

# ON HUMANISM

## Exploring the Concept of Humanism in Indonesia

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### Abstraksi

Konflik yang menghiasi peradaban bangsa Indonesia terasa demikian mengoyak humanisme. “Kemanusiaan yang beradab” terasa asing di negara kita. Keberadaban di banyak tempat telah mendadak lenyap. Yang ada malahan kebalikannya, kebiadaban. Tulisan ini mencoba menguak kembali ide-ide yang pernah dimiliki oleh para pendiri negara ini khususnya dalam mendulang konsep tentang humanisme. Kita diingatkan kembali. Ditegur malahan, untuk mengupayakan peradaban kemanusiaan baru di negeri tercinta ini. Segala upaya politis untuk meredam konflik dan kekerasan tidak boleh menyisihkan prinsip-prinsip humanis.

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A series of profound and enriching discourses on humanism, which is many times have mirrored the influence of the modern concept of humanism to our intellectuals or thinkers, in the various newspapers have raised some questions in my mind. What is the contribution and relevance of this discussion to our country that is raising discourses and actions on human promotion? Can we track the echo of the concept of such a modern concept of humanism to the half-naked inhabitants of the jungle in our isolated areas, such as the people in Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Irian Jaya? Can we identify the concept of such a modern humanism in the different faces and expressions in our country, Indonesia? Or, by being involved in the discussion, do our scholars and intellectuals start to build their status as a new bourgeois who is only expert in the room of discussion but immune from the concrete and dark-unending struggle of the people in our country in increasing our quality of life? In its turn, somehow, such questions intrigue me to explore the concept on humanism in our country. I do realize since in the beginning that exploring such a huge concept is really a big project. The next questions that came up in my mind were how do I start? How do I inventory the resources that can be accessed and should be taken into account? What kind of approach or method I can use? Won't I find the classical difficulty that is the epistemological question? Instead of just being captured by those difficulties, somehow, I should start, just by using some resources I can access, even if it is only a small step on the long journey. Otherwise, I will not start and will do nothing.

It seems to me that investigation of the discussion among the Indonesian founding fathers, concerning the formation of the state and nation, can be a fruitful initial step in exploring Indonesian concept on humanism. This study, then, is intended to track concept of humanism in Indonesia by examining the discussions and negotiations that were conducted in 1945 and thereafter in Indonesia, concerning

the formation of the state and nation. Investigating the main themes of the founding fathers' discussions in that time apparently will help us to identify how Indonesians have pictured and reflected themselves either as a nation or as human beings. And since in that period the themes of the European ideological discourses were also focused on humanism, it is not impossible that the concepts of humanism of our founding fathers, to a certain measure, were also influenced by the certain western schools, such as existentialism and Marxism. Another aim of this study, then, is to identify the influences of Western concept of humanism on the Indonesian's. To pursue this project I will first present the discussion of the founding fathers about the state and nation in 1945 and after, and then reflect on its implications on the concept of humanism. In this step I will also identify the influences of western concept of humanism, especially Marxism, on the Indonesian's. Second, I will investigate the implications of this concept on some political policies in Indonesia today.

## **An Exploration of A new State and Nation**

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Instead of giving a chronological story of what was happening in the period, in which our leaders had striven to find a suitable format for the new state and nation after the long and tiring war of 1945 and after, I would rather giving some notable information and present the dominant issues in relation to the idea of a new nation and state. At first, while challenged to find the form of a new nation and state, our leaders should formulate the objectives, nature, and sources, of the Indonesian State and nation. Our leaders, during this time, were also facing some crucial issues. In this period people were still in the strong trauma of imperialism and colonialism of the Western world. In such an atmosphere the leaders had to find a sort of *elan vital* that could energize and motivate people to build a new nation. The other fact should be faced is that awareness that Indonesia contains so many different ethnic groups, languages, economical resources, religions, and even various local histories as a background. Moreover, geographically some inhabitants were so scattered and isolated in the different islands so that people were out of touch.

The second, there were four outstanding founding fathers that were involved as the key persons in the process of preparations. They are: Sukarno, the intellectual, politician, and later, President; Muhammad Yamin, the historian and lawyer; Soepomo, professor in *adat* (traditional) law at the former college in Batavia, and Mohammad Hatta, the economist graduated from Rotterdam, Netherlands (Holtzappel, Nationalism 68). Actually there were some other figures, in the stage of post-war Indonesian, that had been involved in the discussions, especially the members of PPKI and BPKI<sup>1</sup>, which had had an European education. But it is

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1 BPKI was the committee for Examination of Independence or Badan Penyelidikan Kemerdekaan Indonesia. It was formed with the permission of the Japanese occupational administration. This committee completed

obvious that the ideas of the key founding fathers colored and dominated strongly the discussions, either in the formal meetings or in the informal discussions (Holtzappel, Nationalism 70-71).

The third, there were three main tendencies of alliances that should be taken into account during that period, namely: 1) the progressive nationalism of Sukarno, Which based itself on the co-operation between Marxists; 2) the conservative one, which based itself on co-operation between government bureaucracy, the new middle class, and the army; 3) and The Islamic nationalism, which see Islam as an instrument of Indonesian nationalism.<sup>2</sup>

Let me start mapping out the main raising ideas that came up during that time. First of all, it is obvious that the founding fathers and most post-war Indonesian Intellectuals believed that in the face of traumatic experiences, the fact of plurality, and the challenge to move forward as a new nation, nationalism is an effective and valuable instrument of national development (Holtzappel, Nationalism, 70). This conviction is in tune with European concept from the eighteenth century Enlightenment that “society can be made/constructed”. The element that in the first place brings the various currents and “school” of thought together, is the idea that nationalism is not just any ideology. Nationalism, to all post-war leaders of Indonesia, is a strategy of central interest to country. On the one hand, it concerns the struggle for political and economical independence, on the other, the struggle for internal development.

The critical and authentic question concerning the idea of nationalism in Indonesia, then, is what is the source of unity that should be accommodated to build nationalism? Is it language, history, territory, tradition, or race? In the absence of a homogenous and uniform cultural heritage that could serve as the source of the new state and nation, it was important to find out the source, that is common objectives and values, that can be accommodated as the basis of nationalism. This basis of nationalism should be able to unite the heart and mind of the Indonesians in striving for independence and development. In this struggle all would go through the mill and learn to shape themselves on the basis of national objectives and values. Thus, one was to be able to loosen one’s ties with local roots, and class or town background. Only on that basis of such common objectives and values that independence can be achieved and independent national development be successful. Such a nationalism, which is shaped by common objectives and values, was ready for battle and primarily oriented to the future. It did not tie itself to what Indonesia was or is, but rather strive for a new Indonesia. Only that Indonesia could be the real Indonesia.

It is obvious that it should be invented the common objectives and values that could unite and guide the minds of the Indonesians and substitute for the loss of local

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its task in July 1945. While PPKI (Panitia Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia) was the Committee for the Preparation of Independence of Indonesia that laid down the definitive text on 18 August 1945. These two committees had several meeting in preparing the concept of nation and state.

2 Among others alliances Coen Holtzappel mentioned these tree strong alliances.

culture, religion, and local history as sources of Indonesian nationalism. In emphasizing the need of a new state and nation that is tied by nationalism on the certain occasion Sukarno said:<sup>3</sup>

“We see in this world that there are many nations which are free, and that many of those free nations exist on the basis of a Weltanschauung, i.e. the Marxist Historical-Materialistic Weltanschauung. Nippon established the nation Dai Nippon on the basis of Tenno Koodoo Seishin,...Saudi Arabia, Ibn Saud established the state of Arabia on a Weltanschauung, even on a religious basis, i.e. Islam. Idealists in the entire world worked to the utmost in the creation of various types of Weltanschauung... (as quoted, *Holtzappel, Nationalism*, 73)

Obviously, Sukarno viewed Weltanschauung as a deliberately constructed product of political idealists who provide the country with a new spiritual or moral foundation. In this way, finally man become master of his own history and his own legal rules and morals. Regarding the principle of the common objectives and values of the nationalism Sukarno cited the ideas of Ernest Renan:<sup>4</sup>

“Nationalism! To be nation! It was no later than the year 1882 that Ernest Renan published his idea of concept of “nationhood”. “Nationhood”, according to this author is a spirit of life, an intellectual principle arising from two things: firstly, the people in former times had to be together to face what came, secondly, the people now must have the will, the wish to live and be one. Not race, nor language, nor religion, not similarity of needs, nor the borders of the land make that nation... (as quoted, *Holtzappel, Nationalism*, 74).

Being weaned by the tradition and culture, the Indonesians as human beings are placed in their free stand. They aren't burdened by a certain moral conception or standard of human beings. They are distanced from a certain conception of human beings that might be inherited from the traditional perspectives. Human beings in such a new perspective are the concrete and free beings. Moreover, by his idea of new nationalism Sukarno, influenced by Marxism<sup>5</sup>, erased the social stratification that had been living in the several feudalistic communities of the society in our country.

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- 3 As quoted by Coen Holtzappel from “*Naskah Persiapan Undang-Undang Dasar 1945*” (edited by Mohhammad Yamin) this statement was made by Radjiman as requested by Sukarno. This statement, then, delivered by Sukarno in a meeting and then colored the spirit of BPKI and PPKI meeting.
  - 4 As quoted by Coen Holtzappel Sukarno's article, that was published in Soeloeh in 1926, became the spirit of the BPKI and PPKI meetings.
  - 5 It is obvious also that in the course of time Sukarno was influenced strongly by Marxism. And his concern to the real people indicates that he knew that Marxism should be close to the real-concrete people (Marxist-existentialist), that is the poor. That is why during his time he was expected as “the just king” that would save the people from the poverty. The Film “The Year of Living Dangerously” demonstrated that finally Sukarno was intrigued by the promises of Capitalism, represented by USA power (See Sartre, *Search For A Method* 17-21, 31).

It is obvious that the idea of nationalism as thought by Sukarno dominated and colored strongly the discussions in this period, and it seems that most leaders agreed to this conception. The problem followed, then, was in correlation to the system of state. In this case there were two strong different opinions. The first was Sukarno and his alliance's opinion that the form of state is a sort of unitary state, in which the individual freedom and right should be subjected to the goal of the unitary state. Also the presidential system, in this case Sukarno adopted the American System as a model of new democratic country, is believed as a suitable system for Indonesia. Practically this option gives concentration of executive power in the hands of the President (Holtsappel, Nationalism 76-77). Furthermore, in the face of heterogeneous peoples the conflict or different opinion should be solved by "azas kekeluargaan" (family loyalty) principle. In such a perspective the individual freedom and interests should be subjected to the ideal of the unitary state. Supomo affirmed the idea of Sukarno by stating that "*nothing was allowed to divide state and nation, not even procedure of Constitutional law.*" (Holtsappel, Nationalism 76) It means that right for freedom of the people and even procedure of Constitutional law should be subjected to the ideal of the unitary state.

As a well western-educated figure Hatta disagreed to ideas of presidential system and "azas kekeluargaan" principle by showing the danger of political abuse of power. He mentioned the risk that a President, as the highest law-making power in the country, would manipulate Parliament in order to disable the controlling power of the institution. Hatta also disagreed to the "azas kekeluargaan" principle by demonstrating the risk of abuse of right and freedom of the individual. Unfortunately in the atmosphere of the trauma of imperialism and colonialism, the critical need of the unitary state, and the absence of a homogenous and uniform of cultural heritage, Sukarno's and Supomo's ideas got more support from the majority (Holtsappel, Nationalism 76-77).

## Exploring the concept on Humanism

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By weaning people from their habitat, which are their ethnic background, traditional value system, culture, language, tradition, geographical territory, the founding fathers wanted to set people free from the bondage of the past and put them in the same stand before the law and constitution. Instead of being used as only a living vehicle to perpetuating tradition or system of values and beliefs, people are freed and invited to live and foresee their future according to the common objective and values, which were formulated in the concept of the nationalism and the unitary state. Again, instead of being used as a living vehicle to perpetuate the inherited history, the new Indonesian is invited to create his/her own histories. Who the Indonesians, hence, are not determined by their history in the past rather determined by the way they concretize or express themselves in the process of constructing a new nation and state.

As a strategy, the concept of nationalism and the unitary state was understood as the mean to eliminate the potency of conflict, as a consequence of the fact of plurality, and intended also to destroy a sort of systematical and continuous colonization in the form of the social stratification, as an inheritance of feudalistic society, that calculated and divided people based on the certain social status. In short, in such a way actually Sukarno and the other founding fathers wanted to make the Indonesians as the concrete beings that are free from any determinations and not subjected to the traditional conceptions and moral standards. And such a perspective, it seems to me, is in tune with the concept of the existential humanism and indeed not impossible influenced by the existential humanism, as proposed by Sartre<sup>6</sup> or Heidegger. This influence was made possible by the fact that Sukarno's circle in Netherlands had a regular contact with Hatta's circle in France. This new intellectual generation was well educated in European schools.

Realizing the need of *elan vital* that can energize and unite the hearts and minds of the people, the founding fathers promoted the spirit of nationalism and the unitary state. This strategy can also avoid the risk of the individualistic concept of human beings, since although human beings were weaned from their historical background, they are united by the spirit of nationalism and the unitary state in pursuing the ideals of a independent and developed country. Moreover, the decision to adopt "azas kekeluargaan" (family loyalty) as a moral code underlines the communal dimension of human beings. Accordingly, even though peoples are uprooted from their cultural background so that they become the independent persons, they are still tied by the same spirits that unite them as a one nation and member of the same state.

## Investigating Some Political Policies

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Creating a new society is never a simple project. The decision to uproot peoples from their culture and to create a new nation and state is really a long process, because culture, historical inheritances, and any other elements as a background of human beings are integrated in the real persons. The system of values and system of beliefs as a form of culture usually are integrated in such a way that shape the horizon of the peoples in interpreting or comprehending their experiences, even in understanding their self-identity. Furthermore, social structure and stratification is not only an external-objective fact but it really is incorporated in the mentality and frame of mind of the concrete persons. Such a phenomenon is a sort of critic for the existential humanism, in the sense that human beings are not the closed entities that can be isolated from their culture or context, regarding the fact that their culture and

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6 In his exposition "existentialism is a Humanism" Sartre believes that existence comes before essence. Thus, there is no human nature. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself, he will no be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. (In Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 1946)



historical background, such as system of values and beliefs and social stratification, are integrated or united in the real persons.

Realizing this phenomenon, as far as I am concerned, the Indonesia government has used the field of education as the main mean for the process of interiorization of the concept of nationalism and the unitary state. Consequently, the educational institutions and resources have been mobilized to support the process of socialization of the concept of nationalism and the unitary state until this time. But in the course of time, after the founding fathers generation, many Indonesian leaders do not have the same vision in relation to such a strategy. That is why the process of socialization of concept of nationalism and the unitary state, is actually not succeeding. The raising separation movements that happen along the Indonesian history, it seems to me, can be explained by this context (East Timor, Aceh, Maluku, Irian Jaya).

The other phenomenon that has intrigued me is the product of law. It is obvious that the Indonesian product of law is constructed by accommodating the some traditional values. And unfortunately these values are mainly adopted from the Javanese culture as the culture of majority. This decision shows the ambiguity of the Indonesian leaders, since in the one hand they tried to wean people from their cultural, geographical, and historical background, in the other hand they used the traditional values to construct the product of law that rules the peoples. This phenomenon, to a certain degree, can explain the source of ethnical conflicts in Indonesia today.