
THE PERFECT POLICEMAN: COLONIAL POLICING, MODERNITY, AND CONSCIENCE ON SUMATRA'S WEST COAST IN THE EARLY 1930S

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"[I want to] make my personal judgment known, a judgment based on my own observations."¹

Policing may have been the dirtiest, most difficult, and most unrewarding job in the Dutch East Indies' late colonial state, but to the Indonesian and European officers of the police force, it was also a window to progress. Indonesians² formed the majority (96 percent) of the modern police force that operated in the Dutch East Indies during the 1920s and 1930s, and most of them filled the lower ranks. To them, service as a

¹ Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, Jakarta (hereafter ANRI), Archief Binnenlands Bestuur (hereafter BB), inv. no. 3592, Roesad gelar Soetan Perpatih to the head of the district criminal investigation department in Padang, May 4, 1933. An earlier draft of this article, since then revised and further developed, has been published in Dutch. See Marieke Bloembergen, "Een ideale politiemann. Politie, beschaving en geweten in Sumatra's Westkust," *Het koloniale beschavingsoffensief: Wegen naar het nieuwe Indië, 1890–1950*, ed. Marieke Bloembergen and Remco Raben (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 2009), pp. 54–82. I thank Beverley Jackson for the translation of that earlier version, and Michael Peletz and the reviewer from *Indonesia* for their comments.

² Although the word "Indonesia" was common in the 1920s, I am aware of the fact that it is an anachronism to talk of "Indonesians" at this time, but it seems to be the most practical solution for describing an all-encompassing police force. Indigenous policemen were recruited from the whole of the Dutch East Indies; the majority came from Java. In an ironic way, the colonial police force may have contributed to the creation of an imagined greater Indonesia among its indigenous members.

policeman offered the possibility of a fixed salary, a limited career, a uniform, and status. To a limited few—the sons of the Indonesian elite, and the more highly educated—the police force, however, offered more than that. These happy few had (restricted) access to the higher ranks, and this access increased during and after the late 1920s. Policing, for some, could also be an intellectual challenge, a chance to be a participant–observer of radical change in colonial society, while paradoxically, at the same time, playing a role in the suppression of change. The colonial police, therefore, may be an interesting source to study if we seek to understand both the functioning of the colonial state and the multiple meanings of modernity—or “how modernity was being used and why”—in colonial society.³ This will be the double focus of this article. Its underlying aim is to gain further insight into the colonial nature of policing in the Dutch East Indies.

Someone who understood the intellectual challenge of policing very well was the Minangkabau-born Roesad gelar Soetan Perpatih, who, from 1929 until 1939, served as *wedana* of police in the district criminal investigation department (*gewestelijke recherche*) of the West Coast of Sumatra.⁴ In May 1929, Roesad started a writing project of his own, wishing to produce a clear account of the religious and political movements that had made Minangkabau society in this region so combustible over the previous few decades.⁵ The project was entirely his own idea, and was not prompted by his superiors, but he based his work on the methods of modern Western scholarship. This would be the first in a series of reports he produced on his own initiative between 1929 and 1934, quite unrelated to the monthly political police reports he was required to submit about indigenous meetings and associations. Together, his independent reports make up a remarkable corpus, which may be read as a study of religion, politics, and modernism in Minangkabau society, most notably in relation to the needs and requirements of the late-colonial state. Roesad wanted his own views on these matters to be known.⁶

Roesad was the perfect officer for the political police, or at least that was the verdict of his superior, the resident of Sumatra’s West Coast, B. H. F. van Heuven.⁷ A capable

³ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), p. 115.

⁴ *Wedana* was a rank in the local indigenous administrative corps, or *pangreh praja*, as well as a specific position, namely that of district chief. *Wedana* of police was a position of similar rank and status within the colonial police force. The *gewestelijke recherche* (referred to hereafter as district criminal investigation department) was set up in the early 1920s with a primarily political focus.

⁵ ANRI, BB, inv. no. 3592, Nota over de godsdienstig-politieke beweging ter Sumatra’s Westkust (Memorandum on the religious political movements on Sumatra’s West Coast), June 3, 1929, by Roesad gelar Soetan Perpatih (hereafter Roesad). *Gelar* indicates a title passed down matrilineally. Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900–1942* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 37.

⁶ The report named in the previous note was the first one that Roesad produced explicitly to publicize his “personal judgment.” See also ANRI, BB, inv. no. 3952, “Rapport over het onderwijs aan godsdienstscholen, in verband met de ontdekkingen tijdens de huiszoekingen in September 1933” (Report on education at religious schools, in connection with the police searches in September 1933), October 18, 1933; and ANRI, BB, inv. no. 3952, “Het modernisme in penghoeloekringen” (Modernism among the *penghulu*), November 6, 1933. Roesad composed both of these reports.

⁷ As will be explained below, the modern colonial police force, which at the time was called the general police force, included, since the police reforms of 1918–1920, special divisions for the task of political policing. These special political police divisions had to report, via the local police head (the *resident*), to the attorney general, who led the centralized Intelligence Service, or Algemeene Recherchedienst (General Criminal Investigation Service, ARD) in Batavia, on all social and political meetings, associations, and

officer of this branch had to possess social intelligence, acute powers of observation, and a wide interest in society. Roesad had all these qualities, which meant he also reflected the contradictions inherent in his position: he was fascinated by the profound social changes of his time, which he observed perceptively and, to some extent, applauded. As a police officer, however, he also helped to block the political changes that struck fear into the hearts of the colonial administrators. For all his detached desire for understanding, his reports were far from innocuous. They provided the basis and arguments—probably directly—for the ban on meetings and gatherings and for the arrests of the leaders of two religious political organizations, the Persatuan Muslim Indonesia (Permi, United Muslims of Indonesia) and the Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia (PSII, the Islamic Association Party of Indonesia), which took place in the summer of 1933 on Van Heuven's orders.⁸

It is interesting to compare Roesad's ideas on the relationship between social and religious change and local radical politics with developments in the scholarly literature on popular radicalism published since the 1950s. Such an inquiry will further this article's attempt to understand how "modernity" and its radical edges were experienced and used at the time Roesad was writing. While early studies on the nationalist and radical movements in the Dutch East Indies tended to understand popular radicalism mainly as an antagonistic reaction to colonial politics, the attention towards local area studies since the 1960s has (ironically enough) broadened and complicated the perspective; since the early 1990s, partly inspired by Takashi Shiraishi's *An Age in Motion*, scholars have tried to understand radicalism *also* in the context of a more general indigenous movement towards progress, or the *pergerakan*.⁹ Roesad looked at the problem of modernity from a perspective concerned with the interests of the colonial state, but precisely because of his efforts, at the same time, to problematize "modernity" in general, he seems to provide an interpretative framework that might still have appeal to those well versed in recent historiography on this topic.

In this article, I postulate that the case of Roesad can help scholars understand the multiple experiences of modernity in the Dutch East-Indies even further, and on a more theoretical level,¹⁰ *precisely* because of the fact that Roesad enables us to make a shift in perspective—namely, from the perspective of the Indonesians being policed

activities in colonial society. These political police divisions were: the political investigation departments in the larger cities, and the *gewestelijke recherche* (or district criminal investigation department) at the regional level, in which Roesad served. However, members of other divisions of the general police, like the *veldpolitie* (field police, set up in 1918), and the administrative police (dating from the nineteenth century) were involved in political policing as well.

⁸ Audrey R. Kahin, "Repression and Regroupment: Religious and Nationalist Organizations in West Sumatra in the 1930s," *Indonesia* 38 (October 1984): 39–40.

⁹ Especially, Jeffrey Alan Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs: Cultural Resilience in Indonesia through Jihad and Colonialism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); John R. Bowen, *Sumatran Politics and Poetics: Gayo History, 1900–1989* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1991); Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912–1926* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Taufik Abdullah, "Islam, History and Social Change in Minangkabau," in *Change and Continuity in Minangkabau: Local, Regional, and Historical Perspectives on West-Sumatra*, ed. Lynn L. Thomas and Franz von Benda Beckman (Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for International Studies, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1985), pp. 141–55; and James T. Siegel, *The Rope of God* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969).

¹⁰ Cf. Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, pp. 142–49; Marieke Bloembergen and Remco Raben, "Wegen naar het nieuwe Indië, 1890–1950," in *Het koloniale beschavingsoffensief: Wegen naar het nieuwe Indië, 1890–1950*, ed. Marieke Bloembergen and Remco Raben (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 2009), pp. 8–15.

towards that of the Indonesian policeman. Most studies on indigenous progressive or radical movements—with important exceptions¹¹—ignore the fact that the local search for progress and modernity did not only entail anticolonial nationalism or radicalism, but could also imply that the person searching would become involved in colonial politics.¹² This perspective, that of an Indonesian aiming to be a perfect policeman—restricted by the boundaries of colonial hierarchical structures—will be key to this article, for such a lens can illuminate further the complexities of colonial society in times of (radical) change, and thus clarify what made colonial policing colonial.

In the historiography of the Dutch East Indies, until recently, scant attention has been paid to the colonial police, certainly in comparison to more extensive studies of police in the historiography of the British Empire since the 1980s.¹³ Since the 1970s, however, the reports produced by the colonial political police in the Dutch East Indies have been plumbed as rich source material for studies on indigenous protest movements, popular radicalism, and the nationalist movement, the preferred focus of attention for social historians and Indonesian historiographers.¹⁴ As a result of this

¹¹ See for exceptions: Siegel, *Rope of God*, pp. 88–90; see also Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs*, who, by offering a smart, multiply contextualized analysis of schools, *adat*, religion, private life, and critical thinking among the Minangkabau, makes this point. However, Hadler addresses the relative lack of attention that has been paid by scholars to non-radical, yet progressive developments by considering these developments in the context of the house and the family. He pays less attention to those members of the Minangkabau elite, who were equally interested in modernization but entangled in collaboration with the Dutch.

¹² See for an elaboration of this perspective: Henk Schulte Nordholt, “Onafhankelijkheid of moderniteit: Een geïllustreerde hypothese,” in *Het koloniale beschavingsoffensief: Wegen naar het nieuwe Indië, 1890–1950*, ed. Marieke Bloembergen and Remco Raben (Leiden, KITLV Uitgeverij, 2009), pp. 105–20. (An elaboration in English of Henk Schulte Nordholt’s article will be published this year in the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*.) For a notably broad and integral analysis of the multiple European, Chinese, and Indonesian initiatives that sought to further progress and associational life in colonial society, see: Kees van Dijk, *The Netherlands Indies and the Great War, 1914–1918* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007).

¹³ The first standard works in this field are David Arnold, *Police Power and Colonial Rule: Madras 1859–1947* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986); David Anderson and David Killingray, *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority, and Control, 1830–1940* (Manchester and New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 1991). More recent works include Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, “Police and Public Order in Bombay, 1880–1947,” in *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance, and the State in India, c. 1850–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 181–233; David Andrew Campion, “Watchmen of the Raj: The United Provinces Police, 1870–1931, and the Dilemmas of Colonial Policing in British India” (PhD dissertation, University of Virginia, 2002); Georgina Sinclair and Chris A. Williams, “‘Home and Away’: The Cross-fertilization between ‘Colonial’ and ‘British’ Policing, 1921–85,” *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History* 35 (2007): 221–38. For a study of the political police and surveillance in the Dutch East Indies, see Harry A. Poeze, “Political Intelligence in the Netherlands-Indies,” in *The Late Colonial State in Indonesia: Political and Economic Foundations of the Netherlands Indies, 1880–1942*, ed. Robert Cribb (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1994), pp. 229–46; Takashi Shiraishi, “Policing the Phantom Underground,” *Indonesia* 63 (April 1997): 1–46; Takashi Shiraishi, “The Origin of Modern Surveillance Politics in Indonesia,” in *Southeast Asia over Three Generations: Essays Presented to Benedict R. O’G. Anderson*, ed. James T. Siegel and Audrey R. Kahin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2003), pp. 47–74; Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, “State Violence and the Police in Colonial Indonesia,” in *Roots of Violence in Indonesia: Contemporary Violence in Historical Perspective*, ed. Freek Colombijn and J. Thomas Lindblad (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002), pp. 81–104; Marieke Bloembergen, “Koloniale Staat, Politie Staat? Politieke Politie en het Rode Fantoom in Nederlands-Indië, 1918–1927,” *Leidschrift* 21 (2006): 69–90; Marieke Bloembergen, “The Dirty Work of Empire: Modern Policing and Public Order in Surabaya, 1911–1919,” *Indonesia* 83 (April 2007): 119–50; Marieke Bloembergen, *De Geschiedenis van de Politie in Nederlands-Indië: Uit Zorg en Angst* (Amsterdam, Leiden: Boom/KITLV Uitgeverij, 2009), chapter 7.

¹⁴ An important contribution to these studies, based on political police sources, was the publication of the reports of the political police: Harry A. Poeze, ed., *Politiek-politioneel overzichten van Nederlandsch-Indië: Bronnenpublikatie*, four volumes (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1982–94).

preoccupation with the Indonesian nationalist movement and anticolonial resistance, few historians have thought (or wanted to think) of subjecting the Indonesian, Dutch, and Eurasian authors of these reports—which are sometimes very well argued, sometimes one-sided, and always, necessarily, biased—to academic scrutiny that considers them by themselves.¹⁵ These police officers and the way they viewed the changes in colonial society, most notably in Sumatra’s West Coast region in the 1930s, are the subject of this article. Roesad’s experience will be the main example. The focus will be on exploring the ways in which writings like his illuminate the concepts of civilization, modernity, and political progress that circulated and functioned in the late-colonial state.

To assess the policemen’s views of society and to get a further understanding of the colonial aspect of policing in the Dutch East Indies, we must first look at the organization of the police apparatus, and the way in which the concept of the “perfect policeman” was defined and applied, in practice, within this framework.

The Inherent Problems of the Colonial Police

The modern police in the Dutch East Indies, set up in the heyday of the “ethical policy” that held sway between 1900 and 1920,¹⁶ was meant to be the answer to a typical colonial problem: the struggle of a colonial state that wanted to be civilized, but witnessed its legitimacy crumbling. Compelled to use force to impose its authority, the state nonetheless sought to govern by consent. The police thus embodied the ethical policy’s two contrary forces, simultaneous efforts to achieve development and control, as described in the standard work on this subject by the Dutch historian Elsbeth Locher-Scholten.¹⁷ Since the colonial police was the instrument used to pursue these diverse goals, it became a two-headed beast: in trying to safeguard the state’s authority, it provoked resistance, while in reaching out to fulfill society’s need for security, it required and sought the cooperation of the local population.¹⁸

A complicating factor was that the colonial police consisted mainly of Indonesians, who were expected to represent the colonial authorities. In the 1930s, when the police force of the Dutch East Indies peaked at 54,000 officers, around 52,000 police officers

¹⁵ For a critical analysis of political policing in the Dutch East-Indies, see Shiraiishi, “Policing the Phantom Underground.” It may be noted, moreover, that Ruth McVey emphasized that it was reading an English translation of a well-known colonial political report on the causes of the communist uprising on Sumatra’s West Coast that had aroused her interest in “the way in which people digested their experience of social change [at the local level].” The translation she cited was: B. Schrieke, “The Causes and Effects of Communism on the West Coast of Sumatra,” in *Indonesian Sociological Studies: Selected Writings of B. Schrieke*, ed. W. F. Wertheim, vol. I (Den Haag/Bandung: Van Hoeve, 1955), pp. 83–166 (originally written in 1928). In this context, she noted the social scientific aspects of colonial police reports. See Ruth McVey, “Schrieke’s Westkust Rapport,” in *Aangeraakt door Insulinde. De Boeken van Drieëntwintig Lezers*, ed. Peter Boomgaard, Harry A. Poeze, and Gerard Termorshuizen (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 1992), pp. 59–62.

¹⁶ This “ethical policy” (comparable to the idea of the “white man’s burden”), officially launched in 1901, was the Dutch version of the *mission civilisatrice* with which European powers sought to invest their colonial policies with legitimacy.

¹⁷ Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, *Ethiek in Fragmenten: Vijf Studies over Koloniaal Denken en Doen van Nederlanders in de Indonesische archipel, 1877–1942* (Utrecht: HES Publishers, 1981).

¹⁸ Compare Campion, “Watchmen of the Raj,” pp. 1–2.

were Indonesian.¹⁹ As stated above, most of these men occupied the lowest ranks, with senior positions—from that of inspector to chief commissioner—reserved almost entirely for Europeans or Eurasians. Only a few highly exceptional Indonesians were admitted to the senior ranks from the 1920s onwards. However, a few senior positions were specifically designated for members of the indigenous population, such as the *mantri* police (*mantri politie*) and *wedana* of police, which made it possible for more Indonesians to secure positions of authority within the force.

The Indonesian element within the colonial police exemplifies a key aspect of colonial state formation: the state's cooperation with the local population on which the colonial state depended. At the same time, the police force reflects a different aspect of the colonial state, by demonstrating how the racial hierarchy of its organization generated and consolidated ethnic distinctions.²⁰ The colonial police force, therefore, provides a good picture of the colonial state's *modus operandi* and priorities.²¹ It was the police, more than any other instrument of power, that penetrated most deeply into the indigenous society and had the closest dealings with local people. More interestingly, perhaps, as the historians Rajnarayan Chandavarkar and Andrew Campion have argued for the British colonial police in India, is the way in which the police revealed the colonial state's weaknesses, ranging from its lack of legitimacy to the fragmentation of colonial authority.²² This certainly applied to the Dutch East Indies.²³ The police was the face of the colonial state: it looked out, and the public looked right back at it. For a weak colonial state, eager to set the right "ethical" example, this close interaction heightened the need for a good police force, one that was not only effective but also professional and enlightened, authoritative but caring, an institution that promoted civilized values. That was the ideal of the modern colonial police. It remained an ideal, however, since, in practice, a different, violent side of the police was often in evidence, one that emphasized the brute force (and weakness) of the colonial state.²⁴

Faithful to its stated mission of promoting development, the government of the Dutch East Indies greatly respected its own ideal concept of the police force, according to an official declaration read out in the representative assembly, the Volksraad, in August 1931, as "a service made up of men of superior principles, morals, and character."²⁵ The police school founded in Sukabumi, central Java, in 1914—ten years before a similar central body was created in the Netherlands—both symbolized and promoted that ideal. The ideal was expressed, among other ways, through its central guidelines and rules concerning the use of force, which were issued to the new recruits, and which gradually took shape between 1920 and 1940, in the wake of three

¹⁹ *Indisch Verslag II* 1933.

²⁰ Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, pp. 22–23.

²¹ Arnold, *Police Power and Colonial Rule*, p. 2.

²² Chandavarkar, "Police and Public Order in Bombay"; Campion, "Watchmen of the Raj," pp. 1–2.

²³ Bloembergen, "Koloniale Staat, Politiestaat?" pp. 69–90; Bloembergen, "The Dirty Work of Empire," pp. 119–50; Bloembergen, *De Geschiedenis van de Politie in Nederlands-Indië*, chapter 7.

²⁴ On ideals of modern colonial policing and reality, see Bloembergen, *De Geschiedenis van de Politie in Nederlands-Indië*, chapters 6 and 8.

²⁵ Government declaration read out to the Volksraad, August 16, 1931, printed in the manual used by the police training school in the 1930s: P. Dekker and S. H. Tacoma, *De Politie in Nederlandsch-Indië. Hare beknopte Geschiedenis, haar Taak, Bevoegdheid, Organisatie en Optreden*, 2nd rev. ed. (Soekaboemi: Politieboekhandel, 1938).

major reforms, in 1897, 1911–1914, and 1918–20. For instance, article 1 of the regulations of the police school mandated that every police officer, from the lowest to the most senior rank, must be conscious:

... that his conduct towards the public, regardless of a person's nationality, race, or social status, must be calm, civilized in word and deed, sympathetic but decisive where necessary; that the use of force, if not dictated by circumstances, is not permissible, and that all those who find themselves in the hands of the police, whether as an accused, a suspect, or witness, should feel assured of their safety and protection.²⁶

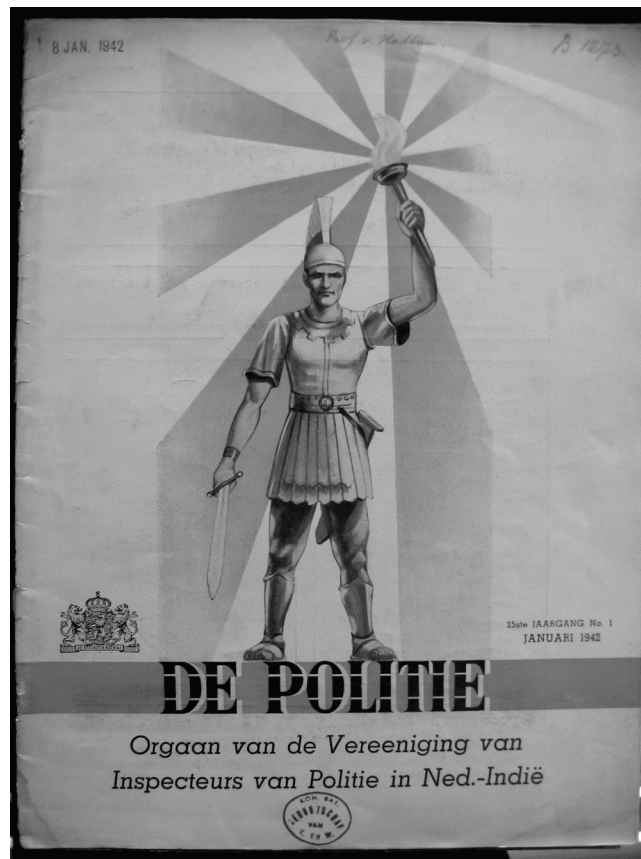
This article was quoted in the manual used by the police training school in the 1930s, along with an indented and italicized summary: "The police exists to serve the public."²⁷ As a sign of professionalization, four police associations—all founded by progressive police officers in the period 1916–20—propagated this ideal, partly through their respective trade journals. These organizations included Perserikatan Pegawai Politie Boemipoetera, or Inlandsche Politiebond, the native police association set up by and for Indonesian police officers, and the Vereeniging van Politie-Inspecteurs van Nederlandsch-Indië (Association of Dutch East Indies Police Inspectors). Members of the latter compared themselves, on the front page of their trade journal, *De politie*, to resolute Roman soldiers in armor, armed with swords and with the torches of enlightenment, who would bring peace, security, and civilization to the country.

Well-meaning descriptions and guidelines of this kind were obviously hard to reconcile with the task of imposing permanent political control, a task entrusted to the officers employed by the political criminal investigation department (in the cities) and to members of the district criminal investigation department, such as the *wedana* of police Roesad. These officers were given the conflicting responsibilities of law enforcement and social work, and the dilemmas inherent in this conflict became more pressing with the growing opposition to colonial rule in the 1930s. For indigenous political movements, but also for all kinds of other modern local groups, from mutual assistance societies to associations of bus drivers, the police acquired a more visible public presence, and, with the passage of time, the effectiveness of the police became the main benchmark for gauging the quality of colonial authority. This police force embodied "the dirty work of empire," in the memorable words of George Orwell, himself a former colonial police officer.²⁸ It therefore became all the more important for the police to show its civilized face, to demonstrate the colonial state's goodwill to the population.

²⁶ Dekker and Tacoma, *De Politie in Nederlandsch-Indië*, pp. 275–76.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

²⁸ George Orwell, "Shooting an Elephant," in *Orwell and Politics*, ed. Peter Davison (London: Penguin Books, 2001), pp. 17–24. Originally published in 1936.



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All these tensions created an interesting relationship between the colonial police, concepts of civilization, and experiences of modernity in the colony: the police force was the product, vehicle, and watchdog of the drive for progress. For the modern police apparatus, which adopted the name of “general police force” (*algemeene politie*) in the 1920s and 1930s, it was perhaps the officers of the political police, acting as the product and guardians of modernity, who most clearly embodied these contradictory characteristics. They were led by the procurator-general and the central political intelligence service (Politieke Inlichtingendienst, PID) set up in 1916, renamed the General Criminal Investigation Service (Algemeene Recherchedienst, ARD) in 1918. They reported on the local population’s fervent *pergerakan*, but they themselves were in the middle of it. Their reports went to local police chiefs—the senior Dutch officials of the internal administration department who were the first to assess intelligence—and, ultimately, to the procurator-general, who weighed up the evidence and translated his conclusions into policy and instructions for the political and regular police.²⁹ Not only in the political police, but also in the general police force, the middle management and senior officials were mainly the products of modern police or administrative training,

²⁹ On the organization, methods, and practices of the political police in the Dutch East Indies, see Poeze, “Political Intelligence”; Bloembergen, “Koloniale Staat, Politiestaat?”; and Bloembergen, *Uit zorg en Angst*, chapter 7.

and were a mix of Europeans and Indonesians. All these young recruits—like Roesad and other political officials—wanted to get ahead. So they, too, favored progress—at least in the sense of promotion and personal advancement.

For many reasons, the colonial police is the perfect point of departure (following the ideas of the American historian Frederick Cooper) for a study of how ideas about modernity, progress, and civilization were experienced by different individuals and groups in colonial society itself.³⁰ What does this institution teach us about the workings of the late-colonial state? Let us examine this question on a smaller scale, on the basis of the reports written by Roesad—the perfect policeman. In addition to performing his role as observer, Roesad was himself a product of the modernity he was paid to monitor. He avidly recorded what he saw of the “wave of civil unrest” that produced turmoil on Sumatra’s West Coast between 1929 and 1933. How did he observe? What did he see? With what consequences? And how did this individual police officer deal with the contradictions between his intelligence-gathering duties and his support for progress?

The Perfect Policeman

In October 1934, the resident of Sumatra’s West Coast, Van Heuven, warmly recommended his remarkable police officer Roesad to the director of Internal Administration (Binnenlands Bestuur). He wanted to honor Roesad, who had been working as *wedana* of police in the district criminal investigation department of Sumatra’s West Coast since January 1929, by conferring on him the title of *patih* (the highest rank but one in the *pangreh praja*, Java’s internal indigenous administration) in recognition of his special services on behalf of the colonial administration, his dedication, and loyalty. In particular, the resident extolled Roesad’s remarkable intellect. The resident noted that, besides taking a keen interest in the diverse interests and trends within society, this political officer was capable of a high level of abstract analysis, and this was an ideal combination for a political observer, especially as it helped his superiors to formulate colonial policy in “this difficult district.”³¹

Van Heuven had every reason to value capable observers in the political police. A few years earlier, on New Year’s Day 1927, when Van Heuven’s predecessor, G. F. E. Gonggrijp, was serving as resident, the authorities had been surprised by a wave of violent communist uprisings on Sumatra’s west coast, less than a month after the police and army in Banten (Western Java) had suppressed a similar, unexpected revolt there. These events were clearly related. The colonial administration (and the colony’s European population) had all reacted with a profound sense of shock, especially, perhaps, on Sumatra, where the rebels were found to be liberally supplied with firearms. Another disturbing feature was that while communism and religion were—in theory—mutually exclusive, these revolts had taken place in two districts populated by extremely devout Muslims.

³⁰ Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, p. 115.

³¹ ANRI, BB, inv. no. 3592, Resident Van Heuven to the director of the Internal Administration Department, October 19, 1934.

For the Dutch authorities in a region like Sumatra's West Coast, having a perspicacious and sharp-eyed officer like Roesad in the political police was a great boon and support. Resident Van Heuven went so far as to call Roesad's presence "a stroke of luck," not so much for Roesad's specific qualities as a police officer as for his capacity to "summarize his observations and place them in their social context."³² According to Van Heuven, Roesad combined profound knowledge with a self-possessed demeanor and superb style of writing, providing razor-sharp, synthesizing analyses of the social and political changes that were rousing the indigenous population of West Sumatra to action. He was also capable of taking practical, vigorous measures when needed. "For Mr Roesad is no absent-minded theorist, he is concerned with reality; he seeks to participate in the events of the day and to have a positive impact on them to the best of his ability."³³ All this was clear, he wrote, from the monthly political reports and special explanatory memoranda that Roesad had prepared for the administrative authorities, three of which he enclosed to prove his point. And should the director of Internal Administration require any further persuasion, senior government officials, such as the sociologist of law and former director of Education and Religious Affairs, B. J. O. Schrieke—who had led the official government enquiry into the causes of the communist revolt in Sumatra's West Coast—and the Arabist E. Gobée, an advisor to the Internal Administration Department, would both gladly provide references for Roesad.³⁴

Even today, anyone who reads Roesad's reports—about the religious and political movements of Sumatra's West Coast (1929), the education provided at local religious schools (1933), and the modernism in *penghulu* (Minangkabau *adat* leaders) circles (1933)—may well be entranced by Roesad's discussions of the apparent contradictions inherent in "modernity" in general, and the changes in Sumatra's West Coast region, in particular. These were the three pieces of "evidence," in the form of unpublished typescripts, that Van Heuven gave to the director of Internal Administration and that he also enclosed with his memorandum on leaving office (1934).³⁵ As a result, Roesad was an important source of information for many later researchers on the socio-political history of this region, whether directly or indirectly, as his observations were relayed through Van Heuven's postal reports and the memorandum he wrote on leaving office.³⁶ Hendrik Bouman, a historian born in the Dutch East Indies, who wrote his PhD thesis at the University of Leiden during the Indonesian Revolution and struggle for independence, analyzing the development of the nationalist movement in Sumatra's West Coast, was one of the few scholars to pay tribute to Roesad in his treatise. Indeed, he quoted at length from "the excellent memorandum by Mr Roesad

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid. See for Schrieke's report: B. Schrieke, *Het communisme ter Sumatra's Westkust* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1928); Schrieke, "The Causes and Effects of Communism on the West Coast of Sumatra."

³⁵ It should be noted, however, that a long passage from Roesad's "Nota over de godsdienstig-politieke beweging ter Sumatra's Westkust," of June 3, 1929, was later reproduced as a political police source in R. C. Kwantes, *De ontwikkeling van de nationalistische beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië: Bronnenpublicatie. Derde stuk: 1928-Aug. 1933* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff/Bouman's Boekhuis, 1981), pp. 228–34.

³⁶ Taufik Abdullah, *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in West Sumatra (1927–1933)* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1971), pp. 35, 128, 194, 208, 255; Kahin, "Repression and Regroupment," pp. 40–44, 46; Audrey R. Kahin, *Rebellion to Integration: West Sumatra and the Indonesian Polity* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), pp. 54, 86.

gelar Soetan Perpatih about ‘The modernism in penghulu circles.’”³⁷ So Van Heuven was certainly not the only person to set great store by Roesad’s analyses. It is time to look at them in more detail.

“Springing Up Like Mushrooms”

Roesad’s gaze focused on what he called “the wave of modern civil unrest”—a remarkable drive to achieve religious, political, and socio-economic progress, and a sudden zest for clubs and societies that had galvanized Minangkabau society since the beginning of the twentieth century. Partly in a professional capacity, but clearly driven by personal interest as well, he was particularly keen to examine the relationship between religion and politics. He himself belonged to the *penghulu*; he saw these developments with his own eyes and described his own experience. But he wrote about them in the language of the colonial rulers. Otherwise, how could he have chosen the phrase (used in Dutch exactly as it is in English) “springing up like mushrooms” to describe the modern religious schools and societies, political organizations, cooperative societies, and commercial and *tolong-menolong* (mutual assistance) associations?³⁸

In his elegant study of cultural resilience in the Minangkabau, Jeffrey Hadler, while providing for a broad contextual analysis of schools, religion, *adat*, and the idea of progress (*kemadjoean*) among the Minangkabau, focuses mostly on explaining the rise of the critical, interrogative, and radical generation of Minangkabau intellectuals who thrived in the context of these special Minangkabau circumstances and who became famous for their role in the Indonesian Revolution and the formation of the early independent state. Because of this particular focus, Hadler overlooks the fact that equally critical and interrogative, but more clearly cooperative, persons such as Roesad were also the product of these circumstances.³⁹ Born (in 1893) and bred in the Minangkabau region, Roesad, like many other Minangkabau intellectuals from his generation who are now more widely recognized, profited from the special dynamics of modernity in Minangkabau culture. These dynamics were created by a blend of colonial education politics, a lively, multiple modern schooling system, and an Islamic reform movement that, around 1900, interacted or were in opposition with the Minangkabau matriarchate and local *adat*. Coming from an elite family, Roesad attended the colonial teachers’ training college at Fort de Kock (now Bukittinggi), known as the Sekolah Radja, where he became a schoolmate of Tan Malaka.⁴⁰ This school, highly prestigious at the time, and described as a “uniquely modern

³⁷ Hendrik Bouman, *Enkele Beschouwingen over de Ontwikkeling van het Indonesisch Nationalisme op Sumatra’s Westkust* (Groningen/Batavia: Wolters, 1949), pp. 73–76.

³⁸ ANRI, BB, inv. no. 3592, “Nota over de godsdienstig-politieke beweging ter Sumatra’s Westkust,” June 3, 1929; and ANRI, BB, inv. no. 3592, “Het modernisme in penghueloekringen,” November 6, 1933, both by Roesad.

³⁹ Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs*, pp. 10, 11, 87–112, 155, 180.

⁴⁰ *Gedenkboek samengesteld bij Gelegenheid van het 35 jarig Bestaan der Kweekschool voor Inlandsche Onderwijzers te Fort de Kock* (Arnhem: Thieme, 1908).

experience,” provided a secure base for a successful or lucrative colonial career, at least if the graduate wished for it.⁴¹

Roesad started his career in public service in 1912 as a teaching assistant at the Inlandse School der Eerste Klasse (First-Class Native School) in Padang. Between 1916 and 1920, he rose from a position as clerk at the office of the local European administrator (*controleur*) of Pariaman, to assistant *demang* (head of district), with responsibility for administering the subdistrict of Padang Pandjang, and from there he went on to become *demang* in the districts of Bangkinan and Buo. He evidently attracted attention as a promising administrator, since in 1921 the colonial government urged him to study at the school of public administration in Batavia, after which he pursued his career as district head in Sawah Lunto. His role in the suppression of the communist uprisings made him known in that area as a severe colonial watchdog who dealt violently with opponents of Dutch colonial rule.⁴² It also earned him (along with a number of other police officers and administrative officials) a medal in the Order of Orange Nassau in July 1927 for his vigorous support and “unwavering loyalty to the authorities.”⁴³ It was in 1929 that Resident Gonggrijp appointed Roesad, whom he called “the intellectually most gifted officer in his force,”⁴⁴ to the position in which capacity he was introduced above, that of *wedana* of the district criminal investigation department. Until then, Roesad’s administrative duties had been confined to the level of subdivisions and districts; he now acquired high-level responsibility for policing the entire region. Over the years, his monthly salary had risen from the 25 guilders he earned in his first teaching job to 225 guilders.⁴⁵

It was in the very first year of his appointment to the political police that Roesad started writing his idiosyncratic analyses of social change or “the wave of civil unrest” that he observed taking place in Minangkabau society. The subject had evidently fascinated him for a long time, since he had previously published a short piece about it in the journal of the Political Economic Federation of the Dutch East Indies (Nederlandsch-Indischen Politiek Economischen Bond).⁴⁶ In the present article, I will

⁴¹ Taufik Abdullah, *Schools and Politics*; on the Sekolah Radja, see Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs*, pp. 94–97.

⁴² Kahin, *Rebellion to Integration*, p. 48. Kahin also points to the ironic fact that Roesad’s younger brother Dahlan was one of the major leaders in the communist uprising in Batavia in November 1926. Dahlan was later exiled to the internment camp in Digul.

⁴³ National Archives, The Hague, Archives of the Ministry of Colonies, Geheim Archief (1901–1940), *verbaal* June 18, 1927, V9, *Decoraties* 1927.

⁴⁴ Gonggrijp on Roesad, as quoted by Resident Van Heuven in his letter to the director of the Internal Administration Department, October 19, 1934, in ANRI, BB, inv. no. 3592.

⁴⁵ This information on Roesad’s career derives from ANRI, BB, inv. no. 3592, “Staat van dienst Mohamad Roesad gelar Soetan Perpatih”; and from a letter from Resident Van Heuven to the director of the Internal Administration Department, October 19, 1934. See on Roesad also Kahin, *Rebellion to Integration*, pp. 84, 86, 89, 111–12; Mestika Zed, Edy Utama, and Hasril Chaniago ed., *Sumatra Barat di Panggung Sejarah 1945–1995* (Padang: Bidang penerbitan khusus Panitia peringatan 50 tahun RI Sumatera Barat, 1995), pp. 22–23, 38, 55. Concerning Roesad’s salary in 1928, the salary of a beginning Indonesian police constable *second class* was twenty guilders, while an Indonesian detective of the criminal investigation department *first class* earned double that amount. A European chief police inspector (in rank parallel to a *wedana* of police) earned 450 guilders a month. ANRI, BB, inv. no. 3230.

⁴⁶ Roesad, “Minangkabause Toestanden,” *Orgaan van den Nederlandsch-Indischen Politiek Economischen Bond* 4 (1923): 587–590, 645–47.

confine my discussion to the three memoranda mentioned above that so fired Van Heuven's enthusiasm.

Understandably—in view of the task entrusted to him—Roesad's focus in these reports was on the political significance of this “civil unrest.” He concluded that this significance was inexorable, multifaceted, and related to local, national, and international developments. Roesad based these conclusions partly on his own observations and partly—as is the case in his second memorandum, dating from 1933—on a thorough study of empirical sources. These sources included evidence collected in the course of police searches, from which he distilled conclusions on the changing religious attitudes and political views among students at the various religious schools in the area, since the evidence consisted of exercise books and dictated notes, class assignments, and answers to questions given in class. In addition, although Roesad's reports rarely referred to colonial ethnographic analyses (except for his own earlier writings), he did build on other people's ethnographies. One piece that influenced him, for instance, was a report on religious life in Sumatra's West Coast region by the Malay scholar and expert on *adat* law, P. S. van Ronkel.⁴⁷ It is clear from Roesad's bibliographical references and terminology that his main indirect source of inspiration was Cornelis van Vollenhoven, professor of *adat* law at Leiden University. Van Vollenhoven was, indeed, the main *direct* source of inspiration for an entire generation of administrative officials, including Van Ronkel.

Partly trained and molded by the colonial system, Roesad saw the events around him from a colonial perspective.⁴⁸ Although he was a Muslim, he appears to identify, in his reports, with a secular attitude of religious relativism, combined with colonial anxiety about active Islam, communism, and nationalism, and the possible relationships among them. At the same time, however, he sought to develop his own independent, critical ideas, and was fascinated by the problem posed by the combination of progress, religion, politics, and *adat*. And it was precisely in this area that so much was happening in the Minangkabau world to which he belonged and that he described in his reports.

The Minangkabau world was structured around the pillars of the Islamic religion and the matrilineal principles of *adat* (in which positions of power and property are passed down by inheritance through the maternal line). Precisely when Roesad was growing up, this world was in the throes of upheaval. Since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, colonial intervention in the indigenous economy and the indigenous administration—an administration composed of *adat* leaders (*penghulu*) and religious leaders (*ulama*)—had become more and more marked. In addition, since around the beginning of the twentieth century, a drive for renewal within Islam had begun to take place, an *adat* movement that sought to adapt to the changes of the times. A rising urban middle class in the region (especially in Padang), whose members had attended Western-style secondary schools in Padang and Bukittinggi, was also inspired by notions of progress.⁴⁹ Roesad came from the latter circles. In short, diverse

⁴⁷ Ph. S. van Ronkel, *Rapport betreffende de godsdienstige Verschijnselen ter Sumatra's Westkust* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1916).

⁴⁸ Cf. Robert Bickers, *Empire Made Me: An Englishman Adrift in Shanghai* (London: Penguin Books, 2004).

⁴⁹ Taufik Abdullah, *Schools and Politics*; Hans van Miert, *Een koel hoofd en een warm hart: Nationalisme, Javanisme en jeugdbeweging in Nederlands-Indië, 1918–1930* (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1995), p. 70.

social groups were rising to the challenges of their times and would go on to found new schools and societies, working to achieve modernization or progress (*kemadjuan*).

In the period in which Roesad wrote his reports, there were two main schools of Islamic thought in the region, of which the modernizing “school” was the dominant force. This *kaum muda* (young generation) rejected the *kaum kuno* (old generation), proponents of a school of Islam that was regarded as traditional but that also had its roots in the early twentieth century. The *kaum kuno* consisted of the *ulama* and teachers (*gurus*) who had returned from the Middle East as *haji*, and the network of schools and mystical fraternities (*tarekat*) they had built up since the beginning of the twentieth century. The *kaum muda* rejected this mystical form of Islam and its dependence on traditional authority; instead, the members of this group advocated a return to, and the independent study of, the sources of Islam: the Koran and Hadith. This explains why Roesad refers to this innovative movement, in the first of the memoranda so admired by Van Heuven—on the religious movements of Sumatra’s West Coast (1929)—as “orthodox Islam.”⁵⁰ In that essay, Roesad focuses on the work and influence of the religious intellectuals who represented the *kaum muda* movement. His chief concern is to define the political influence of this religious movement and its relationship to other religious organizations, such as Muhammadiyah (set up in 1912), which started in Java but which had also acquired a following in Sumatra’s West Coast since 1925. Roesad also kept a close eye on relations between religious intellectuals and the nationalist movement, which he described as being in an “embryonic state” in this region; in addition, he considered and wrote about the *adat* community.

The drive for renewal in Minangkabau society on which Roesad focused must be situated in the larger indigenous movement towards progress, the so-called *pergerakan*, that was so visible in colonial society from the early 1900s into the 1930s. One contemporary colonial observer, Judge W. Boekhoudt, in his 1908 report on behalf of the second large police reform to be instituted by the Dutch in Indonesia, referred to this visible drive for setting up clubs, theaters, associations, journals, and schools with the remarkably neutral phrase “*stoot tot het meer opgewekt verenigingsleven*” (drive for a more lively associational life).⁵¹ Takashi Shiraishi was one of the first postcolonial scholars to point to the broader, multifaceted nature of this *pergerakan*, which might include (or develop into) anticolonial political organizations, but was not restricted to anticolonial politics. Some scholars, who since the 1990s have focused on local expressions of this *pergerakan* and on local forms of popular radicalism, have tended to understand these phenomena more within a broader “universalizing” framework of progress and modernity, and less as a prelude to the anticolonial nationalist movement.⁵² Studies dealing with religious change and the modernization of Islam in Indonesia have also set this movement in a “universal” context by recognizing

⁵⁰ ANRI, BB, inv. no. 3592, “Nota over de godsdienstig-politieke beweging ter Sumatra’s Westkust,” June 3, 1929. Compare how Michael Laffan problematizes the term “modernist” that historiography has more often used for *kaum muda*: Michael Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma below the Winds* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 7–8. On *Kaum Muda*, among many others: Taufik Abdullah, *Schools and Politics*, pp. 3–43; Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement*; Van Miert, *Een koel hoofd*, pp. 69–72.

⁵¹ W. Boekhoudt, *Rapport Reorganisatie van het Politiewezen op Java en Madoera (uitgezonderd de Vorstenlanden, de particuliere Landerijen en de Hoofdplaatsen Batavia, Semarang en Soerabaia), 1906–07* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1908), p. 4.

⁵² Compare Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs*, p. 177.

education as the motor for change.⁵³ Recently, Hadler has offered the long-term perspective on the interactions between *adat* (local customs), religious change, and politics in Minangkabau society. It was precisely this relationship between religious modernization and education, local customs and radical politics, that interested Roesad as well; the difference is that Roesad was being influenced and formed by these dynamics himself.

Roesad's focus of interest—*adat*, religious change, and nationalist politics, and the interactions between these forces—thus also presages the main themes in the recent historiography on popular radicalism in Sumatra. Roesad discussed all these themes entirely in relation to the position and needs of his colonial masters. But in that sense the recent historiography hardly differs: for what it shares with Roesad, despite its other diverse aims, is, ultimately, an interest in the radical element, or political antagonism against the colonial state.

The Modern Religious Mind

In his first report, entitled "Nota over de godsdienstig-politieke beweging ter Sumatra's Westkust" (Memorandum on the religious/political movements of Sumatra's West Coast), Roesad explored the influence of orthodox intellectuals, or *kaum muda*, concluding that this influence was considerable on account of its organizational success, its many schools and societies, and the quality of the education with which it was associated. Roesad saw the independent study of primary Islamic sources as the most important feature of this education: "The depth of this education may be appreciated once it is understood that it completely breaks with the old custom of placing all one's reliance in the explanations provided by teachers." A curriculum based on this principle was more likely to mold critical minds, according to the author. That is why Roesad believed that this religious intellectual training was politically significant as a force that was influencing the Minangkabau matrilineal society and potentially posed a threat to Dutch colonial rule.

In short, Roesad posited a logical connection between what he called the modern "religious mind" (or *godsdienstig intellect*) and nationalism. What is more, he held that the dynamic relationship between religious and political developments in Sumatra was reinforced by colonial domination in itself, and by the reactions to this state of being by the indigenous residents, whose religion was completely different from that of the Dutch.

Nationalism develops along with the mind. This is seen everywhere, also in minds molded by modern Western education. There too, nationalism can easily creep in. It starts by manifesting itself in the will to reform one's own society, then comes the demand to participate in decision-making, and finally, in colonial territories, a desire to regain power.⁵⁴

⁵³ Taufik Abdullah, *Schools and Politics*; Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement*.

⁵⁴ ANRI, BB, inv. no. 3592, "Nota over de godsdienstig-politieke beweging ter Sumatra's Westkust," June 3, 1929.

Roesad also claimed that nationalism was a consequence of religious intellectual training. The critical religious education provided by the *kaum muda* also explained, in Roesad's view, the influence of the "religious mind" within the communist movement, and hence, indirectly, it helped explain the uprising in Sumatra's West Coast region at the beginning of 1927.

Roesad illustrated the thoroughness and modernity of the *kaum muda*'s organizational structure by describing the system it had set up for training teachers and students, as well as the societies, such as Sumatra Thawalib, that students themselves had established in various places since 1918 (which he described as similar to general student societies), and the *kaum muda*'s schools, which were organized along modern lines. The new, "orthodox" religious education had broken decisively with the old system of the *kaum kuno*, in which, as Roesad described, *haji* wanting to give religious instruction had to start by begging from door to door to support themselves, after which they were educated by older religious mentors. In the new system, parents had to pay school fees. Most of the students who enrolled at the Thawalib schools had already completed primary education and came from affluent families. Roesad noted that these students now tended to go around in what he called "smart attire" (*netjes gekleed*): in other words, "wearing ties and long trousers, shoes, and spectacles, just like students at a Western-style college."⁵⁵

The courses set up by Minangkabau religious intellectuals in the early 1920s had grown into fully fledged schools, with former students now serving as teachers. The most important of these institutions were in Padang Pandjang, Parabek, and Padang Djopang, which served approximately 800, 1,000, and 600 students, respectively, from all parts of Sumatra, "who would go on to disseminate the Thawalib's ideals," wrote Roesad. At the initiative of the students of the school of Padang Pandjang, members of the local Thawalib had formed their own society, consolidating its organizational structure during two conferences in November 1928 and May 1929, electing an executive committee, and launching their own periodical, *Perdamaian* (Peace), to be published every ten days. According to Roesad, the Thawalib students were now among the most influential intellectuals in the popular movement in the West Coast of Sumatra. Their goal was to reform society "on the basis of orthodox Mohammedan principles." This they planned to achieve, he went on, by following three lines of strategy. The first, the struggle against the "irreligious customs" of the *kaum kuno*, the *tarekat* doctrine, and *adat* religious offices, was already largely won; the second, the struggle against the matrilineal society, still had a long way to go; but the primary emphasis was on the third struggle, against colonial domination, fueled in part by a powerful revival of nationalist sentiments.

Roesad had been struck by the vehemence of the nationalism expressed at the Thawalib conference in May 1929. The nationalist passion took many forms: criticism of the colonial administration; the decision to change the name "Sumatra-Thawalib" into "Indonesia-Thawalib"; the adoption of a special Thawalib song; and the introduction of public holidays to commemorate the anniversaries of the deaths of

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* For a discussion of shoes, and modern clothing generally, as aspects of modern ideals in the Dutch East Indies, sometimes experienced as provocative, see Henk Schulte Nordholt, "Introduction," in *Outward Appearances: Dressing State and Society in Indonesia*, ed. Henk Schulte Nordholt (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1997), pp. 1–38. See also Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood*, pp. 8, 171–72.

national heroes, such as Diponegoro. In all these decisions, held Roesad, there resonated “the belief in a Great Indonesia that was being propagated on Java, the aim being to create the free country of ‘Indonesia.’” He saw the Thawalib’s new educational plans, which were designed to create more unified standards and curricula, as significant to the movement’s political aims, as he perceived them. Classes would no longer be confined to religious instruction based on orthodox principles; they would be expanded to include economics, politics, agriculture, bookkeeping, knowledge of the law, and so forth.⁵⁶

Roesad expected the growing trend towards nationalism to tip the balance among the *kaum muda* in favor of the struggle of the “religious mind” against colonial domination, rather than to concentrate on efforts to “purge society of customs deemed to be irreligious according to the *kaum muda* doctrine.” He applied similar predictions to the Javanese society Muhammadiyah, which, like the Thawalib, focused on studying the sources of Islam. Roesad pointed out that, in Java, Muhammadiyah was emphatically apolitical and social in its aims, but that the Sumatran branch of the organization had adapted to a different context. In the West Coast region of Sumatra, where it acquired a following from the mid-1920s onwards, Muhammadiyah concerned itself with political issues, wrote Roesad, as it operated under the auspices of the Thawalib and their schools.

When it came to the potential of the nationalist movement based on non-religious principles, Roesad was fairly dismissive. Aside from members of trade unions, “those who had been educated along Western lines” had not organized themselves into any force in this area. He explained this omission by pointing out that most Minangkabau who had enjoyed a Western education worked either for the colonial government or for private companies, which gave them no freedom of movement to organize or to put themselves forward as leaders. Furthermore, there was as yet little mutual understanding between those whose minds had been formed by religious education and those who had attended Western-style schools. However, he expected that this, too, was bound to change.

Modern Religion and Political Conscience

Four years later, in October 1933, Roesad produced a memorandum on education and religious schools, “Rapport over het onderwijs aan godsdienstschoolen, in verband met de ontdekkingen tijdens de huiszoekingen in September 1933” (Report on education at Religious Schools, in connection to the police searches in September 1933), in which he concluded that his predictions had been borne out. Building on the analysis he had outlined in 1929, he expanded in this memorandum on the relationship between modern religious education and politics. Although Roesad was much more straightforward in focusing on the radical element, his conclusions on the development of the youthful critical mind are comparable to those drawn recently by Hadler. In his book, Hadler looks at the broader context and the multiplicity of schooling in West Sumatra, but, like Roesad, sees the questioning and sceptical generation of Minangkabau men and women as one of the unintended effects of modern education.

⁵⁶ ANRI, BB, inv. no. 3592, “Nota over de godsdienstig-politieke beweging ter Sumatra’s Westkust,” June 3, 1929.

Interestingly enough, the research methods of Hadler and Roesad show a remarkable similarity, as well. Both drew their insights about the development of the critical, youthful mind partly from a special source: school materials, including classroom assignments and students' notes. It is true that the sources Hadler and Roesad cite are not entirely from the same period, and that they gathered their empirical data in different ways, through thorough archival research (Hadler) and by police coercion (Roesad).⁵⁷ Yet these differences in method, questions, and framework did not lead to very different interpretations of these sources with regard to the development of the self-conscious, critical mind. It may be, however, that Roesad came closer to getting a grip on how the mind could radicalize, in part because he was conducting a straightforward search for the politicized elements in modern education.

Modernist Islamic education, Roesad explained, insisted on self-examination. It allowed scope for freedom of thought and introduced students to critical Arab authors. The "inspired modern Islamic views" of these writers opened young readers' eyes to trends and problems in their own society, and encouraged them to think of explanations and solutions. Roesad was struck by the fact that, in this modern religious education, texts from the Koran were explained using examples taken from present-day society, and vice versa. From here, he reasoned, it was a small step to examining political principles and problems in the light of Islamic doctrine, so that "the explanation of God's words moves into the sphere of politics."⁵⁸

In the mid-1930s, the Thawalib had reorganized under the new name of Persatuan Muslim Indonesia, the Indonesian Muslims' Union, known as Permi. After its first two years, Roesad claimed, it had emerged as an openly radical political party, "fighting for the freedom of the East Indies." The Permi demanded more say in the management and government of the Thawalib schools. Most Thawalib schools affiliated themselves with the new movement, while some branches of the Permi set up schools of their own, including a number for girls. But the Permi had also provoked opposition from the heads of certain Thawalib schools who wanted to retain their independence, such as *haji* Ibrahim Moeso, from Parabok, and *haji* Abbas, from Padang Pandjang. *Haji* Abbas changed his school's name to "Darulfunun Abbasijah" (House of Multiple Sciences), while Moeso banned "all political carryings-on" in the vicinity of his school. Roesad argued that, in spite of these divergences, the schools were still relevant to his discussion since both continued to be run according to modernist religious principles.

Roesad's lengthy second memorandum was prompted by police searches conducted in August 1933, including one at the Permi teachers' training college for girls, in Fort de Kock, that had yielded evidence for the politicization of education.⁵⁹ A wider-ranging police investigation followed in September, encompassing other schools that were based on modernist religious principles, ostensibly to search for copies of the proscribed book *Mentjapai Indonesia Merdeka* (The Path to a Free Indonesia), by Soekarno. In fact, the real aim of the search, according to Roesad, was to find more material that would help the authorities assess the nature of the education being

⁵⁷ Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs*, pp. 105–11.

⁵⁸ ANRI, BB, inv. no. 3592, "Rapport over het onderwijs aan godsdienstschole, in verband met de ontdekkingen tijdens de huiszoekingen in September 1933," October 18, 1933.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

provided. These searches yielded indisputable evidence, he wrote, of “the political nature [of the education] and the political contamination of the students” in these schools. According to Roesad, aside from “normal educational textbooks of all kinds,” the police also found a large quantity of “radical nationalist” treatises, such as the writings of Mohammed Hatta and Soekarno, and pamphlets distributed by the Partai Nasional Indonesia and Perhimpunan Peladjar-Peladjar Indonesia, as well as various magazines and periodicals, such as *Persatuan Indonesia* (The Unity of Indonesia) and *Medan Ra'jat* (Arena for the People). It was found that many students had taken out collective subscriptions to periodicals and pamphlets and took turns reading them. Furthermore, the police had found notes in the exercise books of “almost every student” relating to classes given by various societies, some political and some not, mixed in with the dictated notes they had written at school. Further enquiries revealed that these classes had been taught outside school. Finally, the police discovered exercise books with notes from political publications, from which “certain passages, salient sentences, and in some cases entire articles had been copied out,” wrote Roesad.

This harvest of confiscated exercise books and notebooks clearly reflects the intrusive actions of the colonial state, which in this case displays features of a police state. But the political writings also reflect the enthusiasm and zest for learning with which the students at these besieged schools set about absorbing new knowledge, political and otherwise. Roesad found all this confiscated material to be a unique source of information that illuminated the religious and political consciousness of the Minangkabau youth, and he quoted at length from this bizarre source material in his second memorandum.

At this juncture, Roesad considered the relationship between modernist religious education and politics to be a matter of “potential,” rather than a logical necessity. He noted that education could not be labeled “politicized” everywhere in the region, and wrote that the “direct” political influence of students generally took place outside schools. He did believe that regular education played a role in this politicization, in that it fostered a desire for social reform among young people. But he also believed that this desire called for the development of “secular knowledge,” which was not provided by the one-sided religious educational model. As a result, “young hearts” listened eagerly to propaganda provided outside school, which could satisfy their urge for action. In addition, the largely theoretical and primarily religious education provided at some schools did not provide any framework for, or satisfy the need for, what he called “all-round thinking” and the freedom to undertake general research, “so that students are then compelled to look elsewhere,” remarked Roesad—perhaps in a moment of self-reflection.

Roesad discussed the schools and the education they provided one by one, on the basis of the evidence that the police had confiscated from them. In this discussion, he combined his role of political police officer with that of a sometimes rather pedantic school inspector. He started by looking at what the confiscated material revealed about groups and organizations before turning to its content. I shall confine myself here to a few examples. Roesad gave short shrift to the Darulfunan Abbasijah run by *haji* Abbas. He was not impressed by the education it provided. Though not politicized, it was of a poor quality, he said. The classes presented a dismal picture of the way in which *haji* Abbas evidently conceived his duties in providing religious instruction. “All the

exercise books are messy, the work they contain appears to have been seldom, if ever, checked; there is no proof that the work was ever corrected." The students attended school for only a few hours a day, "leaving them ample time to organize political courses and to carry out propagandist activities in the houses in the vicinity of the school," where they boarded. "The devil finds work for idle hands," Roesad concluded, ignoring the fact that the modernist religious education encouraged students to act independently.

On the other hand, Roesad attached considerable significance to the oldest Thawalib school, in Padang Pandjang, describing it as an institution that had been closely linked to the political development and history of this district throughout the fifty years of its existence. It had been the breeding ground for the first Thawalib organization in 1918. The school's past and present students reorganized the society at the first Thawalib conference of 1928, and politicized youth organizations, such as the Persatuan Murid Djinah schools, the Himpunan Pemuda Islam, and the "El hilaal" scouting club, were all to be found near this school. The youth organizations of the PSII, PNI (Partai Nasional Indonesia, Indonesian National Party), and Partindo (Partai Indonesia, Indonesian Party) also recruited members here. About 30 percent of the school's 450 students in 1933 were attached to existing political parties, most to Permi. And since those who were still minors joined youth organizations and debating clubs, Roesad concluded that 60 to 70 percent of the students were "politically contaminated to a greater or lesser extent." Although members of the school board did not exert any influence within the school, they influenced students directly by dealing with political subjects in courses taught outside the school.

The curriculum at the school in Padang Pandjang consisted of history, exegesis of the Koran, lessons in patriotism, and social studies or psychology (in Roesad's spelling, *tarich*, *tafsir*, *tarbijatoelawathaniah*, and *Ilmoe Nafsa*, respectively). Roesad concluded from the students' notes that these classes had provided broad outlines of the topics under consideration. In social studies, for instance, students had been taught about the rights and obligations of the individual human being vis-à-vis society, "as appropriate in a well-ordered state." Such discussions might provoke comparisons with the students' contemporary context, Roesad suggested, thus rousing and fueling political sentiments. However, in some notebooks he found evidence of teachers wielding "personal political influence" over their charges. He gave an example, translating some notes (from Arabic to Malay) written by students in the seventh grade, referring to freedom (as ordained by "the Lord"⁶⁰), revolution, and the struggle against colonial rule. Essays about "the mother country"—about a free and harmonious Indonesia, ordained by God, to be achieved through unremitting perfection (*kesempoernaan*) and struggle—provided, in his view, clear illustrations of the students' "fanaticism." Roesad also saw the teachers' corrections and grading of students' work as revealing:

The phrasing of the teachers' dictated notes, their approving comments on students' essays, which constantly included remarks that have no place at a school that aims purely to provide an education, imbued the lessons with a political flavor, and therefore interacted with political influences outside school and encouraged them.

⁶⁰ Roesad's translation uses the word *toean* (the Lord) rather than "Allah."

At the teachers' training college for girls and the Sanawijah school in Fort de Kock, where the police had conducted their first searches, much the same picture emerged. Both were Permi organizations, and were led by *haji* Muchtar Lutfi, a fact that Roesad said assured the schools' political orientation. At the second Permi conference in October 1931, Lutfi's lecture "Manoesia dengan Islam dan Kebangsaan serta Persatoean dalam Islam" (Islamists, Nationalists, and Unity in Islam) was adopted as the basis for the decision to incorporate political education in Permi's program, "in preparation for participation in political life." Roesad wrote that the two schools mentioned above should be judged in the light of that decision. They shared the same curriculum and the same teachers. The staff of the girls' school also included women members of the Permi chief executive who had recently been arrested: Rasuna Said and Rasimah Ismail. Roesad listed the percentage of the eighty-seven female students who belonged to "politicized" organizations. For these schools, too, he plowed through the exercise books, which, together with the propaganda material collected on August 18 and September 7, provided "irrefutable" evidence of the "profound contamination" of girls and boys at these two schools. Just as telling, in his view, were assignments handed out by teachers: students were required to explain a Koran text about *kafir* (infidel), to write about the lessons conveyed by the freeing of slaves according to Islam, to list the characteristics of "society" and "a leader," and to explain how "unity" should be achieved. The teachers' corrections and the grades they assigned were equally significant, according to Roesad.

The most noteworthy difference that emerged from Roesad's comparison of all these exercise books was that the girl students kept their papers in far better order. This may appear to be a superficial observation, but Roesad saw it as politically significant:

The political notes and courses, as well as the passages quoted from political publications, are arranged more systematically and written out more neatly ... than elsewhere, something that not only testifies to dedication and meticulous care, but also to the seriousness with which the [girls] followed and absorbed this political information, which must reflect their education.

This observation reflected the main conclusion arising from Roesad's analyses in this memorandum, which could be summarized as: "the modernist education system and its social context lead to 'political education' in the true sense of the term." But as a theory on gender, dedication, neatness, and radicalization, it may be more meaningful than that, for it complements Hadler's refined analysis of the public role of women in the Minangkabau progressive movement and suggests a path for further research into the role of young Minangkabau women in popular radicalism.⁶¹

Of the three memoranda written by Roesad, this second one had the most far-reaching repercussions. The police investigation that had preceded it had already led to the arrest of several men and women in Permi's senior ranks. What is more, Resident Van Heuven decided to ban all meetings of the Permi and PSII following the report. This ban ushered in a period of strict control and enforcement by the political

⁶¹ Compare with Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs*, pp. 129, 156–63, 170.

police, as a result of which politically active young men and women in this area found new channels and more diffuse ways of expressing their views.⁶²

Modernism in *Penghulu* Circles

Up to this point, Roesad had focused primarily on the effects of the *kaum muda* movement. But he realized all too well that modern ways of thinking were not exclusive to this group. In his third and final memorandum, “Het modernisme in penghoeloekringen,”⁶³ produced in November 1933, he therefore focused on an almost classic anthropological question, which was, at the same time, an important colonial political question: how did the *kaum kuno*, the *adat* leaders (representing “local tradition”), respond to the changes taking place around them?⁶⁴ Since he was himself a *penghulu*, Roesad could speak from experience here. “No one could expect chiefs [*adat* leaders] to remain unmoved by the wave of civil unrest,” wrote Roesad, thus voicing one of the colonial administration’s major concerns. For these leaders themselves belonged to that potentially volatile population, he argued. “Every change in the population’s socio-economic and political ideas must undoubtedly be reflected in *penghulu* circles, which influences the ideas of the chiefs, and not least their position.” Roesad’s central proposition was that the attitudes of the *adat* chiefs to the surrounding struggle for progress were determined by the question of “whether these had a beneficial or adverse effect on their own positions, a question that was often viewed from the vantage point of self-interest.”

After offering a brief outline of the formal position of the *adat* chiefs (under both private and constitutional law) in Minangkabau society, as custodians of matrilineal inheritance law and leaders of the administrative and legal bodies within a community or *nagari*,⁶⁵ Roesad emphasized that this society, based on the principles of *adat*, was never static, but rather was constantly developing. For instance, it had assimilated the influences of the colonial money economy and the revival of Islam in its own idiosyncratic way (Roesad left the administrative interventions of the colonial authorities out of consideration). An important instrument of social change was the consultative system known as *mufakat*, “which opens that way to compromise, even with ideas that are diametrically opposed to its own principles.” The *mufakat* consultations eventually had the effect, in the 1920s, of making *adat* leaders more tolerant of and mildly disposed to modernist Islam—which wanted to purge local Islam of “irreligious” customs, such as the festivities held at the beginning of the sugarbeet harvest and certain funeral customs—and the leaders themselves helped to promote the local religious schools.

In the cases of various shared-interest groups, matters were rather more complex, said Roesad. In principle, the modern organizational structure of a political interest group clashed with traditional *adat* organizations, which Roesad described as groups based on communal family relationships and led by *adat* chiefs. “Because of the system

⁶² Kahin, “Repression and Regroupment.”

⁶³ ANRI, BB, inv. no. 3592, “Het modernisme in penghoeloekringen,” November 6, 1933.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ *Nagari* denotes a basic territorial unit in the Minangkabau.

of administration and leadership, on the one hand, and individual members who are under an obligation of organizational obedience to this administration and leadership, on the other, the existence of shared-interest groups is bringing about a shift of influence from *adat* chiefs to these societies' leaders." Nonetheless, the *adat* leaders had supported a wide variety of associations, such as those set up for economic and social purposes, cooperative societies, and commercial and *tolong-menolong* associations, which, as noted earlier, Roesad described as having "sprung up like mushrooms." Some *adat* leaders joined these associations, or even put themselves forward to lead them, to serve their own "personal interests." Some acted out of dissatisfaction with other colleagues or *nagari* heads, and therefore wanted to "assure themselves of the necessary votes in elections to the latter office." Whatever the case might be, stated Roesad, modern clubs and associations had encountered little opposition from Minangkabau *adat* leaders.

The *penghulu* saw few problems with the groups that revolved around local or socio-economic interests; it was the political groups, in particular the "disciplined organizations," that were not confined to a specific *nagari*, that worried *adat* heads—and the police officer Roesad. These political groups were disrupting the social order, both through their manner of organization and their political slogans. Where organizational structure was concerned, local members were responsible only to the higher ranks in their respective associations (which were unrelated to the *nagari*), the groups set up modern offices and chose the premises for their clubs without consulting *adat* leaders, and the groups' members were difficult to monitor since outsiders more easily traveled into and out of the *nagari*, thanks to modern means of transport. The rallying cry for freedom that inspired members of such groups was accompanied by criticism of the existing social order and its custodians, the *adat* leaders. The *adat* leaders' authority declined, as a result, and they commanded less respect. Roesad added that, as these political organizations proliferated, *adat* leaders had been compelled—by a colonial administrative decision dating from 1919—to adopt the role of observers.

At this point in his memorandum, Roesad inserted the relevant decision himself: *Indisch Staatsblad* 1919 no. 27, which the Dutch authorities had promulgated in an earlier period of turbulence for the colonial state. This decision, according to Roesad's summary, placed the supervision of political developments in the hands of the head of the local administration (the resident), acting in concert with his officials (including European and indigenous police officers, such as Roesad). Roesad argued that this decision had doubly undermined the authority of *adat* leaders: they could no longer take independent political action, and, with the advent of countless rival groups involved in promoting social progress, their subjects increasingly came to feel that these old *adat* leaders were "irrelevant." This belief, in turn, made the people even more susceptible to political propaganda; and the *penghulu*, having lost their old self-assurance, simply allowed the "rapid and destructive political developments of recent times" to run rampant—before their eyes, but outside their sphere of action and authority. The power of the *penghulu* had drained away.

With this analysis, Roesad was speaking the language of conservative politicians, who would seek to restore "traditional centers of authority" over the following few years by setting up local councils to promote law and order.

Roesad and the Limits of Progress

As befits a modern professional police force, the perfect police officer in the Dutch East Indies was (ideally) civilized at all times and strong when necessary. From the perspective of the colonial state, Roesad certainly fulfilled both of these criteria. But he surpassed the basic requirements, as Resident Van Heuven agreed, for he was also a gifted intellectual who had received a modern education and who took a keen interest in the processes of social change going on around him. While it is true that Roesad's memoranda were clearly inspired by his job as a police officer, which required him to monitor political trends, they were more interesting than most reports written by political police officers, which merely registered observations. Roesad not only went in search of evidence of political activity, but he also tried to highlight relationships—between religious and political trends, the old and the new, the general and the specific—and to find explanations for the phenomena he observed. This was a way of looking that went beyond the recognition of political doctrines, organizations, and connections, the things that all political police officers were trained to notice.⁶⁶ In many respects, Roesad was a remarkable man.

All this means that Roesad's reports are interesting not only because of his analyses of the cultural politics of a Minangkabau world that was in the throes of turbulent change, but also because he proved to have developed a remarkable sensitivity to the field of tension between modern trends and the colonial ethos. He had a good nose for new trends—in matters of religion, dress, social interaction, or education—and, in a sense, he might be regarded as a political chronicler of modern times. He saw the “anti-Western feeling” that he discerned in the active life of Minangkabau clubs and societies as something that was “inherent ... to colonial domination.”⁶⁷ Insightfully, he linked the enthusiasm of the locals for forming new organizations and clubs for joint activities—which he was expected to observe—to a spirit of individualism, “independent thought,” and “self-examination,” all aspects of modernity that he judged to be equally important and related: “A club is the product of the trend towards individualism, in which people with a similar education, with similar beliefs and interests, come together to pursue a shared purpose,” wrote Roesad.⁶⁸ What is also striking, at times, is Roesad's empathy and ability to put things in perspective—even while he remains bound by his policeman's terms of reference—in his analyses of the intellectual efforts of the *kaum muda*, teachers and students, and *penghulu* attitudes to modernism. Commenting on the one-sided history lessons offered at the Thawalib religious school in Padang Pandjang—lessons that focused on the history of Islam, related in terms of the struggle against the Christians in the past (during the Crusades) and present (in territories under Western rule in Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt)—he did not see these as

⁶⁶ See Shiraishi, “Policing the Phantom Underground”; and Bloembergen, *Uit zorg en Angst*, chapter 7.

⁶⁷ ANRI, BB, inv. no. 3592, “Rapport over het onderwijs aan godsdienstschole, in verband met de ontdekkingen tijdens de huiszoekingen in September 1933,” October 18, 1933.

⁶⁸ ANRI, BB, inv. no. 3592, “Het modernisme in penghoeloekringen,” November 6, 1933.

curious, but as “a defect or vice inherent in all religions, to view all other faiths in an unfavorable light.”⁶⁹

With his ample gaze and his interest in the general modernist trends in society, Roesad appears to have adopted a more inclusive view of modernity than did many later researchers, who focused one-sidedly on anticolonialism and the political efforts of the *kaum muda* movement and Indonesian nationalism. In Roesad’s view, the efforts of the *kaum kuno* to influence and mold the changes taking place around them were also manifestations of the drive for progress and modernity.

Notwithstanding his sharp mind, frank curiosity, and sometimes empathic observations of the local drive to achieve emancipation, Roesad ultimately contributed actively to the colonial repression of local aspirations. If we judge from the article he had previously published in the journal of the Political Economic Federation, it seems unlikely that this responsibility kept him awake at night.⁷⁰ The above analyses show that, while he supported change, he favored change that was harmonious and gradual. And, after all, political peace and stability were in his interest, too. On the other hand, he had often told his grateful superior, Van Heuven, that he was actually eager to leave the political criminal investigation department for a more intellectually satisfying job. That may have been a sign that his conscience troubled him, or that he felt uneasy about his position. His career was, in fact, fraught with difficulties.

This discussion of Roesad opened by noting the tribute paid to him by Resident Van Heuven, conferring on him the title of *patih*, in recognition of his remarkable intellectual efforts and loyalty. While Roesad had long made it known that he was hoping for a transfer—to some more intellectually challenging position outside the police force—Van Heuven did not want to lose him. That was another reason why Van Heuven was eager to place his valued officer in the limelight. Van Heuven also thought that he understood why Roesad wanted to satisfy his intellectual thirst elsewhere. After all, one could not expect “native employees, however sincere [*reëel*] and loyal their attitudes might be,” ultimately to take personal pleasure in a job that “could discredit them and make them suspect in the eyes of their own society,” a dilemma that would not affect a transient European official so forcefully. At the same time, Van Heuven realized that Roesad had become the victim of his “exceptional aptitude and value” to the district authorities, since they were reluctant to let him go. So this, in itself, made Van Heuven feel uneasy, and it explains why he had for some time felt that he needed to provide some “compensation” for the indispensable Roesad, to sweeten the pill represented by his demanding job.⁷¹

But Van Heuven had another argument for providing this compensation. The new title would give Roesad more prestige and make him more unassailable *within* the district criminal investigation department, and the resident had “pragmatic” reasons for believing this to be necessary. Van Heuven had noticed that the European officers in that department were sometimes envious of Roesad, “who was in many cases

⁶⁹ ANRI, BB, inv. no. 3592, “Rapport over het onderwijs aan godsdienstschole, in verband met de ontdekkingen tijdens de huiszoekingen in September 1933,” October 18, 1933.

⁷⁰ Roesad, “Minangkabause Toestanden.”

⁷¹ ANRI, BB, inv. no. 3592, Resident Van Heuven to the director of the Internal Administration Department, October 19, 1934.

superior to them in terms of his knowledge of Minangkabau matters ... and personal aptitude." These officers could not resist the temptation to treat Roesad in a way "the effect of which may be equated with difficulties that have a deleterious impact on the progress of the work," observed Van Heuven, who (unlike Roesad) was not known for his elegant prose style. In short, Roesad earned his title three times over. Viewed differently, the tribute was an imperfect attempt to compensate for the sometimes complex racial relationships that predominated both in colonial society and within the civil service. Roesad, who was over qualified for his position as a police officer, came off badly in both these environments. He operated within a framework of cooperation and mutual dependency, but also one in which he suffered from obvious discrimination.

The irony does not end here. The police branch of the department of Internal Administration had to deliberate about Van Heuven's proposal. To them, it seemed fraught with problems. To start with, *patih* was a Javanese rank, which was out of place in Minangkabau society. It was also unknown within the police force. However, the police did have and use a number of lower Javanese titles, as was apparent from Roesad's own position. Furthermore, the administrators were forced to concede that colonial policy was not very consistent on this point, since another Minangkabau official with the rank of *patih* was employed by the ARD. An alternative would be to give Roesad the rank of police commissioner, but this might arouse undue expectations for further promotions later in his career and cause consternation among other commissioners. The officials ended up proposing a compromise: Roesad would acquire not the rank, but the personal title, of *patih*. This formula, they hoped, would express their appreciation while averting confusion.⁷² In reality, this fudge showed the extent to which the colonial bureaucracy had become entwined in its own hierarchy of ranks and titles. And, once again, it was Roesad who came off worst.

The how and why of Roesad's subsequent career would repay further research; it is beyond the scope of this article to follow Roesad's responses to the development of colonial policies and the efforts of the indigenous population to achieve progress on the West Coast of Sumatra after 1933. Still, later events do possess a certain ironic relevance to Roesad's fate. After the arrests of the Permi and PSII leaders, in the wake of the searches conducted in 1933, harsh measures were imposed by the political police, and conservative policies of peace and order virtually stifled the drive for political and religious renewal in this region.⁷³ A constructive colonial political move that was wholly in tune with this conservatism was the inauguration of the Minangkabau Council (Minangkabauraad) in 1938, a semi-representative body with a mainly advisory task. Former senior members of Permi put themselves forward for seats on this council. In 1939, the Minangkabau nationalist Mohammed Yamin was elected as this council's representative in the Volksraad.⁷⁴ And none other than Roesad gelar Soetan Perpatih acquired the estimable position of secretary. By this route, he did end up, after all, in a position that offered the greater intellectual freedom he had

⁷² ANRI, BB, inv. no. 3592, Police branch to the director of the Internal Administration Department, January 23, 1935.

⁷³ This movement carried on its activities in a more diffuse manner and using different channels, however. See Kahin "Repression and Regroupment."

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 47–53.

wanted. It is not entirely clear, however, whether he was not still acting, even in this position, as a colonial watchdog and intermediary amid processes of change. In the late-colonial state, the intellectual freedom to which Roesad aspired was probably an illusion and unobtainable, not only for the Permi leaders, but also for Roesad himself.

The ironies accumulated for Roesad after the Japanese occupation, during which he took on official administrative responsibilities as a member of the regional council (Shu Sangi-Kai). At the end of 1945, in the midst of local efforts to set up a Republican administration in West Sumatra, Roesad briefly occupied the highest possible position in West Sumatra, as he was made resident, and thus became the second-most-powerful leader in the newly created West Sumatran National Committee. Because Roesad was one of the most experienced administrators in the region, and probably because of his loyal ties to his former schoolmate Tan Malaka, many members of the National Committee supported Roesad's appointment as resident in November 1945. However, Roesad would not hold that post for very long. In March 1946 he resigned, for he faced too much popular hostility and unrest. His role as the active watchdog for two successive colonial regimes made him unacceptable at the lower levels of Minangkabau society.⁷⁵ Intellectual freedom, if possible for him at all, was an ideal Roesad would have to capture outside administration and politics.⁷⁶

Finally, however, Roesad may have profited from a certain degree of freedom in his investigations and interrogation of colonial modernity, perhaps thanks to the curiosities of his employer. Although he was intellectually formed, in part, by his colonial schooling, and in part by his family background, Roesad did not narrow modernity down to one "universalizing notion of progress." It was his wish to define and explain change in itself, as it was registered by the elements he found most meaningful and remarkable in Minangkabau society: modern religious schooling, *adat*, and politics. Because of his scientific distance from his topic, which led him to a classic anthropological approach, and because of his closeness to his object of study—the world in which he grew up, lived, and worked—he made us hear how colonial modernity, and its many manifestations and experiences, sounded and worked at the time ... including how it worked for him.

⁷⁵ Kahin, *Rebellion to Integration*, pp. 111–12; Mestika Zed et al., ed., *Sumatra Barat di Panggung Sejarah 1945–1995*, p. 22.

⁷⁶ Ironically, he tried his luck in the field of education, the tool of progress and control that he had monitored so severely in the early 1930s. In 1950, Roesad retired from administrative work, after which he apparently moved to the field of higher education. Among other things, he became a member of the Komisariat Fakultas Hukum of Andalas University. Mestika Zed et al., ed., *Sumatra Barat di panggung sejarah 1945–1995*, p. 22.