

# Noto Soeroto: His Ideas and the Late Colonial Intellectual Climate

Madelon Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis

## Introduction

Interest in recent Indonesian history has long been dominated by the processes leading directly up to the creation of the Indonesian Republic. Initially, historians were inclined to trace a single line from the foundation of Boedi Oetomo<sup>1</sup> in 1908 to the Proclamation of Independence on August 17, 1945, coupling this with a neglect, both conscious and unconscious, of a variety of trends and events which from a radically nationalistic point of view had an inhibitive rather than a stimulating effect on the development toward autonomy.<sup>2</sup>

More recently, historians have shown a greater interest in social processes in the indigenous and colonial communities which did not culminate directly in the proclamation of the Indonesian Republic, but which do shed a great deal of light on the ways and the areas in which the two communities, the indigenous and the colonial, interacted—remaining separated, fusing, blending, or repudiating each other. Such an approach made it necessary to view familiar sources in a different light or to look for other sources altogether.<sup>3</sup> In this process use came to be made of ego documents, which, centered as they were on one or more individuals, could provide an insight into the non-institutionalized processes in the society concerned.

This latter approach also has its limitations, however. Generally speaking, its focus is restricted to members of an elite. After all, only such persons were in a position to create and preserve ego documents of this kind. There is a real danger that a person writing in

---

Thanks are due to Heather Sutherland for critically reading an earlier draft of this article and providing useful comments, and to Ria van Yperen for translating the original Dutch text into English.

<sup>1</sup> The spelling used for the names of persons, places, organizations, and so on, is that which was commonly used in the period treated. Thus modern Indonesian *u* here is written as *oe*, *j* as *dj*, *c* as *tj*, and *sh* or *sy* as *sj*.

<sup>2</sup> See also William J. O'Malley, "The Pakempulan Kawulo Ngajogjakarta: An Official Report in the Jogjakarta People's Party of the 1930s" *Indonesia* 26 (October 1978): 111–58.

<sup>3</sup> A similar process is observable in women's studies, which from the beginning had to cope with the problem of the re-interpretation, and, where possible, supplementation of familiar sources. See Elsbeth Locher-Scholten and Anke Niehof, *Indonesian Women in Focus* (Dordrecht: Foris, 1987).

such a privileged position will give greater importance to his or her own historical role than we are prepared to assign to that role with the wisdom of hindsight. Hence the biographer has to address the question of what particular section of society is glimpsed through the protagonist. Concentrating on the "heroes of the revolution," the biographer must beware of the pitfall of tautology, or the rewriting of the history of nationalism as focused on his "hero." The researcher should stop to think whether his protagonist does, in fact, afford an insight into the really important events of the relevant period and into the society concerned at the relevant juncture.

The poet and publicist Noto Soeroto has left a large legacy of ego documents. He has been the subject of a number of Master's theses, in both Indonesia and the Netherlands. The main focus of attention in these has been his literary activities. One may well ask, however, whether his work as a poet was the most important and whether his fame at the time rested on his poetry or on other activities. In the present article, the emphasis will be on Noto Soeroto's political ideas and the context in which these ideas played a role or by which they were generated.

Noto Soeroto was a man of two cultures. As a point of convergence between these two cultures—the colonial Netherlands Indies and the traditional Javanese culture—his life provides an interesting starting-point for analyzing the period and the socio-cultural environments in which he lived. The concepts of "association"<sup>4</sup> and leadership on the basis of "spiritual nobility" were the leitmotifs of all his ambitions and publications, concepts which are themselves a fusion of Javanese norms and ideas and values borrowed from Plato. His ideals tended in the direction of a Greater Dutch Kingdom, encompassing the mother country and the colonies, together subject to an ideal form of colonial politics. According to his concepts, in a later phase Indonesian unity, in which the relation between the Netherlands and Indonesia could take the form of a federation, could then be brought about as the "outward form of a unity of a higher order." He viewed the Dutch colonial problem in a wider perspective—that of the future relationship between East and West.

In studying Noto Soeroto, we have, then, various ingredients to work with, namely available sources and a protagonist who had access to the circles which were crucial in shaping the face and politics of his period. Noto Soeroto's relationship with Mangkoenegoro VII, one of the four Central Javanese rulers in the first half of the twentieth century, will likewise be an important theme in this article. The two men were very close friends from the time of their stay in the Netherlands at the beginning of World War I onward. This relationship reflects many of the ideas, trends, and events of the period.

Some questions one may ask are: what can Noto Soeroto's life tell us about the period and the society in which he lived? What were his motives? With what and whom did he identify? And to what extent was he a victim of the protagonists of the ethical policy, of colonialism, of Javanese feudalism, or principally of himself?

In order to gain any sort of understanding of Noto Soeroto's conceptual world, we will first have to study his early childhood and youth.

<sup>4</sup> The underlying premise of the concept of "association" was that Indonesia and the Netherlands should cooperate on a footing of parity and equality between the two nations and between the Indonesian and the European ethnic groups. See Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, *Ethiek in Fragmenten* (Utrecht: Hes, 1981), pp. 181, 184; see also Raymond F. Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory 1890–1914* (1961: New York: AMS Press, 1970), pp. 8, 9, who says "Assimilation is the traditional doctrine of French colonial policy, but at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century came to be abandoned in favour of a policy of association . . . offered as an antidote to assimilation."

### Noto Soeroto's Youth and Social Background

Raden Mas Noto Soeroto was born into the aristocracy at the court of the Pakoe Alam, one of the four autonomous rulers of Central Java, in 1888. At that time his grandfather, Pakoe Alam V, was ruler. His father, Notodiredjo, was an important man at the court and had great influence on those around him, both administratively and politically. He also played a dominant part in the education of his children. He himself had been enrolled at the high school in Semarang in the 1870s,<sup>5</sup> but had not been able to finish school because he was summoned to assist his father with the government of the Pakoe Alaman when the latter ascended the throne in 1878. Notodiredjo had been put in charge of finances, and within ten years had managed to get rid of the enormous debt with which the Pakoe Alaman had been burdened. Evidence that court life in the second half of the nineteenth century was often less glamorous than it seemed appears in a letter Notodiredjo later wrote to his sons in the Netherlands, in which he said: "Oh, my boys, you simply cannot imagine what the situation was like at the time I was put in charge of the *kadipaten*.<sup>6</sup> We lacked even the most basic necessities. Just imagine, when your grandfather wanted to hold a reception or organize a gambling party, we used to have to borrow chairs, lights, playing tables, glasses, etc., from here, there and everywhere in order to be able to receive our guests."<sup>7</sup>

Those closest to him were not always grateful to Notodiredjo for his influential role at the court of the Pakoe Alam, in particular for the economies he introduced there and the way in which he sometimes handled court affairs. As the Resident of Yogyakarta, F.A. Liefcrinck, wrote in one of his reports: "The brusque way in which he settles matters, without much grace or ceremony, is something which the old-fashioned officials are unused to and find unpleasant. In my opinion Pangeran Notodiredjo shows too little inclination to consider the views of his subordinates, and has a somewhat unnecessarily rough manner. He is rather short-tempered and lacks self-control." It is evident both from documents in the archives of the Algemeene Secretarie<sup>8</sup> and from his own story (*Kort Overzicht*) as narrated by him later, that there were several intrigues against him. He later wrote about these intrigues in detail to his children, explaining: "If you should later be in a position where you have to find a post with us or if, after discharging your duties elsewhere, you are obliged to return to us, then you will know about that man's past, or how those people behaved, and subsequently what attitude or line of action to adopt vis-à-vis those persons."

Notodiredjo was one of the founders of Boedi Oetomo. His early friendship with Dr. Wahidin Sadirihoesodo, the spiritual father of that movement, gave rise to many discussions between the two men. The earliest reference to these discussions dates from the time when Noto Soeroto was still living with his parents, when he wrote in a letter to the Dutch author Frederik van Eeden<sup>9</sup>: "[That I] . . . often overheard conversations about things that

<sup>5</sup> S. Soerjaningrat, *Levensschets van Pangeran Ario Noto Diredjo* (The Hague: Adi Poestaka, 1920).

<sup>6</sup> House of the autonomous ruler, or "regent."

<sup>7</sup> Noto Soeroto family archive, *Kort overzicht van de geschiedenis van het Pakoe Alamsche Huis* [Brief survey of the royal house of the Pakoe Alam], 1908 [hereafter *Kort Overzicht*].

<sup>8</sup> Algemeene Secretarie, 29/3-59 5/12, geh. 16/4/1912. Archives of the former Ministry of Colonies, Algemeen Rijksarchief [hereafter ARA], The Hague.

<sup>9</sup> A Dutch author (1830-1930) who tried to arrive at a synthesis between Christianity and Indian philosophy. He was influenced by Tagore, whose works he translated.

have since materialized, namely the wish, which is now universally manifest, for an awakening of the Javanese people."<sup>10</sup> Notodiredjo became chairman of this association in 1912.<sup>11</sup>

This reality of the impoverished court and of his short-tempered father differed markedly from the romanticized memories of his youth to which Noto Soeroto later gave expression, particularly during his stay in the Netherlands, and which fitted in with the stereotyped ideas of the time about the quiet, demure Javanese, about Javanese Princes, and about palaces reminiscent of *A Thousand and One Nights*.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the influences described above—those of Javanese court life and of a highly idealistic resurgent Javanese nationalism—Noto Soeroto was also subject to European influences. Notodiredjo considered Western education to be very important, not so much as an aim in itself but as a means toward social equality with the colonial rulers.<sup>13</sup> Under no circumstances, however, were Javanese children to forget their own culture—on the contrary, his own children were educated in it during their school holidays. Later, when Noto Soeroto was studying in the Netherlands, his father instructed the young man to write him frequent letters in Javanese, which letters Notodiredjo returned with his corrections. Noto Soeroto also went to high school at Semarang, but later wrote to Van Eeden that he had learnt more Dutch from his father than at school, "where I absorbed literally nothing. I felt terribly lonely and unhappy there . . . because I could not make myself properly understood."<sup>14</sup>

### Abroad in the Netherlands

Such were the intellectual and cultural influences to which Noto Soeroto had been subject when in 1906, at the age of eighteen, he set out for the Netherlands, one of the few students from the Netherlands East Indies at the time. In the Netherlands there was a rather ambivalent attitude toward young Indonesians coming there to study, most from families of the higher *priyayi*. In ethical<sup>15</sup> circles they were applauded, because they were regarded as a new generation who, as a result of their modern education, would be in a position to serve

<sup>10</sup> Letters in the collection of the Frederik van Eeden genootschap, 3/12/1914.

<sup>11</sup> His nephew, Soerjodilogo, who was then head of the house of the Pakoe Alam, gave him permission to assume the position after much hesitation. See Dutch-language letter from Soerjodilogo to his uncle Notowirojo, September 30, 1912. Noto Soeroto family archive.

<sup>12</sup> See Edward W. Said's "Introduction" to his *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 1978), p. 5, where he writes "[There is] internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient (the East as a career) despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a 'real' Orient." See also *ibid.*, p. 6 on Flaubert's *Kuchuk Hanem*.

<sup>13</sup> See also A.P.A. Djajadiningrat, *Herinneringen* (Amsterdam/Batavia: Kolff, 1936), p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> Letter to Frederik van Eeden, December 3, 1914. See also Djajadiningrat, *Herinneringen*, pp. 66–68. Djajadiningrat relates how once when he met the head of the so-called *Hoofdenschool* he held out his hand first, in accordance with the Bantamese custom of *salaman*. "However, he did not shake hands with me, but sized me up contemptuously from head to foot, as if to say 'There's another one of those natives who imagines he's a European.'"

<sup>15</sup> Locher-Scholten has pointed to the complexity of the concept of 'ethisch' as used in colonial policies and debates at the beginning of the twentieth century in her book, *Ethiek in fragmenten*. Some aspects of the ethical policy were "guardianship, association and emancipation," as well as "a welfare policy that is focused on Indonesians." (p. 182).

The concept had its origins in the heightened social conscience at the end of the nineteenth century, and it came to co-exist with, and for many to replace, the Calvinistic moral and ethical code. For the Netherlands, such an ethical policy was essential in the colonies and abroad to make up for what the colonial government lacked in physical force.

their country. More conservative circles were inclined to fear that these young people would no longer fit in with their society of origin on their return home. At the time Noto Soeroto came to the Netherlands, there were twenty Indonesian university students there, in addition to a number of Indonesians following other, shorter courses. The *jongos* and *babu*<sup>16</sup> were already a familiar phenomenon, thanks to the families who had returned from "the Orient." Noto Soeroto at first followed the path which his father Notodiredjo had marked out for him. He graduated from high school in The Hague and went to study law at Leiden. Notodiredjo kept a close eye on Noto Soeroto and his brother, Notokworo, all the way from Java, giving them lots of advice and urging them not to waste any time, as supporting four children in the Netherlands (where Noto Soeroto and Notokworo were later joined by their other brothers) was a heavy strain on his financial resources.

When Noto Soeroto started writing in daily newspapers and journals and speaking at meetings of the Indische Vereeniging,<sup>17</sup> his father was not very happy about this, enjoining his son to

stop it, Soeroto. That kind of activity is bound to antagonize the European colonial officials, who, besides, will probably think or say: "There you are, there's another one of those inexperienced Javanese starting to write against us." You don't realize what the consequences of this may be. It may turn out unpleasant for us in an indirect way. Moreover, at the present moment we are fewer in number, and hence always the losing and injured party. Be careful about these things. I would prefer you to give up your newspaper writing and to devote your time to your studies instead of wasting it on journalism. What if they were to say to you, "Sir, you are right"? What good would it do you? Would you be rewarded for it? As the Javanese proverb says, it is "*rebut balung tanpo hisi*" [fighting over a bone picked clean]. Please stop your newspaper writing. You can write as much as you like later, when you're fully conversant with the Javanese situation, when no one will be able to contradict you or refute your arguments.<sup>18</sup>

But Noto Soeroto was not to be deterred. On the contrary, he was to write a great deal more, as a poet, a journalist, a politician, and a historian.

In 1911, at the age of 23, he gave a lecture before the Indische Vereeniging entitled "The ideas of Raden Ajeng Kartini as a guide to the Indische Vereeniging." In Kartini he recognized a kindred spirit. In this lecture, for the first time, he formulated his ideas on the future of the Netherlands East Indies. Referring to the Boedi Oetomo movement, he cited the words of C. Th. van Deventer,<sup>19</sup> "A miracle has happened, Sleeping Beauty Insulinde has awakened." Then he mentioned the struggle in which particular individuals had had to engage prior to the awakening of the masses. Kartini was one of these individuals. The crux of the struggle was "the conflict or collision between two cultures which to a certain extent are mutually opposed, between two personalities which are complex each in its own right, and which may be briefly referred to as the East and the West." To Noto Soeroto, Kartini was someone who "tried to blend two world views, in each of which only certain aspects of the

<sup>16</sup> Male and female domestic servants respectively.

<sup>17</sup> Founded in 1908, initially as a social club with the aim of "the stimulation of contacts between Indonesians in the Netherlands," this association later set itself as objective the achievement of a synthesis between East (the sphere of the heart) and West (intellect, pragmatism). It was intended to become an association of "future guardians of the interests of their native country, the Indies." In 1913 it had 47 members See Harry A Poeze, *In het Land van de Overheerser, Indonesiers in Nederland 1600-1950* (Dordrecht: Foris, 1986), pp. 95 ff.

<sup>18</sup> Notodiredjo to Noto Soeroto, June 12, 1909. Noto Soeroto family archive.

<sup>19</sup> A member of the States General and proponent of the ethical policy, who died in 1915.

whole of the human personality have been fully developed, into a single, harmonious whole.”<sup>20</sup> In developing this idea, Noto Soeroto was acting in the spirit of the times,<sup>21</sup> where there was a general desire for a dialogue between East and West. The Arabist C. Snouck Hurgronje, likewise in 1911, pleaded that the indigenous elite should be introduced to Western culture and Western education,<sup>22</sup> which would provide a basis for association. Whereas in Snouck Hurgronje's views the idea of “guardianship” still played a role, Noto Soeroto envisaged a fusion of two ways of life, the Oriental and the Western, which would result in a perfect state of being. To achieve this, not only was it necessary for Indonesians to become “enlightened” through contact with Western culture, but also for Westerners, and in this specific case the Dutch, to familiarize themselves with the “East,” and, in particular, with Javanese culture. He hoped that in the process of osmosis<sup>23</sup> the two cultures would blend in a perfect synthesis.

The arrival in the Netherlands of Soeriosoeparto, the son of Mangkoenegoro V and himself the future Mangkoenegoro VII, in July 1913, was to have a far-reaching effect on Noto Soeroto. Soeparto had been frustrated in his hopes of receiving a Western education because the current ruler, his uncle Prince Mangkoenegoro VI, was more old-fashioned in this respect than his father had been. Nevertheless, the young prince had learned Dutch on his own, and in 1909 had been appointed translator at the office in Surakarta of Resident C.F. van Wijk, who had taken a great interest in him. In Surakarta Soeparto had also met the ethical politician Van Deventer, who, together with Van Wijk, made it possible for him to go to the Netherlands to study, in the hope that this would make him a strong candidate to succeed his uncle, Mangkoenegoro VI.<sup>24</sup>

The legitimacy of Mangkoenegoro VI's only son succeeding him had been in dispute at the court for some time. This dispute had not been entirely unwelcome to the ethical politicians, who saw in it an opportunity of having their dreams realized of seeing a modern, Western-educated prince on the throne, capable of governing his principality as an enlightened ruler. The Mangkoenegaran was an important principality. In seniority it was the third of the four autonomous Central Javanese principalities, in size the second, and in wealth probably the first, while its royal house had preserved the right to maintain an army, in contrast to the other three principalities. More important, however, the ethical politicians regarded Soeparto's possible succession as a satisfactory counterbalance to the wayward, autocratic rule of the Susuhunan of Solo, Soenan X. This interest shown by Van Wijk and Van Deventer had been very important to Soeparto, not only because it brought the fulfilment of his long-cherished wish to go to the Netherlands, but also because the succession to Mangkoenegoro VI was becoming an increasingly important issue. Chagrined when it became apparent to him that his own son could not succeed him, Mangkoenegoro VI had

<sup>20</sup> *Oedaya* 79 (1929): 184–87.

<sup>21</sup> See Raymond F. Betts, *The False Dawn* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975) p. 235.

<sup>22</sup> Locher Scholten, *Ethiek in Fragmenten*, pp. 184–85.

<sup>23</sup> This concept was first used as a metaphor for the mutual influencing between the Oriental and Western cultures by the Indonesian Chinese author Kwee Kek Beng in his essay entitled “Oosterse invloeden op het Westen,” *Chinese Revue* vol. 3 (July 1927), pp. 32–65.

<sup>24</sup> The succession in the Central Javanese principalities was never automatic. It was a matter in which the colonial government had the last say. Because of the numerous candidates, it was sometimes quite difficult to establish who was the most senior. This often provided the government with an opportunity for manipulating as it saw fit. A stay in the Netherlands enabled likely candidates to score extra high marks for the nomination.

decided to abdicate. Though Soeparto was not one of the first in line to the succession, some Dutch, as we saw above, favored his appointment, either in the near future or later.

Although they belonged to different generations, Soeriosoeparto and Notodiredjo, Noto Soeroto's father, were fellow members of Boedi Oetomo and thus acquainted with each other. Notodiredjo wrote to urge Noto Soeroto to learn Javanese from Soeparto, saying: "You, too, should take advantage of this opportunity to learn Javanese from him. Thus the two of you will repay knowledge with knowledge, which is sure to take you farthest, and very cheaply so." Notodiredjo apparently considered Soeparto a more suitable friend for his son than Prince Hangabehi, the eldest son of the Susuhunan of Surakarta, who had gone to the Netherlands for a general education at the same time, writing: "He [Hangabehi] already has a position. Actually, he is just going to Holland to look around, and perhaps to have some fun. You are in Holland to study, to acquire certain skills by means of which you must later win a position in society for yourself. . . . There is a big difference between [the reasons for] his visit to Holland and yours."<sup>25</sup> Notodiredjo could not have suspected that his son's contact with Soeriosoeparto would have such important reverberations for Noto Soeroto's life and would even cause it to take an entirely different turn.

Long before his arrival in the Netherlands, Soeriosoeparto had been attracted to theosophy and to theosophical literature, as were other members of the Javanese intelligentsia and *priyayi*. The secretaryship of the Theosophical Society of Surakarta in 1912, for instance, was linked to the Mangkoenegoro house.<sup>26</sup> Even before the foundation of Boedi Oetomo, the deputy chairman of the Theosophical Society, D. Labberton van Hinloopen, had had contacts with STOVIA<sup>27</sup> students, who viewed the theosophical movement and the ideals of Rabindranath Tagore<sup>28</sup> as a means of bridging the gap between East and West and as an inspiration for the future.<sup>29</sup>

At the time of his first meeting with Soeparto, Noto Soeroto appeared to feel perhaps most at home in this world of "osmosis," to which as yet, however, he had only limited access. He had not yet become acquainted with Tagore, with a translation of whose work *Gitanjali* Soeparto presented him. Soeroto commented on the work: "My introduction to this was a revelation to me. . . . Blank verse in a form of Dutch that is most familiar to a Javanese."<sup>30</sup> From that time onward Noto Soeroto also expressed himself in literary form, and was to see many volumes of his poetry published. Soeriosoeparto was to translate several of these poems, as well as some of Van Eeden's Dutch translations of the works of Tagore, into Javanese. Through their publishing activities they came into contact with European authors and artists interested in the Orient.

<sup>25</sup> Letter, May 6, 1913. Noto Soeroto family archive.

<sup>26</sup> See Kenji Tsuchiya, *Democracy and Leadership, The Rise of the Taman Siswa Movement in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), p. 43.

<sup>27</sup> Abbreviation for *School voor Opleiding tot Inlandse Artsen* (= medical school for indigenous doctors). On van Hinloopen's interest in the Boedi Oetomo, see Akira Nagazumi, *The Dawn of Indonesian Nationalism: The Early Years of the Budi Utomo, 1908–1918* (Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies, 1972), pp. 71–73.

<sup>28</sup> Indian philosopher and poet (1861–1941), whose father and grandfather had been among the inspirers of the Indian religious reform movement, the Brahman Semaj.

<sup>29</sup> There were likewise connections with Freemasonry, with Notodiredjo being a member of the Freemasons along with forty other Indonesians, most of them *bupati* and *wedana*. Kenji Tsuchiya, *Democracy and Leadership*, p. 53, n. 87.

<sup>30</sup> Noto Soeroto, "Preface," in *Melatiknoppen* (Amsterdam: van Looy, 1915). The translation was by Frederik van Eeden.

The aim of Soeparto's visit to Leiden was, among other things, to attend Javanese lectures and to familiarize himself with Dutch society. The scions of other princely families with claims to the throne were sometimes given similar opportunities. Soeparto had brought various letters of introduction, from such persons as Resident van Wijk, Rinkes,<sup>31</sup> and Mühlenfeld.<sup>32</sup> Just before leaving Batavia, he had met his future son-in-law, Hoesein Djajadiningrat,<sup>33</sup> who had just been awarded a doctorate by Professor Snouck Hurgronje<sup>34</sup> and who was able to brief Soeparto in detail on conditions at Leiden. These letters of recommendation enabled Soeparto to make the acquaintance of Snouck Hurgronje and other scholars in the field of Indonesian studies. He had already been introduced to Van Deventer in Solo. From here on it was but a small step to that other well-known member of the ethical party, J.H. Abendanon.<sup>35</sup> He also met members of the establishment who were preparing for a career in the Indies, and fellow-students like B.J.O. Schrieke,<sup>36</sup> who was to become one of his closest friends in Java.

During the mobilization following the outbreak of war in 1914, Soeroto and Soeparto, first volunteered as reserve officers, and then entered active service, Noto Soeroto with the hussars (cavalry) and Soeriosoeparto with the grenadiers, thus fulfilling a wish voiced by Dr. D.A. Rinkes in a letter to him.<sup>37</sup> Their decision to become reserve officers was in keeping with their nationalistic aspirations. Both were clearly advocates of an indigenous militia, with Noto Soeroto probably being influenced by Soeparto in this matter. Shortly after his arrival in the Netherlands, Soeparto had written to his former employer, Resident van Wijk, that he had plans for "training as a reserve officer" during the holidays, continuing that "Mr. Colijn,<sup>38</sup> who was still minister at the time, was pleased to hear of my plans and promised me personally that he would use his influence on my behalf in this matter. . . ."<sup>39</sup> Coming as they did from two principalities with militias of their own (even though that in the Pakoe Alaman had now been disbanded), Soeparto and Soeroto were no strangers to a military tradition. In Soeparto's case his ambition to become Mangkoenegoro no doubt played a role as well. But here again the strange ambivalence of the colonial situation mani-

<sup>31</sup> The government adviser on indigenous affairs.

<sup>32</sup> *Controleur* in Klaten at the time, and later director of internal affairs. An adherent of the ethical movement, he was a good friend of Soeparto's even in those years.

<sup>33</sup> The later Prof. Hoesein Djajadiningrat (1886–1959), who was a student of Prof. Snouck Hurgronje, was the first Indonesian to obtain a doctorate at a Dutch university. Later, in 1921, he married the eldest daughter of Mangkoenegoro VII.

<sup>34</sup> The famous Dutch Arabist (1857–1936) who from 1899–1906 was Dutch government adviser on Islamic affairs and later became a professor of Arabic at Leiden.

<sup>35</sup> Abendanon (1852–1925) was director of education from 1900–1905. It was he who, together with his wife, encouraged Kartini to continue her studies. Thanks to his efforts, her letters were posthumously published, under the title *Letters of a Javanese Princess*, translated from Dutch by A. L. Symmers; edited, with an introduction by Hildred Geertz (New York: Norton, 1964).

<sup>36</sup> Director of education from 1929 to 1934.

<sup>37</sup> Rinkes had written: "It seems to me a good idea for you to become a reservist. You are young and healthy and have a sturdy build. . . . That way you will make the acquaintance of lots of people and get to know persons and situations of whose existence you would otherwise never have dreamed. What a much better opportunity of observing the Dutch and the Dutch way of life than we have ever had with regard to Javanese ways and customs." Letter from Rinkes, November 27, 1913. Private correspondence of Mangkoenegoro VII, Reksopoestoko, Solo.

<sup>38</sup> Colijn was minister of war from 1911–1913 and minister for the colonies 1933–1937. He was succeeded as minister by Th.B. Pleyte in 1913.

<sup>39</sup> Collection of private correspondence, September 6, 1913.



fested itself, as occurred in the entire debate about the pros and cons of an indigenous militia. Rinkes was in favor of such a militia, perhaps because he thought that military training would be good preparation for Soeparto's possible accession to the throne, so one might say that Soeparto was following the path that had been plotted for him. On the other hand, certain Javanese nationalistic aspirations were definitely also important in the attitudes of both Soeparto and Noto Soeroto, in the same way as they were to be in the debate within Boedi Oetomo two years later.

Soeroto for his part introduced Soeriosoeparto to the group of Indonesian students who met frequently to discuss their position in the Netherlands and the news from home. Finding themselves in an entirely different—non-colonial—social environment from that at home, in which they had a totally different kind of experience of the Dutch, made them think more consciously about the operations of a colonial society and the reasons behind it. This was the experience of many nationalists.<sup>40</sup> The activities of Indonesian students in the Netherlands also had repercussions in the Indies, as is evident from a letter to Soeriosoeparto from the Boedi Oetomo leader Sastrowijono,<sup>41</sup> who wrote: "Thanks to your reports, my knowledge of the social situation in the West has once more been enriched. This is invaluable to us in our struggle for progress. For our development has its basis in the West. Hence our leaders should consider it one of their prime duties to prevent that which is bad and immoral in the West being transferred to us."<sup>42</sup> Conversely, the Indonesians in the Netherlands were kept well informed on events at home, particularly in Java. In another letter, Sastrowijono writes about the exiling of Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo and his political friends, and about how a Boedi Oetomo committee consisting of Dr. Wahidin, Mas Boediardjo, Mas Dwiyo, and himself had tried to intercede with the government on their behalf by meeting with Dr. Rinkes and Dr. Hazeu.<sup>43</sup>

### The New Course in Nationalism

The direct cause of the banishment to the Netherlands of E.F.E. Douwes Dekker, Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo, and Soewardi Soerjaningrat was the so-called "Native Committee Incident."<sup>44</sup> But their exile was also a result of their establishment in 1912 of the *Indische Partij voor Indo-Europeanen* (Indo-European Party of the Indies), a party that was never recognized by the Netherlands Indies government and was viewed by it as a threat to public order.

<sup>40</sup> Poeze, *In het Land van de Overheerser*, pp. 224–25, who is basing himself on a chapter written by the present author on the basis of an interview with Maria Ulfah Achmad.

<sup>41</sup> Sastrowijono was *jaksa* (district attorney) in Sragen. According to Nagazumi he was one of the most progressive Boedi Oetomo leaders of the period. In 1909 he demonstrated the necessity of the rise of a Javanese middle class.

<sup>42</sup> Letter, January 25, 1914. Collection of private correspondence, Reksopustoko Archive, Sastrowijoyo.

<sup>43</sup> Letter, October 16, 1913. Ibid. G.A.J. Hazeu (1870–1929) was government adviser on native affairs from 1916–1920 and acting government commissioner for native and Arabic affairs from 1917–1920. See also Nagazumi, *Dawn of Indonesian Nationalism*, pp. 90, 91.

<sup>44</sup> A committee of "natives," including Tjipto and Soewardi, had been set up in connection with the commemoration of the centenary of the freedom of the Netherlands. This committee announced the intention of sending a telegram to Queen Wilhelmina with the request to institute a parliament and give permission for the formation of political parties in the Indies. This was followed by a pamphlet written by Soewardi in Dutch and Malay, entitled *Als ik eens een Nederlander was* [If I were a Dutchman], in which he ridiculed the celebration of Dutch independence.

Their arrival in the Netherlands provoked a debate among Dutch as well as Indonesians. On the Dutch side, only the SDAP (Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiders-Partij—Social Democratic Labor Party) in general supported the principles of the Indische Partij. Among the Indonesians, Douwes Dekker, joined by Tjipto, rejected outright the policy of association favored by Noto Soeroto, and at a meeting of the Indische Vereeniging on the occasion of its fifth birthday a heated debate broke out between Noto Soeroto and the newcomers. Douwes Dekker likewise criticized Noto Soeroto's idea that the Netherlands Indies were in need of military protection, a view which he had "anything but expected from a Javanese, as the Javanese people at this moment first and foremost need more education, in which respect the government in his opinion is too stingy in comparison with the expenditure on defense."<sup>45</sup> Noto Soeroto was deeply hurt by Douwes Dekker's remark.

The question of a native militia came up for discussion in a report to the governor-general in 1913,<sup>46</sup> but was deemed premature at the time. Then in 1914 Dr. Radjiman put it before a meeting of Boedi Oetomo. In 1915 the colonial government reconsidered the idea and circulated a questionnaire on the subject among the regents. Debate, which in the Netherlands as early as 1913 had provoked skirmishes between Tjipto, Douwes Dekker, and Noto Soeroto, in the years 1915 and 1916 was conducted with due excitement in Java, in particular in Boedi Oetomo circles, where it came to be linked to the issue of a people's representative body. The arguments of supporters and opponents alike were prompted by nationalistic considerations. The idea of a native militia was eventually rejected by the Dutch Parliament, in particular by the leftist parties, which were not interested in the defense of the Netherlands Indies and were loath to contribute to the emancipation of the colony.

Noto Soeroto's differences with Tjipto and Douwes Dekker were sharper than with Soewardi, who agreed with him about the role to be played by Java and Javanese culture. In later years the two cooperated in an effort to disseminate more knowledge about, and foster a greater understanding of, Javanese culture and society in the Netherlands. The crux of Noto Soeroto's difference with the other two exiles was the idea of association. As Noto Soeroto put it: "The Indische Partij is anti-Dutch nationalistic, whereas the Indische Vereeniging is loyal. The former bears within itself the harmful seeds of dissension and agitation, where at the present juncture strong co-operation is desirable, while the latter is trying to approximate the association idea advocated by so many excellent men."<sup>47</sup> At that time Noto Soeroto's point of view was still supported by a majority of his fellow-countrymen. By his stubborn refusal to give up any part of this idea, however, he became increasingly isolated from his nationalist compatriots in later years.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> See Poeze, *In het Land van de Overheerser*, p. 94.

<sup>46</sup> See Nagazumi, *Dawn of Indonesian Nationalism*, pp. 95–115.

<sup>47</sup> See Poeze, *In het Land van de Overheerser*, p. 94.

<sup>48</sup> In a sense the debate anticipated the later one on the home front in 1918, between Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo and Soetatmo Soeriokoesoemo in reaction to the installation of an Indonesian People's Council and the opening of the Congress for the Stimulation of Javanese Culture in Solo. It here became evident that the difference in fact hinged on the role of Javanese traditionalism in the *gerakan* and on the interpretation of the concept of democracy (see R.M.S. Soeriokoesoemo, A. Mühlenfeld, Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo, J.B. Wensch, *Javaansch of Indisch Nationalisme?* (Semarang: Benjamins, 1918); and Takashi Shiraishi, "The Disputes between Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo and Soetatmo Soeriokoesoemo: Satria vs Pandita" *Indonesia* 32 (October 1981). Noto Soeroto's ideas clearly resembled those of Soeriokoesoemo.

### Soeparto's return to Java

Soeparto was obliged to return to Java in 1915 in connection with the succession to Mangkoenegoro VI. Thanks to letters from his friends in the Indies, who had kept him informed of all the rumors surrounding the abdication of his uncle, he was well aware that he was in the running to succeed him. Soeparto's possible accession to the throne gave his political supporters in Java hopes that the Netherlands government was in earnest after all about the modernization of Javanese autonomous government and about giving the autonomous rulers more latitude.

In Dutch ethical circles, too, hopes ran high when the Dutch government decided in effect to put Soeriosoeparto on the throne, as witness a long article published by Mühlenfeld in the journal *Nederlandsch-Indie Oud en Nieuw* 1916/17, where he wrote: "Those were mighty events which took place in the realm of the Mangkoenegoro in the first months of the year 1916—historic events for Java, which nonetheless managed to attract little attention in the Netherlands, poorly informed as the Dutch public generally is about conditions in the so-called Principalities." The author pointed out that the appointment of Soeparto as ruler of the Mangkoenegaran represented "a chance of realizing one of the wishes cherished by Mr. van Deventer . . . a big step forward, and I don't think it at all unlikely that I will live to witness the creation of a Federation of States of Mataram," ending with the words: "What a glorious future is awaiting the Realm of the Mangkoenegoro, currently by far the best organized and most prosperous of the four states of Mataram."<sup>49</sup> Here too, we observe hopes for a better future for the Javanese self-ruling principalities through greater autonomy and for a restoration of the old empire, albeit in modern form.

Soeparto's departure from the Netherlands was hard for Noto Soeroto to bear. He wrote to him in May 1915:

How different it will be for me. In whom shall I now confide the secrets of my heart, and who will share my joys and fears? Nonetheless, I can well imagine your state of mind. You are probably hopelessly torn between the joy of going home and the grief of having to sacrifice the wonderfully free life you have lived here. I for my part would, I think, be glad rather than sorry when the time came for me to return home; actually, I've been fed up for some time now with my life here in my circumstances.<sup>50</sup>

With this latter remark he was alluding to his perennial financial problems, which are a frequent theme in his letters to Soeparto.

After the war Noto Soeroto embarked on a new phase of his life. The war years had been very fruitful for him as a poet and writer. The collection *Melatiknoppen* (Jasmine Buds) was published in 1915, *De Geur van Moeder's Haarwring* (The Scent of Mother's Chignon) in 1916, *Rabindranath Tagore; Een biografische schets* (Rabindranath Tagore; A brief biography) in 1917, *Fluisteringen van de Avondwind* (Whisperings of the Evening Breeze) also in 1917, and *Bloemeketenen* (Flower Garlands) in 1918.

It now became necessary for him to earn a living for his family, for he had married a Dutch girl, Jo Meyer, whom he had met while in the hussars, when he had been billeted with her parents in Eindhoven. They had resumed the acquaintance when she came to Leiden to study singing. Her father, a tobacconist, was prepared to assist the young couple

<sup>49</sup> "Een troonwisseling in de Vorstenlanden [A succession in the Principalities]" *Nederlandsch-Indie Oud en Nieuw*, 1e vol. (1916/17), pp. 79–88.

<sup>50</sup> Letter dated March 15, 1915. Collection of Private Correspondence of Reksopoestoko, Noto Soeroto.

financially for the first few years, but the amount he could afford was not enough to support them if Noto Soeroto wanted to finish his law course. Noto Soeroto even requested a monthly allowance from Soeparto, who had meanwhile become Mangkoenegoro, promising him in return to serve in some function in the Mangkoenegaran as soon as he had completed his law degree. In his own words: "It won't matter, Goesti, if you pay me a lower salary than the Government. My main ambition in life is not to earn a huge salary, but to find work I enjoy in a congenial atmosphere, and in which I can devote myself to the realization of the cultural ideals which are still alive in the breasts of the best of my fellow-countrymen."<sup>51</sup>

For the time being Noto Soeroto would be obliged to perform this task from the Netherlands. He did not find the necessary peace to finish his law studies, and so in 1919 he opened a bookshop and set up a publishing company, which he named *Adi Poestaka* (= The Excellent Book). He intended to publish books on the Indies, both fiction and non-fiction. In 1923 he began publication of an illustrated magazine, *Oedaya*, for readers in both the Netherlands and Indonesia, defining its aims as follows:

*Oedaya* will not be influenced by any political party views whatsoever, nor by any private interests, but will be guided only by a constructive attitude toward the relationship between the Indies and the Netherlands. It is aimed at arousing among the Dutch an interest in Indonesia and its culture and in the talents and potentials of its people by offering material in the Dutch language. Tranquility, gradualness and naturalness, as symbolized by the rising sun (= *udaya*), are the guiding principles for the way in which the journal intends to serve the cause of the rise of Indonesia. By presenting Malay-language reading matter, it will strive to disseminate among the Indonesian masses not only useful reading for entertainment, but also information on public health, economic subjects, and technology—in short, those subjects for which the Dutch are their obvious source of information. To contribute in this way to the promotion of a mutual understanding and appreciation between the Netherlands and Indonesia, and between East and West in general, to the best of its ability—that is the aim of *Oedaya*.<sup>52</sup>

### The Rift with the New Generation of Indonesian Students after 1918

Politically, Noto Soeroto became increasingly isolated among his fellow-countrymen. With his ideals of unity, for instance, he no longer belonged in a group which now advocated the separation of Indonesia from the Netherlands. The widening rift between him and his compatriots was understandable enough. After the first World War the number of Indonesian students in the Netherlands rose substantially. Communications between the two countries had become better and more regular, and the colonial government was now awarding scholarships on the condition that their recipients should work for the government for a few years on completion of their studies. As a result it was no longer exclusively students from upper aristocratic circles who went to the Netherlands to study, and the views of the newcomers differed markedly from those of the prewar generation. These students certainly did not appreciate Noto Soeroto's ideas.

The articles in the monthly journal *Hindia Poetra*, previously the official organ of the *Indische Vereeniging* and now that of the *Indonesisch Verbond van Studerenden*,<sup>53</sup> in

<sup>51</sup> Letter dated October 8, 1919. Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> *Oedaya* 6 (December 1924): 161.

<sup>53</sup> Founded January 12, 1918, this was a union of associations whose membership was made up of Dutch, Indonesian, and Chinese students preparing for a career in the Dutch East Indies.

which the Indische Vereeniging was also represented, were violently anticolonial, inciting their readers to non-cooperation. From 1924 onward the journal was, in fact, to bear the name *Indonesia Merdeka*.<sup>54</sup> That same year Noto Soeroto was expelled from the Indische Vereeniging on account of his above statement in *Oedaya* about the aims of that journal and also because of an article he wrote in which he described Van Heutsz as a person who had brought the different "tribes" together and had sown the seeds for the future consolidation of Indonesia.<sup>55</sup>

Though Noto Soeroto repeatedly asserted he did not want to be a politician, four years later he did finally present a plan for the "practical art of governing." In a speech delivered on March 16, 1928, entitled "Van Overheersing tot Zelfregeering [From Domination to Self-Government]," he pointed out that since the creation of a *Volksraad* (People's Council—a proto-parliament) developments were going in the direction of a parliamentary form of government. This parliamentary form he regarded as inappropriate for Orientals, however. In his own words: "The parliamentary system is a link in the chain of historical development of some Western countries. There it represents a corrective measure against the absolute power of the sovereign. . . . In Indonesia, however, there is at present no absolute sovereign power, but alien domination." Noto Soeroto's views in this respect partially corresponded with those of the ultra-conservative former Dutch minister for the colonies, Colijn,<sup>56</sup> who was opposed to the *Volksraad* from the moment of its inception, not only because he felt it inappropriate to the Indies, but also because a colonial situation offered no scope for the alternation of roles between government and opposition that typifies a parliamentary democracy. Colijn, however, would almost certainly have disagreed with Noto Soeroto's idea that, if there was to be an Indonesian Parliament, it should have a majority of indigenous members, so that it could become an instrument of opposition to foreign domination rather than of correction. In this connection, Noto Soeroto wrote:

First of all, ways must be found to get rid of this foreign domination. The parliamentary form of government is merely a form of democracy which has its historical roots in the West. . . . To accommodate the natural phenomenon of growth, i.e., the desire for the right of self-government, or the urge of the dominated to become autonomous, we must honor the principle of rule by the most excellent, that is to say, by the person chosen from among the people involved after consultation with their chosen elite, possibly complemented by appointed experts from the society at large. . . . Because of the combination of the two notions of "Man of the People" and "Aristocrat" or "Most Excellent One" within one person, I have labeled this fundamental premise of my system "aristodemocratic."<sup>57</sup>

In a subsequent chapter, "Aristocratie en Democratie in Indonesia," Noto Soeroto discussed these ideas in more detail. He pointed out here that, thanks to the democratization process in Indonesia, which had been set in motion by Western education, the majority of

<sup>54</sup> See Poeze, *In het Land van de Overheerser*, pp. 176, 177.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175. The association at that time was headed already by persons like Hatta, Sastroamidjojo, Mangoenkoesoemo, Sartono, R. P. Singgih, and Soebardjo.

<sup>56</sup> See H. Colijn, *Koloniale Vraagstukken van Heden en Morgen* (Amsterdam: Dagblad en Drukkerij de Standaard, 1928).

<sup>57</sup> See A.D.A. de Kat Angelino, *Staatkundig Beleid en Bestuurszorg in Nederlandsch-Indie* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1929), pp. 354 ff., where this author refutes the argument about "un-Orientalness" by appealing to many other Western influences, such as "the international press, international trade, and multinational industries . . .," which had not come into the discussion.

the intellectuals "who proclaim themselves leaders of the people" did not come from aristocratic circles. True, there was nothing left of the authority of the princes, rajas, and regents—a situation Noto Soeroto attributed to the policy of the Dutch, who, instead of "modernizing the power of the leaders of the people," had reduced it to "mere show and tinsel." Hence it was understandable that the nobility was contributing little to the national awakening. According to Noto Soeroto, there was no contradiction between aristocracy and democracy in Indonesia. Unlike the West, Java had no economically powerful elite. Nor would the opposition "democracy versus aristocracy" be at all relevant in Java. In the West, the task of democracy was more a socio-economic one, whereas in Java its nature would have to be more socially ethical. . . . The emphasis here would have to be on harmony and synthesis. Noto Soeroto concluded these remarks with the observation that everyone with aristocratic qualities who achieved a position of leadership automatically became a *priyayi*, meaning nothing more or less than that they became a younger brother (*yayi* = brother), namely of the prince or ruler. The Javanese cultural ideal was that the aristocrat by birth should be first and foremost an aristocrat of the mind. It was one of the sovereign's duties to be the last to share in any joys and pleasures, and the first to suffer in times of need and danger. The prince who failed in this had best resign.<sup>58</sup>

In the October 1929 issue of *Oedaya*, Noto Soeroto returned to the concept of *aristoi* in reaction to Dutch criticism that he did not understand the ideas of his intellectual compatriots, who allegedly "detest everything to do with aristocrats and aristocracy." In Noto Soeroto's view, these terms had "but an *accidental*, far from exclusive bearing on the concept of aristocracy by birth" (italics Noto Soeroto's). Thanks to interrelations with the common people, the aristocracy in Java was not exclusively aristocratic. Hence there was no antithesis between common people and aristocracy. In concrete terms, Noto Soeroto's blueprint for a political system along "aristo-democratic" lines involved a division of Indonesia into culture areas<sup>59</sup>—Javanese, Malay, and so on—with a supreme governor as administrator, and a further division of these areas into provinces, which in turn were to be subdivided into regencies. For a province or smaller region that had grown sufficiently mature to become autonomous, an Indonesian should be chosen as chief administrator, with executive as well as legislative powers, and appointed as such by a higher authority. There would have to be an indirect form of authority and an indirect electoral system. "As the head of an autonomous district rises from among the people like a filtrate and is wanted by the people and recognized by a higher authority as one of the most excellent and as a link with the central authority, I should like to describe this basis as 'aristo-democratic.' For hereby the people, *demos*, governs itself through its *aristoi*."<sup>60</sup>

For the Indonesian nationalists, the debate about the "culture areas" as envisaged by Noto Soeroto had by that time been closed. Traditionalism on the basis of diversity was regarded as an obstacle to social change. Unity was the goal now being pursued.<sup>61</sup> As far as the Indonesian nationalists were concerned, the concept of culture areas accorded too closely with the new Dutch conservative colonial thinking that had arisen as a reaction

<sup>58</sup> Noto Soeroto, *Schets van een Staatkundig Stelsel op Aristo-Democratische Grondslag* (The Hague: Adi Poestaka, 1931), pp. 53 ff.

<sup>59</sup> By the term "culture area" Noto Soeroto meant "a territorial legal community of a higher order which encompasses a cultural variant or culture area."

<sup>60</sup> Noto Soeroto, *Schets van een Staatkundig Stelsel*, p. 86.

<sup>61</sup> Heather Sutherland, *The Making of a Bureaucratic Elite* (Kuala Lumpur/Hong Kong: ASAA Southeast Asia Publications Series [Heinemann], 1979), p.1.

against the nationalistic movement. The concept fitted in with the principles of the new reform law which had come into operation in 1925, which envisaged the creation of autonomous provinces and regencies, each with its own advisory council. These councils were to be composed of Dutch nationals as well as Alien Orientals and "Natives." There was a growing interest in the late 1920s in the ideas expressed before the first World War by S. Ritsema van Eck about "segregation plus modernization within a federal framework under the hegemony of the Netherlands." In 1928 Minister for the Colonies Colijn, in his *Koloniale Vraagstukken*, likewise pleaded in favor of government from "local territorial units" with limited autonomy. His ideas were rejected by the Leiden professors Snouck Hurgronje and Van Vollenhoven, who pointed out that they were founded on Colijn's familiarity with the Sumatran customary law heads and were not automatically applicable to the Javanese regents. The far from progressive daily *De Tijd* commented that, even if it were possible on the basis of the decentralization law of 1903 to effect "active participation in the government of the colony" in this way, by 1917 "the first stage of the political struggle, in which the emphasis was still on the local aspect, had been passed." This view accorded with the general way of thinking of the majority of nationalistic Indonesians.

Noto Soeroto's ideas and his blueprint for a political system were partly influenced by Plato<sup>62</sup> and closely resembled the views of Soeriokoesoemo as expounded in *Sabdo Pandito Ratoe* [The World of the Wise Prince].<sup>63</sup> The role of the Aristoi here is assigned to the "Wise Man," who possesses natural rights and power, and who will never exercise the right of the strongest in his own interests in the way an animal would. The head of state should be one of these wise men and should be elected by the wise, and not by the ordinary people.

The evolutionary elements of Noto Soeroto's blueprint bore a certain resemblance to the views A.D.A. de Kat Angelino<sup>64</sup> was to expound in his *Staatkundig Beleid en Bestuurszorg in Nederlandsch-Indië* [State Policy and Administrative Concerns in the Netherlands East Indies]. De Kat Angelino here revealed himself to be an advocate of "the synthesis of two cultures as a basis for international politics and colonial statecraft, . . . which will conduce to a reconciliation between East and West and the preparation of the whole of mankind for the communal march forward—in short, that it be viewed first and foremost as the Dutch share in the *mission sacrée de civilisation* to which all leading nations are pledged."<sup>65</sup> He was to comment with respect to Noto Soeroto's aristo-democratic system: "This system includes some attractive ideas. It would seem to demand too much of the people in terms of democracy in the first stages of transition, and to offer too little in the later stages of development."<sup>66</sup>

Although Noto Soeroto's ideas were unquestionably inspired by sincere feelings of patriotism, his notion of association and his emphasis on local autonomy alienated him more and more from his compatriots, both in the Netherlands and in Java. To them he

<sup>62</sup> *The Republic*, in which the state is described in terms of how it should ideally be and not as it actually is. This state should be headed by all true philosophers.

<sup>63</sup> R.M.S. Soeriokoesoemo, *Sabdo Pandito Ratoe. Het Recht is van den Wijze* (Weltevreden: Indon. Drukkerij, 1920). Raden Mas Soetatmo Soeriokoesoemo (1888–1924), like Noto Soeroto, was a scion of the house of the Pakoe Alam. He was a member of Boedi Oetomo and from 1921–1924 of the *Volksraad*. He was also chairman of Taman Siswa.

<sup>64</sup> A Dutch Orientalist who succeeded B.J.O. Schrieke as director of the Department of Education and Religion in 1934.

<sup>65</sup> De Kat Angelino, *Staatkundig Beleid en Bestuurszorg*, pp. 46, 47.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 846,

appeared increasingly as a traitor who thought and spoke like a conservative Dutchman. The tragedy for him was that he was no more acceptable to this category of Dutchmen, being too much of an idealist and too much of the artist, and not enough of a social success. It had, moreover, become apparent that the attempt of the Dutch authorities to let Noto Soeroto act as a kind of counterpoise against the radical spirit that had come to reign among the Indonesian students was also none too realistic. The Indonesisch Verbond, set up with such a purpose in mind, was to be only a short-lived affair, and eventually in effect played only a cultural role. Its successor, the Nederlandsch-Indonesisch Verbond van Jongeren Organisaties (NIVIO) [Dutch-Indonesian Union of Youth Associations] was likewise doomed to extinction, collapsing in 1930.<sup>67</sup>

The Indonesian students in the Netherlands around 1930 included such people as the Communist Semaoen, a protégé of Sneevliet<sup>68</sup> who in 1924 had been instrumental in effecting Noto Soeroto's expulsion from the Indische Vereeniging. Also among their ranks were Mohammad Hatta, Nazir Datoek Pamontjak, and Achmad Soebardjo, who together made up the board of the Perhimpunan Indonesia, since 1925 the radical successor of the Indische Vereeniging. Many of this new generation regularly fell foul of the Dutch authorities. In 1927 Hatta, R.M. Abdoel Madjid, Djojoadhiningrat, Sastroamidjojo, and Pamontjak were even placed under arrest for at least six months.<sup>69</sup>

Now that he no longer exercised any influence on his fellow-countrymen, Noto Soeroto was of no further use to the Dutch authorities. To the Dutch leftists a notion like "synthesis" was anathema, while in Communist and Social Democrat circles colonialism in whatever form was a forbidden topic. Only a small group of friends—those "star-gazers," to use Du Perron's term,<sup>70</sup>—the Oedayists, or *Oedaya* crowd, "artists and art lovers hankering after aestheticism, exoticism, humanism, mysticism, symbolism, and so on"<sup>71</sup>—had retained their faith in him. But for them, too, he had nothing further to offer. His pioneering work of the first two decades of the century, in introducing the Dutch public to an image of the Indies, and in particular Java, had by now become something matter of course. He had succeeded in promoting Javanese culture, especially in its aesthetic aspect, through his publications, performances, and exhibitions, giving expression to Javanese culture, most particularly through his monthly journal *Oedaya*. Especially important in the first period had been his personal demeanor. For here was a Javanese who moved with ease in Dutch and wider European circles. Though this may have been attributed to his "princely" birth, it was something unfamiliar, creating an impression somewhere between the extremes of Prince Charming and a squatting *jongos*. He initially was one of those who cleared the way for acceptance of the idea of greater hegemony for Java, and later for the whole of Indonesia.

<sup>67</sup> See also the special issue of *Oedaya* published on the occasion of that journal's fifth anniversary in 1928, in which among other persons G. G. de Graeff, Minister for the Colonies Dr. J. C. Koningsberger, and President of the Netherlands Bank G. Vissering offered Noto Soeroto their congratulations and wished him success with all his ventures.

<sup>68</sup> The later Communist who in 1914 founded the Indische Sociaal-Democratische Vereniging [Indies Socio-Democratic Association] and the N.A.S. (= Nationaal Arbeiders Syndicaat, National Labour Syndicate). See A. Baars and H. Sneevliet, *Het Proces Sneevliet* (1917; Leiden: KITLV, 1991) and Fritjof Tichelman, *Henk Sneevliet. Een politieke biografie* [Henk Sneevliet, A political biography] (Amsterdam: Kritiese Bibliotheek van Gennep, 1974).

<sup>69</sup> See J. Th. Blumberger, *De Nationalistische Beweging in Nederlandsch-Indie* (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1931) for detailed information about these nationalists

<sup>70</sup> See E. Du Perron, *In deeze Grootse Tijd* (Amsterdam: van Oorschot, 1936), where he describes the group as "those star-gazers who adore Tagore, Noto Soeroto and 'Orpheus in the Desa.'"

<sup>71</sup> R. Nieuwenhuys, *Oost-Indische Spiegel* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1972), pp. 367, 368.



His idea of a synthesis between East and West and aspirations for a universal culture fitted in with the notions of the times, but he was the first Indonesian to give expression to this in the Netherlands and to point out the way in which he believed this ideal might be realized.

The discrepancy between Noto Soeroto's dream and reality had steadily widened, however. His Indonesian fellow-students from the prewar period, who had by this time become integrated in Dutch-Indies society, were a long way past dreaming about the future of Java or the Netherlands Indies. Day-to-day reality was giving them ample opportunity to experience the schizophrenia of the colonial situation, but there was no scope for any policies formulated by Indonesians, let alone for creative ones.

Noto Soeroto's confrontation with the new ideas via those of his younger compatriots who came to the Netherlands after 1918 had made him cling even more stubbornly to his Utopian vision. At the end of the 1920s it gradually became more evident that not only were his publishing company Adi Poestaka and the journal *Oedaya* doomed to failure from a business point of view, but also his role as promoter of the colonial theater state<sup>72</sup> in the Netherlands was played out. The audience had become familiar with the sets of an Oriental fairytale world, but the stage was beginning to totter. A new, more down-to-earth generation was already busy on constructing a new set of foundations, not suspecting that they, too, were building on quicksand. In an interview published in the Dutch daily the *Haagsche Courant* (Nov. 30, 1931), Noto Soeroto stated that he felt that his mission in the Netherlands had come to an end, saying: "I have said everything I had on my mind. Now there is more to do in the Indies." But he was more expansive in a letter to his friend the journalist Ben van Eysselsteyn, admitting that "There have been moments when my mood turned into one of despair. When I felt broken, exhausted, empty, and lonely. This may be mainly because my heart is the heart of a poet, and the tortuous paths of politics are essentially alien to me. A good priest (don't laugh, Satan!) can never be a politician, at least a party politician, with all his heart and soul."<sup>73</sup>

So Noto Soeroto wanted to go back to Java. His loyal followers, the Oedayists, collected the necessary money for his fare. They offered him a farewell dinner and went to see him off. His parting with his wife and children, who were hoping to follow him soon but never could, was sad. On board the *Saarbrücken*, Noto Soeroto wrote several letters evaluating his time in the Netherlands. In this connection he quoted a friend, who had asked him "Isn't this the tragedy of your life, that you wanted to embrace two worlds?" His reaction to this was: "I didn't say 'yes' and I didn't say 'no.' If I am to be ruined by the experiment of my life, I shall say 'Yes.' I shall admit it was a tragedy. Now, even in my grief at parting, I feel that life is a drama, full of meaningful action, significance, and inner tension."<sup>74</sup>

Noto Soeroto's departure from the Netherlands marked the symbolic termination of a period in which, in the Netherlands as well as in Indonesia, the colonial situation had turned from something taken for granted into a problem. A personality like his could not have been formed in any other period or under any other circumstances. His life in the years from 1906 to 1931 was a reflection of every development in the Netherlands with respect to the colonies in those years. Retrospectively speaking, the significance of his role

<sup>72</sup> Taufik Abdullah, "The Making of a Schakelsociety: The Minangkabau Region in the Late 19th Century," *Majalah Ilmu-Ilmu Sastra Indonesia* 6, 3 (1976): 13-31.

<sup>73</sup> Archives of the Museum of Literature in The Hague.

<sup>74</sup> Letters written by Noto Soeroto on his travels. Noto Soeroto family archive.

was limited. The scenario had written itself. Even so, in 1931 all the parties involved still had hopes of giving it a happy end—of which each had its own idea.

### Back in Java

In Batavia, Dr. Poerbatjaraka,<sup>75</sup> two cousins, and Mr. D.J. Kluiver<sup>76</sup> were waiting at the quayside to welcome Noto Soeroto home. His uncle Koesoemo Joedo<sup>77</sup> was not one of the party. Believing that his uncle was not interested in him, Noto Soeroto had not sent him any news of his return. Koesoemo Joedo, for his part, thought that Noto Soeroto did not want “any interference.” Noto Soeroto was to be persecuted by this kind of misunderstanding, in which expectations and reality were gravely at variance with each other, for the rest of his life. This no doubt had everything to do with Noto Soeroto's personality, for such incidents had occurred in the Netherlands as well. In the Indies, where under the pressure of what was a confrontation between two mutually antagonistic parties—the Europeans and the Javanese—the Javanese tendency toward “covert” behavior was often to provoke a paranoid reaction from him. Where his uncle (Koe)Soem(o Joedo), a younger brother of his father's, was concerned, however, Noto Soeroto couldn't have been luckier. This uncle was enough of a “Dutchman” to be able to discuss the misunderstanding, while, thanks to his high position, he was thoroughly conversant with the ways of “Indies” society.

In the first weeks after his return, Noto Soeroto was given an opportunity of exploring life in the Netherlands Indies from his own home. Uncle Soem advised him “not to go dashing off to Solo straightaway.”<sup>78</sup> No doubt Koesoemo Joedo had heard the rumors which had reached the Indies ahead of his nephew that Noto Soeroto was returning at the request of his old friend, Mangkoenegoro VII, and was to be offered a position as agrarian inspector in the Central Javanese Principalities. An old friend of Mangkoenegoro VII, Director of the Colonial Administration Mühlendorf, warned the prince that such an appointment had to be out of the question, because Noto Soeroto not only lacked the necessary specialized knowledge, but that he was also too old. Mühlendorf observed that there had been complaints that the Mangkoenegoro's appointment policy was too subjective, warning “Don't make matters worse, for it would cause a scandal, and rightly so. At the present moment any form of generosity at the expense of the treasury is indefensible.”<sup>79</sup> The Mangkoenegoro, in a reply to this letter, however, denied the report in *Mataram*<sup>80</sup> that there was any kind of agreement with Noto Soeroto about giving him a job, adding that Noto Soeroto himself had already denied these allegations in the *Indische Courant*.<sup>81</sup> He said that “If N.S. should decide to re-

<sup>75</sup> A Western-educated Old Javanese specialist.

<sup>76</sup> A colonial official who at one time was chairman of the Nederlandsch-Indonesisch Verbond van Jongeren-organisaties (NIVIO—see above).

<sup>77</sup> A member of the Council of the Indies and Regent of Ponorogo from 1916 to 1927, Koesoemo Joedo had gone to the Netherlands at the age of eight in 1890. There he went to school and in 1900 enrolled as a student of medicine. He had had to break off his studies because of the death of his brother, and in the Indies sat for the colonial administration entrance examination, after which followed a brilliant career. Married to a Dutchwoman, he returned to the Netherlands after his retirement in 1933.

<sup>78</sup> Noto Soeroto diary, 1931–1932. Noto Soeroto archive.

<sup>79</sup> Mühlendorf's letter of August 27, 1931. Reksopoestoko Collection of Private Correspondence.

<sup>80</sup> A daily news and advertising paper in Yogya and environs (1877).

<sup>81</sup> A paper which had its origins in the organ of the sugar workers' union.

turn to the Indies and for some time should come to me for a plate of rice, so to speak, I, as his friend, would not be so unkind as to refuse him."<sup>82</sup>

Noto Soeroto's uncle thought it would be a good idea for him to pay his respects to several prominent persons, both Dutch and Indonesian. So he paid visits to the secretary to the Governor-General, P.J. Gerke, the adviser on indigenous affairs, E. Gobée, the director of the Department of Colonial Administration, A. Mühlenfeld (whose acquaintance he had already made in the Netherlands as a close friend of the Mangkoenegoro's), member of the *Volksraad* Koesoesmo Oetoyo, the latter's cousin Soewardi (Ki Hadjar Dewantoro), with whom he had worked closely in the Netherlands, the former Boedi Oetomo leader Dwiyoosewoyo, Soetardjo,<sup>83</sup> the musicologist Jaap Kunst, and the editor of *Actueel Wereldnieuws*, Th. van Huut, who asked him to join his staff. With Gerke's intercession, moreover, he secured an audience with Governor-General B.C. de Jonge, who recalled meeting with him at the house of Van Deventer. Though the governor-general was extremely cordial, he could not give him a job, as this would provoke criticism that some people were given jobs in spite of the crisis. He did, however, promise Noto Soeroto help in other ways. Nevertheless, it was not to be expected that this conservative governor would be very sympathetic toward a controversial Indonesian like Noto Soeroto. He looked upon nationalism in any form with revulsion, and even Noto Soeroto, whom his nationalist compatriots regarded as a conservative, was unacceptable to him. Together with Minister for the Colonies H. Colijn,<sup>84</sup> de Jonge made sure that there was little scope for nationalist aspirations.

It was difficult for Noto Soeroto to find a niche in this political climate, as it became more and more obvious that the estrangement between him and his compatriots in the Netherlands and the decline of *Oedaya* and the Oedayists were anything but isolated events. In Indonesia, too, the idea of association had become obsolete. As far as Noto Soeroto was concerned, the Dutch were scared to stick their necks out, while for the Indonesians he was either too conservative or too much of an idealist. His visit to Soetardjo was a disappointment. The latter was prepared to cooperate with him, but "in the past month a resistance movement has sprung up against me [N.S.] among the younger generation. This news has made me feel downhearted."<sup>85</sup> The talks he had were not encouraging, either. They revolved almost exclusively around the subjects of "unemployment, government budget deficits, mass dismissals, and growing shortage of funds."<sup>86</sup> It was indeed anything but an encouraging start for someone trying to build a new future.

An attempt to start a new Oedaya movement in the Indies miscarried. But the Theosophical Lodge did show an interest in him. "Brown and white were mixed together, and the hall was packed, with many people being obliged to leave because of the shortage of seats and standing room. It is said that many were *ébahi* [amazed] at my lecture, comprising

<sup>82</sup> Mangkoenegoro to Mühlenfeld, December 18, 1931. Reksopoestoko Collection of Private Correspondence.

<sup>83</sup> Soetardjo Kartohadikoesoemo became famous for the so-called "Soetardjo petition" asking for Indonesian autonomy in a Dutch-Indonesian union within a period of ten years. He was a member of the *Volksraad* from 1931-1942 and campaigned against the discriminatory treatment of Indonesian public servants.

<sup>84</sup> Before becoming minister for the colonies in 1933, Colijn, like De Jonge, had been a director of Shell. Both were opponents of the Ethical movement.

<sup>85</sup> Noto Soeroto's diary.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

fragments from my letters written on my travels and from the *Wayang-liederen*. The moral victory has begun."<sup>87</sup>

Noto Soeroto was also introduced to "the famous Soekarno. . . . He is a born orator and demagogue; in this respect he is a very gifted man. . . . I did not find his speech of last night particularly good on closer analysis, however." He also arranged a meeting with Sosrokartono, the brother of Kartini, with whom he had been acquainted since his stay in the Netherlands, and who had meanwhile become a kind of quack. "The personification of greatness brought low. . . . To me he is the old Sos with his good and bad qualities."<sup>88</sup>

However, there was no further delaying his return to his relatives in Yogyakarta and his visit to Solo.

### Yogyakarta and Solo

Noto Soeroto returned to Central Java together with Dewantoro. On the train they talked for hours about Dewantoro's educational ideals and about his ideas on *Taman Siswa* schools—ideas with which Noto Soeroto felt a close affinity.

In Yogyakarta he was at first enthusiastically welcomed by his friends and relatives. His cousin, Pakoe Alam VII, gave him an opportunity to clear up all kinds of rumors about himself, which were partially based on misunderstandings. Pakoe Alam VII moreover interceded in his behalf to secure him a position as an inspector with the NILLmij (Nederlandch-Indische Levensverzekering en Lijfrente-Maatschappij—Dutch Indies Life Insurance and Superannuation Company), offering a salary of Dfl. 250 a month. But first he would have to do an assistant inspectors' training course. He would have to concentrate on prospective indigenous clients, meaning that he would have to convince the Javanese elite of the importance of life insurance, and, as a novelty, of scholarship insurance for their children. Noto Soeroto felt extremely relieved, but left for Solo to meet his old friend Mangkoenegoro VII as soon as possible. Their meeting, according to the Regent Patih,<sup>89</sup> was "like that between the two brothers Krishna and Baladewa."<sup>90</sup> For the sake of the outside world, "which was terribly envious," they decided to observe all the rules of etiquette strictly in all their dealings. Noto Soeroto was deeply affected by his reunion with his relatives and his visit to the graves of his parents. But most of all his vanity was flattered by the special attention and treatment he received from the Mangkoenegoro. "The Prince is treating me with extraordinary distinction," he wrote.<sup>91</sup> It was as though he were recovering his identity thanks to the Mangkoenegoro. As a returned former expatriate in the Netherlands and a failure as a Dutchman as well as a Javanese, it had become increasingly obvious that there was no place for him in the ambiguous colonial world of Batavia. But there was no place for him in the traditional Javanese world of Yogya, either. There was a certain willingness to help him, but only by offering him a place in the "Western world" of insurance. In the Mangkoenegaran he now felt that, thanks to the prince, there was more recognition of the role he had played in the Netherlands. He had hopes of further working out his ideas about Javanese society. During his visits, he was welcome to stay in the guest quarters in the Regent Patih's com-

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> The Regent Patih (chief administrator), R.M.Tg. Sarwoko Mangoenkoesoemo, was to become a close friend of Noto Soeroto's.

<sup>90</sup> Noto Soeroto diary.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., May 19, 1932.

pound, where he had a whole house and two servants to himself. He tried to make it like home by hanging up a drawing of his daughter Dewi by Isaac Israels<sup>92</sup> and Tagore's literary calendar.

The Mangkoenegoro being a horse lover, Noto Soeroto was also given an opportunity to ride, enabling him to brush up the skills he had acquired in his hussar days. He even participated in horse races and jumping contests in Solo. Thus he seemed to be living the life of a prince at court, in stark contrast to his former life in the Netherlands and to the realities of life as an insurance inspector with the NILLmij. Because of the Depression, his earnings were not of any great use, and it was no easy task to make enough money to send a monthly allowance to his wife and children and to save up their fare. The Mangkoenegoro had to contribute repeatedly toward the expenses of his family in the Netherlands. In return, Noto Soeroto helped the Mangkoenegoro with the edition of an article on the *wayang* theatre<sup>93</sup> and other editorial work.

He met people with whom he could talk and exchange views at the lectures of the Wijsgeerige Studiekring,<sup>94</sup> which had been founded at the initiative of the Mangkoenegoro in 1917. This group was composed of Indonesian and Chinese nationals, mission personnel, colonial officials, and scholars. Not all its members came from Solo, but some were from Semarang, Yogya, and other neighboring towns. Of the people invited to give lectures there, many came from Batavia. So Noto Soeroto met Prof. C. van Vollenhoven again, as well as the Leiden-trained Javanese specialist Dr. J.J. Pigeaud and Arabist Dr. G.W.J. Drewes, and the Prince's friends, Dr. B.J.O. Schrieke (see above), Dr. W.F. Stutterheim,<sup>95</sup> and the amateur archaeologist J.L. Moens. The aim of the study group was to achieve "closer contact between Western and Javanese culture." Even so, the lectures organized by it "had a political tenor, and this was unavoidable, as politics constituted the common ground on which Europeans and Javanese met each other most intensively." Nonetheless, local politics did not constitute the principal topic of discussion, general international politics drawing attention as well. Sometimes the debates could be quite heated.

So on one occasion . . . the discussion focused on socialism, for instance, . . . in particular because the debate had turned to the then topical Russian movement, in which the Bolsheviks under Lenin and the Mensheviks under Kerensky were at loggerheads with each other. . . . In the arguments and counter-arguments the participants raised their voices, probably partly on account of the noise of the rain, and, further excited by this, banged their fists on the rather rickety table now and then. . . .<sup>96</sup>

After an interval of a few years, as a consequence of the departure of a number of members, the group was re-founded in 1931. This time, however, political issues were avoided as much as possible.<sup>97</sup> As Noto Soeroto recorded in his journal, sometimes "the Prince would

<sup>92</sup> Famous Dutch painter of the Amsterdam impressionist school (1865–1934).

<sup>93</sup> "Over de elementen van symboliek en mystiek in de Javaansche Wayang-Koelit," translated by Claire Holt as *On the Wayang Kulit (Purwa) and its Symbolic and Mystical Elements*, Southeast Asia Program Data Paper No. 27 (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1957).

<sup>94</sup> Philosophical Study Group, mostly referred to as "Mangkoenegorose Studiekring" [Mangkoenegoro Study Group].

<sup>95</sup> An archaeologist and later director of the AMS in Yogyakarta, and later again of the Oudheidkundige Dienst [Archaeological Service] in Batavia.

<sup>96</sup> *Triwindoe-Gedenkboek* (1939): 5.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9–12.

discuss Javanese grammar with him and two Javanese scholars for hours on end, staying up all night—a classical custom in classical performances.”

But in Yogyakarta, Noto Soeroto's involvement in Mangkoenegaran politics was not appreciated. Besides, there were rumors that he was “a government spy.” Moreover, the Sultan of Yogyakarta appeared to have anything but buried the hatchet in an old conflict with Noto Soeroto. This conflict had arisen between them in 1919, when both were in the Netherlands and were close companions. The Sultan, or then Crown Prince, had given Noto Soeroto a pair of earrings to sell on his behalf, which he had lost when, on his way from a dinner party with the prince and other friends, he had followed some girls home. Although the prince had been understanding about the loss, the press had published the story, creating a lot of trouble for Noto Soeroto. The affair had been one of the reasons for his postponing his return to Java.

After all the emotions, the rush, and the excitement of parting from the Netherlands Noto Soeroto now experienced a period of psychological depression. “The moments when I feel buoyant and not so depressed are those in Solo, where I have friends. The Prince is the person who is keeping my spirits up. His *joie de vivre* is having a stimulating effect on me.”<sup>98</sup> For the first time in his life, Noto Soeroto felt an aversion to writing and public appearances. He was inclined to be hesitant about his wife's suggestion that he apply for a job as a broadcaster with the NIROM (= Nederlandsch-Indische Radio-Omroep, Netherlands Indies Broadcasting Company), as this would mean going to Bandung, where he feared he might feel homesick and lonely among the Sundanese. A further reason was that, “whereas in the Netherlands a broadcaster may gain a certain popularity, in the Indies the ordinary people have no radios at home. My listeners will be those conceited, pseudo-educated persons, or intellectuals, among my fellow-countrymen who will always make life difficult for me.” He also suspected that he would have little chance, as some newly arrived Dutchman would probably have priority: “A native director of broadcasting? That would be an impossibility in this colonial country.”<sup>99</sup> His suspicion was confirmed by the subsequent appointment of a Dutchman to the post. Noto Soeroto preferred to stay in the vicinity of the Mangkoenegoro. His political ambitions had not abandoned him.

#### Noto Soeroto's Place in the Political Life of the Principalities

Noto Soeroto hoped to qualify for membership of the *Volksraad* (People's Council). Although he was still opposed to a democratic form of government for Indonesia, the Mangkoenegoro hoped that a seat in the council might put him in a position to serve the interests of the native rulers in Batavia. Probably that was precisely why Batavia was hesitant, notwithstanding the assurances of Assistant Resident Jonkers of Yogyakarta that Noto Soeroto had in fact been nominated as a member. These assurances had allegedly been confirmed by Sam Koperberg,<sup>100</sup> who was reported to have said: “I don't agree with him, but he ought to have a seat in the *Volksraad*.”<sup>101</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Noto Soeroto's diary, Noto Soeroto archive.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., October 23, 1933.

<sup>100</sup> Secretary of the Java Institute (1918–1948) and a member of the Comité voor Javaansche Cultuur-ontwikkeling (Javanese Cultural Development Committee) in 1918, Sam Koperberg (1884–1957), who referred to himself as a socialist, acted as mediator between the European elite, the Javanese elite, and the nationalists. While the authorities on the one hand distrusted him, regarding him as “an unreliable Jew,” on the other hand they used him as an informant because of his close acquaintance with a wide variety of persons. There were rumors that he was a secret adviser to the “gentlemen in Batavia.” Noto Soeroto's diary, December 12, 1933.

Politically, matters proved far more complicated than he had even begun to suspect in the Netherlands. In the politics of Central Java, altogether different problems were at issue, although the struggle still had the labels of evolution or revolution and cooperation or non-cooperation affixed to it. What was actually going on was a power struggle between the four Principalities and the colonial government. Since 1930 the Javanese rulers had been thwarting the colonial government's attempts to institute councils<sup>102</sup> to advise the indigenous rulers. The rulers were afraid of too much government interference, while the old rivalry among them, in evidence at the time the Mangkoenegoro had tried to create a federation of Principalities, was also still present. From the moment of his appointment in 1916, the Mangkoenegoro had been a fervent advocate of such a federation, in which the autonomous rulers would be represented and which itself would have a representative in the proposed *Volksraad* in Batavia, in preparation for a future larger federation and as a means of escaping from the tutelage of the Residents. But neither the Sunan nor the Sultan favored the idea, fearing that it would give the Mangkoenegoro too much influence. Aware of these problems, the Mangkoenegoro had put the project on ice, which suited the Dutch East Indies government excellently.<sup>103</sup> So, when the government insisted that municipal councils, or Bale Agoeng, also be instituted in the Principalities, the Mangkoenegoro initially lent his cooperation, provided this move contributed to the formation of a union between the four Principalities. But this scheme, too, proved illusory. When it turned out that members of the municipal councils would not be granted parliamentary immunity, three of the Principalities employed delaying tactics, and only in the Kesuhanan was a Bale Agoeng eventually instituted in 1935.<sup>104</sup>

Understandably, Noto Soeroto followed all these developments with great interest. Here he was witnessing at close range developments which he had imagined in his "Schets van een Staatkundig Stelsel op Aristo-Democratische Grondslag." He favored merely an advisory role for the Bale Agoeng, writing: "One more step in the direction of the parliamentary system would suffice for me to regard the cause of autonomous rule and the aristocracy as a lost cause."<sup>105</sup>

However, Noto Soeroto could take no part in this bickering between the Principalities. Politically he stood nowhere. He wanted to stand as a candidate for the *Volksraad* and toward this end addressed a petition signed by a number of his friends to the governor-general. In his view, "those signing would have to be people from all walks of life and form no organized party together, but manifest themselves as individual voices from among the people, who have faith in myself and in the direction in which I have been working all along, namely that of cooperation and rapid evolution."<sup>106</sup> On the basis of the recommenda-

---

After the Japanese occupation, too, he apparently played an intermediary role between Soekarno and consorts and the old establishment.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> These advisory councils were to include European colonial officials, who, however, would have no voting rights.

<sup>103</sup> C. Ch. van den Haspel, *Overzicht in Overleg Verhandelingen van het Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* Nr. 111 (Dordrecht: Foris, 1985), pp. 228-33; Resident of Soerakarta to G.G. June 26, 1916. Vb. no. 57, January 31, 1918. ARNAS.

<sup>104</sup> George D. Larson, *Prelude to Revolution* (Dordrecht: Foris, 1987).

<sup>105</sup> Noto Soeroto diary.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., July 18, 1933. *Volksraad* chairman Dr. J.W. Meyer Ranneft, in a note of advice to G.G. de Graeff (No. 25, secret, copy in his own handwriting, Vb. no. 1, February 5, 1932), recommended the appointment of indigenous representatives in the right wing as a counterpoise to the elected left-wing members. "The indigenous press and

tions of Meyer Ranneft and H.J. Kiewiet de Jonge,<sup>107</sup> the *Raad van Nederlandsch-Indië* advised that members of the *Volksraad* should be appointed according to the formula "right-moderate right-left-extreme left."<sup>108</sup> In a memorandum of February 16, 1935, however, plenipotentiary general government representative W.G. Peekema condemned a so-called "logical" political composition of the *Volksraad*, as "the first vote will show that we have made an error of judgment. . . . It is more important to find a number of persons who are individually open to reason, amenable to argument, and willing to cooperate. Moreover, the right of appointment should be exercised in such a way that the Government can be maximally sure of a fairly constant *Volksraad* majority which will be prepared to support its policies in important matters."<sup>109</sup> Hence the appointed members would have to act as a counterbalance to the elected members. Peekema's advice was, accordingly, to choose candidates with outright rightist tendencies for this.

Noto Soeroto would have felt most at home in Prince Soerjodiningrat's Pakoempoelan Kawoelo Ngajogjakarta (Association of Subjects of Yogyakarta). In the 1930s it had a membership of about 225,000, making it the largest political party in the Indies.<sup>110</sup> Prince Soerjodiningrat, a half-brother of the Sultan of Yogyakarta, was an agrarian inspector, in which position he had regular dealings with the *wong kecil*, and was struck by the poverty of their existence. As a *-ningrat*, the survival of the sultanate as a separate Javanese state was important to him. But this would involve recognition by the aristocracy of its duties toward the ordinary people. Its traditionalist strain, in combination with the then growing unrest as a result of the heavy taxation burden for the peasants, turned the PKN into a veritable popular movement. The enormous interest shown in this organization was not only explained by the combination of its traditionalist tendencies and its economic and social objectives, but also by the economic depression.<sup>111</sup>

Noto Soeroto could not join this party, even though he felt that theoretically the PKN's objective of "Prince and people at one" was wholly in agreement with his own views. In his diary entry for November 5, 1933, he compared Prince Soerjodiningrat's organization with the Pakoempoelan Kawoelo Soerokerto (Solo Subjects' Association).

These associations have thousands of members, most of them ordinary villagers. Theoretically their objective is "prince and people at one," hence exactly what I am aiming at. But that dunce of a Prince Soerjodiningrat never stops triumphantly proclaiming that he was right and I was wrong. What he is referring to here is the former conversion of the N.I.V.I.O. into the N.I.V.<sup>112</sup> For I was allegedly engaging in politics, which supposedly

---

alas a proportion of the indigenous members of the *Volksraad* are in the habit of treating such rightist elements as enemies of their own people."

<sup>107</sup> Plenipotentiary general government representative in the *Volksraad* from 1921–1931.

<sup>108</sup> Copy of Vb. no. 1, February 5, 1932..

<sup>109</sup> Copy Vb. Lt.G. 13 of July 8, 1935.

<sup>110</sup> O'Malley, "The Pakempulan Kawulo Ngajogjakarta."

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> The NIVIO (= Nederlandsch-Indonesisch Verbond voor Jongeren Organisaties, Dutch-Indonesian Union of Youth Organizations) was founded on March 30, 1926. Its aim was to foster a better understanding and better relations between Indonesians and Dutch. Soerjodiningrat was this union's patron, and Noto Soeroto at one time its chairman. In 1928 the words "voor Jongeren Organisaties" (of Youth Organizations) were dropped from its name, but this did not entail any change in its objectives or political course.



meant death for any association. As though Soerjodiningrat were not engaging in politics with his "Pakoempoelan Kawoelo Ngajogjakarta"!<sup>113</sup>

The Pakoempoelan Kawoelo Soerokerto provided no alternative for Noto Soeroto, either. The aim of this association, which had its origins in Sunan circles, was the annexation of the Mangkoenegaran, toward which end it was engaging in seditious actions in the Mangkoenegaran. The Pakempoelan Kawoelo Mangkoenegaran (PKMN) was founded in reaction to the Pakoempoelan Kawoelo Soerokerto, and Noto Soeroto tried to support it by publishing articles in the *Soerabajaas Handelsblad* and the *Soerabajasche Courant*. In 1936 the two organizations were locked in a fierce struggle for power, but after gaining 40,000 members the PKMN died the same year.<sup>114</sup>

Nor was it possible for Noto Soeroto to join Boedi Oetomo. Although the organization's moderate political course in the years 1931-1934 certainly provided no obstacle to his entry, its domination by the Sunanate did.<sup>115</sup>

### Rejected and Displaced

Noto Soeroto failed to find sympathizers not only politically, but also socially. His relations with his Pakoe Alaman kinsmen as well as with the Sultan's relatives remained fraught with problems. In his diary he tells of a *wayang* festival at the Pakoe Alam's palace. He says that the festival was "deadly boring" and comments that he deliberately addressed the Pakoe Alam, "but H.H. did not continue the conversation with me." The affair of the earrings was undoubtedly partly responsible for this rebuff, but the fact that Noto Soeroto was an odd man out in almost every respect made his position in Yogya exceptionally difficult. In spite of the many years he had spent in the Netherlands, he had not taken any academic degree and was penniless. Although his wife was Dutch, his family had not returned with him. Noto Soeroto did not fit into the pattern of his Yogya relatives in any way. Nor did his friendship with the Mangkoenegoro do anything to improve matters. Whereas outsiders could afford to be on a friendly footing with different courts at the same time, this was not possible for members of the Javanese royal houses. The appropriate conduct was to keep one's distance, unless the relationship was sanctioned by a marriage. So his friendship with Mangkoenegoro VII itself in no way conformed with Javanese conventions.

The Dutch administration did not do anything to make Noto Soeroto's life any more pleasant, either. When he succeeded once in making a little money on the side as an examination supervisor, thanks to the help of Stutterheim, principal of the Yogya High School, his allowance was stopped, because he still had a scholarship debt to the government.

Actually, people did not know what to make of an assimilated man like Noto Soeroto, who wrote in the Dutch language, and who combined an affection for the Netherlands, the Dutch Queen, and all kinds of things Dutch, with Javanese revivalism and a moderate form of nationalism. The Frenchman G.H. Bousquet was to express his surprise in 1940 at the presence of "a Dutch poet, one Noto Soeroto, who is a pure Javanese, which, however, is a matter of utter indifference to the Dutch."<sup>116</sup> This was not the only reason why he had only a small audience, however. People in both the Netherlands and the Indies at this time were

<sup>113</sup> Noto Soeroto diary, November 5, 1933.

<sup>114</sup> O'Malley, "The Pakempulan Kawulo Ngajogjakarta," p. 158.

<sup>115</sup> Harry A. Poeze, *Politiek-Politieke Overzichten van Nederlandsch-Indië* (Dordrecht: Foris, 1988).

<sup>116</sup> G. H. Bousquet, *A French View of the Netherlands Indies* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 111.

taking even less interest in culture, artists, and ideals than usual because of the Great Depression, rising fascism in Europe, and nationalism in the Indies. An apt illustration of this attitude was given by Governor-General de Jonge with reference to the commemoration day celebration of the Batavia school of law in 1933: "We were regaled with a lecture on Malay *pantun*, a kind of poetry, by Prof. Djajadiningrat. This made me wonder for just a second whether we are in need of such treatises and such professors at times like this."<sup>117</sup> Noto Soeroto had not lost his sense of drama, which he had evinced at his departure from the Netherlands. At the end of a party for which he had hired a *gamelan* orchestra to play, he compared himself to the main character in Tolstoy's *Live Corpse*, who strikes the balance of his life in a monologue, settling his account with it while a gypsy band plays in the background.

### Secretary at the court of the Mangkoenegoro

As Noto Soeroto could find no one to sympathize with his political ideas, either in Yogya or in Batavia, the Mangkoenegaran became more and more his home. Moreover, his activities on behalf of the NILLmij. became increasingly less important. It remained difficult to sell insurance to a sufficient number of indigenous clients. Times were hard and, after a few years of canvassing, all potential indigenous clients had been reached. He found his work for the Mangkoenegoro and his intellectual and cultural activities at court much more attractive. The Mangkoenegoro continued to show an interest in cultural matters despite all the political wrangling, and Noto Soeroto was useful to him in this. It even looked as if, as the growing repressiveness and paternalism of the colonial government dimmed the prospects for realizing his former ideals, the Mangkoenegoro was trying to turn his realm into a cultural center. The Philosophical Study Group<sup>118</sup> flourished there, cutting right across the boundaries dividing the different parties.

During these years Mangkoenegoro VII involved Noto Soeroto in several publications on the Mangkoenegaran. The latter's experience with his own press, *Adi Poestaka*, in the Netherlands and his excellent command of the Dutch language proved a great boon in this. It, moreover, offered Noto Soeroto the opportunity of doing something in return for the Mangkoenegoro's support of his family in the Netherlands. Hence, when the Mangkoenegoro needed a new private secretary, Noto Soeroto was an obvious choice. And so it was that he accompanied the prince and his consort, Ratoe Timoer, on their visit to the Netherlands on the occasion of the wedding of Princess Juliana and Prince Bernhard in 1937.

The Mangkoenegoro was the only autonomous ruler present at this wedding, and hence was a focus of public interest. His daughter's performances as a dancer, dancing to music played by the Mangkoenegoro's own *gamelan* orchestra from Solo and presenting programs for radio broadcasting, drew particular notice. The press also devoted ample attention to the prince, his family, his realm, and the arts which were so important to him. Noto Soeroto had been able to organize all this publicity thanks to his former Oedaya friends, who included authors and journalists. It was easier for him to promote the Mangkoenegaran in the Netherlands than in Indonesia itself. The echoes of this publicity in the Netherlands did reverberate to the Indies, but made no impression against the backdrop of international political developments.

<sup>117</sup> S. L. van der Wal, *Herinneringen van Jhr. Mr. B.C. de Jonge* (Groningen: Wolters, 1968), p. 204.

<sup>118</sup> The objectives, members, and guest speakers of this circle and the role of Mangkoenegoro VII in these as well as other cultural activities will be the subject of a future publication.

The visit to the Netherlands, of course, offered Noto Soeroto an opportunity to see his wife, children, and friends again after a six-year absence. His family had not been able to join him in the Indies owing to their shortage of funds, and by this time his two eldest children had reached an age when it was difficult to change schools. Nor was it possible for his wife and youngest son to come to the Indies after the two eldest had become independent, for by that time war had broken out. Thus his second departure from the Netherlands was to be a farewell for good. He was only to see his youngest son again, and then only shortly before his death.

After his return to the Indies, Noto Soeroto suffered a fit of deep depression. His parting from his family and the need to keep in step with the closed Javanese and colonial societies proved too much for him. He wrote to his friend Metz: "Seen from the outside, the conditions and the mentality of the people in the Principalities seem so wonderful and interesting. When you're in the midst of it all, as I am, however, and become more or less a victim of these conditions, attitudes, and mentality, you feel like cursing the moment you first stepped into it." Nevertheless, he recovered his spirits. In the same letter he wrote: "I have always lived in the great wide world, and suddenly I was locked for years into a small cage, so that I ran the risk of forgetting how to fly. This, I hope and believe, has changed, and you shall see the signs of it as soon as you receive the circular from the Oedaya Circle. I fervently hope that our friends will respond to it and pray that my loyalty to our common cause will not remain unanswered. If it does meet with response, you will see how my mind will regain its resilience and how I shall succeed in overcoming my difficulties one by one."<sup>119</sup> Noto Soeroto is referring here to an Oedaya circular drawn up by him in connection with the Soetardjo petition<sup>120</sup> in 1937. He regarded this petition as evidence that the nationalists, too, had come to realize that "cooperation between Indonesians and Dutch on a basis of complete equality is the only way to lasting peace and prosperity for the realm as a whole." But although there were a few positive reactions to the aspirations of the Oedaya circle in one or two journals in Java<sup>121</sup> as well as the Netherlands,<sup>122</sup> there was no massive response, and hence no follow-up.

Noto Soeroto did, however, publish numerous articles on the occupation of the Netherlands, national socialism, "the place of the colored peoples," and "the colonial aspirations of the Nazis" in such papers and journals as *Kritiek en Opbouw*, *Indisch Weekblad*, *Locomotief*, and *Soerabaiaasch Handelsblad* in the years 1940 and 1941. The tone of the articles is set by reflections on the future of Indonesia, in which terms like "cooperation," "intellectual and spiritual awakening," "wisdom," and so on figure frequently. He referred repeatedly to the example set by Mangkoenegoro VII, describing him as "a wise ruler inspired by idealism and exerting himself for the cause of the development of his people."<sup>123</sup> He continued raising objections to a parliamentary system for the future Indonesia, regarding it as a medium of opposition to foreign rule, partly because the Indonesian element would have a majority in it. This would make the divisions deeper and so exclude the possibility of cooperation and mutual reconciliation. For democratic rule an Oriental form would have to be found.

<sup>119</sup> Letter to Metz, December 18, 1937. Noto Soeroto family archive.

<sup>120</sup> The aim of this petition (July 1936) was to call a meeting of Dutch and Dutch East Indies representatives in preparation of the assignment to Indonesia of the status of an independent state within the Dutch commonwealth.

<sup>121</sup> *Mataram*, December 15, 1937.

<sup>122</sup> *De Volksstem*, December 18, 1937.

<sup>123</sup> *Oost en West*, October 31, 1941.

In 1939 Noto Soeroto compiled his epic for Mangkoenegoro VII, in commemoration of the *Triwindoe*<sup>124</sup> of whose reign he edited a volume *Het Triwindoe-Gedenkboek Mangkoe Nagoro VII* (1939) to which all the Mangkoenegoro's friends—Indonesian, Dutch, and other nationalities—contributed. It gives us an idea of Noto Soeroto's versatility. It consisted of two volumes, running to over 600 pages, to which there were 185 contributors, approximately half of them Indonesians. Part two appeared in August 1940, when the German occupation of the Netherlands was already a fact. The Introduction to this volume concluded with the words:

Finally, we are inclined to wonder whether the publication of a collection of essays like this, pervaded by high ideals as most of them are, is justified at a time in which our attention is claimed by the cruelest reality or warranted by a sober sense of the practical and the immediately necessary. Our answer here is a whole-hearted, unconditional "yes," as, without ethical ideals as the be-all and end-all of life, all our courage in not running away from the inevitable and all our preparedness to accept what is necessarily new, indeed, every deed and every act we perform in these times, can only be a step in the direction of the nihilism that is death to all ethics, all civilization, all art and all culture.<sup>125</sup>

With these lofty words the curtain fell on the colonial era. Although they testified to a presentiment of the "inevitable" and the "necessarily new," at the time no one could have an inkling of what this would imply.

### The Japanese Period and the Indonesian Revolution

In one of the articles which Noto Soeroto wrote at the beginning of the Second World War,<sup>126</sup> he analyzed *Die Revolution des Nihilismus*, (1938) of the ex-staffmember of Hitler: Hermann Rauschning.<sup>127</sup> According to Rauschning, the Nazis assigned "for the eastern European states a semi-sovereign status, with the economic and political elite being formed by a German ruling class." Noto Soeroto rejected the imperialist notions as linked to the Nazi racial theory out of hand, writing "This, and the resultant ruthlessness, promises little good for the world, but also for the colonies." In a subsequent article he discussed the theories of the Nazi philosopher Haushofer, who contrasted the renewed German dynamism with "a decadent British empire," but, according to Noto Soeroto, did so using "obsolete, outdated arguments." The principal tenor of his next articles, too, was that the nationalists should not expect any good to come from Nazism, warning the nationalists not to try and realize a nationalist state, at the expense of the "mother country." By placing itself outside the Western alliance, Nazism would pose a real threat to the Indies. Noto Soeroto did see an opportunity here of creating a Dutch-Indonesian union on a footing of equality, because the Dutch could not afford to reject the support of the Indonesian population at that juncture. Although the draft decree on the creation of an "indigenous militia," which Noto Soeroto and the Mangkoenegoro, among others, had advocated since the First World War, was a corollary of this idea, Noto Soeroto was rather skeptical about it. This skepticism was, on

<sup>124</sup> A Javanese anniversary of 3 x 8 years.

<sup>125</sup> Introduction for *Het Triwindoe-Gedenkboek Mangkoe Nagoro VII* (Surakarta, 1939).

<sup>126</sup> Published under the title "De plaats der gekleurde volkeren in de nieuwe wereldordening naar nationaal-socialistische conceptie" [The place of the colored nations in the new world scheme in the national socialist conception] in *Kritiek en Opbouw*, September 16, 1940.

<sup>127</sup> Zurich: Europa-Verslag, 1939. Published in English under the title *The Revolution of Nihilism: Warning to the West* (New York: Alliance Book Corporation, 1939).

the one hand, because of the express reservation in the decree that the measure was being taken "under force of circumstances," and on the other because some Indonesians were making creation of an indigenous militia conditional on the institution of a parliament. Noto Soeroto persisted in his objections to a parliamentary system in the Indies, though he recognized that a militia would have to be justified by a change in the status of the "indigenous population." He nevertheless enjoined his fellow-countrymen to cooperate, as there was no time for debate, hoping that the Dutch Indies government would of its own accord "presently grant that political status which will wholly justify the sacrifice of lives and property demanded."

The Japanese occupation of the Netherlands East Indies in 1942 heralded a new era. In an article entitled "Een oude waarschuwing voor het Japanse gevaar [A repeated warning against the Japanese threat]" appearing in the *Indisch Weekblad* of January 16, 1942, Noto Soeroto drew attention to a curious book, *Bansai! Het Gele gevaar* [Bansai, the Yellow danger], written by a German, which had been published in Dutch translation by Parabellum in 1909. This book dealt with an imaginary war between the United States and Japan, which was fought on American territory. This was to be Noto Soeroto's last article under the Japanese occupation.

At first the Japanese adopted a moderate attitude toward the autonomous rulers and informed the Mangkoenegoro that "he was to remain head of the Mangkoenegaran and autonomous ruler of his realm, although the suzerainty over Java had passed from the Netherlands to Japan."<sup>128</sup> But Japanese pressure and interference were gradually stepped up. In 1944 Noto Soeroto was imprisoned for a few months on account of his pro-Dutch sympathies. His imprisonment and the torture he endured in jail coincided with the death of the Mangkoenegoro at that same time, marking another break in his life.

The death of the prince led to a new ruler being enthroned in the palace. And a new ruler, in Java as everywhere else, meant new loyalties. There were shifts in the hierarchy, with the former consort now being the ruler's stepmother, the royal concubines being pushed even further into the background, and their children becoming half-brothers and -sisters, implying an even further weakening of their rights. The old ruler's intimate friends were mere acquaintances of the new ruler, loyalties were shifted, and the new consort's relatives came to occupy an important place at court. For Noto Soeroto this change meant a loss of emotional as well as material support. Initially he was asked to leave the palace, but as time went by his loyalty toward the rulers, as manifested in numerous articles which he published in *De Locomotief* and elsewhere made a reconciliation possible. From 1951 on he was partially supported by a small allowance granted him by the new Mangkoenegaran circle because it was felt that "as a guardian of culture Noto Soeroto should not be left to his own devices." He was commissioned to undertake journeys from time to time "in order to establish contacts with people outside Solo who believe that the Javanese self-ruling prince-dom should be preserved as cultural centres, and in addition to give advice on the formulation of regulations for self-rule."<sup>129</sup> To eke out his income, he had to look for a job, but could not find a decent one. One factor responsible for this was "his status as a *persona non grata* in Republican and nationalist circles, which have gained the upper hand." Another reason was that, during the Republic's struggle against the Dutch, he failed to heed the advice of Dutch friends to present himself in Batavia to try and secure a position. On this subject he himself said, "I could not find it in my heart to side with the Dutch. I did not

<sup>128</sup> Notes concerning the Mangkoenegaran in the days of March 1942. Noto Soeroto family archive.

<sup>129</sup> Letter from Noto Soeroto to Metz, July 12, 1951. Noto Soeroto family archive.

want to give my opponents among my fellow-countrymen the satisfaction of being put in the right by confirming the allegations that Noto Soeroto is a collaborator."<sup>130</sup> In 1950 Noto Soeroto asked his friend in the Netherlands, the journalist Ben van Eysselsteyn, to set up, together with four other mutual friends, a trust for the benefit of Javanese culture, "to the preservation of which I wish to dedicate the last years of my life . . . . The promotion of Javanese culture through the preservation of the Javanese self-ruling communities in a modern form is a cause that merits the sacrifice of my last efforts."<sup>131</sup> His friends in the Netherlands remained faithful to him. But that was about the only support he could muster. Van Randwijk, editor-in-chief of the Socialist Dutch weekly *Vrij Nederland*, which had its origins in the illegal wartime press, described the reason for this as follows: "Noto Soeroto does not play an important part in Indonesia at present, as they also consider him useless."<sup>132</sup> And a good month before his death in 1951 Noto Soeroto wrote to his friend Lemei: "At the present moment, the public cause does not have my interest at all. I am too engrossed in my own personal misery and my anxiety about my already matured but as yet unborn spiritual offspring, namely my manuscript 'Modern Fables' and that of a collection of essays entitled 'Pantjasila and Other Critical Essays.'"

In these essays he tried to link up his own ideas on a new society with the Pancasila, on which the new Indonesian state was based. Taking the five principles of the Pancasila, with which he agreed entirely, as a starting-point, he exhorted his compatriots to aim at a genuine experience of the principles of *kemanusiaan* and *ke-Tuhanan*, rather than let themselves be tempted to build a political and economic system on them. He tried to arrive at a synthesis between the ideals of his youth and those of Boedi Oetomo, the ideas of Tagore, his own aristo-democratic concept, and the philosophy of the new republic. These essays were never published, however, and one may well wonder if their publication would have provoked any reaction. His writings were erudite, philosophical, and vague. There was no interest in moral reflections among his contemporaries, whether Indonesian or Dutch. In his last pamphlet, *Pro Swapraja*, which was published in 1950, Noto Soeroto again pleaded for a union of the self-ruling Javanese Principalities—a proposition which was just as unrealistic then as in the 1930s.

Noto Soeroto died aged 63 in 1951. From a literary point of view perhaps his last work, his "Modern Fables" was the most interesting.<sup>133</sup> These fables were published posthumously by his friend, Ben van Eysselsteyn, under the title "Van Goden, Mensen en Dieren [Of Gods, People and Animals]." In one of these fables Noto Soeroto compared himself to a monkey, who said,

The last remaining wish I cherish is to become really separated from this turbulent, hectic, noisy life around me. I would like to have a small, separate cage all to myself, where I shall no longer be bothered with the problems of society, which have ceased to interest me. In my solitude, I would like to reflect on a problem that has recently suggested itself to me and which I am not yet able to solve, namely the question of whether after my death my monkey soul will end up in a monkeys' heaven or a monkeys' hell, or whether I shall be granted eternal sleep, or the Great Repose, for which I feel such a strong need after this long, exhausting life.

<sup>130</sup> Letter to Lemei, September 2, 1949. Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Letter to Ben van Eysselsteyn, June 21, 1950. Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Quoted in a letter from Noto Soeroto to Lemei, September 2, 1950. Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Noto Soeroto, *Van Goden, Mensen en Dieren* (Delft: Preciosareeks, 1956).

Noto Soeroto received a visit from his youngest son, whom he had not seen for fourteen years, just a few days before his death. His eldest son had died as a result of the war. His wife, however, who as a member of the Dutch Resistance had been interned in the concentration camp at Ravensbrück, survived the war, dying in the 1980s. He never saw her or his daughter again.

He was buried near his home in a *kampung* in Solo, and not in one of the Mangkoenegaran graveyards, nor in that of the Pakoe Alaman. This will make plain to anyone who knows how important graves and visits to graves are for the Javanese just how socially isolated Noto Soeroto was, also in the last phase of his life.

### Epilogue

A drama like the life of Noto Soeroto requires an epilogue. It is clear to all who study his life that, while his return to Java did not bring him what he had hoped for, nor did his stay in the Netherlands. Noto Soeroto fitted into the pattern which, with reference to Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, Edward M. Said characterized as follows: "There was the virtual epidemic of Orientalism affecting every major poet, essayist and philosopher in that period."<sup>134</sup> This was certainly still true of the Netherlands at the beginning of the twentieth century. The prevalent interest in the Far East there, combined with the lack of knowledge about that part of the world, made it possible for Noto Soeroto to stand out intellectually and artistically and to give his talents full scope to develop in those years. He moved in prominent circles, the names of some of whose members Dutch high school students are still required to know today, while others are even reckoned among the great painters or writers of the period. Noto Soeroto's own work, however, is only ever mentioned as a curiosity or a historical phenomenon.

During Noto Soeroto's years in the Netherlands, the East Indies became less and less a land of fantasy and fairytales for the Dutch, while Indonesian nationalism was becoming too real to be viewed with detached interest. More important, the European problems—rising Nazism and the Great Depression—were beginning to claim the attention of the Dutch, who had to start making political choices. Not only had Noto Soeroto lost his uniqueness, but it had become impossible for him to work to achieve the political aim with which he had identified himself, namely the association between Indonesia and the Netherlands.

For both Mangkoenegoro VII and Noto Soeroto, from the first moments of the arousal of the awareness of nationalism and politics, cultural aspects had been inextricably bound up with this. The Mangkoenegoro became realistic as a result of years of experience as an administrator. Realizing the impossibility of pursuing a consistent policy as an autonomous ruler, and the perpetual confrontations with the Dutch East Indies autonomous government, he was able to look at complex developments with greater detachment than Noto Soeroto. The clearer it became to him that his political ambitions were incapable of realization, the more he restricted himself to government and administration and the improvement of the infrastructure in his own territory. So he put more and more effort into turning his court into a cultural center. In this work Noto Soeroto's services proved of immense value to him, while Noto Soeroto for his part was cut out for this role.

In contrast with his patron, however, Noto Soeroto never gave up his old illusions. He persisted in his efforts to achieve a synthesis of all the colonial contradictions—between the Javanese, and later Indonesians, and the Dutch. In the political arena, he hoped to accom-

<sup>134</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 50.

plish this by means of his aristo-democracy, which he actually visualized in terms of the ideal Javanese monarchic system—an ideal state, with echoes of ancient Mataram. The ruler who would be head of this state would have to possess the qualities of Mangkoenegoro VII, be enlightened in his thinking, and be Western-educated, so that he would be able to foster the blossoming of positive Western achievements in Javanese soil. The Dutch had no intention of exchanging their colonial state for a Javanese one. The nationalists, meanwhile, had become too divided to let themselves be inspired by an elitist Javanist philosophy. Nor did they have any use for a fully worked out political concept in which the division of power had been determined in advance. The imposition of such a strait-jacket as well as the moralistic tone of Noto Soeroto's writings could not fail to arouse the irritation of friends and foes alike. Nevertheless, Noto Soeroto was a nationalist and in his own way contributed to the independence of Indonesia. The way in which he envisaged this was totally incompatible with the type of nationalism which eventually led to the creation of the Indonesian Republic. But it constitutes a chapter in Indonesian history just the same.