schools such as the HIK. But it was not until the raids of

the Japanese air force above Java in March 1942 that teachers and teacher candidates were convinced that the times were changing, as testified by R. Suroso (1992, 30–32), a first-year HIK student of 1942. In their privileged positions, government teaching personnel had never been totally immune to news and rumors about the macro-political situation. Some of their seniors, especially those who had dropped out of training and had not pursued a teaching career, plunged themselves into all kinds of organizations and local presses (Abdurrachman 2008, 131, 198). Exposure to mass media and increasing public rallies organized by youth organizations, contacts with colleagues from unofficial schools, and changes in domestic rules within the school all conspired to make HIK students gradually aware of the slackening grip of the colonial master. By the end of the 1930s, students and alumni of teacher training schools had begun to imagine a society beyond the colonial construct, as R. Darsoyono Poespitoatmodjo (1987, 49), a 1935 graduate of the Yogyakarta HIK, has testified. Among Indonesian teachers and students at government schools in particular, the 1930s were crucial to the development of a self-perception of their identity, position, and roles in the broader context of *the* Indonesian society, which was still in the making.

In this paper, I consider students of public HIK and Indonesian teachers in public primary schools of the 1930s as one cohort of eyewitnesses. Although spanning different age groups and pedagogical roles, they had some characteristics in common in terms of the steps toward becoming politically conscious. The majority of them came from socially lower-class families. Both students and teachers followed the training provided by the Netherlands Indies government. Most of those who graduated during the 1930s worked in the government service. They witnessed, and were part of, the changing Indonesian society during the period. Those who survived the Japanese occupation continued to serve as role models of intellectuals for an independent Indonesian society, either by teaching or by entering other professional fields. For these commonalities of characteristics, both teachers and students comprise one overall picture of an Indonesian generation of teaching personnel. The term “Indonesian teachers in public schools” in the title of this paper should therefore be defined as both Indonesian teachers who held teaching positions in public schools during the period under study, and Indonesian teacher candidates who were receiving training in public HIK during the same period.

In exploring the process of the emergence of political consciousness, my attempt is to take the perspective of the teachers and students themselves by examining daily events of their professional lives. For this purpose, direct quotes of the source texts are provided throughout this paper. The quotes, which are originally in the Indonesian/Malay language, are classified in groups on the basis of thematic similarity and are presented in English through my own translation. A short discussion follows each group of thematic

quotes. Although an alteration in meaning might occur, the direct quote technique is considered to be the most feasible technique to obtain a “life” nuance of the teachers’ perspectives and the realm of their thoughts. In this paper, both teacher journals that were published during the period under study and those published in more recent times are used as sources. The former include *Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe* in West Sumatra, *Sinar Goeroe Vorstenlanden* in Yogyakarta and Surakarta, and *Persatoean Goeroe*. An example of the latter is the journal *Gema*, which was first published in 1978 by the Association of Alumni and Ex-students of the HIK of Yogyakarta.

The organization of this paper is as follows: Following the foregoing Introduction section, this paper discusses the socioeconomic background of teachers. Then it deals with the process of the changing political horizon of teachers, followed by students. Finally, the concluding remarks attempt to present an interpretive description aiming to bind the elaborated data into a theoretical discussion.

## **Socioeconomic Background**

Against the backdrop of colonial circumstances, students at public HIK were trained in an academic atmosphere that isolated them from the idea of political and structural change. In some cases, exposure to social problems led them to undertake philanthropically motivated actions. This was part of the indigenization exercise, as Yasuf Bilyarta Mangunwijaya beautifully illustrates in the novel *Balada Dara-Dara Mendut* (A ballad of the girls of Mendut) (1993). This characteristic situation coalesced with the personal motivation of students. Many of those who attended teacher training schools had chosen to do so for socioeconomic reasons. Umi Kalsum, for example, went to the teacher training school in Yogyakarta in 1908 against her own wishes. She had dreamed of becoming a physician, but her father, who worked as a teacher in the government service, found it too expensive to send her to the medical school in Batavia. After graduating from her European primary school, Umi, whose mastery of Dutch was “above average” for the entrance qualification to general high school, was accepted straight away into the third year of the *kweekschool* at which her father worked (Soeprapto 1984, 46–48).

Some two or three decades after Umi’s experience, there had been hardly any changes in the students’ backgrounds or their motivation for attending teacher training school. In 1929, for example, Soeparmo entered the HIK in Yogyakarta because his parents were too poor to afford his education at other types of European schools. Soeparmo recalled:

I had actually wanted to become an engineer. For that, I had to go to the MULO [*Meer Uitgebreid Lager Onderwijs*, upper primary school], then to the AMS [*Algemeen Middelbare School*, high school], and finally to the *Technische Hogeschool* [Technical Institute] in Bandung. But I realized that my parents simply could not afford these long stints of schooling, which were all part of the European stream. So, after graduating from an HIS [*Hollands Inlandse School*, Dutch-language primary school for Indonesian children] in Salatiga, Central Java, I rather unwillingly accepted a recommendation (*verklaring*) from the HIS principal for a test-free entrance to the HIK in Yogyakarta. (Soeparmo 1987, 73–78)

By moving to the HIK, Soeparmo made a quantum leap forward. He had come from a village school and a second-class school in Banjarsari, near Boyolali in Central Java.

“I had always desired a Western education because it provided broader chances for a career [than indigenous schooling could have done]. But the only Western school available where I came from was the Hollands Javaansche School (HJS), a private school equivalent to public HIS,” he wrote in another testimony (Soeparmo 1988, 31–37). After graduating from the second-class school, he went to the HJS in Boyolali. “But I realized that it was difficult for someone from a private primary school to move on to a public secondary school,” he added. “At the end of sixth form at the HJS, I gathered up my courage to sit for a test to be able to transfer to seventh form of the HIS in Salatiga, and I passed the test. That was how I could finally make my way to the HIK” (*ibid.*, 36–37). Soeparmo wrote further:

During my HIK years, my parents’ financial situation did not improve. Sometimes, for a few consecutive months they could not send me Fl. 5 for school fees and Fl. 3.5 for books and school facilities. As I performed well academically, I was granted “*gratis leerling* status” [tuition waiver] when I was in second year, thus I no longer had to pay those fees. In spite of my academic performance at the HIK, I still did not want to become a teacher. By the time I was in third year, I managed to switch to the AMS, but this attempt failed totally. In the end I accepted that it was my “destiny” to be a teacher. (Soeparmo 1987, 73–78)

Another testimony comes from Burhanuddin Nasution (1987, 79–87). Born in Kotanopan, in the subdistrict area of Tapanuli, North Sumatra, Burhanuddin identified himself as “a country boy.” Most of his classmates from the HIS went on to the MULO in Padangsidempuan or to the public *Hogere Burger School* in Medan for secondary education. “Given the financial situation of my parents, I personally had only two options: to give up schooling or to go to a public HIK. I chose the second,” he wrote. After graduating from the HIS in Tapanuli in 1936, Burhanuddin received a test-free recommendation to continue at the HIK in Yogyakarta. He does not seem to have experienced the same dramatic financial problems as Soeparmo. Nevertheless, it was not until his father’s death, while he was in the second year of the HIK, that he began to think seriously about

a teaching profession.

Asvismarmo entered the HIK, also in Yogyakarta, in 1939. In an interview in his home in the neighborhood of Cipete in South Jakarta on October 4, 2006, he said: “I actually wanted to go to the Prinses Juliana School (PJS), a vocational engineering school, which was located just opposite the HIK. But the PJS was too expensive for my parents. At the HIK, I paid Fl. 7.5 per month, all inclusive.”

Samsuri went to the HIK because his father was a village school teacher. “I grew up in a teacher’s family; that was why I wanted to be a teacher,” he said during an interview in his home in the city of Malang, East Java, on November 3, 2006. As a child who came from a lower social-class rural family, he had to take a roundabout schooling path before he could apply to the HIK: six years in the indigenous line of education—in *volks-school* and *vervolg-school*, then two years in *schakelschool*, which bridged him to the European line of education. Unlike others, Samsuri’s motivation for going to the HIK might be considered primary in the sense that, inspired by his father, he did want to become a teacher.

These testimonies provide a brief illustration of the fact that as far as life histories can be traced, the socioeconomic situation of parents was as much a push factor as a pull factor in making the decision to attend public HIK. Students were pushed to go to teacher training schools because their parents could not afford to send them to other types of European schools. According to Imam Sajono, who enrolled in the HIK in Yogyakarta in 1939, he and most of his colleagues at the HIK realized that teaching, although in their opinions less prestigious than working as an engineer or a medical doctor, could still offer the promise of a socioeconomic position much better than that provided by other jobs in the indigenous sphere (Imam, interview, Jakarta, September 6, 2006). This “better-than-nothing” perception of the prospect of teaching drew them to achieve successes throughout and right up to the top of the training phases. The students’ focus on vertical-mobility issues during the school years is understandable considering their socioeconomic backgrounds. Qualified as their training had designed them to be, these students were mostly engaged in professional issues. They were trained to be teachers to serve, and not to oppose, the late-colonial state.

How different was the situation of activists in private unsubsidized schools, which the Netherlands Indies government called *wilde scholen* (unofficial schools) in 1932! Ki Hadjar Dewantara (R. M. Soewardi Soerjaningrat), the founder of the Taman Siswa schools in 1922, was a member of the Paku Alam royal family in Yogyakarta. In 1909 he quit medical school in Batavia and became politically active, which led to his being exiled to the Netherlands in 1913 (Abdurrachman 2008, 96–97). Soewarsih Djojopoespito, a teacher at the Taman Siswa school (first in Surabaya, then in Bandung), was from a



Sundanese royal family in Cirebon. She had enjoyed a European primary education in Bogor and had then attended the European *kweekschool* in Surabaya before graduating in 1931 (Termorshuizen 1986, 220–224). More examples can be highlighted to prove the more privileged backgrounds of nationalist activists. For these people, becoming actively engaged in nationalist activities and organizations—becoming political—was a conscious choice. They deliberately left the socially and economically established lives they had led, for an ideal that they considered higher. In contrast, many HIK students had come from nonestablished families. They went to the HIK to pursue a place in the establishment via the teaching profession. Again, in interviews (September 6 and October 12, 2006), Imam said:

[Being] a schoolteacher was a step to material and social welfare (*welvaart*). Being a schoolteacher was all lower-middle-class families like mine could imagine. Many of my friends did so, but only a few could make it because of the strict entrance selection. When you finally achieved the teaching position and received your salary as an HIK graduate, you had achieved a very high status in society. If you were still single, many parents wanted to marry their daughters to you.

For HIK students, becoming political in the same sense as their counterparts in unofficial schools had been was not a matter of choice. It was an inescapable condition, especially in the wake of the Japanese arrival. Therefore, in their case, the meaning of “being political” should not be understood primarily as an involvement in nationalist activities or organizations. It embraced a widening horizon; it was a process of rebuilding self-perception, individual identity, and social roles and relationships.

### The Seeds and the Seeding Ground: Teachers

Various teachers’ journals (bulletins, newspapers, magazines) disclose that in the first half of the 1930s, an atmosphere of change was already reshaping the public school lives of teachers. In many cases, they were exposed to the concept of unity—not necessarily the nationalists’ pursuit of independence, but a dream of a new era for Indonesian society. The following quote, from the December 1930 issue of *Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe*, a journal published in Bukittinggi by the West Coast of Sumatra Association of Indonesian Teachers, well illustrates the changing atmosphere:

Advance Indonesia! Unite! Let us work together to achieve Greater Indonesia! Look at the Japanese! . . . Take them as a role model! (*Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe* 12, Year 10, December 1930)

In June 1931, *Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe* republished an article from *Indonesia Moeda* titled

“Semangat Baroe Menoedjoe Indonesia Raja” (New spirit toward Greater Indonesia) in which “the renaissance of Indonesia” was explored. “Our people begin to become aware and hence capable of differentiating between the darkness and the light, between the colored and the white. The crow of a rooster is a sign of dawn!” the article reads (*Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe* 6, Year 11, June 1931, 106–109). In August 1931, the editors of the journal cited an article from *S[oeara] Mardéka* titled “Oedjian bagi Ra’jat Indonesia tentang Persatoean dan Politiek” (Test on unity and politics for Indonesian people). The article discusses a railway strike in Semarang, stressing the importance of national unity (*Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe* 8, Year 11, August 1931, 154–157).

In October 1931, *Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe* sent out an explicit call:

Day by day, our national movement is growing. Every Indonesian boy and girl has to be responsible for the advancement of our nation. We teachers should not be left behind in this glorious work! Let us educate our children in the Indonesian way, in the spirit of being Indonesian, for they have to be Indonesian people in the fullest sense. Now, our schools are in the hands of foreigners. But we Indonesian teachers have to convince ourselves that we are more capable [than those foreigners] of educating our children, for we understand our children better [than they do]. Let us educate our children in the spirit of Indonesia. Let us teach them the refinement of our arts and literature, and the glory of our heroes such as Diponegoro and Teuku Oemar. Let us teach our children the lyrics of the beauty of our land! (*Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe* 10, Year 11, October 1931, 209–211)

In the newspaper *Persatoean Goeroe*, which was published in Surakarta by the Federation of Indonesian Teachers’ Associations (Perserikatan Guru Hindia Belanda, PGHB), the idea of unity was mostly dealt with as an attempt to tackle the status of teachers as individual members of the federation (Awas 1930). To get a perspective of how extensive the impact of such a call for unity in *Persatoean Goeroe* was, it is relevant to mention that in 1930 the newspaper was read by some 12,000 individual members of the PGHB spread in 102 branches. These members were teachers who joined various associations under the PGHB, including the Village Teacher Association (Persatuan Guru Desa), the Normal School Association (Persatuan Normal School, PNS), the Teacher School Association (Kweekschool Bond), and the Higher Teacher School Association (Hogere Kweekschool Bond, HKS Bond) (*Persatoean Goeroe* 5–6, March 1930).

It was pointed out that professionally and socially individual teachers were ranked according to the segregated system of training they had followed; unity meant a convergence into one professional category. The magazine *Sinar Goeroe Vorstenlanden*, published by the Association of Teachers of the Principalities (Yogyakarta and Surakarta), made the need for unity among teachers explicit: “Because of our diverse educational backgrounds, we [teachers] must unite! We have to strengthen our sense of brother-

hood” (*Sinar Goeroe Vorstenlanden* 3, September 1, 1933).

Initially, this concept of unity gained in relevance for a practical purpose. As the editors of *Persatoean Goeroe* put it, if individual PGHB members were to improve their living standards, “we [the members] need to be firmly bound together so that others respect us and our profession, and pay us accordingly” (*Persatoean Goeroe* 16, August 15, 1930). An elaborate statement of the purpose of unity appeared in an article by Moeh Saleh, a teacher: “Now we [teachers] are aware that it is through unity that we can pursue our rights . . . and so hone our professional skills so as to attain our destiny. We have to understand the value of working shoulder to shoulder” (Moeh 1930).

“My brothers,” urged Moeh, “our silence, our weaknesses, hesitations, and disagreements about taking an active part in the Federation give others courage and judgment to undermine our position and to take strong measures that demean our rights and degrade our dignity as teachers! We have the obligation to struggle for a better destiny. Do not give up!” (*ibid.*). The tone of Moeh’s writing sounds slightly florid, but it continued to resound in the discussion about unification as a professional category.

Soon, the striving for unity expanded to include ideological matters. One of these concerned language. With diverse backgrounds in training, only a limited number of PGHB members understood Dutch. “Times have changed, and it is now a must that we become united in a true sense as a nation,” wrote C. A. Awas, a PGHB member. “From now on, *Persatoean Goeroe* should publish articles in the universal language only, namely Indonesian, because this is the language which all of us [PGHB members] understand well” (Awas 1930).

The journal editors did not endorse Awas’s proposal: “We do our best to accommodate our members [readers]. Articles in Dutch are relevant not only to our colleagues from the *kweekschool* and *Hogere Kweekschool* but also to *outsiders*. We have to take our influence on the *outsiders* into account!” (*Persatoean Goeroe* 19, September 15, 1930). The editors did not specify what they meant by “outsiders,” which is emphasized in its original source text by italicization. All that can be assumed is that they were non-PGHB members. However, considering that the topic of the debate was the use of either Indonesian or Dutch, the term “outsiders” possibly implied Dutch readers of *Persatoean Goeroe*. Hence, in this context, unity meant the choice between uniformity and recognition of plurality.

The concept of unity was also germane to the teachers’ pedagogical role. Teachers had to unite because it was their responsibility to develop a sense of unity among their students. At the 19th congress of the PGHB in Surakarta on February 18, 1930, the chairman of the federation, L. L. Kartasoebrata, stressed this point: “My fellow teachers, it is our responsibility to increase unity among our students, Indonesian boys and girls.”

He went on to say, “However, we cannot do this simply by uttering fine phrases. Unless we are united in body and soul, we cannot expect our students to have a strong sense of unity!” Unity, Kartasoebrata stated, had to be part and parcel of the personality that should characterize Indonesian teachers. “Take a look at our fellow teachers in Asia and around the world. They are all growing in unity. We, too, are growing in unity, but we still have to strengthen it” (*Persatoean Goeroe* 5–6, March 1930). Kartasoebrata articulated a politically crucial way of thinking. He began by stressing on why individual teachers had to internalize the value of unity. He ended by formulating a sort of comparative status of equality, if unity were achieved, between Indonesian teachers and their fellow teachers worldwide. Into both aspects, within the persona and without, the quality of self-respect was sought to be inculcated as another strand in the growing consciousness of teachers.

As with the concept of unity, the concept of self-respect was also nurtured due to practical considerations. First of all, it was standard etiquette for teachers and low-ranking indigenous government officials to greet officials of higher rank with the *sembah jongkok*, paying homage by squatting (Patje 1930). Teachers, including school principals, had to pay homage to a school inspector by falling on their knees. Teachers considered such customs no longer an appropriate part of social relationships and urged that they be abolished. In a meeting of the West Java Chapter of the Normal School Association (Persatuan Normal School, PNS) in Bandung on June 25, 1930, representatives of the Tasikmalaya branch tabled a motion for the removal of the *sembah jongkok* rule (*Persatoean Goeroe* 15, August 15, 1930). The editors of *Persatoean Goeroe*, citing the congress of the Association of Indigenous Government Officials (Persatuan Prijaji Bestuur Bumiputra) in Surabaya in July 1930, also urged that the *sembah jongkok* requirement be done away with (*Persatoean Goeroe* 19, September 15, 1930). In *Persatoean Goeroe*, an individual named Patje Mateng wrote that *sembah jongkok* prevented teachers from being free to express their opinions to higher-ranking officials. “*Sembah jongkok* does not tally with our *zelfbewustheid* [self-respect] or *zelfvertrouwen* [self-confidence],” Patje argued. “We, educators of our children, have to be conscious that our honor and dignity are borne of the sanctity of and the competence with which we perform our duties, not from paying *sembah jongkok* to higher-ranking officials!” (Patje 1930). The consciousness of self-respect showed a progressive leap toward a rational, instead of feudal, basis to social relations.

Many volumes of *Persatoean Goeroe* are liberally sprinkled with articles expressing concerns about how important it was for teachers to develop self-esteem and self-confidence as prerequisites to gaining public recognition and appreciation. The articles suggest that self-confidence had so far been lacking among teachers and, as one article

put it, this situation often hindered or even prevented teachers from taking an active social role (*Persatoean Goeroe* 14, August 30, 1934, 124–125). The editors of the journal reminded their readers about the following:

We [teachers] have to respect our name, corps, and unity, our profession and labor. We do not need to think that we are the most important group of people in the world, or that we are *onmisbaar* [indispensable]. But as long as we teachers do not appreciate our own profession and job, other parties will not respect us. If we are not consistent in what we say, others will not show us respect. (*Persatoean Goeroe* 16, August 15, 1930)

In developing self-esteem and confidence, the matter of salary could not be overlooked. “One day we went to a Japanese shop only to find out how expensive the goods it sold were,” the editors of *Persatoean Goeroe* wrote in an editorial. “The shop assistant surprisingly replied, ‘Yes, Sir, people always want high-quality goods at a low price’. We cannot forget what the Japanese shop assistant said to us. It happens everywhere, not exclusively in trade. Employers always want to recruit industrious, well-trained employees who allow themselves to be paid a pittance. Isn’t it also the case with teachers? We have been rated cheaply!” (*Persatoean Goeroe* 20, September 25, 1930).

An individual, whose name was shortened to Pr., pointed out some examples of how poorly teachers were paid by the government. Indonesian teachers, according to Pr., bore the responsibility for the success of all curriculum programs: trade schools, sports schools, and training schools. “The government even made use of Indonesian teachers to carry out the population census [of 1930?]. But are we paid the same as those who hold a European teaching certificate? No, not even half! Why is it? Because we Indonesian teachers acquiesce in being treated that way!” Pr. wrote (1930).

Arguably, the critical point here is that teachers began to understand the light in which they should view and appreciate themselves, and how they should expect others to see and appreciate their profession. Thus, the significance of the salary issue went beyond merely payment. It dealt with the question of personal and social perception, and the manner in which the esteem of the teaching corps should be built up; in other words, self-respect as a sense of pride, recognition, and appreciation.

The teachers’ newfound consciousness of the value of self-respect was inextricably linked to their growing understanding and expectations of the relationships between individuals and society. In November 1933, for example, the Association of Teachers in the Principalities (Perikatan Perkoempoelan Goeroe Vorstenlanden, PPGV) passed a motion demanding the official replacement of the term *guru desa* (village teacher) by *guru rakyat* (people’s teacher) and *sekolah desa* (village school) by *sekolah rakyat* (people’s school) (*Sinar Goeroe Vorstenlanden* 5, November 1, 1933). The argument was that

*sekolah rakyat* and *guru rakyat*, rather than *sekolah desa* and *guru desa*, were the correct Indonesian translations of the Dutch terms *volksschool* and *volksonderwijzer*. They were therefore analogous with other terms such as *volksraad* (*dewan rakyat*, people's council), *volkslectuur* (*pustaka rakyat*, public library), and *volkslied* (*nyanyian rakyat*, folk song). Above this linguistic reason lurked a sense of pride. Teachers objected to the label *guru desa* because it implied "a tone or sense of condescension derogatory not only to the teachers but also to pupils and the schools. . . . It is as if we [Indonesians] are being called 'inlander'" (*ibid.*).

It was not long before the petition incited a debate. Several articles, which first appeared in *Darma Kanda* and were republished by *Sinar Goeroe Vorstenlanden*, critically questioned what the term *rakyat* meant. "Are children of *asistent wedana* and the auxiliary teachers also *rakyat* although they do not go to the *volksschool*? If they are *rakyat*, both teachers and schools should be provided for them and all the other children of our society" (*Darma Kanda* 257).

Those who demanded the introduction of the name *guru rakyat*, *Darma Kanda* said, exhibited a "new spirit for change." The socioeconomic category of *desa* (countryside) was associated with rural backwardness, in contrast to the urban modernity expressed by the term *kota* (town/city). *Guru desa* conjured up a picture of a traditional teacher who, on account of his training, lagged behind modern teachers in knowledge and competence. Because many teachers working in village schools in the 1930s actually held a *normaal school* or even a *kweekschool* diploma, which was of much higher standing than the certificate of a village school teacher, the name *guru desa* was obsolete. However, *Darma Kanda* was convinced that the core problem lay in the teacher and the school itself. "Has the village school so far provided sufficient instruction to serve as a solid basis for the primary education of our people as the *dorpschool* does in the Netherlands? Have village school teachers performed well in accordance with the diploma they hold?" *Darma Kanda* insisted that unless there was a reorganization of the educational structure enabling the position of village schools and teachers to be made equivalent to other primary schools, the negative attitude toward village schools and teachers would persist (*Darma Kanda* 258).

An anonymous individual using the pseudonym "Bapa Tani," indicating an archetypal male peasant, opposed the motion. He argued that the translation of *volksschool* as *sekolah rakyat* was linguistically correct but culturally wrong. *Volksschool* was a Dutch word. Its Indonesian counterpart (hence, not a mere translation) was indeed *sekolah desa*, and the teacher, *guru desa*. Bapa Tani said this was not only because the schools and the teachers were in the *desa*, but also because they were funded by village funds (*kas desa*). Bapa Tani stated that going beyond the matter of translation, the demand for a new name

had been motivated by the teachers' need for public recognition of their awareness of, and participation in, national movements. Bapa Tani suggested that these teachers take as their role models their compatriots from the Taman Siswa, who worked hard for national movements without bragging about their contributions. "If those [village school] teachers truly work for the *rakyat*, people will recognize them as *guru rakyat* even if they do not ask for it," he wrote (*Sinar Goeroe Vorstenlanden* 1, January 1934, 4).

In response to Bapa Tani, the editors of *Sinar Goeroe Vorstenlanden*, citing *Darma Kanda*, again raised the question of *rakyat*. "Who are *rakyat*?" they asked. The *desa* people were indeed the *rakyat*, and the village funds belonged to them as they were collected from them. The editors believed that the names *guru rakyat* and *sekolah rakyat* would enhance the people's sense of belonging to these teachers and schools. The editors also refuted Bapa Tani's argument that a *sekolah desa* was always in a *desa*, as some of these schools were indeed located in towns (*ibid.*). A member of the PPGV urged teachers to wait for the government response to the issue because "the name *guru desa* had been coined by the government" (*Sinar Goeroe Vorstenlanden* 2, February 1934, 12). Another member, Moed, argued that many villagers could not afford to send their children to a school other than the village school. The term *sekolah desa*, Moed was convinced, had been mooted as a reaction to the existence of the upper-class schools, to which the villagers could not send their children (*ibid.*, 13).

Commencing from the categorical polemic of the name, teachers began to question who the *rakyat* were and, accordingly, who they were themselves. They wanted to do away with the name *desa*, but not because they aimed to deny their background as *desa* people. They did, indeed, live in the countryside, and did not demand that the term *guru desa* be substituted by *guru kota* (*Sinar Goeroe Vorstenlanden* 6, December 1, 1933, 47). What they wanted was to use the name *rakyat* because *desa* implied a long-standing sense of being a defenseless object of exploitation (Boeke 1934). *Rakyat* provided them with a sense of dynamic status and created a nuance of active position in opposition to the non-*rakyat*, namely, the power structure of the society and the state; for more than being an issue about such superficial matters as the proper name and language, the teachers' demand for the attributive name *guru rakyat* was a matter of political consciousness and modernity. Gradually, teachers were becoming aware of their identity and status of citizenship (*burgerschap*) and what it entailed.

"What is the value of teachers' progress if it is of no use to the people?" another article in *Persatoean Goeroe* asked its readers. "Teachers, however high the diploma they have, cannot live outside a movement that originated among the people. Don't let people think that we [teachers] work only for a living. Show them [the people] that we are a role model for them and their children and are willing to work for them!" (*Persatoean*

*Goeroe* 13, August 15, 1934, 110–111).

The campaign for the title *guru rakyat* is the best illustration of the process in which public school teachers in the 1930s were becoming political by developing a sense of closeness to, and a relationship with, society at large. As a rule, because of their status as civil servants, public school teachers were not allowed to join political organizations or movements (*Sinar Goeroe Vorstenlanden* 6, June 1, 1933; 5, November 1, 1933, 45; *Persatoean Goeroe* 14, August 30, 1934). As they felt their way toward forming themselves into a corps, as well as being individuals, the teachers sought a new horizon of citizenship. They understood that they would demean themselves if they did not serve as mental/intellectual guides (*geestelijk leiders*) and continued to remain mere instructors (*lesgevers*) (Soetopo 1934a). They had to play an active role in the process of social change because the principal meaning of education was indeed *cultuuroverdracht*, the transfer of culture (Soetopo 1934b).

The teachers' growing consciousness was reflected in their daily duties. It grew from deliberations about life in the small world of the classroom, where inspiration almost always came from outside. This realization implied giving a new meaning and recontextualization to existing pedagogical practices. Using the new "knife" of analysis, teachers critically reconsidered the same schooling activities and questioned several elements of identity previously taken for granted. The debate about *guru rakyat* was a sample case.

In Sumatra teachers also sought new meanings, for example, by dealing with the sensitive issue of *kemerdekaan*, or independence. Instead of embracing the nationalist sense of political independence, which aimed to supersede the existing colonial power relations, the Sumatran teachers' introduction of the concept of *kemerdekaan* began with a breaking away from the traditional mission of schooling as a means of reproduction of social class. Some flashbacks in time and space are essential to exploring this story.

In July 1929, *Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe* published an article on the Montessori method of teaching (*Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe* 7, Year 9, July 1929, 126–130). Unlike other aforementioned cases for which the source(s) of borrowed articles were explicitly mentioned, for this article the editors just wrote a "W." Deducing from its content and language style, the article might have been penned by Ki Hadjar Dewantara, as a cross-check reveals an article with exactly the same title and content that appeared under his name in the Taman Siswa magazine *Waskita* in May 1929 (*Waskita* 1, 8, May 1929). The most significant fact about it is that in the last colonial decade, Indonesian teachers at public schools were covertly following the development of the thoughts of their fellow teachers in unofficial schools.



Maria Montessori, a prominent Italian educational reformist in the early twentieth century, founded the principle of individual autonomy in education. She thought that education was a natural process spontaneously embraced by the human individual, in which punishments and rewards were not an appropriate mechanism to encourage learning. (For information on Maria Montessori and her works, visit <http://www.montessori.edu/maria.html>.) In the article cited by *Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe*, the Dutch words *zelfstandig* and *vrij* were used as translations for Montessori's "autonomous" and "spontaneous." They were followed by Indonesian translations: *mardéka* and *bebas*, which are synonyms for "being independent and free." When the concept was explored in more detail, the meanings of the terms in the Indonesian language were extended and strengthened. For example, while Montessori's idea of abolishing rewards and punishments was aimed to stimulate the child's inner motivation for learning, its purpose, as the writer of the article put it, was *memardékakan anak*, which, retranslated into English, means "to make children independent"—instead of "to establish the individual autonomy of children" (*Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe* 7, Year 9, July 1929, 127).

The Indonesian word for the Dutch *zelfstandig*, in the English sense of "being autonomous," could have been *mandiri*, whose meaning applies to an individual rather than to a collective of people. Therefore, *zelfstandigheid* or "autonomy" could have been *kemandirian* instead of *kemerdekaan*. *Kemerdekaan* is closer in meaning to *onafhankelijkheid* or "independence." In the article published by *Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe*, Montessori's principles of (individual) autonomy were described as *pangkal kemardékaan* or "sources of independence." This interpreted the meaning of *kemardékaan* as *tidak hidoep terperintah* (not to live under the orders of others), *berdiri tegak karena kekoabatan sendiri* (to be able to stand on one's own feet), and *tjakap mengatoer hidoepnya sendiri* (to develop the capacity for self-determination) (*ibid.*). The overall context of the article was the reform of educational principles and the teaching method; hence it carried a pedagogical concept. However, the terminology implied a message much more sweeping than just the pedagogical one.

Other articles on pedagogical issues also provide good examples. In April 1931, *Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe* published an article titled "*Zelfstandigheid van den Onderwijzer*" (Autonomy of the teacher), originally a lecture delivered by Soedjadi to a meeting of the West Sumatra chapter of the PGHB (Soedjadi 1931, 65–70). The article deals with the teacher's sustainable improvement of professional quality. "A teacher has to be *zelfstandig*," Soedjadi wrote in the article. This implies, he stated, that a teacher should be imbued with the spirit of self-learning in order to maintain his self-esteem as a teacher and to learn from the experience of fellow teachers (*ibid.*, 66–67). That is all well and good, but the particular way in which Soedjadi explored these points shows how politi-

cal his concept actually was. He said: “Here *zelfstandigheid* should mean ‘standing on one’s own feet’, hence *merdéka*.” He lost no time in adding: “The word *kemerdekaan* is often used in either a political or a religious sense. But we are now using it in a pedagogical sense.” Nevertheless, in explaining the meaning of *kemerdekaan*, Soedjadi picked a politically suitable example. “In England,” he wrote, “even the lowest-ranking *koelies* obtained the right to education up to the level of the Dutch MULO. Here, our people will never have the rights the English *koelies* have until all teachers achieve *kemerdekaan!*” (*ibid.*, 68).

In July 1931 *Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe* published an interview with Oesman Idris, director of the Malay Language Department at Hamburg University, Germany, who also worked as a freelance editor of the journal (*Aboean Goeroe-Goeroe* 7, Year 11, July 1931, 130–132). Oesman stated that school education in Indonesia was not geared toward improving the autonomy of children. “Many of our children go to school because they want to become government officials and administrators,” said Oesman. “We must educate our children so that they can be their own masters” (*ibid.*, 130). Oesman pointed out that education in Indonesia was accessible exclusively to children of the haves, “as if the have-nots are only spectators, who do not possess the right to it . . . In Europe, both the rich and the poor have equal rights to education!” (*ibid.*, 130–131). The interview with Oesman shows that the concept of *kemerdekaan* had taken on more political than pedagogical overtones as it pointed as much in the direction of educational content as to accessibility to and equality of rights. The transformation in the concept shows the subtle process at work in the way that teachers were exposed to progress through their understanding of their social roles.

### **The Seeds and the Seeding Ground: Students**

The process by which HIK students of the 1930s became politically conscious was a gradual one. In general, three phases of the process can be identified: the students’ daily lives in schools and boarding houses during the 1930s; changes in schools’ domestic rules and events from the end of the 1930s to the beginning of the 1940s; and the shutting down of Dutch schools right after the conquest of the Netherlands Indies by Japanese troops in March 1942. Testimonies from HIK graduates and former students describe this process of the changing self-perception leading to political awareness.

Graduates and former students of the HIK speak of the increase, during the 1930s, in the availability of and access to reading materials in schools and boarding houses, even though those were censored, as one factor that initially stimulated their political curiosity.

“At the HIK in Bukittinggi, I regularly read Dutch newspapers and magazines from which I learned about up-to-date events and developments in Indonesia and the world,” wrote Abdul Haris Nasution in his autobiography (Abdul Haris Nasution 1990, 28–29). He entered the lower level of the HIK in Bukittinggi in 1932 and continued to the upper level in Bandung in 1935. At one time, a Dutch newspaper published the Japanese idea of a Greater Asia and warned its readers against what it called “the danger of the Japanese.” Instead of paying attention to the warning, Abdul Haris “wondered why I felt proud of the Japanese; perhaps because they were inspiring Asians regardless of the negative commentaries about them in the Dutch press” (*ibid.*).

Alatif Azis had a different experience, as he revealed during an interview in his home in Bandung on November 27, 2006. He entered the lower level of the HIK in Bukittinggi in 1930 and the upper level in Bandung in 1933, two years senior to Abdul Haris. While in Bukittinggi, Alatif regularly took part in discussions held by the Youth Organization of Muhammadiyah although he never officially became a member of the organization. He occasionally watched public processions of what he remembered as “the Nazi Youth Organization of the East Indies.” Alatif never realized that his interest and “passive participation” in those activities had invited the suspicion of the authorities.

Unlike Alatif, Mohamad Isa did not say that any step was taken against his active participation in an organization. In 1940, he joined the Islam Youth Organization (Islamistische Jeugd Bond) in Yogyakarta (Mohamad 1993, 14–15). To celebrate the Islamic Day of the Sacrifice (Idul Adha) in 1942, the organization’s leaders decided to hold a public prayer. “We marched and chanted the Takhbir prayer along the way. I think it was the first public religious march Islamic students in Yogyakarta had held in colonial times,” said Mohamad (1991b, 29–32).

Djoko (1991, 2–11) wrote that on a certain day students of the HIK in Yogyakarta participated in a long march organized by the Nederlands-Indië Atletiek Unie (Netherlands Indies Athletics Association). He wrote:

As we marched down Malioboro Street, we [the HIK students] sang Hawai’ian pop songs. But Mr. Mabesoone, our Dutch teacher who was our leader in the show, didn’t seem to like our singing. He said, “If you do not have a feeling for music, you’d better shut up!” We whispered among ourselves, “Quiet, quiet!” We then marched on in silence. Noticing we had fallen silent, Mr. Mabesoone approached us in our ranks and said, “Sing [instead] appropriate patriotic songs, boys!” I spontaneously gave a loud rendition of “Indonesia Raya!” To my great surprise, immediately everybody began to sing “Indonesia Raya” as if I had issued an order. I was amazed myself that we dared to sing the forbidden song in a public thoroughfare.

In the late afternoon, when we were all back at our boarding house, I saw a police motorbike being parked in the front yard of the house of the school director. Instinctively, I was overcome by trepidation, especially after I saw from a distance a police officer pointing his finger at me as he

was talking to our school director. At dinnertime that evening, I was asked to see the director in his office. He did not say much except for “The bucket is already full; no more drops can [be poured into it].” Then he gave me my report book, in which was written “*verwijderd wegens wangedrag*” [expelled for bad behavior]. That evening I ended my days as an HIK student! (*ibid.*)

The case of the singing of “Indonesia Raya” is perhaps one that has a strong political theme. Djoko also noted that day-to-day events in the boarding house made him feel “rebellious” ever since his first days at the HIK in 1938. As a rule, Dutch was the language of instruction at school as well as in daily interactions among students. “But we sometimes spoke Javanese with fellow Javanese, something that we could not always avoid as it is our mother tongue,” wrote Djoko (*ibid.*, 4). He added:

When our teachers heard us speaking Javanese, they reprimanded us, “*Spreekt toch Nederlands!*” [Do speak Dutch]. This was indeed an acceptable reminder. But often such a reprimand was followed by “*Denk toch Nederlands!*” [Think Dutch]. I thought the latter order was very offensive, as if they wanted to make us Dutch.

. . . One day during a pedagogy class the director of the HIK, Mr. Nuhoff, said that the aim of the Netherlands Indies government was to improve the lives of indigenous people. When given the opportunity, I raised my hand and asked, “If that were the case, why has the Dutch language been considered better than our Indonesian language?” I saw a blush infuse Mr. Nuhoff’s face. He replied, “Young man, the Dutch language is your scientific language. And . . . whenever I hear the word ‘Indonesia’, I conjure up the image of people once removed from cannibals!”

There was another incident that really upset me. One of my juniors (I forget his name) had not yet become accustomed to eating his meals using a spoon and fork. This invariably happened among the new students, as many of us had come from a rural tradition. This junior sat on my right side at the dining table and always became nervous when others watched him eat.

One day, when we were having lunch, our supervising teacher, Mr. Van Oerle, approached and said to him, “Now then, listen carefully: If an animal eats, it brings its mouth to the food; if a man eats, he brings the food to the mouth!” My junior friend looked very frightened. But I felt personally offended by what Mr. Van Oerle had said, although he was not addressing me. I stood up straight away and replied to Mr. Van Oerle: “Sir, when in Rome, do as the Romans do! In your culture a man brings the food to his mouth; in ours . . . We have to assume a properly noble position!”

Mr. Van Oerle ordered me to see him in his office after lunch. When I arrived, he said that he would make a minute report unless I apologized for what I had done in the dining room. This time I was frightened, because I realized the serious repercussions such a report could have. I did, then, apologize to Mr. Van Oerle. (*ibid.*, 4–5)

The anticipated war against the Japanese in the early 1940s forced the authorities of the Netherlands Indies to prepare for an emergency situation, and this inevitably brought changes in the daily routines of students and teachers. Zurchiban Surjadipradja was in the fourth year of the HIK in Yogyakarta in 1941. Recalling the situation at the end of 1941, he wrote:

The city of Yogyakarta was only half lit at night. The authorities decided to reduce the lighting in anticipation of a sudden Japanese attack. So, streetlights in open spaces were turned off or covered.

In the boarding house, we also had to reduce the number of lights. Lamps in the corners and along the pathways were not turned on so that at night we could only see the flashlight of the inspecting teacher spotting pathways in different directions. (Zurchiban 2003, 24–28)

As war approached, students began to get involved in war-related preparations. Some students were appointed by the school director to form an internal security corps as air-raid wardens, or *Luchtbeschermingsdienst*. Suroso testified: “We were given a crash course by an officer from the local fire department. He showed us how to identify the effects of *brisantbom* (anti-personnel bombs) and *brandbom* (incendiaries), and how to tackle them” (Suroso 1992, 33–34).

Several other students were selected by a team from the medical service in Yogyakarta to join the Student Red Cross Corps. They included Mohamad, Hanafi, Nazir, Ismail Harahap, Soedjiran, Suwanton, Warsito, Suhardjo, and Sayid Salim Baazir (Mohamad 1991a, 34). “In the Corps, we were trained in the dispensing of first aid, not for battle,” Mohamad said (*ibid.*). The experience of Mohamad, as quoted below, shows the direct involvement of student members of the Red Cross Corps in dealing with the war situation:

After lunch, one day at the end of 1941 or the beginning of 1942—I do not really remember—the student members of the Corps were summoned to assemble immediately in the front schoolyard. We were then taken by bus to the Tugu railway station. From there a train took us westward to . . . Tjilatjap [a harbor on the southern coast of Central Java].

There . . . we had to take many patients, all badly burnt. . . . At 9 o'clock that evening, the train departed back to Yogyakarta. We were very busy with the patients. They cried and shouted in panic the whole way, “Water! Water, please! Oh my God, forgive me! Ease the pain! Oh Mummy, Mummy, pray for your son!” The stench of burnt flesh mixed with blood filled the air in the carriage. Luckily, the military doctor I assisted stayed calm and gave me practical guidance. “*Houd vast z'n bijs, Maat. Houd vast en stevig!*” [Hold his bottom firm, mate. Hold on firm and tight!] he told me when we were giving a patient, who was in intense pain, a morphine injection. Another patient died after being administered an injection. “We were too late,” said the doctor. Every time I took my hands off a patient's body, *astaghfirullahal'adhim* [Oh my God], my palms were full of burnt skin or even some of the flesh protruding from the patient's body!

After midnight we had time to get some rest. The doctor offered me a cheese and egg sandwich, along with warm bouillon and coffee. During the two and a half years I had lived in the boarding house, I had never drunk coffee. During the first school break at 10 o'clock every Monday and Thursday, we were served green bean porridge instead of coffee. So the doctor's offer of coffee was actually golden. But at that time I could not take it. “No appetite, Doc. Because of the smell of the men's burnt flesh, I feel sick. I want to vomit!” I said.

The train arrived in Yogyakarta long before dawn. I do not recall how busy it was at the station. I do not even remember how we got back to the dormitory. (*ibid.*, 36–40)

The situation in the boarding house when Mohamad and his colleagues returned was described by Suroso, who was only a first-year student in 1942. He wrote:

The silence of an early morning was suddenly loudly disrupted when a group of soldiers of the Student Red Cross Corps returned. They looked really messy and exhausted; some were no longer in uniform. We all crowded around them and inquisitively showered them with questions. Because some of us asked questions simultaneously, the story Mohamad and his friends told us was rather *onsamenhangend* [incoherent]. Then our school director, Mr. Brouwer, came and took his turn asking them questions. There really was an uproar that morning. (Suroso 1992, 33)

HIK students assiduously followed news about the war developments by listening to the radio (*ibid.*). Two air-raid shelters (*schuilkelders*) were built in both the northern and southern boarding houses of the Yogyakarta HIK. “We were instructed to run to the shelters whenever we heard sirens. Weeks before the Japanese arrived in town, lessons or classes had ceased because we did drills,” wrote Soesilowati Basuki (2003, 4–6).

The war was indeed creeping closer. The conquest of nearly the entire territory of the Netherlands Indies by the Japanese in March 1942 was followed by the closing of colonial schools, including the HIK. Teachers and students were caught up in an emergency situation. Soeparmo, who graduated from Bandung in 1935, was a teacher at an HIS in Balikpapan, East Kalimantan. “Two colleagues and I were released from school to man a Dutch telegraphic radio station. When the Japanese came to town, I managed to return to Java,” Soeparmo wrote (1986, 45–46).

Kadaroeman, who had graduated from Bandung in 1938, was a teacher in Tapaktuan, South Aceh. “People were really panicked and hid in shelters every time there was an air raid,” he recalls (Kadaroeman 1989, 33–39). Kadaroeman notes that unlike other places where local people cheerfully welcomed Japanese troops, the local people of Tapaktuan preferred to hide when Japanese troops entered the town.

As all schools were closed, students were sent home. At the last moment, just before sending the students home, the authorities of the HIK in Yogyakarta handed students in the final year what was called a *nooddiploma*, an emergency certificate. It was not a school-leaving certificate but a statement of the stage of training that the students had reached. The *nooddiploma* was meant to provide a basis of assessment in case further training was to be followed in the future. The *nooddiploma* was given also to HIK students in Bandung. However, perhaps because Bandung was the main base of the Netherlands East Indies military defense, the situation there had become extremely critical since the landing of Japanese troops in Merak and Banten on March 1, 1942. In some instances, students in the upper years did not receive the *nooddiploma* when they had to leave school in April 1942 (Mohamad 1992, 37–41; Suparno 1993, 4–8; Suroso

1996, 11–19; interview with Moerdiono, Yogyakarta, September 27, 2006).

With or without a *nooddiploma*, all HIK students had to give up their training and leave the boarding house. Soesilowati managed to flee from the boarding house of the girls' HIK in Yogyakarta to her relatives in Medari, near Magelang in Central Java (Soesilowati 2003, 4–5). Suparno B. of the upper-level HIK in Bandung wanted to return to his parents in Makassar, but the virtually insurmountable difficulty of finding transport forced him to move to Solo. “It was the darkest time in my life,” he wrote (Suparno 1993, 5). From the Christian HIK in Solo, Central Java, Priguna Sidharta managed to go home to Losarang, Indramayu, on the north coast of West Java, but was stranded in a hilly southern area of the region (Priguna 1993, 35–36). Suroso had to spend another three weeks in the HIK boarding house in Yogyakarta before finding a way to get home to Trenggalek, East Java (Suroso 1992, 35). For these students, the period between March and August 1942 was a desperate time as they struggled, often unsuccessfully, to get home.

Around the end of the colonial era, during the period of regime change, Suroso witnessed an event that illustrated crucial elements of a future Indonesia. He wrote:

Immediately after we heard that Japanese troops had arrived in town, we came out of the school boarding house and went into the street. I noticed many of my colleagues wore a sarong and a peci [rimless cap] on their heads. Suddenly I felt strange and awkward being among my colleagues, who were dressed in a sarong and a peci, because I was the one who did not own a sarong or a peci. Fortunately, nothing that would have created unpleasantness between us happened. (*ibid.*)

In an interview in Jakarta in January 2007, I asked Suroso what he meant by “felt strange and awkward” and “unpleasantness.” His answer remained vague. However, in the course of our conversation he did somewhat explain the point. The sarong and a peci were accepted by some Indonesians as the symbolic outfit representing an Islamic identity. The rules governing life in the HIK boarding house were designed to stifle any overt show of ethnic or religious diversity in the form of symbolic materials. Religious activities were allowed at the individual level. Consequently, students could live in harmony despite differences in ethnic and religious backgrounds. Suroso’s testimony can also be interpreted to mean that with the arrival of the Japanese, Dutch school rules went into abeyance and this opened the way for the free expression of self or group identities, including a religious one. Later, during the occupation, in exactly the same boarding house, Muslim students recited the Shalat prayers aloud five times a day, something that had never happened during colonial times (Soemarto 1989, 41–45).

## Conclusion

This paper has presented a picture of how Indonesian teachers and teacher candidates at government schools during the last colonial decade became politically conscious, as a consequence of ideas and reflections, in their daily professional lives. Of humble origins, from socially lower-class families, most of the teachers and students had initially stepped into the teaching profession for personal vertical mobility; but, spurred by changes in society at large, they then developed a shared sense of caring and engagement that encompassed the scope and aim of the teaching profession for which they had been educated. Like many of their Indonesian contemporaries during the 1930s, the schoolteachers in this study were called upon to embrace the idea of *persatuan*, or unity. As they did so, feelings of self-respect, self-esteem, and self-confidence arose as crucial issues that gradually strengthened the teachers' perception of their position in society. In this climate, discussions about progress in pedagogical theories often turned into reflections about identity and social roles. Teachers began to search for new meaning in the relationship between individuals and society. This search for new meaning was enhanced by various international events that were reported regularly in teachers' journals. All this confirmed the growing political horizon of the teachers and teacher candidates.

The individual testimonies presented here reveal that the rise in political consciousness was not always a deliberate decision. In many cases it began with an "unprecedented introduction" to events in daily lives. In the 1930s, when students at the teacher schools were still a privileged stratum receiving the training that ascribed them a place in the intellectual elite status, they were exposed to, or experienced, certain "incidents" that slowly made them aware of their social position in colonial society. In the critical years toward the early 1940s, the students' understanding of a new Indonesian society expanded when they witnessed substantial changes in daily school activities and, at the same time, school authorities took a more accommodating approach. During the Japanese occupation of the Indonesian islands (1942–45), teachers' political consciousness became more structured and radicalized; but by then it was already in an advanced phase of the process that had originally begun from an unstructured, somewhat incidental, and nondeliberate shift in the course of their lives through the 1930s.

Through gradual phases, the teachers' political consciousness stimulated an imagination in their mind of a new society other than the colonial one. It is doubtful, however, whether the teachers as a collective were conscious of the imagination they shared at the time it emerged. The data cited from the teachers' journals and newspapers of the 1930s show the growing concern of teachers and students over the changes in society.



Unfortunately, they do not indicate whether the teachers knew and saw themselves as one collective body, even though the idea of unity was widely discussed. The teachers' recollections and testimonials *do* show that the teachers shared the consciousness of themselves as one community. Yet, this is a post-factum consciousness as the data were compiled by the teachers themselves, and by my interviews, some 40 to 70 years after the actual events had occurred. So, while it is obvious that the teachers of the 1930s shared a vision of a new society, it is not clear whether they shared it consciously as a collective at the time that the vision was emerging.

The political consciousness that public school Indonesian teachers were experiencing during the 1930s could not have been an expression of nationalism in any sense. It could not have suited the context of what were generally known as anti-colonial movements propagated by the (mainstream) Indonesian Nationalists. Nor could it be precisely understood by Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities (Anderson 1983, Indonesian translation 2001). It holds true that Indonesian teachers at government schools during the 1930s began to envision a society different from the existing colonial structure, but they did not see it in terms of changing the structure of power politics. The new society they had imagined, as long as they testified, was a society where the privileged elites widened their social horizons and participated in finding solutions to the most recent and urgent problems of the people. In this case, the teachers shared an identical vision of the change in the social structure, and therefore they, seen post-factum, comprised a sort of community. Yet, it is doubtful whether they can collectively be categorized as a fragment of a nation—even in its smallest unit. As Anderson (*ibid.*, 8) has suggested, the concept of a nation requires that people who share the same imagination are conscious of their being a collective, although they may never, or will never, know or meet each other. The teachers in the present study did not appear to indicate a consciousness of a shared sense of collectiveness at the time the vision they all shared was emerging and growing. Although they met Anderson's requirement of a shared experience and a shared imagination, they lacked the collective mental awareness of what they were sharing. On this account, the emerging political consciousness of the teachers cannot be understood within the frame of nationalism, whatever sense the term may convey.

Instead of attempting to understand the teachers' emerging political consciousness in the frame of nationalism, I would rather see it in the context of the emergence of a shared sense of citizenship. It was the process in which a perception of equality and equity was growing among Indonesian teachers, who, as part of the privileged indigenous elites of the 1930s, had initially been prepared to become role models of docile subjects of the colonial administration. In this sense, the growing shared sense of citizenship did

not necessarily have to do with state formation, but with the realization of a coexistence among people of different social classes, ethnicities, and even levels of attachment to power politics.

For this sort of citizenship, Henk Schulte Nordholt (2011) proposes the concept of cultural modernity. It is not a “fashionable container concept” but, rather, “refers to the role of the individual and to equality, to notions of development, progress and mobility” (*ibid.*, 438). According to Schulte Nordholt, the Indonesian middle-class elite, during the late colonial decade, did not aim to create a nation in the first place, but to embrace a lifestyle. “Access to such a lifestyle could be obtained by joining the framework of the colonial system and in doing so consolidating the colonial regime” (*ibid.*). Schulte Nordholt’s hypothesis well suits the case of public school teachers, who, as part of the emerging indigenous middle-class elite, were stepping onto a rung of the lifestyle ladder they considered economically higher and more promising than the one they had begun from. However, his hypothesis falls short when used to analyze the position of the teachers as critical, nonideological agents of socio-political transformation. In hypothesizing that the aim of the non-Nationalist element in Indonesian transformation during the 1930s was not a nation in the first place, Schulte Nordholt has managed to forward his criticism against the “black-and-white” historiography of the last colonial decade. Notwithstanding this, his basic framework in setting the hypothesis has actually been ideological and reflects the paradigm that education, and the cultural modernity resulting from it, is state business.

It is obvious that Indonesian teachers at government schools during the 1930s underwent a transformation in their view of school education. Their perception shifted from a right-wing, conservative view of school education as a tool for economic reproduction to a left-wing, progressive perspective that considered schools as “powerful social structures actively involved in the process of moral and political reproduction” (Giroux 2003, 6–9). Although the transformation that the teachers underwent in their view of school education was a radical leap when seen from the perspective of the Indonesia-centric historiography of the 1930s, it did not actually show a process of transformative pedagogy. Whether they saw school education as a tool for embracing cultural citizenship and modernity or as a moral and social engagement, the teachers remained in their position as subjugated subjects of the state: first the colonial state, then, after 1945, the imaginary Indonesian state promoted by the Nationalists. The education they had received made them lose the capacity to become critical agents who encompassed the role of “ideological gatekeepers” (*ibid.*). Hence, the sense of citizenship that teachers shared in the 1930s, albeit a dramatic shift from their original motivations of vertical economic mobility, did not reflect the notion of public education as an independent

practice of cultural upbringing irrelevant to the state and state-formation ideology.

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