

‘Whither Indonesian culture?’  
Rethinking ‘culture’ in Indonesia in a time of  
decolonization

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When Claire Holt returned to Indonesia in 1969 after an absence of twelve years,<sup>1</sup> signs of “cultural change,” “economic development or “modernization,”[...] could be seen and felt everywhere, not least in the sphere of the arts.’ The bitter debate between proponents of nationalism and of internationalism was no longer raging, she wrote. ‘If it continued simmering below the surface, signs of it were not discernible’ (Holt 1970:163).

Recalling her observations of the world of the Indonesian arts in the 1950s and 1960s, Holt (1970:163) wrote:

among individuals and groups consciously concerned with the cultivation of the arts [...], love of the past, awareness of the present, and aspirations for the future produced efforts in three different directions. There were those who strove to preserve traditional art forms in their classical purity, as in music, dance and dance drama; those who tried to meet the challenges of modern times by grafting new elements upon the solid body of tradition or even modifying some of its basic principles; and those who, turning away from tradition entirely, were introducing new inventions or adapting borrowings from outside. (Sometimes all three of these directions were pursued by one individual or were the declared policy of one organization.) This, as far as I could judge, remained true in the sixties, but the lines seemed more sharply drawn.

While many of the contributions to this book explore aspects of the approaches to Indonesian art and culture Holt describes here, the following essay takes the discussion one step further back in time, to the very beginnings of Indonesian thinking about culture in an era of decolonization.

1 I would like to thank Melani Budianta, Tony Day, Keith Foulcher and Jennifer Lindsay for their critical comments on earlier versions of this essay.

## A NEW CULTURE FOR A NEW NATION

As in most decolonizing countries, in Indonesia ‘the nation-state was seen as the protector of culture and the opponent of cultural imperialism’ (Betts 2004:46). Indonesian governments of the early 1950s promoted the development of nationalism in culture, art and science (Jones 2005:95-6), and official Cultural Congresses (Kongres Kebudayaan), first held in 1948, discussed ways of defining Indonesian culture in the new post-colonial context. As early as the 1948 Congress, this new context added a degree of urgency and a need for practical decision-making to the terms of the cultural debate that had been part of Indonesian nationalist discourse since the 1930s. Now, alongside definitions of culture and explorations of the relationship between culture and the nation, it was time to begin setting in place the cultural arm of the Indonesian state. This meant addressing questions like: What was to be done with the inherited colonial structures and institutions for culture, and what was the Republic to set up in their place? Should the Republican government include a Ministry for Culture? How would the management of cultural heritage – such as archaeological sites, urban architecture and the material culture of the regions – be handled? How would teaching and training in the field of culture be managed? Notably, these early cultural congresses also discussed the need for arts academies teaching performing and visual arts, particularly Indonesia’s own performance traditions. These academies began to be established in the early 1950s, and many continue to function (as arts ‘institutes’) to this day.

Reflecting their conviction that thinking about culture should form part of the philosophical underpinning of the structure of the state, participants in the 1948 Cultural Congress passed a resolution calling for the establishment of an advisory body to government comprised of prominent government and non-government figures in the world of the Indonesian arts. This was the Lembaga Kebudayaan Indonesia (LKI, Institute of Indonesian Culture), an initiative of Armijn Pane, Sunarjo Kolopaking Sanyata Vijaya and Wongsonegoro, which was established in 1948 with Wongsonegoro as head and Abu Hanifah as his deputy.<sup>2</sup> It was entrusted with the publication of the cultural journal *Indonesia*, which from 1950 drew together creative artists and cultural thinkers from right across the

2 Wongsonegoro, a specialist on Javanese spiritualism (*kebatinan*), later became Deputy Prime Minister (1953-1955). Abu Hanifah, a writer of drama, politician, medical doctor and diplomat, was Minister of Education and Culture in the Republik Indonesia Serikat (RIS, Federated Republic of Indonesia), formed after the transfer of sovereignty in 1950.

political and ideological spectrum, as well as the organization of subsequent cultural congresses.<sup>3</sup>

Outside the official channels for the promotion of a new national culture, Indonesian intellectuals and artists gathered in *sanggar*, their preferred forums for cultural exchange. Here they discussed culture and art, and the role of art in the creation of a new Indonesian identity (Spanjaard 2003:81). Mass media also became important forums for debate, as the bases for a national culture detached from the colonial burden were explored and a variety of cultural options were held up to examination. Despite the political and economic turbulence and chaos of the first years of independence, dozens of new journals appeared, several of them lasting from the end of the 1940s until the beginning of the 1960s.<sup>4</sup> Written in Indonesian for an Indonesian readership, these journals offer important insights into the discourse of the time, showing the range of topics discussed and serving as a guide to the networks that existed among small elite groups in Indonesia, and between them and the rest of the world.

In this essay, I will look at the early discussions concerning culture and decolonization in *Mimbar Indonesia* (abbreviated *MI*), a general weekly magazine published in Jakarta from 1947 to 1966.<sup>5</sup> I use the adjective 'early' as I will concentrate on the issues of the journal that were published in 1950, showing the ways in which Indonesian intellectuals and cultural figures of the time attempted to give cultural form and content to political independence. I will restrict myself to just a few main topics and omit others that also regularly feature in the journal, such as literature, sports or the representation of foreign cultures, to name but a few.

#### MIMBAR INDONESIA: 'A NATIONAL ENTERPRISE'

In its first issue, published on 10 November 1947, *Mimbar Indonesia* presented itself as an independent journal for building the nation, for discussion of political, economic and social questions, and for devel-

3 In 1952, the LKI was amalgamated into a larger advisory body called Badan Musjawarat Kebudajaan Nasional (BMKN, Council for Deliberations on National Culture), which was active until the late Soekarno period. For more on the cultural congresses, see Foulcher 1986; Sapardi Djoko Damono 1987; Jones 2005; Nunus Supardi 2007.

4 Liesbeth Dolk (1993:179-81) and Ulrich Kratz (1988:820-33) give an overview of the journals they consulted for their research. The Ipphos Report claims that in 1950 about a hundred journals were published (with 800.000 copies per issue), while by the end of 1954, 186 different journals were published (with 1.243.000 copies per edition) (*Ipphos Report* 9-1:4).

5 I would like to thank Liesbeth Dolk for generously sharing her archive of *Mimbar Indonesia* and other Indonesian journals with me.

oping Indonesian culture.<sup>6</sup> As a ‘national enterprise’ (*usaha nasional semata-mata*) it appeared for the first time on National Heroes’ Day, the date that commemorated the beginning of the national revolution in November 1945 (*Kata pengantar* 1948:3). *Perdjoangan*, or struggle, was thus an important founding principle for *Mimbar Indonesia*, standing alongside its declared liberal attitude and its cosmopolitan openness and intellectual approach. It took its duty to devote itself to the nation’s ideals seriously, and claimed to be completely independent from any political party or affiliation (*Pemberitahuan* 1948:24).

From 15 January 1951 onwards, *Mimbar Indonesia* published a separate monthly cultural edition entitled *Zenith* ‘as a contribution to the building of the Indonesian nation and state in the field of culture’.<sup>7</sup> The monthly existed only a few years. From November 1956 onwards, going into its tenth year of publication, *Mimbar Indonesia* instead devoted a special column to art and culture, entitled ‘Seni dan kebudayaan’.

In its first edition, *Mimbar Indonesia*’s editors expressed the hope that in line with its name (‘Indonesia Forum’) the magazine would develop into a forum in which the public had the opportunity to voice opinions about Indonesia and the world in all political and social fields, especially in relation to problems of political, economic, social, and cultural reconstruction (Redaksi *Mimbar Indonesia* 1947). During the first years of its existence, the editors also seemed to have aimed to attract an international readership, as English synopses of certain articles were also included. Right from the start, readers from all over Indonesia and abroad were invited to participate in the discussions.<sup>8</sup> Critical contributions from writers living in areas distant from Jakarta were particularly welcome, as long as they did not offend specific ethnic, religious, racial or social groups (*Obor* 1948:31). In addition, readers were encouraged to take part in the national struggle and serve their country to the best of their ability (Adi Negoro 1950a:7). The editors were grateful to

6 ‘*Madjallah merdeka diselenggarakan untuk pembangunan, politik, ekonomi, sosial dan kebudayaan*’ (Redaksi *Mimbar Indonesia* 1947). These words are included in an ‘Introduction’ (*Kata pengantar*), glued between the last page and the back flap and presented as a letter from the editors. From October 1948 onwards, the text on the front cover, ‘*Madjallah Merdeka*’, is replaced by the English words, ‘Independent non-party’.

7 ‘[s]ebagai sumbangan untuk membangun masyarakat dan Negara Indonesia dalam lapangan Kebudayaan’ (*Zenith* 1951:1).

8 On 28 February 1948 *Mimbar Indonesia* mentions that the journal was distributed in cities in Sulawesi, South Kalimantan, West Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, Sumatra, Java and the islands of the (then) province of Negara Indonesia Timur (State of East Indonesia), as well as in ‘Singapore, Leiden, Den Haag, New Delhi (India), Karachi (Pakistan), Cairo (Egypt), Canberra (Australia), New York City (USA), Manila (The Philippines), London (England), Djaddah (Saudi Arabia), Zürich (Switzerland)’.



MIMBAR

# Indonesia

INDEPENDENT NON-PARTY

*Kebudayaan Teori  
& Praktek*

\*

*Arti Kesehatan  
Manusia*

\*

*Tjerita Pendek:  
Padi*

\*

**35**

**2 SEPTEMBER 1950**



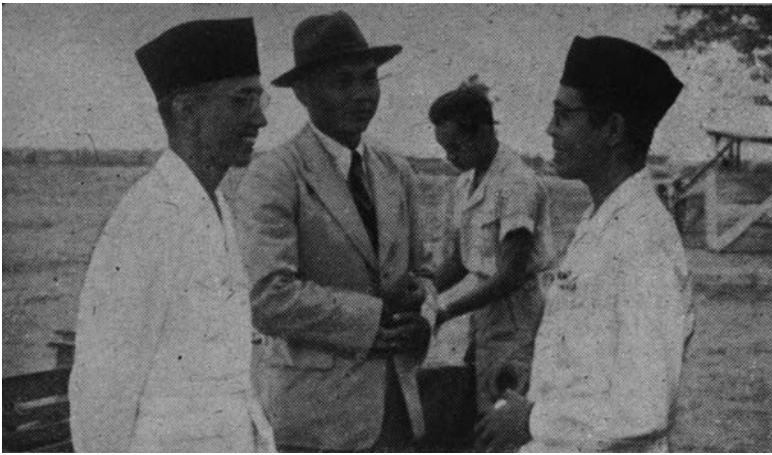
MOH. NATSIR pembentuk Kabinet pertama N.K.R.I.

(Uppha)

Photo front cover *Mimbar Indonesia*

those who supported the journal's mission, nearly 10,000 people, consisting of intellectuals, academics, and male and female artists of different backgrounds from all over Indonesia and abroad.<sup>9</sup>

Founded in Jakarta by the Dharma Foundation as a reaction to the Dutch seizure of Balai Pustaka facilities in 1947 (*Ramon Magsaysay Award* 1989:295), and backed by prominent Indonesian intellectuals, *Mimbar Indonesia* was a fully Indonesian enterprise (Jassin 1984:30). In January 1950, the editorial board consisted of Sukardjo Wirjopranoto (chief editor), Adi Negoro, Prof Dr Supomo, and H.B. Jassin.<sup>10</sup> The latter, already with a reputation as a prominent literary critic, played a particularly influential role as the editor of the journal's art, culture and literature sections. Changes in the editorial board took place when Supomo became Minister of Justice and Sukardjo Wirjopranoto became the Indonesian representative in the Vatican. They were replaced by Ir. Pangeran Mohamad Noor as chief editor, and Mr Suwandi and Mr Jusuf Wibisono as members.<sup>11</sup>



Mohamad Noor (far left) and Sukardjo Wirjopranoto (second from left) are welcomed by Mohammad Natsir (far right) in Yogyakarta (*MI* 4-45 (10 November 1950):12)

9 '[k]aum tjerdik pandai Indonesia, para sardjana, seniman dan seniwati, ahli senilukis dsbnja, jang namanja tidak kami sebutkan dihalaman ini, karena djumlahnja dekat sepuluh ribu, berkediaman di seluruh Indonesia, dari berbagai-bagai kedudukan, dari jang tinggi sampai jang rendah dan dari segala bangsa, diluar dan didalam negara' (*Kata pengantar* 1948:3).

10 The first volume lists a slightly different editorial board, made up of Sukardjo Wirjopranoto, Andjar Asmara, Adi Negoro and Prof Dr M. Supomo (Redaksi *Mimbar Indonesia* 1947).

11 Adi Negoro 1950a:7. Further changes in the 1950 editorial board are mentioned in (*MI* 4-45 (10 November 1950):12).



(left to right) Adinegoro, Sukarsih, Sugardo H.B. Jassin, Darsjat Rachmad and J.A. Dunga take over editorial work of *Mimbar Indonesia* during the evacuation of Moh. Noor and Sukardjo Wirjopranoto to Yogyakarta (September 1948-February 1949). (*MI* 4-45 (10 November 1950):12)

*Mimbar Indonesia's* editors and contributors consisted of a heterogeneous group of individuals who moved in nationalist circles and were actively involved in the shaping of an Indonesian identity. They called themselves true republicans (which Jassin (1984:31) expressed in Dutch as '*republikein in hart en nieren*'). As they belonged to a small urban intellectual elite and often were Dutch-educated, it is not surprising that European – including Dutch – culture, politics and philosophy formed influential sources of inspiration at the initial stage of independence, as they had done for this group of Indonesians during the colonial period. These were the people who brought a cosmopolitan touch to 'Indonesianness', while at the same time explicitly declaring themselves to be anti-colonial. They expressed their opinions through their contributions to *Mimbar Indonesia* and other journals, as well as in their creative work. The groups they connected to at the time were still fluid; only later would these groups become more clearly defined along ideological and cultural political lines.<sup>12</sup> Most often they were multi-skilled and already experienced in a wide variety of fields and contexts. Adi Negoro (1904-1968), for example,

12 In a letter to Aoh K. Hadimadja, 22 November 1951, H.B. Jassin (1984:80) points to this openness which he calls 'Bhinneka Tunggal Ika'. Gajus Siagian gives another example of the absence of strict ideological boundaries between the journals. He mentions that in 1952 *Gelombang* editors Rivai Apin, Siti Nuraini and Asrul Sani joined the editorial board of *Zenith* (Gajus Siagian 1952:473).



was Dutch-educated and had studied at the School tot Opleiding van Inlandsche Artsen (STOVIA, School for Training of Indigenous Physicians). He worked in the Netherlands, studied journalism in Germany and travelled extensively within Europe. Before joining *Mimbar Indonesia*, he was active as chief editor at the *Pewarta Deli* (Medan), and also worked as a cartographer. He contributed a column to *Mimbar Indonesia* entitled *Pemandangan dalam dan luar negara* (Views from home and abroad), and from March 1950 onwards he became the journal's correspondent in Western Europe.<sup>13</sup> Trisno Sumardjo, who Maya Liem discusses in her contribution to this volume, is another good example of an all-round intellectual and artist who contributed to *Mimbar Indonesia*. He was a painter, as well as a writer of short stories, essays, drama and poetry. He also translated Shakespeare into Indonesian (Trisno Sumardjo 1950b:22-3). The same holds for Usmar Ismail, Abu Hanifah, Asrul Sani, Rosihan Anwar and many others. Despite their different ethnic backgrounds and ideological affiliations, they shared one common goal: the building of the nation.

The contributors to *Mimbar Indonesia* expressed a multitude of opinions that sometimes differed widely from each other. They conveyed a wealth of information and expressed a multiplicity of thoughts and ideas. Yet as long as they supported the national enterprise, did not propagate a radical stance and were of excellent quality, their submissions were welcomed by the editorial board.<sup>14</sup> According to Gajus Siagian (1952:473) the journal did not pursue a specific political course. Teeuw (1979, I:115) also described *Mimbar Indonesia* as 'fairly independent of politics', although he claimed it was politically close to the Indonesian National Party (Partai Nasional Indonesia, PNI) and the daily newspaper *Merdeka*.

Not only did the (written) texts of the reports, articles, essays, discussions and letters to the editor inform readers and help form their opinions on a wide range of issues affecting the nation and its culture, the visual contributions in the form of cartoons, advertisements, reproductions of paintings, drawings and etchings, and especially photographs were similarly important. Soon after the establishment of *Mimbar Indonesia*, IPPHOS, the Indonesia Press Photo Service, began to provide photographs on a regular basis.<sup>15</sup>

13 For more information on Adi Negoro see <http://pwi.or.id/index.php/Pressedia/A-dari-Ensiklopedi-Pers-Indonesia-EPI.html>, (accessed 11-8-2009).

14 In several of his letters Jassin (1984) stresses how strict his norms for selection were.

15 The Indonesian Press Photo Service (IPPHOS) Co. Ltd., the first national press agency, was established in 1946, when a group of photographers took the initiative to devote themselves to the country and the revolution, propagating the cause of an independent Indonesia (*Ipphos* 1951:149). The first issue of their journal, *Ipphos Report*, was published on 1 August 1948. Although like other journals of this period *Ipphos Report* experienced serious difficulties, it managed to keep publishing until 1963.



These photographs reveal how Indonesia presented itself internally and abroad at this time and the extent to which the press contributed to the building of the nation and its people. On behalf of *Mimbar Indonesia*, Adi Negoro (1950c:8, 22) urged the press to concentrate on visual imagery that represented progress, and those who were building the nation, rather than focusing on politicians, receptions and cocktail parties.

The journal offers a view – *Mimbar Indonesia's* view – of intellectual and cultural history and so lends itself to analysis of the discourse on culture in Indonesia at the time. Its articles shed light on how a small group of urban Indonesian intellectuals began the task of building a culture of independence, anxiously grasping the opportunities and the challenges to build the new nation, while coming to terms with colonization and keeping the revolutionary fire burning.<sup>16</sup> The journal records the dynamic first steps in the shaping of a 'new' Indonesian culture, and the effort of putting the new country on the world map. At the same time, and in both the national and the international domains, it also worked to counter the continuing presence of the Dutch.

#### 1950 – A NEW ERA?

27 December 1949, the date when the official transfer of sovereignty took place, marked the end of the struggle for political independence. By 1950 a new era was underway, a time when the pressing concern came to be what was described as 'giving content to independence' (*mengisi kemerdekaan*) (Sugardo 1950:3). For *Mimbar Indonesia's* editors, all the new nation's energy, capital and ideas needed to be activated in order to achieve this aim (*Dari redaksi* 1950:3). In the first place *mengisi kemerdekaan* meant securing economic development and social welfare for the Indonesian people. However for those involved in culture and the arts, the slogan also resonated with the challenge to shape a national identity and the potential role that culture might play in this process.

Many parties and individuals involved themselves in the discourse on culture and nationalism in *Mimbar Indonesia*. Discussions revolved around how to define Indonesian culture, what should be considered as valuable cultural heritage for the future of Indonesia, how to combine (*mengawinkan*) this cultural heritage with modern technique and industry, and how to define the role of the people

16 See for example Sukardjo Wirjopranoto's article (1950).

in shaping this new national culture.<sup>17</sup> Alternative approaches and cultural models were raised and explored: was Indonesian culture to be seen as part of an 'Eastern world' and Asian culture, or as belonging to 'world culture'? Was it to be inspired by Europe (or the West for that matter), Muslim sources, or other cultures?

Artists and *budayawan* (those involved in the practice of the arts and/or the thinking about culture) were at the front line when it came to discussing the building of a national culture in the 1950s. Their involvement and concerns were, however, not new and should not be seen in isolation from previous and following events. According to Keith Foulcher (1986:13),

when LEKRA, the 'Institute of People's Culture', was formed in August 1950, attempts to define the ways in which cultural practice might embody an ideal of Indonesian nationhood were already some twenty years old. 'Indonesian culture' had been an issue of debate and intellectual exchange since the 1930's, when nationalist-minded artists and intellectuals had engaged in a vigorous series of cultural polemics on the nature and direction of a national culture in and around the pages of the journal *Pujangga Baru*.

This *Polemik Kebudayaan* (Cultural Polemic) was preceded by the *Sumpah Pemuda* (Youth Pledge) that in October 1928 proclaimed one motherland, one nation, and Indonesian as the language of unity. During the Japanese occupation, new ideas on Indonesian art and culture came to the fore,<sup>18</sup> and in 1950, the publication of the Surat Kepercayaan Gelanggang (Gelanggang Testimonial of Beliefs)<sup>19</sup> again led to heated debates on the same topic, Indonesian culture.

By 1950, what was new was the context in which these ideas were being discussed. The physical and mental traces of the Japanese occupation and the revolution still lingered on, but the transfer of sovereignty to an independent nation made all the difference. Indonesians were now responsible for their own destiny, as they

17 Supomo (1948:2), for example, advocated a culture of, by and for the people for both Indonesian and Asian culture: 'Sebagai halnya dengan demokrasi pula, jang menurut kehendak zaman harus menudju kearah demokrasi rakjat, maka kebudayaan Indonesia, bahkan kebudayaan Asia dikemudian hari harus menjadi kebudayaan dari rakjat, oleh rakjat dan untuk rakjat.'

18 Tresna (1948:17-8) and Marakarma (1950a:15, 24, 27) report on new ideas on Indonesian art and culture developed during the Japanese Occupation. See further chapter 7 of *The encyclopedia of Indonesia in the Pacific War* which is entirely devoted to culture in the Japanese period (Post et al. 2010:348-402). On the influence of the Japanese period on Indonesian painting, see Raben 2009:92-3.

19 On the Surat Kepercayaan Gelanggang see further Goenawan Mohamad 2002:202.

reinterpreted the past and actively responded to a present full of challenges and opportunities. 1950 was therefore a pivotal year, the beginning of a short period in Indonesian history when everything seemed possible, and the future was full of promise. Indonesia was in the process of formation, and *Mimbar Indonesia* was at the forefront of the national project.

#### FILLING IN INDEPENDENCE: THE QUESTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

As a journal aiming to enhance the building of a national consciousness, *Mimbar Indonesia* devoted ample attention to promoting an awareness of the manifold cultures of Indonesia. Articles on the various ethnic groups and regional cultures presented the inhabitants of the regions as Indonesians, all having their specific traditions and cultural expressions.<sup>20</sup> In informing readers about these cultures and traditions, the journal was promoting the need for a coexistence of regional and national cultures that was enshrined in the 1945 Constitution (Yampolsky 1995).

The discourse concerning cultural heritage in *Mimbar Indonesia* revolved around the question of 'how to combine our essential cultural heritage with the modern scientific and industrial civilization', as Supomo wrote in 1948.<sup>21</sup> For some, this meant maintaining values from the past, like those in ancient literature and regional languages, which they considered to be still of value in an era of independence and sovereignty (Bradjanagara 1953:6-7). An example of how cultural heritage might be preserved and yet adapted to contemporary circumstances was the establishment of the Konservatori Karawitan Indonesia in Solo, where traditional music would be taught and studied in conjunction with contemporary methods (Ki Hadjar Dewantara 1950c:12-14). Trisno Sumardjo (1950c:30) provided another example: as the nation's art history forms a resource of extraordinary value, it should be preserved as a contribution to world history and culture. For this reason he proposed the establishment of a collection of paintings that recorded glorious periods in the past (*zaman2 kedjajaan sedjarah*).

Knowledge of the past, obtained by means of historiography (*ilmu sedjarah*) and archaeology (*ilmu purbakala*) was, according to Suk-

20 An example is 'Serba-serbi dari Atjeh' by Mohd. Thahir Herun (1953).

21 'Bagaimana tjaranja "mengawinkan" warisan kebudayaan dari zaman jang lampau dengan keadaban teknik dan industri modern pada zaman sekarang.' (Ways to 'marry' cultural heritage of the past with modern technology and industry) (Supomo 1948:2).

mono (1950:13-5), essential for several reasons, including the need to widen and deepen one's insight into the history of one's country so as to become conscious of one's own culture. Sukmono interpreted the meaning of history as not just confined to political history, but embracing various fields of everyday life. It saw that it encompasses all human activities, thoughts and efforts, and culture in its broadest meaning. The only restriction being that it concern the past.<sup>22</sup>

Often the rhetoric of the glorious character of the past and the level and value of its culture emerge in this context, and adjectives like perfect (*sempurna*) and high (*tinggi*) are used as though to convince the readers of the achievements of their own people. According to Shanty, knowledge of one's own culture was indispensable, but for different reasons from those advanced by Sukmono. Studying culture was just as useful as studying other fields of science, because the level of the intelligence and the character of a people may be measured from its culture (Shanty 1950:23). Readers of *Mimbar Indonesia* know, he claimed, that the Indonesian people are the inheritors of a high culture, as is proven by structures like the Borobudur which is part of 'our' cultural heritage. Just as the Egyptians took pride in their pyramids and sphinxes, he went on, so 'we' (*kita*) should admire the high level of the ideas and culture of our ancestors.<sup>23</sup>

The rhetoric of the glorious culture of the past, which rested on the work of Dutch orientalist scholarship from the colonial era, gave some Indonesian thinkers a way of establishing a continuity between the present and the precolonial past. As Betts (2004:40) observed, for some intellectuals in post-colonial societies, 'an imagined pre-colonial past [gave] direction to an imagined postcolonial future'. Sukmono, however, saw things differently. For him, cultural development was a continuing process of upward movement and decline, depending on political, economic and social circumstances. This meant that the weaknesses of the past offered lessons for the present that were just as valuable as past glories. In his view, a thorough historiographic knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the past would give the nation a firm basis for the future and would heighten and strengthen the Indonesian people's position in the international world (Sukmono 1950:13). Therefore, a scientific institute like the Djawatan Purbakala (the former Oudheidkundige

22 'Seperti umum mengetahui, sedjarah itu tidak terbatas kepada sedjarah politik-sadja, melainkan mempunjai ber-bagai2 tjabang jang bersangkutan-paut dengan kehidupan manusia seumumnja. Dengan pendek dapat dikatakan bahwa sedjarah itu lapangannja meliputi semua kerdja manusia, semua hasil buah pikiran dan tenaga manusia, seluruh kebudajaannja dalam arti jang seluas-luasnja. Hanja pembatasannja ialah bahwa semua itu harus sudah lampau' (Sukmono 1950:14).

23 'Sungguh patut kita kagumi ketinggian pikiran dan kebudajaan leluhur kita itu!' (Shanty 1950:23).

Dienst, the Archaeological Institute) was indispensable for the study and preservation of Indonesia's heritage (Sukmono 1950:15).

The discourse on the Hindu/Indian and Islamic origins of Indonesian culture is another part of the rhetoric of the glorious past. It was defended by some and rejected by those who saw it to be the perpetuation of a colonial discourse. On scientific grounds, Sukmono (1950:13-5) fiercely defended the study of Indonesian culture in its own right, not neglecting the foreign influences, but giving priority to research into the form they took when they were adapted and incorporated into Indonesian culture. This approach made Sukmono highly critical of S. Wojowasito's recently-published history (1950) of Indonesian culture, the first chapter of which was entirely devoted to the history of Indian culture.<sup>24</sup>

Contributions to *Mimbar Indonesia* that dealt with cultural heritage and how it might be used in a contemporary Indonesian context may be seen as post-colonial appropriations of colonialist scholarship. Inspired by European, including Dutch, theories and approaches, they showed how the work of orientalist scholars from the colonial era might be adapted to the new conditions and the new image of the Indonesian self. As such, they can be seen as discursive adjuncts to the Indonesianizing of the research and training institutions of the colonial era and the establishment of new institutes for the study and preservation of Indonesia's cultural heritage. Both institutional reform and discursive practice played a part in the decolonizing of culture that was taking place at this time.<sup>25</sup>

#### PROGRESS AND MODERNITY

Alongside the question of how to deal with the cultural heritage of the past, the Indonesian cultural debates of the early Independence period were characterized by a concern with modernity and the question of how notions of progress (*kemadjuan*) might be detached from colonial culture. *Mimbar Indonesia's* contributors expressed the view that culture should fulfil the needs of the time and that modernity was an issue that concerned all levels of society. The association between modernity and Western culture could be felt in the adver-

24 Sukmono 1951:22-4, 27. *India zaman purbakala* was published in 1950 in Djakarta by Badan Penerbit 'Pendidikan'.

25 This process of decolonization lasted well into the Independence period. The nineteenth-century Dutch Oudheidkundige Dienst, renamed Djawatan Purbakala in 1936, did not acquire its first Indonesian director until 1957, when Professor Sukmono succeeded the institute's former Dutch head.

tisements for fashionable clothes or products like modern English kitchenware that were carried in the journal. Some contributors expressed the idea that modernity meant being young and engaging with Western music. It meant taking up *dansa*, Western-style dancing with its associations with modernity, popular culture and foreignness, rather than remaining attached to *tari*, which was a part of the indigenous cultural heritage. Others noted that radio broadcasts of pop music and drama (*sandiwara*), movies, recorded music on discs and the performances of pop music bands, reflected the growth of a youth culture that could no longer be ignored (Kalimuda 1950:24-5). In both the articles on *dansa* and popular music, the authors discuss critically the importing of so-called Western culture. While Sju'aib Sastradiwirja (1951:22-3) lists the pros and cons of the *dansa* phenomenon, St. Kalimuda (1950:24) stresses the need to reflect on the effects of this stream of foreign influences on Indonesian music so as not to endanger the young nation.

Writers also endorsed the newfound progress of women (*kemajuan wanita*) which was seen as a contribution to the further development of the nation (Dengah S. Ahmady 1948:11-2). The movement for women's emancipation opened up opportunities for women in areas previously dominated by men, like science, politics, health and art – all areas where the Western example provided indications of what Indonesian women might achieve if given the chance. Referring to Käthe Kollwitz and her work, for example, Rukmi pleaded for an increase of the role of women in the field of art. Female artists like Emiria Sunassa (painter), S. Rukijah (author), Ketut Reneng and Tjawan (Balinese dancers) showed what women could contribute to the Indonesian arts, and pointed to the need for an increased participation by women in these and other fields of artistic endeavour (Rukmi 1950:23-4).

*Mimbar Indonesia's* enthusiastic embrace of the ideals of modernity and progress reflected the journal's cosmopolitan orientation, its openness to the outside world. Foreign cultures were presented to the readership from different perspectives, such as through reviews of North American films, literary translations, articles on Negro spirituals and jazz or Indian music and films, to name but a few. In the words of Trisno Sumardjo, this openness and cosmopolitanism were essential characteristics of the 'new Indonesian person'.<sup>26</sup>

For Sitor Situmorang, giving the Indonesian people access to world cultures required the input of young Indonesian artists, financially supported by the government. In 'Gelanggang', he called on

26 '[p]ertama2 kita mesti orang Indonesia Baru, dan djuga kosmopolit, serta manusia jg. hati dan otaknja terbuka untuk ketumbuhan dan pembaharuan' (Trisno Sumardjo 1950b:23).

young artists to make the work of well-known authors available to the Indonesian people by translating it into Indonesian and making their ideas accessible to an Indonesian readership. His list of famous writers whose work should be translated into Indonesian included not only names belonging to the Western canon (Homer, Goethe, Shakespeare, Dante, Shelley, Hugo, Baudelaire, Schiller and Ibsen) but also representatives of Eastern cultures (albeit mainly writers known and admired in the West, like Lao Tse, Confucius, Lin Yutang, Iqbal and Omar Kayam) (Sitor Situmorang 1950b:19, 21).

The confidence with which contributors to *Mimbar Indonesia* in the early Independence period embraced the modern world and the variety of cultural options it offered to newly emerging nation states was a direct outcome of the sense of national pride born out of the hard-won recognition of independence in 1949. Freed from colonial domination, Indonesians stood ready to meet the rest of the world on equal terms, not as colonial subjects of a foreign queen but as citizens of an independent nation. Under these circumstances, Western European culture was no longer associated with colonialism, but with the modernity and progress that was the rightful aspiration of the nation state and its people. Thus, when Adi Negoro addressed *Mimbar Indonesia's* readers in April 1950 to advise them of his departure for Europe and his forthcoming new column, *Surat dari Eropah* (Letters from Europe), his tone bore no trace of the colonial inheritance, but rather gave voice to the confidence of the new world citizen:

In coming editions, our esteemed readers will find a series of varied contributions about my journey to and residence in Western Europe, short articles on observations of important matters which I hope will be useful, primarily for the consciousness of sovereign, independent Indonesian citizens who are aware of their self-worth as human beings with their own country and their country's position and standing in the world.[...] An independent country needs people of an independent spirit, free from all feelings of humility, free from the feeling of being colonized and a sense of inferiority. To foster that inner condition, *Mimbar Indonesia* must provide its readers with contributions of [ever] greater quality.<sup>27</sup>

27 'Dibelakang ini para pembaca yang budiman akan menerima ber-turut2 serba tjatatan aneka-warna dari per-djalanan saja dan kemudian dari Eropah Barat, karangan2 yang bersifat ringkas, penting, berisi berbagai pemandangan yang kiranya bermanfaat, pertama yang berfaedah untuk kesedaran warganegara Indonesia yang telah merdeka dan berdaulat, sadar akan harga dirinya sebagai manusia yang telah bernegara dan tahu tempat dan deradjat negaranya itu didunia. [...] Negara merdeka menghendaki jiwa merdeka yang bebas dari segala rasa-rendah, rasa-terdjajah, rasa-ketjil, maka untuk mendapat kedudukan bathin yang sedemikian itu haruslah matjalah *Mimbar Indonesia* menjediakan pembacaan yang lebih baik' (Adi Negoro 1950a:7).



In this spirit, *Mimbar Indonesia* promoted itself as the bearer of a changed consciousness, born out of independence and sovereignty and looking towards an Indonesian future as a modern nation among the world community. Relations with the Netherlands itself continued to be shadowed by the colonial experience, but *Mimbar Indonesia* reflected the sense that with the rest of the world, including Western Europe, Indonesia was now a free and equal partner.

#### POLEMICS ON AESTHETICS

Most contributors to *Mimbar Indonesia* regarded art as a significant contributor to Indonesia's national identity and resilience. The teacher and violinist Sutan Kalimuda (1950:24-5), for example, wrote in 1950 that a country that failed to give proper attention to art (*menganaktivirkan kesenian*), would be short-lived and lacking in stability, since art is one of the building blocks of the nation, strengthening and inspiring its progress. Artists from various disciplines explored possibilities for shaping national art forms, and this led to various polemical exchanges on the nature and function of art. In the debates published in *Mimbar Indonesia* in 1950, terms and concepts were used that only much later in the decade and in the early 1960s became ideologically rigid. Nevertheless, the different schools of thought were often subject to criticism. The writer, dramatist and filmmaker Usmar Ismail, for instance, (who Hairus Salim discusses in his contribution to this volume), mockingly presented his opinion of adherents of these schools when discussing attitudes towards Indonesian art: those defending *l'art pour l'art* who pay no attention to the audience; those who give the public what it wants (but among themselves say that the public is stupid); and those in between who defend 'art for the people' (*seni untuk rakyat*). The first and second categories trample on the third one, he added quite cynically (Usmar Ismail 1950:19, 26).

*Mimbar Indonesia* covered debates occurring in the wider media of the time, but it was also itself a forum for polemical exchange. For instance, it reported the lengthy public discussion between two prominent figures, Trisno Sumardjo and Sudjojono, and also published their ongoing exchange.<sup>28</sup> In this debate, Trisno Sumardjo criticized Sudjojono, the 'father of painting in the new Indonesia'<sup>29</sup>

28 See also Spanjaard 2003:85-90. Marakarma (1950b, 1950c) summarized the polemic and commented critically on the exchange in 'Kesan dan harapan'.

29 '[t]okoh bersedjarah (historische figuur) selaku bapak seni lukis Indonesia Baru' (Trisno Sumardjo 1950a:21).

and leader of the Seniman Indonesia Muda (SIM, Young Artists of Indonesia), for promoting his idea that realism was the only possible painting style for Indonesia. He accepted the notion that artistic inspiration should be drawn from present circumstances in Indonesia, but rejected both Sudjojono's interpretation of realism (which, for him, was naturalism), and his assertion that realism should be 'the' definitive style for Indonesian painting.<sup>30</sup> In Sumardjo's view (1950a:21-3), Sudjojono's assertions were damaging the development of Indonesian art, despite the latter's claims to be making a healthy contribution to the cultural struggle.

Sudjojono (1950a, 1950b) responded in his two-part article 'Sudjojono about Sujojono'. Claiming that his work was inspired by the context in which he lived, his experiences during the guerilla war and the sufferings of the people, he argued that modern painting should not be abstract, so one cannot be deceived.<sup>31</sup> He proposed the term 'real-realism' as a way of indicating a style which combines realism as a form with 'real' content, producing art which is intelligible to ordinary people.<sup>32</sup> He admitted that he had rejected influences from Indonesian traditions as well as from the West, placing himself in a neutral position in relation to the Indonesian world. Finally, he also rejected Trisno Sumardjo's accusation that he was a demagogue, and refused to enter into discussions on politics (in particular on the communist party, the PKI, thus warding off Trisno Sumardjo's insinuation that his views on art were the result of his political affiliations).<sup>33</sup>

## INDONESIAN MUSIC

Music was another subject of debate about ways to shape national art to which *Mimbar Indonesia* contributed. Modern technology

30 'Bahwa keadaan tanah-air dizaman sekarang dijadikan sumber "ilham"-nja, itu kami anggap baik, sudah selajaknja dan fitri (natuurlijk). Tapi interpretasinja jang salah tentang realisme-naturalisme, serta kejakinannja bahwa "realisme"-nja itulah tjorak definitif senilukis Indonesia Baru, ini tidak mejakinkan kami' (Trisno Sumardjo 1950a:22).

31 'Buat saja senilukis modern tidak lagi sesuatu barang jang abstrak, ia buat saja suatu benda jang konkrit, jang tak ada seorangpun akan bisa "menipu" saja, meskipun dia punja nama internasional' (Sudjojono 1950a:21).

32 '[...] desnoods real-realism. Isi realistik, bentuk realistik. Gambar saja buat rakjat udik bukan teka-teki' (Sudjojono 1950a:21).

33 In an anecdote related almost 50 years after these exchanges appeared in the journal, Sobron Aidit (1999) shed a different light on this discussion, saying that the polemic was artificial, as both men were in urgent need of money and *Mimbar Indonesia* was paying them for their contributions (<http://www.lallement.com/sobron/serba27.htm>).

facilitated the development and dissemination of ideas on Indonesian music. In its coverage of Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI)'s annual 'Radio Star' (Bintang Radio) contest from 1951 onwards, *Mimbar Indonesia* showed the role played by RRI in fostering and promoting the quest for Indonesian music at this time.

Music and nationalism are a powerful combination, and many discussions in *Mimbar Indonesia* focussed on the character of *musik Indonesia*. Among the regular contributors writing on this theme were Amir Pasaribu, J.A. Dunga, Sutan Kalimuda and L. Manik. Opinions differed widely and ranged over all musical styles and genres. The issues of common concern were 'ethnicity' and 'authenticity'. Folk music or '*musik rakyat*' from the various ethnic groups received special attention. Contributors expressed a variety of opinions on how these musical traditions might be preserved and/or developed, and how they could be used in contemporary compositions (pointing to composers like Béla Bartók as exemplars). According to Ki Hadjar Dewantara (1950c:12-4), music categorized as classical art, such as Javanese gamelan music, had been recognized internationally for its high standing and value, and needed to be seen as another part of the national cultural heritage. However, not all participants in the discussions on music and the nation were prepared to acknowledge that gamelan was indeed 'Indonesian' music. To them, gamelan music was a Javanese cultural expression, and thus not Indonesian. Further, the music was seen as a remnant of a feudal society, from which modern Indonesians wanted to distance themselves.

Another type of music that was a source of controversy was *keroncong*. According to Nirwani (1950:22-3), *keroncong* had acquired a place in the history of Indonesian music and needed only to be brought up to date.<sup>34</sup> Sutan Kalimuda however disagreed. For him, *keroncong* was not 'authentic' Indonesian music, as it was performed on what he called international instruments. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that music like *keroncong*, as well as Malay music (*musik Melaju*) and jazz was becoming increasingly popular, in particular in urban environments (Kalimuda 1950:24).

In trying to define what constituted Indonesian music, contributors looked to all possible alternatives, and this sometimes led to controversy. In the view of *Mimbar Indonesia's* editorial board, it was an issue that 'generated confusion'<sup>35</sup> and there-

34 '[p]aling2 hanja dapat dimodernisir sadja, karena krontjong sudah tetap dalam rupa dan bentuk, dan sudah merupakan suatu fase dalam sedjarah Seni Musik Indonesia' (Nirwani 1950:22-23).

35 'Dalam keritjuhan keadaan sekarang ini dimana anggapan mengenai kebudajaan musik kita saling selisih dan ada malah jang bertentangan [...]' (Redaksi *Mimbar Indonesia* 1951:6).

fore, in October 1951 the journal devoted a complete issue to music.<sup>36</sup> Appearing on the occasion of the 23rd anniversary of the national anthem 'Indonesia Raya', the editors expressed the hope that as W.R. Supratman's composition evoked the feeling of the unity of the nation (Redaksi *Mimbar Indonesia* 1951:6), it might soothe the controversies. Apart from the history of the national anthem, this issue of the journal featured articles taking a variety of approaches to the question of Indonesian national music. Some contributors proposed a hybridity of musical styles as a way of making Indonesian music a part of world music.<sup>37</sup> L. Manik added another point of view, arguing that the concentration should not be on the 'national' qualities of Indonesian music, its authenticity and Eastern-ness (*keaslian dan ketimuran*), but rather on the composition of music of high quality. Just as Sudjojono urged painters to master the technique of painting, for L. Manik (1951:11-3, 28) the study and mastering of composition technique was of far more importance to the nation than the effort to discover the music's 'national character' (*tjorak nasional*).

Many of the issues about music discussed in *Mimbar Indonesia* in the early 1950s had arisen in the first cultural congress in 1948.<sup>38</sup> The concern for a distinctive Indonesian character in music, the influence of Western music including the potential threat of popular music, the place of *keroncong*, and the role of music from Indonesia's regional cultures had all emerged as topics at this congress. A decade later, they also preoccupied the Left. As Rhoma Dwi Aria Yuliantri shows in her essay in this volume, LEKRA's music division, the Lembaga Musik Indonesia (Indonesian Music Institute), was also concerned with Indonesian musical expression. It promoted the collection of folk music and new arrangements of regional songs, along with the injection of ideologically 'progressive' lyrics into Indonesian melodies, including *keroncong*, and railed against the influence of 'decadent' western music such as rock 'n' roll. By the late 1950s, however, while the issue of 'what is Indonesian' still drove the debate, the different responses to it were becoming increasingly divergent.

36 *Nomor musik* 1951.

37 W. Lumban Tobing (1951), for instance, investigated the possibilities of synthesizing gamelan *pelog* with forms of world music. However many other ideas on hybrid forms were also advanced in this issue.

38 The 1948 congress was recorded in a special issue (Nomor Kongres) of the LKI journal *Indonesia*, *Madjalah Kebudayaan Indonesia* 1-1-2 (June-July) 1950. B. Sitompul's contribution to the discussion on music is reported on pp. 94-9.

## CULTURE HEROES

On 10 November 1950, the third anniversary of the journal's foundation and the first commemoration of National Heroes' Day in independent Indonesia, *Mimbar Indonesia* published an article by H.B. Jassin proposing the concept of 'cultural heroes' (*pahlawan kebudayaan*) as a way of honouring those artists whose creative work fostered the spirit of nationalism during the Japanese Occupation and the Revolution. In Jassin's view, artists embodied a nation's inner strengths.<sup>39</sup> For him, these 'cultural heroes' included the poets Chairil Anwar and Rivai Apin, and the poet, author and filmmaker Usmar Ismail, who established the theatre group Maya during the Japanese Occupation to counter the activities of the Japanese cultural centre Keimin Bunka Shidosho. Rosihan Anwar was included as a poet, creative writer and journalist whose fresh and fiery reports on the revolution in Java and whose exposure of the so-called 'Van Mook drama' in East Indonesia contributed to national independence. Sudjojono had a place on Jassin's list as the father of new Indonesian painting, and Simandjuntak as the pioneer of new Indonesian music. All these prominent artists engaged openly with the sufferings of the people, making them national heroes in the pursuit of justice, truth and honesty (Jassin 1950b:22). As all the 'cultural heroes' Jassin listed had contributed to the development of 'modern' forms of contemporary Indonesian culture, the publication of this article in *Mimbar Indonesia* was an implicit endorsement by the journal of the role modern Indonesian art had to play in the process of decolonization.

### 'RUSTY REMAINS OF COLONIALISM'; COUNTERING THE CONTINUATION OF THE COLONIAL PRESENCE

'Giving content' to independence above all required a decolonization of the mind.<sup>40</sup> When travelling from Amsterdam to The Hague

39 'Tapi seniman2 sebenarnya adalah kumpulan tenaga batin suatu bangsa. Pada mereka terkumpul dan terbentuk kekajaan (atau kemiskinan) batin bangsa, pada penjair2, pengarang2, pelukis2, pemahat2, komponis2 dan lain2 pentjipta. Dan sebagai kumpulan tenaga batin mereka mungkin merupakan pemanjar tenaga batin melalui tjiptaan2 mereka, berupa sadjak2, tjerita2, drama2, lukisan2, pahatan2, lagu2 dan sebagainya.' (Jassin 1950b:22.)

40 This concept was coined by Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in his 1986 study of the politics of language in African literature. Central to his book was the argument that 'in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Europe stole art treasures from Africa to decorate their houses and museums; in the twentieth century Europe is stealing the treasures of the mind to enrich their languages and cultures. Africa needs back its economy, its politics, its culture, its languages and all its patriotic writers' (Thiong'o 1986:xii).

on his way to Moscow, in 1950, Jusuf Wibisono was surprised to find that the Netherlands was such a small country. Writing in *Mimbar Indonesia* of his impressions, he told of how at primary school in Indonesia, he had studied the geography of the Netherlands from a large book, and the geography of Indonesia from a small book, which had given him the idea that the home country of the colonizers was much larger than the colony (Jusuf Wibisono 1950:7-10). This experience of travel brought him to reconfigure his mental map, as obviously the spatial 'division' of the world had changed, which suddenly made him aware that the topographical representation of both countries during colonial times had not corresponded to their actual proportions.<sup>41</sup>

Jusuf Wibisono was also struck by the fact that Dutch employees of the Indonesian High Commission in The Hague had opposed the transfer of sovereignty in 1949. Some of them had even obstructed the work of the Commission. In his '*Tjataan2 perdjalanen ke Moskow (VIII)*' (Notes from a trip to Moscow) he described the way some of these Dutch employees had not yet adapted themselves to the new circumstances, and continued to humiliate Indonesians with their arrogant behaviour. For example, they addressed Mr Palar, the leader of the mission to Moscow with the informal second person pronoun instead of calling him 'Excellentie'; they did not know (or pretended not to know) that Batavia had become Djakarta, and they used 'Nederlandsch-Indië' instead of 'Indonesia' (although the person responsible apparently later apologized).<sup>42</sup>

#### A LOOMING PRESENCE

Indonesians had made progress in achieving their aims, wrote Marakarma, characterizing their country in *wayang kulit*-like style as 'prosperous and peaceful, with a high civilization and a brilliant culture'.<sup>43</sup> It was however not possible to reach perfection at once,

41 It was Adi Negoro who, together with others, produced the first 'Indonesian' atlas in 1952, a translation of a Dutch work. Only in 2009, however, 60 years after independence, was the first official national Indonesian atlas published, the *Atlas Nasional Indonesia*. The Indonesian newspaper *Republika* (6-2-2009) marked the occasion with the headline, 'Finally independent from the Dutch atlas' ('*Akhirnya merdeka dari atlas Belanda*').

42 Jusuf Wibisono 1950:7-10. Similarly, in his article 'Indonesia dan Nederland dimasa depan', Adi Negoro (1950b:27) reported that discussions in the Netherlands were carried on as if Indonesia were still a Dutch colony.

43 '[s]atu negara jang makmur dan damai, tinggi peradabannja dan gemilang kebudajaannja', (Marakarma 1950b:20-1).

he wrote, because of the 'rusty remains of colonialism that still clung to the country and most of its inhabitants'.<sup>44</sup>

Despite Indonesia's newly won sovereignty, the Netherlands was still a looming presence in the early 1950s. It featured constantly in writing published in *Mimbar Indonesia*, as a force to be reckoned with, to be on one's guard against, and as an inhibitor of progress. Contributors to the journal in particular expressed their ongoing worries about the potential influences of Dutch culture in independent Indonesia. After all, in the past, culture had been used purely as a means for colonizing, Vice-President Hatta argued (*Djawaban pemerintah* 1950:9). During the Round Table Conference in 1949, cultural cooperation had been part of the negotiations between the two countries, although it was just a minor topic on the agenda. Ki Hadjar Dewantara, whose critical analysis of the negotiations was published in *Mimbar Indonesia*, reported that culture was seen by the Indonesian negotiators as a potential trap used by the Dutch to gain profit on the political level. From past experience they knew, he said, that the Dutch were not to be trusted, as they had always used undertakings in the field of culture ('*usaha-usaha kebudajaan*') to strengthen and maintain their capitalist and imperialist colonial policies. However the Indonesian negotiators' exclusive focus on politics had meant that negotiations on culture had regularly ended in disappointment and the sense of a 'fait-accompli' (Ki Hadjar Dewantara 1950a). According to the Indonesian government, the agreement on culture would remove these anxieties, as the government itself was to regulate and control Dutch culture and to prevent it from entering Indonesia on its own terms (*Djawaban pemerintah* 1950:9).

Nevertheless, a number of phrases in the cultural agreement had made the Indonesian leaders nervous, Dewantara (1950b:14) continued, especially those stating that the relationship between both countries should be based on complete freedom, voluntariness and reciprocity. Besides, he said, the content of several clauses was incompatible with the basis of the agreement. Both parties had to agree for example to promote the exchange of radio programs in the field of culture and news (clause 7). It was also proposed that either party would be allowed to establish and maintain institutes in the field of teaching, art and other cultural fields in the country of the other party (clause 10). To demonstrate the absurdity of the proposals, Ki Hadjar Dewantara reversed the point of view and wondered what would happen if Indonesians began to disseminate

44 'Sisa2 dan karat2 pendjadjahan jang selama ini masih menebal ditanah air kita dan pada sebahagian besar bangsa kita' (Marakarma 1950b:20-1, 27).



Indonesian culture through Dutch radio. Why would they do so anyway? Or, what if Indonesia established cultural organizations in the Netherlands, similar to the Dutch cultural centre in Surabaya that was sponsored by European enterprises? And would it be logical to teach Indonesian science and art to Dutch children? Finally, Ki Hadjar Dewantara warned that if Indonesians did not take care, they might well remain independent in the political meaning of the term, but be culturally recolonized by the Dutch. This would have the effect of endangering the political independence of the Indonesian people.<sup>45</sup>

The use of a national language was another subject that touched on ongoing colonial influence. The language of unity (*bahasa persatuan*) was a crucial theme in the people's struggle to build a national soul (*djiwa kebangsaan*), Adi Negoro (1948:2) wrote in 1948. The question now was how to balance the development of Indonesian as a language of science and in the world of reading and libraries, with its daily use. While most of the Dutch had agreed that Indonesian should become the national language, a 'fanatical gang' (*'segerombolan Belanda jang tekak (fanatik)'*) had hoped to maintain Dutch as the language of communication among people from the higher social classes in Indonesia. Their efforts had clearly failed, but language use remained a concern. The 'Obor' column in the journal published questions from readers on matters to do with language, along with answers from the editors. For example, A.R.U. from Bondowoso questioned the continuing use of Dutch subtitles in films, when Indonesian subtitles would be useful for those Indonesians who did not know Dutch.<sup>46</sup> S. Alibasah from Purwokerto wanted to know whether the teaching of Dutch at schools would be abolished.<sup>47</sup> And S. Suwarwotho from Semarang wondered why the

45 Ki Hadjar Dewantara 1950b:14-5. This discourse influenced the discussions during the Konferensi Kebudayaan (Culture Conference) that was held in Jakarta from 4 to 6 August, 1950 (Jassin 1950a:3, 29). Organized by the Lembaga Kebudayaan Indonesia (LKI, Institute of Indonesian Culture), this conference was called to reflect on the Cultural Agreement between Indonesia and the Netherlands, a result of the 1949 Round Table Conference, and to address the question of Indonesian national culture and its relationship to the culture of other peoples (Kebudayaan nasional dan hubungannya dengan kebudayaan bangsa-bangsa lain) (Nunus Supardi 2007:151). See also Foulcher 1986:15-17.

46 In answer to A.R.U.'s question 'Mengapa kini film2 itu masih mempergunakan teks bahasa Belanda? Djika teks itu dibuat di Djakarta, apa djeleknja bila diganti dengan bahasa Indonesia, sehingga penonton2 jang masih buta huruf dalam bahasa Belanda dapat membatjanja', Mimbar Indonesia's editors wrote: 'Sekarang telah dimulai mengadakan teks bahasa Indonesia' (Obor 1950b:2).

47 'Tanja: Apabila R.I.S. telah berdiri, apakah peladjaran basa Belanda di-sekolah-sekolah itu akan dihapuskan?'; 'Djawab: Pasti. Malah di-daerah2 Republik basa Belanda itu telah lama dihapuskan. Kemungkinan kelak basa Belanda hanja diadjarakan kepada mereka jang merasa perlu mempeladjar basu itu (fakultatif)' (Obor 1950a:2).

name of the Nederlandsch-Indische Handelsbank was maintained even though ‘Nederlandsch-Indië’ no longer existed.<sup>48</sup>

‘BUSH CLEARING’

All these examples show, as Betts (2004:88) has remarked, that ‘the disappearance of formal empire did not mean the end of the colonial experience in the opinion of many critics. For them, decolonization required much more: a fundamental change of outlook and attitude, of heart and mind. In an aptly chosen phrase, “bush clearing” was declared necessary’.

In newly independent Indonesia, not everyone saw this ‘bush clearing’ as necessary; even for those who did, untying the threads proved to be difficult and complicated. Many of the people involved in cultural policy and in the discourse on culture in the early 1950s were themselves Dutch-educated. Their views were European influenced and they maintained good personal contacts with Dutch artists and intellectuals. Urged on by the new circumstances, however, Indonesia had to build a new relationship with the Netherlands, clearing away what Rosihan Anwar (1950:19) called ‘the colonial air that continued to envelop Indonesia’ (*‘udara kolonial jang terus meliputi Indonesia’*). The continued Dutch presence in some layers of Indonesian society was fiercely criticized, and interference from the Dutch, such as was said to have occurred in the case of an exhibition of ‘contemporary Balinese art’ in Amsterdam in 1949, would no longer be tolerated.<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, cooperation between Indonesia and the Netherlands in the field of culture continued. The Dutch foundation for cultural exchange (STICUSA) sponsored and organized cultural activities in both countries. It also invited Indonesian artists to study in the Netherlands, giving them opportunities to travel elsewhere in Europe. However as Dolk argues in her essay on STICUSA in this volume, any official Dutch–Indonesian cooperation after 1945 stood little chance

48 The answer to S. Suwarwotho’s question, ‘Konon katanja Nama Nederlandsch Indië itu sudah tidak ada lagi. Tetapi mengapa masih ada nama Nederlandsch Indische Handels Bank?’ was ‘Djuga akan segera diganti’ (Obor 1950c:2).

49 While the original selection of the Balinese paintings and sculptures, created by artists of the new era (*zaman baru*) had been purely based on artistic considerations (*mendjadi melulu ukuran kesenian*), due to the interference of the Indisch Instituut in Amsterdam, several ethnological museum pieces (*‘barang-barang jang aneh’ jang ada di museum sana*) were added to the exhibition (Armijn Pane 1949:11-3). According to the writer of this article, this resulted in the ‘complete failure’ (*‘complete mistukking’*) of the exhibition.

of success in Indonesia. The debates in *Mimbar Indonesia* show that the December 1949 agreement might actually have reinforced the Indonesian rejection of a mutual cultural cooperation, the outcome of which was seen to be mainly of benefit to the Dutch.

In another contribution to this discussion, Abu Hanifah (1950:7) emphasized that Indonesia expected the Netherlands to regard its former colony as an equal partner. As for the position of the Dutch in Indonesia, he declared that all non-Indonesian citizens in Indonesia were foreigners, who were expected to behave in a way that was appropriate to guests. This meant they should not interfere in the internal affairs of Indonesia. For Indonesians, especially those in positions of leadership, it was time to cast off the inferiority complex bred of colonialism and approach the world as an independent and self-confident nation (Abu Hanifah 1950:6-7).

Articles published in *Mimbar Indonesia* on the question of the continuing Dutch presence show that the Indonesian people were anxious to determine their own destiny (*Djawaban pemerintah* 1950:8) and extend their contacts with the world at large. In Sitor Situmorang's words it was 'London, Paris, New Delhi. And maybe Peking. The actual meaning of Western culture, Russian communism and new democracy in China is what matters to us. Between Washington and Moscow, the Netherlands is just too small a factor for us to worry about'.<sup>50</sup>

#### 'WHITHER INDONESIAN CULTURE?'; CONCLUDING REMARKS

When Claire Holt (1967:211) used the words 'Whither Indonesian culture?' to introduce her discussion of Indonesia's polemics on culture from the 1930s onward, called 'The Great Debate', she was quoting the question that dominated cultural life in Indonesia in the early independence period. As Vice-President Hatta remarked in his opening speech to the 1951 Cultural Congress in Bandung, the advent of these regular congresses served to remind Indonesians that this was one of the questions that needed to be asked and re-asked in the process of giving meaning to independence.<sup>51</sup> The publications in *Mimbar Indonesia* – 'a national enterprise' – show

50 'London, Paris, New Delhi. Dan bila kesempatan ada di Peking misalnja: Apa dan bagaimana itu kebudayaan Barat jang sebenarnya? Dan bagaimana pula alam komunis Rusia dan demokrasi baru di Tiongkok? Soal inilah jang actueel pada kita. Faktor Belanda dalam hal ini terlalu ketjil antara Washington dan Moskou untuk kita timbang berat' (Sitor Situmorang 1950a:17).

51 'Memang, setiap waktu apabila ada Kongres Kebudayaan, kita selalu bertanja dalam hati kita: "Kemana arah kebudayaan kita?"' (*Kemana arah* 1951:14).

how the question shaped intellectual debate on cultural matters at the very beginning of Indonesia's existence as an independent sovereign state. They offer an insight into the ways in which this question permeated Indonesian thinking about the role of culture in the process of decolonization, across the whole spectrum of educational and cultural backgrounds and ideological affiliations among members of the urban intellectual elite.

The discussions that were carried on in *Mimbar Indonesia* reveal the openness to the multiple ways in which an 'Indonesian' culture could be conceived, and the enthusiasm for intercultural contacts and influences that marked Indonesian cultural debates of the early 1950s. They also show how the legacies of the past, including cultural heritage and the colonial experience, complicated these discussions and made politics an inescapable dimension of Indonesian cultural life. Many of the topics that dominated the discourse on culture at this time had been around since the 1920s, and even some of those who contributed to the debates were already familiar names in Indonesian cultural history. However the new context of political independence meant that Indonesians approached these questions with a different state of mind and a different view of the rest of the world. And it is a window on those changed attitudes, and the eagerness with which a group of Indonesians seized upon the task of 'giving content to' independence, that *Mimbar Indonesia* provides. The contributions to the journal at this time offer a unique impression of the atmosphere of this new era and of the voices of these new Indonesians. They show us the concrete steps taken in the pursuit of a culture that was 'Indonesian'. But the answer to the question 'Whither Indonesian culture?' remained wide open. Only later in the 1950s would the lines between adherents of the different possible directions become more sharply drawn, and the direction of modern Indonesian culture become more bitterly contested (Holt 1970:163). Even then, however, the question remained unresolved. It remains on the agenda in Indonesia today.

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