Democracy, self-determination and the Indonesian revolution

Robert Cribb, The Australian National University
A group celebrating Independence Day carries a copy of the text of the proclamation which reads:

we the people of Indonesia hereby declare Indonesia's independence. Matters concerning the transfer of power and other matters will be executed in an orderly manner and in the shortest possible time.

On behalf of the Indonesian people, (signed) Soekarno Hatta
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Democracy Self Determination and the Indonesian Revolution

Robert Cribb

In the historiography of the Indonesian revolution of 1945-49, the words diplomasi and perjuangan are familiar terms and the controversy they represent is a standard part of the analysis of the politics of that era. Was Indonesia's independence to be secured by diplomasi, that is by carefully managed negotiations, not just with the Dutch but with other international forces and by astute management of the current international climate? Or would armed force win the day in the end? Would negotiations simply put the seal on a victory already won by the armed forces and their civilian allies fighting a guerrilla war in the countryside?

In this discussion, I want to focus attention on a third, political, dimension of the struggle. Both the diplomatic and the military dimensions imply that the aims of the Dutch were to restore and maintain colonialism more or less as it had been before the Japanese invasion in 1942. But although the idea of restoring the pre-war status quo may may been dominant in Dutch thinking in August and September 1945, Dutch strategy evolved rapidly into a rather more sophisticated method for winning over the hearts and minds of Indonesians by offering a programme of political development which was rather progressive by pre-war standards. That political strategy failed, as we know, as did Dutch military and diplomatic strategies, but we will understand the dynamics of the revolution better if we have a more precise idea of what was at stake.

Initially, the Dutch sought to re-establish the Netherlands Indies by military force alone, assuming that they retained the loyalty and affection of the vast majority of their former subjects. Only a few malcontents and opportunists, they believed, supported the Republic and whatever following the Republic had managed to gather, they expected, would disappear at the first whiff of grapeshot. If the Dutch returned to Indonesia with any political programme, it was a simple one of restoring the peace, order and tranquility which they imagined had been characteristic of the colonial era. The Dutch took some time to realise that the brutality of their forces, especially the so-called Special Troops of Westerling in South Sulawesi, did nothing to assist in this program, and they also remained obsessed with those they called 'extremists', whom they saw as unrepresentative men of violence standing in the way of a peaceful and affectionate reunion

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1 This chapter draws both on research undertaken in the 1980s for my PhD thesis on Jakarta during the Indonesian revolution and on current research I am undertaking on the regional elections of the 1940s. I should like to thank the Algemeen Rijksarchief in The Hague for its assistance in the former project, including permission to publish findings from collections not yet open to the public, and to thank the Australian Research Council for its financial support of the latter research. I draw the reader's attention to the fact that some of the conclusions drawn here are provisional and may change in the light of my continuing research.
between the colonial rulers and their former subjects. Nonetheless, the fact that virtually no ‘moderate’ Indonesians of any political significance came over to the Dutch cause early in the revolution alerted colonial planners to the need for a more developed political strategy. From late 1945, therefore, the Dutch began to develop a strategy which shrewdly challenged the Republic on two points where it appeared to be weak: democracy and the recognition of Indonesia’s ethnic diversity.

In formal terms, the democratic credentials of the Indonesian Republic certainly looked shaky. None of its leaders or representative institutions had been elected: they had emerged out of Japanese-sponsored bodies for the preparation of a puppet independence at the end of the Second World War and had been augmented by executive appointment. There was serious doubt, moreover, whether the acting parliament, the KNIP, even approximately reflected the likely will of the people at the ballot box. During the revolution itself there seems to have been a broad consensus that the Masjumi and PNI, which were later to emerge as the two largest parties in the 1955 elections, were probably under-represented and the left in general was probably over-represented. In the 1955 elections, the Socialist Party, which in an earlier incarnation had dominated Indonesian governments from late 1945 to early 1948, achieved a very poor result.

Republican leaders had foreshadowed elections from soon after the declaration of independence. Even in early October, when Indonesia was officially a one-party state, the government took the trouble to announce that it was preparing for general elections, and as soon as parties became formally legal in early November 1945, the prospect that they would one day be able to test their support in a national poll was universally accepted. Indonesia’s leaders were conscious, too, that their lack of a democratic mandate weakened their position internally and externally. One of the early announcements of the Sjahir cabinet in November was that elections would be held in January 1946. Regional elections were in fact held in Bali and in the Solo and Kediri regions of Java in early 1946, but the promised general elections, however, never came. This was partly because of the sheer logistical difficulties of organizing a proper poll, but it also reflected political misgivings: what would be the significance of elections when the Republic controlled only Java, Sumatra and small, vanishing pockets of Republican authority in the rest of the archipelago? The socialist governments of Sutan Sjahir and Amir Sjarifuddin, moreover, were engaged in negotiations with the Dutch which were immensely unpopular. Their social base was already much more slender than that of the PNI and Masjumi; to have submitted themselves to elections would have been to risk annihilation. Here, then, was a political weakness which the Dutch believed they could exploit.

4 Ibid., p.197.
The other area of apparent weakness was the Republic’s attitude to ethnic diversity. Although several figures in the pre-war nationalist movement had toyed with the idea of a federal form for independent Indonesia, the Republic was created in 1945 as a unitary state. Provincial governors were appointed by the President and none of the eight provinces created in 1945 corresponded to any ethnic identity in the archipelago. Two ethnic groups, moreover, the Javanese and the Minangkabau, seemed to be unduly prominent in the institutions of the Republic. The Dutch, for all that they had treated their indigenous subjects as ‘natives’ (inlanders)\(^6\) had a strong sense of the distinct ethnic identities of their subjects; stereotypes about the basic characteristics of groups such as the Javanese, Sundanese, Bataks and Ambonese were a significant part of the Dutch mental map of their colony, and they came to believe that by offering self-determination on an ethnic basis they could compete politically with the national self-determination championed by the Republic.

The Dutch strategy of recruiting democracy and self-determination as political weapons against the Republic came together in the policy of federalism. In contemporary Indonesia, the concept of federalism is reviled because of its association with Dutch anti-nationalist strategies, and it is not unknown for Indonesian and foreign commentators to suggest that federalism is alien to Indonesian political culture. The very vehemence of this condemnation, however, ought to alert us to the possibility that federalism is reviled precisely because it was a credible threat to the success of the Indonesian revolution.

The heart of the Dutch strategy was to create a series of local councils in the territories they controlled, to expose them one by one to some form of democratic elections, and to treat the resulting institutions as building blocks for a series of federal states which could be grouped in turn into an Indonesian federation retaining significant ties with the Netherlands. Most of the councils began their existence as nominated bodies, but local elections began in early 1946 and continued in various parts of the archipelago until early 1949. In all, about thirty such local elections took place, most of them in the twelve months from mid-1947 to mid-1948. In addition, several municipal council elections were held, as well as an unofficial plebiscite in Madura and a few elections of delegates to regional conferences which subsequently constituted themselves as the provisional parliament of one or other of the federal states.\(^7\)

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Local elections were by no means an innovation in the colonial context. Colonial administrative reforms from the beginning of the century had included the election of municipal and local councils, especially on Java, and the postwar elections followed many prewar practices on matters such as franchise and voting procedures. What was different was the scale of the postwar elections and the fact that they were presented as stepping stones on a relatively short path to far greater political political freedom for the Indies and far more extensive political rights for its people than had ever been suggested officially in the colonial era.

In the event, however, federalism did not rescue the political cause of the Netherlands in Indonesia. For the most part, the act of voting generated little enthusiasm amongst the Indonesian public, in sharp contrast to the atmosphere of intense excitement and anticipation which surrounded the first national elections in 1955. The very fact that the elections took place has largely slipped from the consciousness both of the Indonesian public and of Western scholars. What, then, can we learn about the nature of the Indonesian-Dutch struggle from the story of these elections?

A closer examination suggests that the elections failed to achieve what the Dutch wanted for three reasons. These were, first, that the procedures used to hold them fell considerably short of what we might think of as standard democratic practice; second, that a large number of voters used the opportunity to show support for the Republic rather than for pro-Dutch alternatives; and third that, even in a era when freedom and self-determination were principles of enormous public importance, the Republic’s failure to hold elections was not a decisive political disadvantage. Let us examine each of these in turn.

Probably the most important democratic shortcoming in the federal process was the fact that the power of the elected councils of the 1940s was seriously circumscribed by traditional Indonesian aristocracies. This came about because in the colonial era the limited transfer of power from the colonial authorities to Indonesians had taken two forms. Better known is the process by which semi-democratic local and regional councils were created, becoming in turn electoral colleges for the Volksraad, or People’s Council, in which many nationalists participated. The second process, called ontvoogding or detutelisation, had involved transferring responsibilities from the colonial state to the rulers of the native states, or zelfbesturende landschappen, who had numbered 282 in 1940, and whose territories had been permitted to survive as semi-autonomous zones within the Netherlands Indies. Although in many practical respects their position resembled that of the Inlandsch Bestuur, the ‘native administration’ which included the bupati (regents) on Java, the zelfbesturen formally enjoyed greater autonomy and were considered to have a direct relationship with the Dutch crown, rather than being simply exalted agents of the governor-general. In planning the reconstruction of the Indies as a viable political alternative to the Republic, the

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9 They appear to have been unknown to Feith when he wrote his *Indonesian Elections of 1955* (see. p.1).
colonial authorities chose the *ontvoogding* model, rather than that of the Volksraad, partly because it offered a quicker format for transferring real power to Indonesians, and partly because the traditional rulers in the native states in the areas under Dutch control were powerful local figures whom they did not want to alienate. Thus the basic constitutional unit for the new political order in the Indies was to be the *landschap*, a term taken directly from pre-war practice, and areas which had previously been under direct Dutch rule, such as the islands of Bangka and Belitung, were to be transformed into *neo-landschappen*. At the same time, pockets of directly-ruled territory within or close to existing native states were unilaterally transferred to the authority of those states.\(^{10}\) Finally, in the course of 1948 and 1949, the lower-levels of the colonial administration which had existed to some extent in parallel with the native states were abolished and their powers transferred to the heads of the *landschappen*. By the end of the revolution, the lower ranks of the Europeesch Bestuur, the European general administrative corps, had largely disappeared from Dutch controlled regions, though Dutch officials stayed on from time to time as ‘advisors’.

The Dutch saw the holding of democratic elections as an essential part of this reshaping of the archipelago’s political structure. They wished to continue to use what they saw as the traditional authority of the rajas and sultans of the archipelago, but they wished also to place democratic limits on royal absolutism and to give scope for democratic participation appropriate to what they judged the local level of political development to be. Most of what came to be known as the *daerah* governments, that is, the regional administrations below the level of the *negara*, or federal state, were therefore constituted as federations of *landschappen* with a bicameral system consisting of a partly or entirely elected chamber (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakjat*) and a chamber of rulers (*Dewan Radja*).\(^ {11}\) Depending on local conditions, one or other chamber was given executive power and the other some level of advisory or supervisory power. In several regions, rajas who had previously been significant only within their own kingdoms now became powerful regional figures. Best known of these was Sultan Hamid II of Pontianak, who turned the West Borneo federation into his vehicle for pursuing national political goals, but the same expansion of influence could be seen on a smaller scale in several other regions. The specific division of powers between the rajas and the popular councils varied widely, but the overall effect of this structure was to place heavy constraints on the extent to which elected councils could turn their popular mandate to any administrative effect.

If this were not enough, the actual conduct of the elections tended to diminish their democratic character. In most cases the elections were conducted indirectly. That is, villagers elected

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\(^{10}\) Such pockets included regions conquered during one or other Dutch campaign in the archipelago, former native states whose ruling houses had become extinct and which had been brought under direct rule for want of any alternative, and small parcels of land, sometimes less than a hectare in area, which had been excised from a native state to provide land for the residence and office of a European colonial official, whose authority might have been constrained if it were exercised on land not unambiguously under Dutch sovereignty.

\(^{11}\) In this discussion, I have retained the spelling used at the time for organisations, political units and personal names. All other Indonesian and Dutch terms are presented according to today’s spelling conventions.
kiestmannen (‘electors’) who formed an electoral college to choose council members. For the most part, this meant that the chance of any aspiring politician using the elections to build up a personal following was limited.\textsuperscript{12} In addition, provisions of the electoral laws generally permitted the colonial authorities to nominate a number of members to ‘correct’ the election result if, in their opinion, important groups were insufficiently represented. In most regions, the main ‘foreign’ minorities (Chinese and European) voted separately and elected a larger number of representatives than their numbers would otherwise have given them.\textsuperscript{13} Nomination of kiestmannen and/or council members was also permitted where climatic or political conditions made a ballot unfeasible.\textsuperscript{14} Women were given the vote in only a few regions (Ambon, Minahasa, Gorontalo, Bali and East Java), while age, and sometimes property or education, qualifications meant that not all politically engaged people were eligible to vote. Moreover, in two cases (Kutei [Kutai] and Klungkung) elections were annulled when the results turned out to be unfavourable to the Dutch and to the local rulers, while elsewhere nationalist council members were vulnerable to arrest and temporary detention by the Dutch police authorities. All in all, the electoral process was hedged about with so many safeguards from a Dutch point of view that few of the voters can have imagined that their ballot papers gave them the key to bringing about any kind of significant political change.

The seriousness of the Dutch commitment to democratic forms was put under further question by the issue of plebiscites which arose in the second half of 1947. Because the Dutch military action of July 1947 took place after the Dutch had given ambiguous ‘de facto’ recognition to the Republic, questions arose about the legal status of the Dutch in the newly occupied territories. Negotiations between the Republic and the Dutch, taking place under United Nations auspices, increasingly settled on a plebiscite as the most appropriate way of deciding the political status of disputed regions, and the Renville Agreement, signed in January 1948 between the Dutch and the Republic, eventually provided that any changes in the status of territories would take place only with the ‘full and free consent’ of the local population. A plebiscite was also to be held in Dutch-occupied territories to enable local people to choose between returning to the Indonesian Republic or joining another state within the proposed United States of Indonesia. This plebiscite was to take place ‘within the period of not less than six months or more than one year from the signing of this agreement’.\textsuperscript{15}

At first, the Dutch appeared to see the plebiscite as tool for demonstrating the broad public support they enjoyed. They chose to use it first on the island of Madura, where their legal claim

\textsuperscript{12} Dutch officials were not so certain of this and argued at times that the electoral colleges were more easily worked by ambitious (mainly nationalist) politicians who would not have achieved significant support in a direct popular vote.

\textsuperscript{13} The interesting exceptions to this rule were Bangka and Belitung, where Chinese were numerically strong but were proportionately under-represented in the councils.


\textsuperscript{15} Regeeringsvoorzichtingsdienst, Mailbrief no.1 (18 February 1948), Algemeen Rijksarchief (General State Archives, The Hague) \textsc{Alg.Sec.II} 666.
to authority was relatively weak. The Dutch governor of East Java, Ch.O. van der Plas, was a master of political management and had strong ties from before the war with East Java and with the Muslim community in general. Planning began in November 1947 and the plebiscite itself was held on 23 January 1948. The result was an overwhelming majority—92%—for a separate status for Madura. Held a few days after the signing of the Renville Agreement, the Madura plebiscite, certainly breached the letter of the Agreement, but the Dutch sought to claim it is a democratic victory.

As in other elections, however, closer examination of the vote casts some doubt on the democratic credentials of the result. First, voting rights were restricted by age, gender, education and property qualifications to 315,566 out of the island’s population of just over two million. Second, only a week was allowed between the announcement of the plebiscite and the actual poll, while the wording which was put to voters apparently concealed the fact that what was being proposed was a separation from the Republic. There must be at least some doubt about whether the voters knew what they were doing. And third, the voting took place under martial law and in public, with voters being asked to stand on one side or the other in each village to indicate their vote. Nor were procedures conspicuously more democratic in the elections which followed in March and April 1948 for an assembly (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat) for the new Negara Madura: ten of the 50 members were appointed by the government, and the remainder were elected indirectly, through the use of kiesmannen, or electors.

In Madura, a well-managed plebiscite could achieve the result the Dutch wanted, but the same was not true in West Java. The cities of Jakarta and Bandung in West Java, together with a narrow corridor linking them, had been re-occupied by the Dutch early in the revolution; the Dutch claimed the remainder of the region, with the exception of Banten, in the Military Action of mid-1947, though nationalist forces of various ideological leanings continued to control significant areas, especially in southern Priangan, throughout the revolution. The Dutch had especially strong political hopes for West Java because the region had been relatively prosperous towards the end of the colonial era and was populous enough to form a significant counterweight to the Republic. Rather than allow a plebiscite, however, the Dutch program after the Military Action was to call three successive West Java Conferences to discuss how West Java might fit

16 Madura had been Republican from the start of the revolution, but its connection with Republican territory was made difficult by the early Dutch occupation of Surabaya. The Dutch hoped that food shortages on the island would lead to discontent with the Republic but they did not intervene there until July 1947, when their forces overran the western half of the island as part of the First Military Action. They did not, however, occupy the eastern half of the island until October, and were thus in breach of the ceasefire agreement which followed the Military Action. See Kahin, Nationalism and Revolution, pp.218, 220.
17 His actual position was Regeeringscommissaris voor Bestuursaangelegenheden (Government Commissioner for Administrative Affairs), or Recomba.
18 Schiller, Making of Federal Indonesia, p.158.
19 These criticisms are all from Kahin, Nationalism and Revolution, pp.236–37.
20 Schiller, Making of Federal Indonesia, p.159. Even so, according to Kahin, 31 of the successful candidates were pro-Republican. (Nationalism and Revolution, pp.237–38).
into federal plans. The third of these conferences, which met in February 1948, consisted of one hundred delegates, 53 of them elected and the remainder appointed. The elected representatives, however, were chosen only by indirect election: qualified voters—again a relatively small part of the population—chose kiesmannen who in turn chose conference delegates.\footnote{Schiller, \textit{Making of Federal Indonesia}, p.160.} Nationalists stood as candidates in most areas and despite the Dutch control of the election a pro-Republican block of about 27—just over half of the elected members—took part in the conference in Bandung and thereafter formed a powerful Republican bloc in the Pasundan parliament.

This election result demonstrated to the Dutch the dangers of allowing the people of West Java to decide their fate by plebiscite, and they re-interpreted the terms of the Renville Agreement in a way that allowed them to postpone the plebiscite indefinitely.\footnote{The Dutch were able to do so with some justification because the Renville Agreement was ambiguous on whether the time frame for the plebiscite was determined by the Renville Agreement itself or by the final Indonesian-Dutch agreement which Renville foreshadowed.} Republicans in West Java responded by creating a so-called ‘plebiscite movement’ which organised a campaign of rallies and posters calling for the plebiscite to be held and, with great effect, portraying the Dutch refusal to do so as undemocratic.\footnote{I have discussed the plebiscite movement in a little more detail in my ‘Jakarta in the Indonesian Revolution, 1945–1949’ (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1984), pp.242–43.}

The elections not only failed to crystallise support for a moderate anti-Republican coalition, but, as hinted above, they often delivered encouraging results for the Republicans. Not only in Kutai and Klungkung, but in Gorontalo, Sangir-Talaud, Manado, Ambon, Banjar, Madura and West Java pro-Republican parties either gained a majority of the elected seats or at least won a large minority block, in which case their superior organisation generally allowed them to become the dominant political force. Although the Dutch could make grim use of such results by pointing out that they had clearly not created puppet states, the consequence was that the councils did not form the basis for a significant ‘Third Force’ in Indonesian politics. The significance of this fact became clear in late December 1948 when the Dutch launched the so-called Second ‘Police Action’, a military operation intended to capture the Republican capital and to destroy the Republic as an institution. The short-term military goals of the operation were achieved, but Dutch success began to unravel within days, when the governments of the federal states of Pasundan and Eastern Indonesia, which out of all Indonesian institutions stood to gain the most from the elimination of the Republic, resigned in protest at the Dutch action. In time, of course, the Dutch were able to piece together more amenable coalitions to govern the two states, but by then their military and diplomatic strategies had started to come adrift. Extensive guerrilla resistance in Java, Sumatra and parts of Kalimantan overstretched the Dutch armed forces, and colonial control began to slip even in regions which had been relatively secure before December 1948, while international condemnation gathered force and the Netherlands faced a significant possibility of sanctions, even from its Western allies.
Despite all the limits on the degree of democracy allowed in Dutch-controlled territories, the Dutch could and did argue that they offered more democracy than the Indonesian Republic. They over-estimated, however, the extent to which the lack of elections was a domestic political disadvantage for the Republic. National liberation, rather than democratic institutions, had lain at the core of the nationalist claim against the Dutch and the nationalist movement had developed a political culture in which the presence and active participation in decision-making of representatives of the main social groups (whether these were defined ethnically, ideologically, by class or by gender) was widely accepted as democratic in form. Even though the Left was over-represented in the Republican parliament, and therefore controlled the government until 1948, there was a voice for all, and this fact assuaged some of the misgivings which might otherwise have arisen over the lack of elections.

The revolution, moreover, was a time of mass mobilisation on a scale unprecedented in the colonial era. Through a large variety of mass organisations, armed and unarmed, official and unofficial, the Indonesian population of the Republic felt itself to be directly engaged in the anti-colonial struggle. Within these organisations, too, leaders were often elected (and deposed) in informal but democratic meetings during the early part of the revolution, and even after this practice had disappeared leaders who lost the confidence of their supporters were for the most part relatively easy to remove from power. This engagement of the Indonesian people in affairs of state gave them what we might now call a sense of ‘owning’ the revolution which compensated for the lack of formal democratic processes. Also important was the fact that the revolution was a time when hardship and sacrifice were glorified as necessary parts of the national struggle. Indonesians who were willing to put up with shortages of food and clothing for as long as it took to defeat the Dutch were likewise willing to accept that democratic elections were an expense and a distraction which the Republic could not afford at that stage of its existence, even if such elections were expected to be as important a part of the independent political order as a decent standard of living.

The ethnic dimension of the Dutch federal strategy was less systematic and less important in the Dutch program than is often supposed. The Dutch federal strategy was shaped by their experience of a conference held at Malino in South Sulawesi in July 1946. The conference assembled delegates from most of the territories under Dutch control at the time—Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku, Nusatenggara, Riau, and the islands of Bangka and Belitung—and was to discuss the future political framework of Indonesia and its constitutional relationship to the Netherlands. An important aim of the conference was to show the world and the Indonesians that the Dutch were not simply aiming to restore colonial rule, but were committed to self-rule for the Indies, but the meeting was also used as a sounding board for ‘moderate’ Indonesian opinion in

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24 Indonesia’s New Order government, which holds regular elections but does not allow them to be used as a vehicle for political change, has sought to stoke the thirst for democracy by encouraging people to be involved in a series of developmental campaigns (most notably in the fields of family planning and environmental protection) which give participants a sense of being part of the state endeavour.
order that the Dutch could develop a programme more closely attuned to Indonesian aspirations. The conference could not itself claim a democratic mandate. For the most part the delegates were chosen by local Indonesian advisory committees which had been established in turn by the Dutch. These committees, moreover, were allowed to choose only delegates approved by the local Dutch administration. Nonetheless, the conference was notable for the absence of calls for ethnically-based political units in autonomous Indonesia. Instead, the conference allowed itself to be guided by the Dutch into a format which, like so many other aspects of postwar colonial policy, was primarily a development from and extension of prewar forms. In the Dutch vision, Indonesia should become a federation of four large states—Java, represented by the Indonesian Republic which had been declared in 1945, together with Sumatra, Borneo and Eastern Indonesia, corresponding to the largest administrative divisions of the pre-war Netherlands Indies. These were all to be massive, multi-ethnic units, not ethnically based polities. The Dutch gave expression to ethnic identity only in their treatment of minorities. Representatives of the Chinese, Eurasian and Arab communities were invited to a conference at Pangkalpinang in Bangka in October 1946 to consider the implications of the Malino conference for the minorities, but there was no thought then or later of going further in minority recognition than the pre-war arrangement of allowing them separate electorates within the states which were to make up federal Indonesia.

In the event, of the federal states planned at Malino, only the state of Eastern Indonesia (Negara Indonesia Timur) was created more or less as envisaged. A Negara Sumatra on the other hand could never be created because most of the island remained outside Dutch hands. The failure to create a Negara Borneo has not been thoroughly investigated, but it appears to be connected with inter-regional rivalries on the island. In central and western Indonesia, therefore, the Dutch pursued federalism in smaller units. Nonetheless, only one of the sixteen federal parts of the Republic of the United States of Indonesia which formally came into existence in December 1949 was more or less congruent with a single ethnic group. This was the Daerah Bandjar in southeastern Kalimantan, a region which offered the Dutch the heaviest guerrilla resistance of anywhere outside Java and Sumatra, to the extent that the Republic at times tried to treat it in the negotiations as de facto Republican territory. The Negara Madura was exclusively Madurese, but it did not cover the millions of Madurese living on the East Java mainland. These Madurese in turn kept the Negara Djawa Timur from being ethnically homogeneous, while large Javanese and Malay speaking communities in the west of the island similarly prevented Pasundan from having an exclusively Sundanese character.

In retrospect, it appears that the association of Dutch-sponsored federalism with ethnic separatism has three sources. First, the early discussions of a federal structure for Indonesia

26 The Indonesian delegates at Malino all envisaged that the NIT would include western New Guinea. The Dutch decision to exclude that territory from the NIT as practical power was gradually devolved to it was a significant source of friction between the Dutch and NIT authorities.
allocated Java to the Indonesian Republic and indeed even the Linggadjati Agreement of November 1946 provided for the gradual transfer to the Republic of the Dutch-occupied territories on Java and Sumatra. This proposal alarmed both conservative Dutch figures and a small number of Sundanese, who began in early 1947 to campaign for a separate Negara Pasundan, emphasizing Sundanese identity and the historical enmity between Sunda and Java. Although the Pasundan movement appears to have had no support from the Dutch leadership in Batavia/Jakarta, the campaign certainly tainted the later Negara Pasundan with an air of ethnic separatism. Second, the federal structure also provided an institutional framework for the secessionist Republic of the South Moluccas in 1950. Christian Ambonese might well have revolted against the Republic had there been no federal structures in eastern Indonesia, but the NIT’s Daerah Maloekoe Selatan both provided the rebels with a convenient territorial framework and linked their ethnic claims to federalism. And third, although virtually none of the federal units (and by no means all of the daerah within the NIT) could claim any degree of ethnic homogeneity, the sometimes openly anti-Javanese arguments for federalism gave an ethnic cast to the debate.

In this discussion I have argued that democratisation in the form of federalism became a significant element in the Dutch attempts to maintain their influence in the postwar affairs of Indonesia. The strategy appeared to have been shrewdly chosen, because of the Indonesian Republic’s democratic shortcomings, but proved in the long run to be as ineffective as the military and diplomatic strategies which have previously received most attention. The democratisation strategy failed partly because it was so hedged about with safeguards for colonial interests that it failed to inspire more than occasional enthusiasm. Still more important, however, it failed because Indonesians in the territories occupied by the Dutch for the most part refused to be seduced. Here and there the federal system developed a small degree of resilience, but for the most part the Republic remained the repository of the nationalist hopes of Indonesians. Perhaps inevitably, the historiography of the revolution emphasises events in Republican territory, but the importance of the nationalist faithfulness of people living under Dutch occupation needs to be kept in mind.

In retrospect it may be fortunate that the opprobrium generated by Dutch political strategies attached primarily to the structure of federalism rather than the institution of democracy. Had democracy been branded a divisive neo-colonialist tool, the elections of 1955 might never have been held and the prospects for democratic change in contemporary Indonesia might be still more remote.