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Indonesian Commoners in the Colonial Period”

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Transformation of Dress and National Subject Formation of the Indonesian Commoners in the Colonial Period¹

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Abstract

This paper examines the transformation of dress of by Indonesian commoners from traditional to Western style in the colonial period. This paper centers on a major research question: was the changing discourse of the commoners' dress a form of obedience or a negotiation to colonial subject formation? The argument proposed here takes the second stance: the transformation of dress was a negotiation of colonial subject formation. The negotiation took a form as a movement to break the traditional and colonial hierarchy that had trapped the commoners at the lowest level of the society. This paper suggests that only by breaking the social and cultural hierarchy of the colonial society, the Indonesian commoners could establish a national movement against the colonial power.

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Introduction

This paper examines Indonesian dress and body and their relationship with power, dominance, and resistance. The literature suggests that the transformation of dress was a result of the power relation of the Indonesians and colonial authority. Why did they change their dress and what was the process? Did the Indonesians transform their dress as an expression that they were fully subject to colonial

¹ This research is made possible due to generous funding from Indonesian Scholarship and Research Support Foundation (ISRSF) and its benefactors: PT AKR Corporindo, PT Adaro, PT Bank Central Asia, PT Djarum, the Ford Foundation, the Rajawali Foundation and the William Soeryadjaya Foundation.

authority? Or did they use the transformation of dress to overcome the colonial power?

My paper investigates the discourse of the transformation of dress of Indonesians in the colonial period. At this time, the journalist-nationalists led by Mas Marco Kartodikromo challenged the Indonesian commoners to transform their dress from traditional to Western style. The change in dress articulated negotiation in the subject formation of Indonesians in the colonial period and raises the important question: How did Indonesians negotiate their identity and redefine colonial subject formations? My paper argues that the transformation of dress was not a form of obedience to colonial authority, but rather it was a resistance to colonial domination. Transformation of dress was an attempt for the nationalists to break the traditional and colonial hierarchies that had trapped the commoners at the lowest level of society.

My paper examines the colonial power to dominate the population that was articulated in the dress regulation of colonial subjects. I investigate the colonial government requirement that the natives wear only their own ethnic dress and prohibited them from wearing Western clothing. The purpose of this strategy was to co-opt the traditional hierarchy for the colonialist purpose. The colonialists hoped that by their ordering the natives to wear ethnic dress, the natives would always obey the traditional authority that had been co-opted by the colonialists. Thus, this research examines the production of the colonial hierarchy resulting from the collaboration of traditional/native hierarchy and colonial/Western hierarchy. In the established colonial hierarchy, the Westerners were at the highest level and were

superior and authoritative to other groups—the Westerners had the right to interpellate other groups' identity.

The colonial government gave to the aristocrats the privilege of continuing their domination over the commoners, while the aristocrats themselves were subject to the colonial authority. The nationalists therefore argued that traditionalism was thus a part of colonialism. That is why when the nationalists were looking for a political dress as a symbol of their resistance to colonial authority, they did not choose traditional dress; rather they chose Western dress. This research paper suggests that the imitation of Western dress did not represent full domination of the Indonesians by the colonial authority, but rather it was an expression of anti-colonialism.

This research is a part of a larger project concerning domination and resistance in Indonesia. To understand the present circumstance of Indonesia, I argue that we must investigate how the colonial regime produced the hierarchy of colonial citizens. Following the coloniality of power perspective, I argue that an ex-colonial country's governance continues the colonial governance, while at the same time it tries to negotiate and reform the colonial structure.² My further question then is, did the authorities of independent Indonesia continue the cultural hegemony strategy of the colonial regime or did they produce a new strategy—thus a new hierarchy in the society? If the latter, which groups were subordinated, how did they resist, and in what form of expression?

² Grosfoguel, R. (2007). THE EPISTEMIC DECOLONIAL TURN: Beyond political-economy paradigms 1. *Cultural studies*, 21(2-3), 211-223.

A. Historic Background and Literature Review

At the end of 1913, Mas Marco Kartodikromo, a Javanese journalist and activist, established Inlandsche Journalisten Bond (IJB, Native Journalist Union). IJB published a weekly journal, *Doenia Bergerak* (DB), as the representative of the voice of native journalists. *Tjahaja Timoer* (East Light), one of the native newspapers, welcomed DB by saying that DB “contains radical articles and is very important for the native people.”³ During its one year of publication, DB portrayed the dynamics of colonial society such as polemics among Indonesian political activists and between Indonesian activists and colonial officials. Among those dynamics, the hottest issue during the period of DB's publication was the dress transformation of the Indonesians from traditional to Western style.

This paper investigates the relationship of dress and the Indonesian nationalist movement in the Dutch colonial period of the early twentieth century, exploring the transformation from traditional to Western style as the beginning of modernization and nationalism through the reading of selected articles in DB. Only a few scholars have explored the Indonesians' dress transformation to Western style. *Outward Appearances* (1997), a comprehensive study of dress, offers an anthology of articles that examine “the role and meaning of clothing in social action.”⁴ This book narrates a lengthy time span of the relationship of the state and its subjects: from the early interaction of Western colonialists and natives to the New Order era of Indonesia. However, this book does not explore the agency of

³ *Tjahaja Timoer*, 11 Februari 1914.

⁴ Schulte Nordholt, H. (1997). *Outward Appearances. Dressing State and Society in Indonesia*. p. 1.

Indonesians in the colonial subject formation, especially how the Indonesian interpreted the Western dress and the traditional dress, and what kind of dress the Indonesian wanted to wear. In addition to what scholars in *Outward Appearances* have examined, this paper offers a study of Indonesian activists' interpretation of Western dress in the 1910s.

Other influential work on dress history in the early twentieth century of Indonesia is Rudolf Mrazek's *Indonesian Dandy*, published as a chapter in *Engineer of Happyland* (2002)⁵, and as a chapter in *Outward Appearances*. Mrazek explores the hybridism of the Indonesians as they wore Western dress. Mrazek calls them the "Indonesian dandy," meaning the Indonesians who "borrowed Dutch clothes to place themselves in the modern society."⁶ Responding Mrazek's idea of the Indonesian dandy, this paper offers a different conclusion. While Mrazek sees the Indonesian in the 1910s as merely the victim of modernity and consumer culture, this paper argues that dress transformation was a political identity movement and an attempt to break the colonial domination.

This paper also examines the history of colonial subjection practices over Indonesians and gains some insights and data from writings on the history of cultural practices in the Dutch East Indies period by France Gouda's *Dutch Culture Overseas*,⁷ John Pemberton's *The Subject of Java*,⁸ and Marieke

⁵ Mrázek, R. (2002). *Engineers of happy land: Technology and nationalism in a colony*. Princeton University Press. Mrazek 2002, p. 143.

⁶ Mrazek 2002, p. 143.

⁷ Gouda, F. (2008). *Dutch culture overseas: Colonial practice in the Netherlands Indies, 1900-1942*. Equinox Publishing.

⁸ Pemberton, J. (1994). *On the subject of "Java"*. Cornell University Press.

Bloembergen's *Colonial Spectacles*.⁹ Those scholars provide analyses of colonial cultural history on colonial domination and colonial subject formation.

This paper explores the dress transformation of Indonesians and its relationship with the emergence of Indonesian's national solidarity feeling. This paper agrees with some scholars' argument about the significance of dress in the process of national subject formation. For example, *The Politics of Dress in Asia and the Americas* (1997), edited by Mina Roces and Louise Edwards, explores how dress represents the political identity struggle of colonized people. Every writer in this volume shares the same question: How do political elites and political activists represent themselves and craft national and political identities through clothing and bodily practices?¹⁰

Their articles offer a broad historical analysis on the relationship between political dress and the changing of culture and social structure, beginning with the first contact between colonial powers and indigenous people. The book also examines the intersection of dress with political identity and how the politics of dress produces the discourse of nations. National dress originated in the nineteenth century in Europe. Nationalists in Iceland and Norway invented national costumes based on the clothing of the peasantry. Johann Gottfried Herder explains that romanticism was prominent in European culture at the time nationalism arose. Peasant dress as a part of folk culture was seen as the strongest sign to represent

⁹ Bloembergen, M. (2006). *Colonial spectacles: the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies at the world exhibitions, 1880-1931*. NUS Press.

¹⁰ Roces, M., & Edwards, L. P. (Eds.). (2007). *The politics of dress in Asia and the Americas*. Sussex Academic Press, p. 3.

nationalist idealism.¹¹ In contrast to the European experience, the culture of the peasantry in Latin America signified local and racial identity. As a result, these nationalists chose to wear European dress to display their national identity.¹² Meanwhile, in the 1920s, Indian nationalists challenged Western dress with Indian traditional dress.¹³ Burmese nationalists were influenced by the Indians' strategy and also chose to wear traditional dress, adopting the *pinni* and *longyi* as their nationalist statement against colonialism.¹⁴

Studying the national dress means investigating the history of colonial cultural domination and the history of the colonized people's resistance to the colonial power. Each country has different experience and thus different national dress. To contribute to what scholars in *Politics and Dress in Asia and the Americas* has explored, this paper investigates the political dress of the Indonesians through the exploration of the Dutch cultural domination through dress regulation. The Indonesian case shows that, in contrast with the Indian experience, the Indonesians chose Western dress as their national dress in the colonial period.

Another important work on dress is *Dress and Globalization* (2004) by Margaret Maynard. Following Paul Du Gay, Maynard defines globalization as "both the condition and the rhetoric of being part of a supposedly single inter-woven macro culture, as well as the actual process by which commodities move across the

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Earle in Roces and Edwards 2007, p. 166.

¹³ Edwards P. in Roces and Edwards 2007, p. 129.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 131.

world.”¹⁵ While there are scholars who believe globalization creates an unequal condition in which the Third World is under First World hegemony, Maynard contends that despite the power of globalization, people in less developed countries are nonetheless able to negotiate the use and meaning of Western dress.¹⁶ In Zambia and West Africa, for example, people buy secondhand Western clothing and modify it with ornaments to adjust to local tastes. In so doing, they show that “a capacity for choice exists, and the process of identity formation can never be static, and it becomes impossible to regard identity as fully definable and static, rather, the self is ambivalent and often culturally unsettling.”¹⁷

Dress and Globalization is an inspiring book especially because it locates people of the “third world” as a hybrid and ambivalent agency. Ambivalence, as Homi Bhabha argues, can be seen in the form of mimicry man which is “a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite.”¹⁸ The mimicry man is represented by the colonized people, who are influenced by the colonizer’s form of modern culture and education, who then perform in the style of the colonizers. However, mimicry can also be a form of political and cultural resistance to colonizer culture. In the case of this research, the journalist-activists who wore and promoted Western dress were seen as mimicry men.

¹⁵ Maynard, M. (2004). *Dress and globalization*. Manchester University Press, p. 3.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Hendrickson 1996, p. 5 in Maynard 2004, p.4.

¹⁸ Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Psychology Press, p.122.

This paper is a cultural history project. Focusing on the discourse of dress transformation as articulated in *Doenia Bergerak*, this paper investigates the history of the power of dress as a technology to govern¹⁹ and dominate the population, and also as an instrument of the resistance to domination. Overall, this paper examines the regularities and the ruptures of discursive formation of the dress in the Indonesian colonial period.

B. The Discourse of Dress Transformation in *Doenia Bergerak*

The first Indonesian journalists' union, Inlandsche Journalisten Bond (IJB), was founded in Surakarta, Central Java, at the end of 1913. The founder was a 24 year old journalist and Sarekat Islam (SI) activist, Mas Marco Kartodikromo. He was Javanese, son of a lower ranking *priyayi* (aristocratic family members who worked as colonial administrators) who had only the lowest aristocratic title in front of his name: *Mas*. This title gave him the small privilege of having a position in the colonial government offices, but he had to compete with higher-ranking aristocrats who had the titles *Raden* and *Raden Mas* in front of their name. Therefore, for Marco to obtain a higher position than people with the titles *Raden* and *Raden Mas* was almost impossible because the colonial offices applied the traditional aristocratic hierarchy: lower ranking people would never have a higher position than higher-ranking people. Marco, as well as many other young men from lower-ranking *priyayi* families and bourgeois families, chose not to work for the government. They chose instead to

¹⁹ Hunt, L. (Ed.). (1989). *The new cultural history*. University of California Press, p. 36.

work in private business companies, and many of them chose journalism. They called people like themselves who did not work for the colonial government "*kaum mardika*" (free people).²⁰

In the IJB organizational structure, besides Marco as president, were Raden Sosrokoornio as secretary and Mohammad Haji Bakrie as treasurer. There was also a board of commissioners that consisted of some editors of Indonesian newspapers and some heads of government offices.²¹ Marco never announced the number of IJB members, and it was also hard to track their names because they usually used pseudonyms in their writings. The journal of IJB, *Doenia Bergerak* (DB) aimed to give voices to the common people, to stand up for journalists who were banned by the government, and to be critical of the government.²² Therefore the majority of IJB journalists chose to hide their true identities in their articles in DB, and probably this was why Marco never published the names of members of IJB. Among the few journalists who bravely used their real names were Dr. Raden Mas Tjipto Mangoenkoesomo, Raden Mas Soewardi Soerjaningrat, and Raden Ayu Siti Soendari. The first two were young Indonesian journalist-activists who were the former leaders of Indische Partij, a nationalist organization which was banned in 1913 because of its radical journalism and activism. The third was one of the Indonesian women who managed newspapers, in her case, *Wanito Sworo* (the Voice of Women).

²⁰ Toer, P. A., (2003) Sang Pemula, *Hasta Mitra*. Jakarta, also see Shiraishi, T. (1987). Reading Pramoedya Ananta Toer's " Sang Pemula"[The Pioneer]. *Indonesia*, 129-139, p. 133.

²¹ DB number 1, 1914.

²² Ibid.

IJB and DB affiliated with Sarekat Islam (SI), an organization that was founded by members of the Indonesian middle class: Muslim traders and Muslim lower and middle ranking aristocrats. SI was the largest native organization in the colonial period. Most SI members were Muslim commoners: peasants, small traders, and laborers. SI leaders were from the local elite. They were educated and labeled themselves a part of *kaum muda* (young people).²³ *Kaum muda* signifies a generation that pursued intellectual achievement to obtain a better position in the colonial society.²⁴ They could be aristocratic, but they were not the type of aristocrats who merely used aristocratic privilege to become government officials to rule the commoners. Rather they were aristocrats who pursued modern education and a modern lifestyle. *Kaum muda* could also come from business families, peasant families, and laborer's families.

The emergence of *kaum muda* was made possible because the colonial government opened some schools for the lower classes. Mas Marco graduated only from Tweede Inlandsche School (second rank elementary school) and a private junior high school. His fellows in IJB who had a higher title such as Raden Mas Tjipto and Raden Mas Soewardi also had a higher education. Both of them went to STOVIA, a school for the training of Javanese physicians. They were the new generation of the Indonesian elite.²⁵ They accessed modern thought and had a closer relationship

²³ The term *kaum muda* introduced to the Indonesian by Abdul Riva'i, an Indonesian journalist who ran a Dutch owned newspaper, in 1905. Abdul Riva'i was influenced by the young people movement in China in the early 1910s (Adam1995, p. 177).

²⁴ Van Niel, R. (1970). *The emergence of the modern Indonesian elite*. W. van Hoeve, p. 100.

²⁵ Van Neil 1970.

with progressive thinking than the commoners and even the aristocrats. And because of this characteristic, they were able to establish their own organizations and newspapers and, furthermore, they became political leaders.

Marco, Tjipto, and Soewardi were the representatives of the journalist-activists in the early twentieth century. They were considered leaders of radical organizations. However, at this time, radicalism was still in the form of voices through newspapers. This period was the era of voices,²⁶ and national identity existed only vaguely. But the emotions of national identity and anti-colonialism were represented in journalistic writings.

The journalist-activist role in this era was not only political but also cultural. Van Dijk, Mrazek, and Jean Gelman Taylor recognize these activists as the Indonesians who exchanged their dress and who promoted the dress transformation of the Indonesians. An important question is: What was their purpose in challenging the commoners to transform their dress? Was dress transformation merely an imitation of Western culture?

The Indonesian Journalists' Interpretation of Dress Transformation

In DB, a writer who used the pseudonym Bledek Kesongo²⁷ reported that in his town, Cilacap, Central Java, the rulers restricted commoners from wearing Western dress, while rulers in other cities allowed it.

“In a meeting in the pavilion of Kediri’s regent office, the *priyayi* (native officials) are allowed to sit in chairs and wear pantaloons. Thus, ‘crouch and crawl’ are gone! Great! But in Cilacap, this never happened! Why

²⁶ Shiraishi 1997.

²⁷ Bledek Kesong means thunder in a dry season.

do the Javanese rulers in Cilacap not want to change their dress to follow the progress of the world?"²⁸

European rulers imitated this governing technique. They obliged low ranking officials always to wear black *sikepan*²⁹ clothes with *keris*³⁰ as official work dress. Wearing western footwear was restricted. In addition, low ranking officials had to crouch down and crawl when they entered the office of their boss.³¹

The DB writer further noted that the rulers thought the commoners were arrogant and disrespectful when they wore European dress. He argued that the rulers, whom he called anti-progress people, were afraid of losing authority over the commoners and blocked them at every turn from having a better place in colonial society.

From this article, we can see the journalists' dislike for the people who practiced the traditional customs and used the customs to rule the commoners. Many other articles made the same point. The journalists usually called the traditional custom *adat Madjapaitan*, meaning the custom of the Madjapait people, the biggest pre-colonial Javanese kingdom. The journalists were aware that they were being subjected and governed by the *adat Madjapaitan* discourse, and they resisted it by using modern discourse. An article titled "O Justice, where are you?" articulated their resistance to *adat Madjapaitan* subjection.

²⁸ DB Number 27.

²⁹ A Javanese traditional jacket used in formal occasions, adapted from a Dutch style of jacket.

³⁰ *Keris* (Kris) is a Javanese traditional sword, inserted in the belt toward the back side of the body.

³¹ DB Number 27

"To respect the others, the Javanese people walk with four feet, sit on the floor and bow 1000 times. And because the Javanese are crawling to honor the others, then foreigners (*bangsa asing*) call the Javanese: 'Animal! We are wretched people!

To show that the Javanese people are gentle and kind, we never disobey the other's order and we are always obedient. And because we love to succumb, then the foreigners say: 'the Javanese are like buffalo.' We are wretched people two times!

Nowadays, the Javanese people understand that crawling is animal behavior, thus we want to imitate civilized people that are walking with two feet and stand upright. But then the foreigners scream out: 'the Javanese people are arrogant!' We are wretched people three times!

The foreigners then teach the Javanese people to understand what is truth and justice, and not to be always obedient like a buffalo. The Javanese people are now applying these teachings. But then the foreigners shout out: 'the Javanese are disrespectful!' We are wretched people four times!

Who wants to be a Javanese? If I could be reborn, I would not choose to be born again as a Javanese!"³²

Walking with four feet, sitting on the floor, crawling, as well as being kind and succumbing to others were the traditional ways the Javanese respected people of higher status, especially members of aristocratic families and Europeans. In this era, however, these customs were defined as uncivilized. The journalists realized that this definition was made by the foreigners. In this article, the journalists expressed frustration: for although they had adopted the civilized culture such as accessing Western education and dressing in Western style, the foreigners still

³² DB number 6.

hated them. This article shows that there was tension between the natives and the foreigners and that the tension had existed for decades. To understand this tension, this paper explores colonial dress regulation and the colonialist cultural domination over the natives.

Colonial Dress Regulation as Colonial Cultural Domination

In 1893 the Dutch East Indies government sent a gift to the Queen of the Netherlands-- a collection of dolls of indigenous people that iconized them. The dolls showed that there were dozens of ranks in the Javanese social hierarchy; the ranks were represented by their dress. For example, the Sundanese people were represented by thirty-five dolls in consecutive order, starting from princely regent as the highest rank to farmer as the lowest rank.³³

Mrazek argues that these dolls produced by the Dutch were the miniature representation of indigenous people showing normal native dress, a style distinct from the European.³⁴ He suggests the dolls represent the peacefulness of native lives and harmony among different groups in the colonial society. In contrast, this paper argues that the Dutch representation of the indigenous through their distinctive costumes did not simply reflect pure indigenous culture. It was not simply a representation of an exotic world that was untouchable by Western culture. Rather for centuries the Dutch had maintained the distinctiveness among the various colonial citizens in order to produce a new social order.

³³ Mrazek 2002, p.129.

³⁴ Mrazek 2002, p. 130

Since the early period of the Dutch colonization, the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC)—a company that was granted a charter by the Dutch government to exploit the Dutch East Indies as well as to develop a colony—ruled the population in the cities by requiring the citizens to wear their own traditional ethnic dress. Meanwhile, Western dress was exclusively for the Europeans. In 1658, the Dutch controlled natives through dress distinction. In colonial cities, especially Batavia, natives had to wear their own ethnic dress and were prohibited from wearing Western dress.³⁵ For example, Javanese men usually “go naked and have a cloth around their waist that reaches under the knee, sometimes binding a sash around the same, into which they insert a *keris* or some other weapon, their head is covered by a cap, but they go barefoot. Amboinese men wrap a cotton cloth around their head, both ends hanging down, and trim this head cloth with various flowers.”³⁶ The foreign Easterners such as Chinese, Japanese, and Arabians also had to dress in their own ethnic styles.³⁷ It was stated that this regulation aimed to prevent criminality and to make tracking the criminal easier.³⁸

Another purpose of this colonial dress regulation, which this paper emphasizes, is that it produced a new hierarchy and located the natives, especially the commoners, in a more marginal position. The Dutch rulers produced a social

³⁵ Plaakatboek 1885-1900, II: 306 in Dijk, K. V. (1997). Sarongs, jubbahs, and trousers: Appearance as a means of distinction and discrimination. *Outward appearances: Dressing state and society in Indonesia*, 39-84. P. 45.

³⁶ A description of Batavia in 1682 by J. Nieuhof (1682:216) and was almost literally copied by N. De Graeff in 1742. See van Dijk (1997: 45-47). Also see Taylor, J.G., 1997:93.

³⁷ Plakaatboek 1885-1900, II:506, III:112 in Dijk, K.V., 1997:47.

³⁸ Ibid.

hierarchy and used dress as the code. Europeans were at the highest level of the hierarchy while the commoners were at the lowest. In the middle were some groups that were given the privilege of adopting European dress. The first group was the natives who were Christians.³⁹ This group was mostly people from the eastern part of Indonesia where Islam did not reach. The second group was members of the royal family. The royal families both in Java and outside Java usually mixed some parts of European dress with their traditional attire.⁴⁰ The third group was the Mardijkers, the freed slaves from Africa or other places. The Mardijkers were allowed to adopt Western dress in order to differentiate them from the natives. However, the Mardijkers's dress still was distinct from that of the Europeans, as they were required to wear ankle-length trousers and hats on their heads.⁴¹

Colonial dress regulation was an engineering of cultural domination by the Europeans over the Indonesians. By using dress regulation, the colonial rulers determined who could improve their social status. For example, the Chinese tried to transform their dress to Western style some years before 1651, but the Dutch forbade them from doing so. Thus, wearing ethnic dress was not an expression of 'national virtue' as the Dutch described it? ; rather, it was a compulsion to obey the colonial rule.⁴² In 1701, many citizens of colonial cities changed their area of

³⁹ Dijk, K.V., 1997:45.

⁴⁰ Pemberton, John, 1994.

⁴¹ Nieuhof 1682: 217 in Dijk, K.V., 1997:45.

⁴² Gerstacker 1855:425 in Dijk, K.V., 1997:47.

residence to avoid colonial supervision and also changed their dress to other ethnic costumes.⁴³

For the commoners, as represented in the doll collection, the native traditional hierarchy had a history of rigidity, and the colonial hierarchy repeated that pattern. The traditional and colonial powers had collaborated since the early period of their interaction. In the late seventeenth century, King Amangkurat II (1677-1703), the founder of Kartasura Kingdom in Central Java, was dubbed the Admiral Sunan because he liked to wear the Dutch naval uniform.⁴⁴ When King Amangkurat's offspring King Pakubuwono II built a new palace in Surakarta in 1745, European furniture and ornaments decorated the palace. The move-in procession to the new palace also represented the collaboration of Dutch and Javanese power: "Pakubuwana II rolled along slowly in the monstrous royal carriage of the state named "Sir Venerable Eagle" (*Kangjeng Kyahi Garudha*, after the mythic Indic bird who carried the god Vishnu), a gift from the Dutch."⁴⁵ Several Dutch brigades and the Dutch military marching band were also part of the procession.⁴⁶ In 1783, King Pakubuwana III gave the right to Surakarta Kingdom's family members and palace servants to wear Dutch costume in court ceremonies.⁴⁷ The 1700s was the era when the Dutch penetrated more deeply into the Javanese kingdom's internal affair.

⁴³ Plaakatboek 1885-1900, II:306 in Dijk, K.V., 1997:45.

⁴⁴ Pemberton 1994, p. 58.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 58. Also see Kumar, A. (1980). Javanese Court Society and Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century: The Record of a Lady Soldier Part II: Political Developments: The Courts and the Company, 1784-1791. *Indonesia*, 67-111., p. 70.

To the Dutch, the aristocrats were the class to be guided and mentored. As part of the processes, the aristocrats not only could adopt Western dress but had the privilege of accessing modern schools. A photograph of the Surakarta King Pakubuwono X with the Dutch Resident of Surakarta⁴⁸ in the 1897 represented the teacher-student relationship. The photograph shows that the King had already adopted a European suit and mixed it with Javanese batik. Yet the Dutch Resident linked arms with King Mangkubumi as if he were the Resident's wife. This gesture represented the continued domination of the Dutch over the Javanese ruler.

John Pemberton, in his book *On the Subject of Java* (1994), argues that the adaptation of Western dress not only reflected the desire of the aristocrats to imitate the Western culture, but also aimed at doubling their power.⁴⁹ The relationship between the Europeans and the aristocrats benefited the Dutch in their ability to rule the population more effectively and efficiently. That is, the Dutch ruled the population indirectly through the power of native aristocrats who could gain the commoners' obedience with the traditional *kawula-gusti* (servant and master) relationship.⁵⁰ The Dutch rewarded these members of the princely class with the privilege of bequeathing their position to their children.

Dressing the population with ethnic dress was an attempt not only to dominate the colonial citizens but also to dominate in the competition among

⁴⁸ Resident W. de Vogel en soesoehoenan Pakoe Boewono X van Soerakarta. Photo collection of Koninklijk Instituut voor taal-, land- en volkenkunde (KITLV) in www.geheugenvannederland.nl.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ See Moertono, S. (2009). *State and Statecraft in Old Java: A Study of the Later Mataram Period, 16th to 19th Century*. Equinox Publishing.

European imperial powers. In the eyes of the Dutch, regulating the natives in wearing their own ethnic clothes also aimed to show the world how powerful the Dutch were. The colonial exhibition in Amsterdam in 1883 projected the desire of the Dutch to be seen as the superior imperialist among European nations through the discourse of scientific classification. In the exhibition, the Netherlands exhibited the stages of evolution in the Dutch East Indies.⁵¹ The exhibition divided the population into three groups that purported to represent evolutionary stages: the natural life, the native life, and the modern European life. The native were represented by an ethnographically rigid classification from the most primitive peasants to the most civilized natives who had the closest relationship with Europeans. The native culture was shown in its traditional daily life: traditional clothes, traditional houses, and traditional market. Meanwhile, the Dutch were represented by their success in bringing civilization to the colony, as well as introducing modernity such as hygiene and modern education.⁵² "In this evolutionary narrative, the colonial world as exhibited in Amsterdam became a testing ground for the shaping of the Netherlands into a modern, powerful nation."⁵³

In contrast to the perspective presented in the exhibition, a journalist stated in DB that continued use of the traditional costume represented the yielding of the natives to the Dutch. Meanwhile, among the natives traditional costume with its consecutive rank represented the domination of the aristocratic people over the

⁵¹ Bloembergen, M. (2006). *Colonial spectacles: the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies at the world exhibitions, 1880-1931*. NUS Press. P. 60.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ ibid, p. 60-63.

commoners. The doll collection and the exhibition materials thus represented not only the order of colonial society but also the tension between groups: between the colonial and the native, and within the native hierarchy.

This paper argues that the dress transformation in the early twentieth century was the accumulation of the commoner's resistance against both colonial and traditional power. This idea is in contrast to Mrazek who argues that the dress change in the 20th century was the beginning of a period of disorder. This paper argues that during the colonial period, the society was already experiencing disorder.

Ethical Policy

The collaboration between the Dutch and the aristocrats began and reached its peak success in the *Cultuurstelsel* period (forced cultivation system period; 1830-1870). Under the power of regents who acted as if they were local kings, the peasants were forced to cultivate certain crops for the trade interest of the Dutch. This system gave the Netherlands enormous wealth.⁵⁴ In 1870, the Liberal Policy replaced the *Cultuurstelsel*. This policy opened the colonial system to greater penetration of private capital. Influenced by humanitarian ideals, it also provided a little more concern for the welfare of the natives. At the turn of the 19th century to the 20th century, the call to change the colonial policy to a more modern approach became stronger in both the Dutch parliament and the colony. In 1901, Queen Wilhelmina announced the Ethical Policy as the new colonial system.

⁵⁴ In 1877 Netherland earned 823 million guilders and thus became one of wealthy imperialists. See Gouda 2008, p. 24.

Ethical Policy was a means not only to uplift the native to a civilized position but also to modernize the government and expand its imperial power to all of the archipelago.⁵⁵ As noted, the Dutch had ruled the East Indies indirectly by using the local aristocracy and traditional indigenous hierarchy. As the Dutch expanded their power, a more effective and efficient bureaucracy was needed as well as an increase in the number of indigenous civil servants. In the Ethical Policy period, the traditional custom became a barrier because of the rigid hierarchical relationship among colonial citizens.

Ethical Policy was empowered by some colonial anthropologists and *adat* (traditional custom) specialists of the period, such as Christian Snouck Hurgronje and Cornelis van Vollenhoven.⁵⁶ They suggested the importance of educating and uplifting the Indonesian population was a moral imperative. They argued that the Dutch were obliged to be the guardian of the natives.⁵⁷ In response, journalists often referred in DB to the Dutch as “Bapak” (father) and “Guru” (teacher), representing the Ethical Policy subjection of the Indonesian to the Dutch.

Ethical Policy was also designed to produce a new social relationship between European and natives, crucial to the success of another Ethical Policy goal: the development of a modern state that had a more autonomous relationship with

⁵⁵ Locher-Scholten 1996.

⁵⁶ Gouda 2008: 24.

⁵⁷ Pemberton 1994.

the Netherlands.⁵⁸ The colonial anthropologists suggested integrating Europeans and native civil servants under one comprehensive hierarchical structure.⁵⁹

This suggestion of a new association between Europeans and natives responded to the need for both efficient and effective bureaucracy and the moral duty to civilize the native. The Dutch government then opened schools for middle class natives and villagers. The number of schools increased significantly from the 1890s to the 1910s. According to Kees van Dijk (1997), the students, especially STOVIA⁶⁰, were the first group who dared to change their dress to European style, around 1914. Other groups then followed: lower ranking *priyayi*, teachers, office clerks, and shopkeepers.⁶¹ However, Van Dijk neglects to mention the groups that emerged in the early 20th century who changed their dress to European style: the native organization activists such as Sarekat Islam and journalists.

Ethical Policy had two objectives: the expansion and modernization of the colony, and the moral duty to uplift the native welfare. Proponents of the policy always suggested that the Europeans were the tutor and the guide of the natives. Not all Europeans, however, were willing to play that role. Most Europeans still enjoyed their superior status over the natives. For instance, in DB number 41 a writer who used pseudonym Djokobodo⁶² reported that in Solo, European prosecutors still prohibited Javanese witnesses from taking a seat. The journalists

⁵⁸ Encyclopedie van Nederlandsche-Indie in Gouda 2008: 24.

⁵⁹ Gouda 2008: 24.

⁶⁰ STOVIA is an abbreviation of School tot Opleiding van Inlandsche Artsen (school for the training of native physicians).

⁶¹ Dijk, K.V. 1997, p.61.

⁶² Djokobodo means stupid boy.

then argued that in this era, the witnesses should have a seat as long as they dressed in an appropriate style.

Journalists in explained in DB that there were two types of Dutch belief with regard to the native people: that natives could become civilized, and that they could not. Ethicists and “humanitarian dreamers” held the first belief.⁶³ The ethicists were mostly people who were born in Europe and had just arrived in the colony. Starting in the Liberal period (what years?), many Europeans came to the colony as “the businessmen and entrepreneurs, representatives of financial interests, and civil administrators.”⁶⁴ They typically helped children of aristocratic families engage in modern education. This group composed only one quarter of the number of Europeans in the Dutch East Indies, but they showed a more friendly manner to the natives and were willing to act as tutors. The group of people in opposition to the ethicists believed that Indonesians were childlike and ignorant. This group was mostly the Europeans who were born in the colony, and they composed about 75% of the Europeans in the colony.⁶⁵ This group was attacked in DB by journalists who challenged “colonial administrative order and all its trappings: Dutch superiority, *priyayi* arrogance, and the social barriers imposed upon native society.”⁶⁶

The Negotiation of Identity of Indonesians

As a part of the colonial government’s desire to modernize the colony, the Governor of the Dutch East Indies published *Hormat Circulaire* (HC). The main

⁶³ Gouda 2008, p. 25.

⁶⁴ Van Niel 1960, p. 12.

⁶⁵ Van Niel 1960, p. 13.

⁶⁶ Gouda 2008, p. 27.

purpose of the circulars was to remove traditional customs from the bureaucracy and to replace them with the European manner. In one circular, in 1890, the Governor ordered the Europeans to encourage and help the natives to speak in Dutch⁶⁷. In 1904 the Governor required every European resident and heads of colonial offices to associate with and cooperate with natives in an appropriate manner: the Europeans were prohibited from being rude to the natives.⁶⁸ This second circular also announced that the exchange of native traditional custom for European custom had to be gradual, starting with treating the natives gently. On April 3, 1906 the Governor ordered the European officials to eliminate native custom from the colonial bureaucracy and exchange it with a more “normal” and “proper” style: the European salutation.⁶⁹ In 1909, the Governor not only obliged the Europeans to encourage natives to speak Dutch but also ordered the Europeans to speak Dutch when they communicated with natives who were able to do so.⁷⁰

Circulaire No. 2014 was issued in 1913 and signed by the secretary general of Dutch East Indies. It was addressed to the heads of regional administration offices⁷¹ to ensure that their officers, both European and Indonesian, obey the new salutation regulation. Circulaire No. 2014 repeated the previous circulars' orders regarding the salutation regulation, noting that there had been five previous circulars about salutation since 1890, with the latest one in 1913. Circulaire No.

⁶⁷ Helping and encouraging the natives to speak Dutch was the main point of the circular of September 10, 1890 Number 2198 (*Doenia Bergerak* Number 32)

⁶⁸ This was the point of the circular of August 20, 1904 Number 3222 (*ibid*)

⁶⁹ *Doenia Bergerak* Number 32

⁷⁰ *Doenia Bergerak* Number 32

⁷¹ The head of regional administration offices were always European. In a region, the highest rank of European officers was called Resident.

2014 aimed to remind and emphasize to the colonial officials the importance of obeying the regulation. This circular, however, represented the failure of government officials to implement the regulation about salutation.

A copy of Circulaire No. 2014 was published In DB Number 32, and the journalists used it for justification when they attempted to persuade the commoners to change their dress to Western style. Although this circular did not include the exchange of dress, the journalists interpreted it as the legitimization of the commoners' dress transformation. With this interpretation, the journalists found the power to legitimate their resistance to *adat madjapaitan* that had located the commoners at the lowest level of colonial society for centuries. Moreover, the journalists used the circular to mock and resist the ruling class of the colonial society. Thus, situated at a relatively high rank of society, the journalists were able to attack the aristocratic Indonesians and even the Europeans who had disobeyed the government regulation of new salutation, while as the representatives of Indonesian commoners, they aimed to elevate the commoners to a higher status in society

By following HC, the journalists were seemingly obedient to colonial regulation. At the same time, however, they used the power of colonial regulation to attack colonial authority and thus disturbed the colonial order. The journalists were ambivalent: in a position between obedient and disobedient to colonial power. The dress transformation of the commoners thus was neither merely an imitation of Western culture nor merely a desire to be seen as European. Rather, this transformation represented the political identity negotiation of the commoners. By

wearing Western clothes, the commoners broke both the traditional identity hierarchy and colonial identity hierarchy.

Ironically, if the governor of Dutch East Indies established the circular in order to create a more efficient and professional bureaucracy, the journalists used it for another purpose. Criticizing the rulers who were disobedient to the HC was the most common issue in DB during 1914 and 1915. For example, in DB number. 8, 1914, a journalist wrote an article entitled *Menghormati Haroes dengan Sepantasnya* (Honoring must be appropriate) about differences between types of colonial citizens: those who loved to be treated like a king by the commoners, and those who followed the new ideals of social relationship. The writer assumed the role of a guardian of the HC and reported violations of the regulation. However, he went further by categorizing the disobedient officials as crazy people, snobbish people, bootlickers, and aggrandizers.

He expounded: “Snobbish people and aggrandizers, of course, do not obey this regulation, because in their minds they are the rulers: people who have power like a god or a king and deserve worship from little people. If most people do not want to obey the new regulation, our salutation custom will remain the old one, which is *modjopaitan* custom.”⁷²

The journalist in the role of the defender of HC encouraged the readers to wear Western dress, especially when they, who were commoners, met with aristocrats or the Dutch. “Don’t be afraid of being scolded by the snobbish

⁷² *Menghormati Haroes dengan Sepantasnya* (Honoring must be appropriate)
In DB number 8, 1914, *Menghormati Haroes dengan Sepantasnya* (Honoring must be appropriate)

aristocrats. The most important thing is we already honor them in the right way, which is the modern way and with the spirit of freedom. People who disagree with that attitude can be seen as crazy men.”⁷³

The DB journalists argued that the commoners now had a new awareness regarding social relationship. The journalists believed that there was no essential difference between the aristocrats or high-ranking people and the commoners; therefore, the *adat madjapaitan* custom was no longer needed. The journalists emphasized that the natives could now access modern education, create organizations, and practice a modern lifestyle. This access broke the cultural hierarchy. “Now is the era of change, every bad thing must change, the snobbish must come down to earth and not be arrogant.”⁷⁴

Furthermore, the journalists categorized people who wore traditional dress and used traditional custom as the enemy. They were the group that had to be challenged. The article thus articulated the awareness of the journalists about how the aristocratic group had benefited from the previous colonial systems and did not want to lose their advantage. In DB number 20, a writer who used the pseudonym Lid I.J.B. No. 246 (member of IBJ number 246), reported that the European officials in the Department of Forestry restricted the native officials from wearing Western dress, and demanded the natives call them “kanjeng,” meaning lord in Javanese. The

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ *Menghormati Haroes dengan Sepantasnya* (Honoring must be appropriate), DB number 8 1914.

journalist also noted that these officials demanded that the natives kneel in front of them. Finally, the journalist called these European officials snobbish persons.⁷⁵

In the mid-1910s, the journalists produced a redefinition of colonial subject. The journalists defined the people, both Indonesians and Europeans who used *adat madjapaitan*, as the enemy. For example, a journalist reported how *adat madjapaitan* was used by a native regent for his own benefit and that of the Europeans. Using the *adat madjapaitan*, a Javanese regent could force the commoners to rent their land to European businessmen at a lower price than its true value. The journalist then argued that the power of *adat madjapaitan* as well as its practitioners were their enemy.⁷⁶

This was the period when the journalists, who came from the commoner culture, struck back at the group who had dominated and subjugated them for centuries. If the elite colonial group called the commoners stupid and animal, the journalists called the colonial group crazy people, snobbish people, bootlickers, and aggrandizers.

Another article used a satirical style to illustrate how traditional dress was used as a means of suppression: "Hey Javanese, what is the purpose of throwing away your *kaen* (batik clothes) and head cloth? And changing to shoes and suits? Because if you use this clothing, you will not bow and bend on your knees to honor me [...] hey Javanese, do not throw away that custom, because your custom shows

⁷⁵ *Hormat Circulaire tidak diendahkan* (*Hormat Circulaire* is neglected), DB number 20.

⁷⁶ *Menjamboet karangan Toean-toean Sambermata dan Wisanggeni* (A respond to Mr. Sambermata's and Mr. Wisanggeni's articles), DB number 5, 1914.

that you are obedient, now give me your fields!"⁷⁷ By understanding how *adat madjapaitan* was used by the aristocrats and Europeans, the journalists realized how colonialism worked against them. This was the period when the journalists, who came from the commoner culture, struck back at the group who had dominated and subjugated them for centuries.

Awakening Nation

For the journalists, wearing Western dress meant challenging the power that had colonized the commoners materially and mentally. The colonial power had made them obedient and even obsequious. The colonial cultural engineering, especially through clothes regulation, had located the commoners in so powerless a position that they did not have any strength to resist. In fact, the commoners did not even realize that they were being colonized.

A journalist who used the pseudonym Wibisana,⁷⁸ wrote a radical article about cultural manipulation by the colonialists and the awakening of national solidarity among the natives. In DB number 39, Wibisana reported racial marginalization of Indonesians in a package shipping service. He explained that the European manager always prioritized service to the Dutch first, then the Chinese, and finally the natives. Despite being marginalized, the natives were never resentful. Wibisana explained that this kind of native person represented the majority of commoners—they were still sleeping.

⁷⁷ DB number 7, 1914.

⁷⁸ One of Ramayana epoch characters who betrayed Rahwana, his big brother, to join Rama, the hero of the story, to defeat Rahwana.

Wibisana wrote: "When we were still sleeping soundly, our ears were deaf so we could not hear the voices that humiliated us. Our eyes were blind so we could not see every action that disparaged our dignity. And our mouth was unable to speak even one word to resist every humiliation toward us. Now the world is changing, so we have to wake up and change the way we think and see. We have to change our direction. With our power and bravery, we must force other nations to see that we are also human."⁷⁹

In Wibisana's article, as well as in many other articles, the metaphor of the sleeping of a nation and the feeling of dehumanization were used to resist the people who had colonized and dehumanized the commoners. Later in his article he showed that the commoners had already awakened, realized what had happened, and were ready to resist. The article argued that the awakening of a nation emerged as the commoners became aware of their history of humiliation. Wibisana then attempted to persuade the commoners to combat the humiliation by "honoring yourselves, honoring your humanity, honoring your nationality!"⁸⁰

The dress transformation illustrated the agency of the Indonesian in the construction of self during the later colonial period. When the commoners wore Western dress, they took modern disciplines into themselves and acted and behaved through the modern body discipline: they became more rational and professional. Furthermore, engaging with modern disciplines meant activating emancipation and participation in the society. They began to speak out and challenge the groups that

⁷⁹ DB number 39

⁸⁰ ibid

had dominated them. Western dress thus elevated the natives from passive victims of colonial domination to active political actors in colonial society. This transition was represented in seeing themselves as people who awoke from sleeping.

Modernism not only took Indonesians to a Western lifestyle and rationalism but also provided them with the tools to research their history. For centuries they had been powerless and hopeless, and the articles in DB articulated the frustration of the commoners. Through the lens of modernism, the Indonesians realized they had been humiliated, colonized, and marginalized. At the same time modernism gave them the power to resist the colonial power and its aspects. Dress transformation thus represented the resistance to colonial power. Through exchanging the dress, they refused to continue the colonial domination toward them and at the same time they imagined a new society that located them in a better place. Furthermore, the dress transformation broke the construction of nationhood: from distinct and diverse nations according to ethnic bonds to one nation according to a political bond.

An article written by Mas Marco about engagement preceding marriage articulated the kind of society that the journalist-activists imagined. Marco argued that by this time a native woman should be able to marry a European man, because many native women were well educated and as modern as European men. Marco argued that arranged marriage had to be combated because it perpetuated the inequality among citizens. Instead, a marriage had to be based on equality and love. Marco's idea about the equality between native women and European men represented the imagination of a new society in the colony: a society where each

citizen is equal before the law. Another journalist articulated the same idea by saying that the schools in the colony should not be based on race. Instead of Javanese schools, Chinese schools, and European schools, the journalist argued that there should be only one kind of school: the Indies school. The journalists never used the word nationalism in their writing, but their writings represented the emergence of new imagination of a nation, the imagination that could occur only after the breaking of the cultural and mental barriers among citizens of the colony. The transformation of dress both promoted and represented the shift of the Indonesian into a new phase of political struggle against colonialism.

C. Epilogue

In 1915, the colonial government arrested Marco because four articles in DB violated the colonial press law. Marco was put into jail, and DB stopped its publication. Some journalists and activists protested the government's action, asking it to free Marco. Among the participants of the protest was Henk Sneevliet, the founder of Indies Social Democratic Association (ISDV), the embryo of the Communist Party of Indonesia.⁸¹ Some Eurasians who were members of Insulinde also participated in the protest.⁸² Marco, as the representative of the journalists, was a symbol of anti-colonial attitude.

The protest was successful. Marco gained his freedom six months earlier than the official sentence. Despite celebrating Marco's freedom, Sosrokoornio, Marco's counterpart in DB and in SI branch Surakarta, said that Marco should not

⁸¹ Shiraishi 1990, p. 85.

⁸² Ibid.

have been freed early because *nationalitetitsgevoel* (national solidarity) had just emerged as an impact of Marco's imprisonment. He explained that Marco's incarceration caused elements of the radical movement to unite; it also opened the debate about the form of a new nation.⁸³ The radical and the conservative activists debated with one another whether the new nation should be based on nationalism or ethnocentrism.⁸⁴ Nationalism, Islamism, and communism all influenced the activists. After the era of dress transformation came the era of motion,⁸⁵ a more radical movement against colonial power.

This paper argues that the emergence of Indonesian activism against the colonial power would never have happened if the Indonesians had not broken the social and cultural hierarchies of the colonial society. Only after the Indonesians stood at the same level with the Europeans and other nationalities, could the Indonesian anti-colonial movement emerge. Abdul Riva'i, in an article about *kaum muda* in 1905, argued that the only way to combat a nation whose people are intellectuals is through intellectuality.⁸⁶ Thus, to combat modern people's power one must use modernism. The transformation of dress to modern style, therefore, represents the historical rupture in Indonesian subject formation—from traditional to modern—as well as the beginning of the formation of national identity. After 1915, the anti colonialism attitude among Indonesians increased as did the number

⁸³ *Sarotomo* Number. Extra, 1916.

⁸⁴ Shiraishi, T. (1981). The disputes between Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo and Soetatmo Soerikokesoemo: satria vs. pandita. *Indonesia*, 93-108.

⁸⁵ Shiraishi 1990.

⁸⁶ *Bintang Hindia*, 1902, Number 3.

of Indonesians who wore Western dress. Marco's novel *Student Hidjo* published in 1918, portrayed the increase of Western dress in a Sarekat Islam meeting.⁸⁷

The first half of the 1910s was the period when Indonesians put their traditional dress into the closet, to be worn as costumes only for special occasions. Modern dress became their daily dress. This transformation of dress played a pivotal role in accelerating the national solidarity feeling, national identity, and subsequent movements against colonial power. Thus transformation of dress was neither merely the imitation of the colonizer's culture nor merely obedience to colonial rules. It was a quiet form of rebellion.

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⁸⁷ Kartodikromo, Mas Marco. 1999. *Student Hidjo*. Semarang: Masman en Stroink.

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