
WHOSE PATH TO MODERNITY? NATIONALISM AND THE CHRISTIAN MINORITY ELITE

Geert Arend van Klinken. *Minorities, Modernity and the Emerging Nation: Christians in Indonesia, a Biographical Approach*, Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, no. 199. (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2003). 285 pp.

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Klinken's book brings a new eye and a novel set of concerns to a period of Indonesian history that has already received a great deal of scholarly attention: the period beginning in the 1910s with the awakening of a national consciousness and ending in 1950 with the achievement of an internationally recognized Indonesian republic. Whereas most histories of this period have tended to focus on revolutionaries and radicals, Klinken chooses instead to focus on a number of prominent Indonesian Christians who sought to bring about political reform through collaboration with colonial and occupying powers. Specifically, Klinken traces the political biographies of five main figures, all of whom he characterizes as being part of a modern, middle-class, indigenous administrative elite. According to Klinken, these biographies reveal that the ruptures that have been used to characterize this period of Indonesian history—ruptures brought about by the nationalist struggle, the Japanese occupation, and the revolution—mask a deeper continuity between the colonial and postcolonial eras. As he puts it: "much greater than the difference between colonial and independent Indonesia is the difference between twentieth-century Indonesia (both colonial and independent) and the multiplicity of traditional kingdoms that preceded it."¹

In addition to enriching the body of knowledge about this important era in Indonesian history, Klinken's study speaks to a number of issues of concern to scholars of Indonesia. In this essay, I will take up three of these issues. First, I will address the

¹ Geert Arend van Klinken, *Minorities, Modernity and the Emerging Nation: Christians in Indonesia, a Biographical Approach*, Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde, no. 199 (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2003), p. 2.

issue of methodology. A number of recent studies have made use of, what might be loosely called, a biographical method in their study of modern Indonesian history and culture.² Klinken does so explicitly, but he does so in quite a different way than these other studies. One focus, in what follows, will be to compare Klinken's particular approach to those used by other students of this period. The second issue I will address concerns the use of Weberian ideal types as a framework for interpreting Indonesian political authority. Scholarship on Indonesia has long been dominated by Weberian theories of power, especially in the work of Benedict Anderson, Shelly Errington, and Clifford Geertz.³ But Klinken's use of Weber's theories represents a departure from the interpretive and "localizing" approach to political power in favor of a universalizing typology.⁴ I will examine some of the implications of this change in orientation. The third issue I will address is Klinken's historiographical argument, which involves highlighting a "minority" history as a means to critique nationalist-centric history. While the critique is conceptually promising, I will suggest that Klinken's own historical material seems to show that, even for the Christian minority, nationalism was indeed the decisive force in shaping political positioning in the period leading up to and including the revolution.

The Use of Biography

In *Telling Lives, Telling History*, Susan Rodgers suggests that historians ought to pay more attention to personal narratives in making sense of early twentieth-century Indonesian history. As she puts it, "Indonesians born early in the century know well that their individual lives and their family memories hold these larger eras' historical imprints deep within them in vibrant ways."⁵ While Rodgers's own interest is in autobiography, her observation also holds for biography. There is something about the history of the first half of the twentieth century in Indonesia that seems to lend itself to being told not just in terms of events, but in terms of the intersecting and diverging paths of individual lives. In part, this may be due to the need to memorialize "heroes" (*tokoh-tokoh*) of a newly emergent nationalism.⁶ However, I would suggest that, in more general terms, it is also due to an interest in memorializing the emergence of a

² See, for example, Rudolf Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony*, Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Rudolf Mrázek, *Sjahir: Politics and Exile in Indonesia*, ed. Benedict Anderson (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1994).

³ Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, "The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture," in *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 17-77; Shelly Errington, *Meaning and Power in a Southeast Asian Realm* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

⁴ Oliver W. Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications; Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1999).

⁵ Susan Rodgers, P. Pospos, and Muhamad Radjab, *Telling Lives, Telling History: Autobiography and Historical Imagination in Modern Indonesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 4.

⁶ This encyclopedic tendency is particularly prevalent in Indonesian scholarship and government-sanctioned histories. See, for example, S. Abdulrachman et al., *Tokoh-Tokoh Sejarah Perjuangan Dan Pembangunan Pos Dan Telekomunikasi Di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Departmen Pariwisata, Pos dan Telekomunikasi, 1985); Delia Noer, *Membincangkan Tokoh-Tokoh Bangsa* (Bandung: Mizan Pustaka, 2001).

particular form of modern subject. This subject, defined by his/her capacity to chart a personal path against the backdrops of an imaginable "society" and "history," finds its fullest articulation in the genre of biography.

To shed light on how Klinken represents the emergence of this modern Indonesian subject, it is useful to compare his approach to that used by Mrázek in his recent study of the same historical period.⁷ Although Mrázek does not explicitly use biography in his analysis, he centers his narrative around a series of key personages. These include Kartini, Mas Marco Kartodikromo, Soekarno, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, and others.⁸ Each of the personages is treated as a figure that represents a particular moment, tendency, or possibility in the development of Indonesian nationalist consciousness. For example, Kartini is made to stand for an early moment in Indonesian nationalist consciousness, when it seemed possible that "Europeans" and "natives" might come to share a common modernity. In trying to make sense of the subjectivities and nationalist dreams of each of these personages, Mrázek focuses as much on their writings (e.g., reports, novels, essays, and memoirs) as on their life stories.⁹ However, in each instance, individual lives and works are seen as significant primarily because they function as indexes of much broader historical continuities and changes in the character of Indonesian nationalism.

Klinken's study positions itself on an intermediate ground between more conventional biography and the kind of indexical biography found in Mrázek. He treats his protagonists as indexes of various types of political authority among the Christian elite, while tracing their individual life stories through successive periods of political history.

The attempt to describe several individual life stories against a backdrop of a periodized history leads to a tension in the narrative structure of the book. After a brief introduction to the history of Christianity in the Indies prior to 1920, Klinken dedicates four chapters to describing Indonesian politics and the personal and political biographies of four of his protagonists prior to the Japanese occupation. He then has three chapters that trace what happened in the lives of each of his figures in the context of the Japanese occupation and the revolution. The advantage of this structure is that it highlights the differences in how each of the figures responds to the changing political circumstances of the late colonial, occupation, and revolutionary eras. The disadvantage is that the life stories of the various individuals are broken up into several pieces, making their biographies more difficult to follow.

The particular persons Klinken makes the center of his study were some of the most powerful Indonesian Christians of the late colonial and early Republican eras. Ratoelangie (1890-1949) was born into an elite Tondano family in northern Sulawesi

⁷ Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land*.

⁸ Many of these same figures are also found in James T. Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

⁹ Siegel's approach in *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution* is comparable to Mrázek's, but his focus is almost exclusively on literary texts rather than biography. Thus, for example, he provides an exegesis of Soewardi Soerjaningrat's "Djika saya Nederlander," showing that it represents a moment when the *lingua franca* first enabled Indonesians to imagine themselves as subjects who could shift between identities and escape the confines of being only "native" or "Javanese." Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*, pp. 26-30.

and was schooled in Europe. He was a member of the Nederlandsch-Indische Vrijzinnigers Bond and was elected to the Volksraad, where he represented the largely Christian area of Minahasa. Soegijapranata (1896-1963), a Jesuit and member of the Javanese of the aristocratic *priyayi* class, was one of the first indigenous priests in the Dutch East Indies and became the bishop of Semarang. He was editor of the Catholic *Swara Tama* and effectively headed the Catholic Church in Java during the Japanese occupation. During the revolution, he established a presence for the Church in republican-controlled areas and was highly regarded by nationalist leaders. Goenoeng Moelia (1896-1966) was born in Sumatra, schooled in the Netherlands, and became the Batak representative to the Volksraad. He was active in confessional political parties and an editor of *Zaman Baroe*, a Protestant journal. Kasimo (1900-1986) was born into the royal entourage in Yogyakarta and was educated at the Catholic school in Muntilan and the agricultural high school in Bogor. He helped to found the Javanese Catholic political party, became editor of *Soeara Katholiek*, and served first in the Volksraad and later in various independent parliaments and cabinets. Amir Sjarifoeddin (1907-1948) was born into a Batak ruling clan, went to high school in Holland, converted to Protestantism, edited the *Indo Raja* journal, and was active in nationalist and communist political parties. He served briefly as Prime Minister of the nascent Indonesian republic, but was executed for participating in the Madiun Affair.

For Klinken, all five of these men were representatives of a modern and emancipatory variant of Christianity, one that was quite distinct from the mission variant of Christianity that scholars have usually focused on in the Indonesian context.¹⁰ The former variant was evident only among an elite group of Indonesian Christians, many of whom were heavily influenced by the ethical liberalism that dominated Dutch colonial politics prior to the First World War. This elite carried on and transformed the ethical project in the period after the war, at a time when the political landscape was increasingly divided between Dutch conservatives and Indonesian nationalists. According to Klinken,

[t]his functional elite was always a much larger and more varied grouping than the almost caricatural depiction of them in much recent historiography would suggest. Though hardly non-nationalistic, these were all middle-class townfolk, members of various kinds of minorities with no constituency for radical mass action and a great interest in orderly, constitutional change. They were not alienated from the modern bureaucratic state, believed in economic progress and in gradual rather than sudden Indonesian emancipation...¹¹

In examining the lives of several men from this elite, Klinken gives greatest attention to the positions they took in regards to the major political issues of the time. Thus, information about their career trajectories, political statements, voting records,

¹⁰ Unfortunately, Klinken does not relate his work to the interesting studies produced in this domain in recent years. See, for example: Lorraine V. Aragon, *Fields of the Lord: Animism, Christian Minorities, and State Development in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000); Albert Schrauwers, *Colonial "Reformation" in the Highlands of Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, 1892-1995*, *Anthropological Horizons* 14 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

¹¹ Klinken, *Minorities, Modernity, and the Emerging Nation*, p. 46.

and political alliances is detailed, while information about their childhoods and personal lives is quite summary. Klinken's interest in the changing political stances of each of these men appears to stem from two main concerns. The first relates to his broader objective of determining how they should be classified in a Weberian framework of ideal types of leadership (see below). The second, more implicit, objective is to determine whether or not they succeeded in maintaining an ethical stance under the highly polarized political circumstances of the late colonial period, the occupation, and revolution. Did they support the "non-collaborationists"? How did they respond to German fascism? Did they join with the Republicans during the revolution, and if so, when? Did they promote ethnic pluralism or exclusionism? Were they forward looking or did they resort to "re-traditionalization"? Among his protagonists, Klinken finds a diverse set of answers to these sorts of questions, demonstrating that the Christian minority was far from homogenous in its political outlook. Nonetheless, he does show that underlying these differences were some commonalities: a suspicion of communal politics, a fear of the lower-class masses, and a strong tendency to position oneself on the side of state power (regardless of regime).

Klinken identifies strongly with the forward-looking, moderate, and universalistic ideals represented by a "modern" politics. As he puts it in his Introduction: on "the historic journey to modernity [there were those who] made strides well in advance of some of their contemporaries..."¹² His biographies thus provide the kind of information one would need to establish whether or not the particular choices his protagonists made put them on the side of a modernizing history. Kasimo and Goenoeng Moelia seem to have succeeded at becoming "modern," for example, whereas Ratoelangie remained constrained by an ideology of conservative ethnic nationalism and Amir Sjarifoeddin fell tragically into a "youthful, 'irresponsible' romanticism."¹³

Weber and Indonesia

The central theoretical apparatus that orients Klinken's study is a Weberian framework of ideal types of authority. Weber distinguished between three main types of legitimate authority: charismatic, traditional, and legal-rational. Charismatic authority is based on the personal qualities and achievements of leaders and the attribution of leadership qualities to leaders by their followers. Traditional authority is based on an appeal to a long-established tradition of legitimate authority and customs about succession, etc. Legal-rational authority is based on neither personal qualities nor traditional values, but on a legally established system of rule and an impersonal order of offices. Broadly speaking, Weber envisioned the process of modernization as being characterized by the shift in forms of legitimate authority from charismatic and traditional types to the legal-rational type.

Weber's theory of ideal types of authority has been extremely influential among social scientists seeking to understand Southeast Asian politics in general and Indonesian politics in particular. The most influential works in this vein have been

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

those that sought to "localize"¹⁴ Weber's theory by showing the local idioms in which charismatic and traditional forms of authority are expressed. Anderson's study of the Javanese concept of charisma and its role in a neo-patrimonial state was a foundational essay in this regard, as were Geertz's study of the "theater state" in Bali and Errington's study of gender and potency in Sulawesi.¹⁵ These studies have given rise to numerous refinements, amplifications, qualifications, critiques, and further localizations.¹⁶ In addition to the focus on charismatic and traditional forms of authority, there has also been a great deal of research into the rise of legal-rational authority in the late colonial and postcolonial periods. This literature has also sought to localize Weber's model, either by showing how the process of rationalization was inflected by traditional forms of authority (e.g., Islamic religion and Javanese culture) or by challenging Weber's evolutionism by showing the continuing importance of charismatic and traditional authority in the context of the modern bureaucratic state.¹⁷

Rather than using the Indonesian case as a means to refine or challenge Weber's theory, Klinken takes Weber's theory and uses it as a typology for classifying the leaders he is studying. His use of Weber's theory is universalizing rather than localizing. Thus, we learn that Amir Sjarifoeddin and Soegijapranata were both charismatic leaders, Ratoelangie was a traditional leader, while Kasimo and Goenoeng Moelia were legal-rational leaders. Of course, he does not always find that the individuals fit precisely in one box. Soegijapranata was somewhat of a mixture between the charismatic and legal-rational types, since he was a nationalist (making him charismatic) but worked from within the modern institution of the Church (making him legal-rational). Despite such complications, this classificatory logic runs throughout the text. In fact, it is one of the main principles embedded in the structure of the book, since the grouping of biographies within particular chapters is done according to the type of leadership they represent: Chapter Four for legal-rational types, Chapter Five for traditional types, and so forth. What is gained by this practice of top-down categorization? What does it tell us to know that one leader is a representative of the charismatic type and another a representative of the traditional type? In the end, the significance of belonging to one category or another is derived from the evolutionism of Weber's schema. Thus, it provides a legitimating theory for evaluative claims about the relative progress of a leader's politics: it furnishes a

¹⁴ The idea of "localization" was proposed by Wolters in *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* as a means to study the diversity of Southeast Asian cultural histories. Strictly speaking, Wolters meant the localization of foreign cultural elements. Here, I am using it to describe another of his concerns: examining the different terms in which Southeast Asia-wide cultural forms (e.g., forms of leadership based on evidence of "soul stuff" and "prowess") are expressed in local contexts.

¹⁵ Anderson, "The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture"; Errington, *Meaning and Power in a Southeast Asian Realm*; Geertz, *Negara*.

¹⁶ For example, Ward Keeler, *Javanese Shadow Plays, Javanese Selves* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Koentjaraningrat, *Javanese Culture* (Singapore, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Anthony Crothers Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule* (Tucson: published for the Association for Asian Studies by the University of Arizona Press, 1982).

¹⁷ For example, Joshua Barker, "State of Fear: Controlling the Criminal Contagion in Suharto's New Order," *Indonesia* 66 (October 1998): 7-44; Heather Sutherland, *The Making of a Bureaucratic Elite: The Colonial Transformation of the Javanese Priyayi* (Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books, the Asian Studies Association of Australia, 1979); Anna Lowenhaupt, *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way Place* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

rationale for saying that certain leaders were further along in the "historic journey to modernity."¹⁸

Minorities, Modernity, and Nationalist Historiography

Klinken's focus on minorities and modernity is presented as a critique of nationalist-centric history. He wants to argue that scholarship on twentieth-century Indonesian political history has been so focused on the rise of nationalism that it has lost sight of a much broader historical transition: the transition from tradition to modernity. A focus on minority groups, he suggests, serves to bring this broader transition into view, since these groups were relatively untainted by the polarizing ideologies of nationalism and colonialism. In this respect, their marginality makes them significant because one can find in their thinking and their biographies a set of concerns that stand apart from the immediate concerns of the nationalist struggle.

While it is certainly true that studies of twentieth-century Indonesian history have been dominated by an interest in nationalism, it is not the case that this interest has resulted in a failure to examine the transition to modernity. In fact, almost all the major accounts of the rise of Indonesian nationalism situate this rise within the broader context of bureaucratization, technological change, and the emergence of modern consciousness. In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson specifically links the origins of nationalism to the advent of print-capitalism and such scientific and bureaucratic technologies as the map and the census.¹⁹ Takashi Shiraishi argues that the emergence of radicalism in Java took place in an "age in motion" when people and ideas were circulating in hitherto unimaginable ways.²⁰ And Mrázek argues that the *problem* of Indonesian nationalism was that it was so heavily inscribed by the fascination with technological modernity that it lost sight of its social roots.²¹ Furthermore, there are a number of shorter studies that focus explicitly on the emergence of modernity, with only passing reference to nationalism. Kenji Tsuchiya, for example, has described the emergence of a specifically modern perception of the landscape that accompanied the advent of train travel.²² Similarly, Anderson has examined autobiography to explore changing perceptions of time and life history in the transition from Javanese tradition to modernity.²³

What is distinct about Klinken's work is not its focus on modernity, but its focus on minority politics. To my knowledge, there have been relatively few works explicitly addressing minority (i.e., Christian and Chinese) politics during the early twentieth

¹⁸ Klinken, *Minorities, Modernity, and the Emerging Nation*, p. 4.

¹⁹ Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd rev. and extended ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1991).

²⁰ Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912-1926* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

²¹ Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land*.

²² Kenji Tsuchiya, "Kartini's Image of Java's Landscape," *East Asian Cultural Studies* 25,1 (March 1981): 1-20.

²³ Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, "A Time of Darkness and a Time of Light: Transposition in Early Indonesian Nationalist Thought," in *Perceptions of the Past in Southeast Asia*, ed. Anthony Reid and David Marr (Singapore: Heineman, 1979).

century.²⁴ While there appears to be an effort within Indonesia to begin uncovering such a history for the Chinese, I am not aware of any such effort regarding *pribumi* (non-Chinese native) Christians.²⁵ Klinken's book stands as an important contribution on this front. (It would have been interesting if Klinken's cast of characters had also included some Chinese Christians, because this "double minority" might well have experienced politics in somewhat different terms than their *pribumi* contemporaries.)

What then do we learn by seeing early- to mid-twentieth-century Indonesian politics through the lens of the Christian minority elite? Does it cause us to rethink existing nationalist-centric history? If anything, the minority lens seems to reinforce the notion that nationalism was the defining feature of politics in this period. Nearly all the political positions articulated by the minority were framed by the conflict between nationalists and the colonial state. This was already the case in the late colonial period, but became even more evident in the heated context of the revolutionary period.

Perhaps it is not surprising that minority politics would be defined so strongly by nationalism. After all, in *The Spectre of Comparisons*, Anderson argues that the very concept of "minorities" in Southeast Asia came into existence only with the rise of nationalism and the maturing of late colonial states.²⁶ Local minorities—whether conceived of in religious or ethnic terms—were the groups with which minority Whites created coalitions in order to counter the emergence of a majority nationalist "we."²⁷ According to Anderson, the status of such minorities after independence was largely determined by the specific character and history of the nationalist struggle. In Indonesia, nationalism was characterized by inclusiveness and minorities, therefore, were included in the post-independence elite.²⁸

I would argue that Klinken's research should be read not as a critique of nationalist-centric history, but as a refinement of Anderson's thesis regarding minorities in Southeast Asia. In its broad outline, Anderson's argument is borne out by Klinken's research. Klinken's biographies show that elite *pribumi* Christians were indeed drawn into the colonial state as coalition partners for the Dutch, and later, the Japanese. They feared communalism (i.e., the "we" of the masses) and only chose to support the republican cause very late. After independence, several achieved high offices in the reconstituted state. Nonetheless, Klinken's research also shows that this group was far from homogenous in its political orientation. Sjarifoeddin became a

²⁴ One of the reasons for this is that it is difficult to define a minority in this context. In terms of ethnic groups, there has never been a statistical majority, even if the Javanese have long dominated the political establishment. And in terms of religion, every religion and system of belief that is not Islamic could be said to be a minority.

²⁵ Research in the English language on the Chinese has tended to focus either on their role in the economy or on their role in popular literature. In the latter regard, James Siegel and Claudine Salmon have both drawn attention to the important role played by Indies Chinese in developing the print culture that acted as a foundation for various expressions of modern consciousness, including nationalism. See Claudine Salmon, *Literature in Malay by the Chinese of Indonesia: A Provisional Annotated Bibliography* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International; Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1981); Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*.

²⁶ Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 318.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 320.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

Communist, Ratoelangie embraced ethnicized politics, and Kasimo and Moelia remained suspicious of any form of ideological politics. There was, as Klinken argues, a great deal of diversity within this minority group, and individual political stances could be quite distinct. In other words, even if minority politics were constrained by structural factors originating in nationalism and the colonial state, they were not entirely determined by them.