

THE IDENTITY OF 'SUMATRA' IN HISTORY

Anthony R e i d (Australian National University)

Any endeavours such as the 1981 Conference on 'North Sumatra', and the present book, raise questions about the most fruitful and appropriate boundaries for scholarly enquiry. Although two of my own books (1969; 1979) are premised on a quite different definition of 'North Sumatra' - including Aceh but excluding Tapanuli - I would be the first to concede that the Hamburg Conference did show the value of looking at the present (since 1956) province of North Sumatra as a distinct unit. Behind this question of definition, however, there lies an older and deeper question, whether Sumatra as a whole should be distinguished as a field of enquiry.

Since William Marsden (1783; 1811) and his less distinguished contemporaries Eschels-Kroon (1781) and Radermacher (1781) published their books within three years, there has been a succession of impressive scholarly monuments to the proposition that Sumatra is a unit - notably Lekkerkerker (1916), Collet (1925), and Loeb (1935). More recently (1971) the Sumatra Research Bulletin aimed to establish a permanent forum for the coherent study of 'one of the most important culture areas of island Southeast Asia'. It was the birth of that admirable journal which set my own thoughts moving on the present topic, although its death four years later led me to wonder whether the question had already been decided in the negative. The degree of objective unity in the language, culture, mythology or economy of Sumatra has not yet been adequately researched, and is too ambitious a subject for this paper. Since scholarship often follows political reality, however (though the reverse process also occurs, as we shall see below), it may be of interest to

trace the self-identification of Sumatrans themselves during their recent history.

Geography has always made it difficult for Sumatra to manifest a single identity, at least as long as the most effective communication was by sea. The Straits of Malacca united the broad rivers of the east coast with the Malay Peninsula and beyond, as the Sunda Straits united the south with Java. The great historical achievements of the people of Sumatra, therefore, never remained exclusively Sumatran. Perversely, even some of the names by which Sumatra first appeared on the historical stage - Melayu (in the Nagarakertagama) and Java (in many Arab sources, including Ibn Battutah) - have been appropriated by Sumatra's neighbours.

There are two major historical achievements, in particular, which might have been expected to form the basis for a Sumatran cultural nationalism in modern times. Firstly the Sri Vijaya empire, centred in Palembang and Jambi, was supreme over all the coastal ports of Sumatra as well as the Malay Peninsula for most of the period from the 7th to the 13th centuries - by far the longest-lived of Indonesia's great powers.

Secondly the Malay language and its literature, now the official language of four countries, was nurtured primarily if not exclusively in a succession of Sumatran centres - Sri Vijaya, Samudra-Pasai, Aceh, Palembang, Riau-Lingga - and was spoken and read throughout the island. It was the very success of this language in becoming first the lingua franca of the Archipelago and then the language of nationalism which prevented it being seen as 'the language of Sumatra' (cf. Roolvink, 1975).

If we compare the career of Sri Vijaya with that of Majapahit in nationalist historiography (Reid & Marr, 1979, pp. 171-85, 287-9), it becomes clear that the former has been at a disadvantage. Both empires of the past had been largely forgotten by the 19th century, though retaining an indistinct aura of a vanished greatness. Because Dutch scholarship was concentrated on Java, Brandes' editions of the Pararaton and the Nagarakertagama provided the basis, at least by the time of Fruin-Mees' popular Geschiedenis van Java (1919), for

incorporating a glorious Majapahit into the textbook view of Javanese, hence Indonesian, history. By contrast Dutch scholarship on Sumatra was modest and uncoordinated. Most of the more ambitious writing on Sumatra was always by non-Dutch scholars, and it was two Frenchmen, Coedes (1918) and Ferrand (1922), who finally established the claims of Sri Vijaya to a former greatness. The impact of their findings on Sumatrans was delayed not only by being relatively inaccessible in French (until incorporated into Dutch textbooks, notably by Krom in the 1930s), but also because the name selected by the scholars, 'Sri Vijaya', had no popular association at all. The legendary greatness of a past Sumatran kingdom was linked in the popular mind with 'Andalas' and 'Pulo Percha', both apparently kingdoms in the headwaters of the Musi or Batang Hari rivers, which must have flourished during the long process by which the aura of Sri Vijaya moved upriver until it eventually settled on the Yang di Pertuan Sakti of Minangkabau, at Pagarruyung (for Andalas see Brown, 1955, pp. 24-5; Pires, 1944, pp. 136, 155, 159-60; for Pulo Percha see Hill, 1961, pp. 103, 170-1; Marsden, 1811, p. 339n.). Even today there appears to be no Indonesian work on Sri Vijaya.

On the other hand, once the centre of British interest in Southeast Asia moved from Sumatra to Malaya (in 1824 at the latest), there were no more works like that of Marsden. British scholarship increasingly tended to associate the heritage of Sri Vijaya and the achievements of the Malay language with the Malay peninsula, notably Singapore (Tumasek) and Malacca - a tradition which laid a natural basis for Malayan cultural nationalism rather than Sumatran.

Nineteenth century writers are probably correct in reporting that Sumatra was then 'without a name familiar to the inhabitants' (Crawford, 1856, p. 413). As an experienced French traveller explained,

When one asks a native of Sumatra what name he gives his island, one has considerable difficulty making oneself understood. He knows the islands, many of them, around him, but Sumatra, with its innumerable countries, its diverse races, its numerous languages, is a world for him. (Brau de St. Pol Lias, 1891, pp. 74-5)

For navigators from elsewhere, on the other hand, the name of the whole was taken from the name of a part - in particular from the strongest kingdom of the northwestern corner which was the first landfall for Arabs, Indians, and Europeans. Lamri (Lamuri, Lambri or Ramni), near present Banda Aceh, gave its name to the whole island for many Arab geographers of the 10th-13th centuries, whereas the rising power of Samudra (or Pasai), near modern Lhokseumawe, had begun to popularise the modern name by the late 14th century (e.g. Nicolo de Conti, Ludovico de Varthema). It is possible, however, as Krom (1941, pp. 22-5) has argued, that the success of Samudra/Sumatra as the name for the whole island also owed something to the older Sanskrit term Suwarnabhumi ('Gold-land') occasionally applied to Sumatra, notably by a Singasari inscription of 1286.

THE HERITAGE OF SRI VIJAYA

The inhabitants of the island only began to call it Sumatra as a result of European influence, for the most part in this century. It was not the north but the centre of the island which carried powerful associations for most of them. These associations must originate with the mantle of Sri Vijaya. The Raja Alam or Yang di Pertuan Sakti of Pagarruyung, despite having very little effective power even within Minangkabau itself, was widely believed to have semi-divine powers as one of the three heirs, along with China and Rum (Constantinople/Turkey), of the world ruler Alexander the Great. At least twice a war-leader was able to arouse widespread support in Sumatra on the basis of a real or alleged connection with the dynasty of Pagarruyung. In the 1680s Ahmad Shah ibn Iskandar obtained support from the rulers of Palembang and Jambi, and from many chiefs in the Lampung and Bengkulu regions, for his intended 'holy war' against the Dutch (Kathirithamby-Wells, 1970, pp. 48-63; Marsden, 1811, p. 337). A generation later, in 1717-18, Raja Kecil used a similar claim to be a prince from Pagarruyung to good effect in seizing the thrones of Siak and Riau (Andaya, 1975, pp. 250-314).

Even the Bataks, relatively more isolated in their mountain valleys, appear to have shared this reverence. According to

Marsden (1811, pp. 376-7),

Notwithstanding the independent spirit of the Battas ... they have a superstitious veneration for the Sultan of Menangkabau, and shew blind submission to his relations and emissaries, real or pretended, when such appear among them for the purposes of levying contributions: ... they think that their affairs would never prosper, that their padi would be blighted, and their buffaloes die: that they would remain under a kind of spell, for offending these sacred messengers.

This remote but attractive Minangkabau supremacy appears to have been ended by the militant expansionism of the Padris in the first three decades of the 19th century. These Islamic reformers may have sought to unite the whole of Sumatra on an Islamic base, with the central valleys of Central and North Sumatra rather than the coastal cities as the power centres (I owe this point to Christine Dobbin). Their aggressive tactics in South Tapanuli, however, had the opposite effect, changing the sacred but remote image of Minangkabau into a hostile and threatening one similar to the long-standing image of Aceh. A recent Batak author (Sangti, 1977, pp. 24-6) has seen the Padri offensive as a crucial watershed which divided the Bataks from each other as well from the Minangkabau. The subsequent adoption of Christianity by the Toba Batak can be seen as a response to this threat to Toba identity.

By the end of the 19th Century, therefore, there was little recollection of any common Sumatran identity or loyalty. Even the anti-Dutch hopes kindled by the Aceh War failed to evoke any such response except among a small group of followers of Singamangaraja XII in the 1880s. The Acehnese leaders wrote to Minangkabau and Batak chiefs for support in 1873, but since their letters were entrusted to a Dutch spy they were unlikely to have reached their destination. Envoys were more successful among the neighbouring Gayo and Karo people, though the envoys to Karo were eventually killed there in 1874, perhaps because of the traditional distrust of Acehnese motives referred to by Singarimbun (1975, p. 6; also Reid, 1969, p. 153).

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

If there was an economic and communications centre for Sumatra

in the 19th Century, it was paradoxically in the British settlements of Penang and Singapore. Since it was there that the trade of Sumatra was concentrated, it was only there that Sumatrans from different ends of the island were likely to meet. For the Acehnese, for example, Snouk Hurgronje argued in 1893 'Penang is the gateway to the world; yes, the world itself' (cited Reid, 1969, p. 269). If Acehnese used the word pulo (island) without further qualification, it meant not Sumatra but Penang.

This same problem dogged the two European powers which, seeing Sumatra as a geographical expression on a map, appointed consuls to it in the 19th Century. The French based their Sumatra consul at Padang, the principal Dutch post, in the period 1856-65, and the British based theirs at Uleelheue, the port which supplied the Dutch forces in Aceh, in 1883-5. Both proved 'a complete failure', since the commerce they were meant to serve had flourished only by avoiding these centres of Dutch power and trading at scores of tiny independent ports along the Sumatran coast (ibid., pp. 198-201).

The Dutch in the 19th Century knew at least two Sumatras - the West Coast and the East Coast - with Palembang as something else again, a little more nearly part of Java. Their earliest newspapers proclaimed themselves Sumatran, but whereas the Sumatra Post (Medan, 1889-) in practice circulated among the planters of East Sumatra, the Sumatra Bode (Padang 1893-) was limited to the West Coast.

Java was physically united by a trunk railway in 1894, speeding up the long-standing network of the post roads. By contrast railway-building in Sumatra laboured to unite not the whole island, but each of the three distinct regions mentioned above. The northern Sumatra network, begun at different ends in the 1880s, finally joined Aceh with Medan and Belawan only in 1916. Similarly in the South, the Lampung line and the Palembang-Lahat line joined in 1927. Meanwhile a third, smaller network developed in West Sumatra from the 1880s. These three distinct networks were never linked, and it was left to road transport finally to accomplish the economic unification of the island. The major boom in road building and in vehicle import to Sumatra

coincided with the high rubber prices of the mid-1920s. The number of trucks and buses imported to Sumatra leaped from 94 in 1924 to 1172 in 1926, while the number of private cars rose in the same period from 539 to 3059. Relative to population, the motor vehicle was playing a larger role in Sumatra than in Java, and at last breaking down the isolation of the island's regions from each other. Although the first 'Sumatra Highway' (longitudinalen weg) was planned in 1916, however, the last bridge linking the southern networks to those of the north and centre was only completed in 1938. It was not a pure coincidence that Sumatra's decade as an autonomous political/administrative unit also began in 1938, and was therefore enacted at a period when internal communication was easier than at any time before or since. During the 1940s Sumatran officials constantly toured the island by car, something only a very brave and patient man would have done in the 1950s and '60s.

'SUMATRAN NATIONALISM'

The heyday of 'Sumatran nationalism' occurred earlier, however - two decades before the structural basis of unity had been laid by this road network. Like so many other Indonesian movements, it began in the Dutch-language school systems, especially the STOVIA Medical School in Batavia. This elite school, which educated the ablest sons of the various Indonesian regions and peoples, had given birth to Budi Utomo and to Jong Java, and it was not surprising that the Sumatran minority of students felt the need of their own vehicle for expressing the common striving for unity and progress. In December 1917 the Jong Sumatranen Bond (JSB) was formed 'for Sumatran young people who are undergoing secondary or vocational education', with the primary aim 'to strengthen the bond between studying Sumatran youth, by driving out all racial feelings (rassenwaan) ... and by posing to each member the inescapable demand that he call himself a Sumatran' (Jong-Sumatra 1918). Its first chairman, the Asahan (East Sumatra) prince Tengku Mansur, emphasized in his opening speech that Sumatrans would continue to be disregarded until they were united. Nevertheless cooperation was necessary not only among Sumatrans but also with the other ethnic groups of

the Indies. The second chairman, Amir, was still more emphatic in rejecting the 'chauvinism' of some who dreamed of separating 'an absolute-Sumatran state and nation' from the Indies bond (JSB 1922, p. 19). As Lance Castles has pointed out (1972, p. 175), these Sumatran nationalists spoke 'the language ... of unity, not division; ... they really had no very cogent reasons why working together should be limited to Sumatra'. Sumatran nationalism was a stage in the movement towards Indonesian nationalism rather than a contradiction of it (as Java nationalism sometimes was, with its deeper cultural associations).

It was not surprising that the sense of Sumatran unity was first felt by students in Batavia, conscious of being outnumbered in an alien environment. However JSB initiative evoked a rapid response in Sumatra itself. Branches of the JSB were established in Bukittinggi and Padang² (where Hatta was an enthusiastic leader) in January 1918, and in Medan the following May. More remarkably, the popular political movements of West Sumatra and Tapanuli went through a striking period of pan-Sumatran enthusiasm between 1918 and 1922. Newspapers like Tjahaja Sumatra, Sinar Sumatra, and Sumatra Bergerak were founded, and unity congresses pledged their faith in Sumatra as 'the island of the future'.

The catalysts of the Sumatran unity conferences were young political activists who happened to have a foot in more than one ethnic group. Xarim M.S. (the later leader of the Sumatran PKI) was a Minangkabau who had grown up between Aceh and East Sumatra; Manullang was a fiery Toba Batak, who as leader of the radical Hatopan Kristen Batak frequently cooperated with the Muslim southern Bataks of Sarekat Islam; and the Angkola Batak journalists Abdulmanap and Parada Harahap both worked with the Sibolga radical newspaper Hindia Sepakat, which drew its readers from Aceh, Tapanuli and West Sumatra. They staged two preliminary unity congresses, at Sibolga and Padang respectively, in the last two months of 1921, campaigning among other things for the removal of the headquarters of the Sarekat Sumatra from Batavia (where it acted primarily as a lobby for the Minangkabau Volksraad members, Abdul Rivai and Abdul Muis) to Sumatra itself

(IPO 1921, pp. 528-32, 568-71).

The high point of this Sumatra Unity movement was a well-attended conference in Padang in July 1922, with Manullang as chairman and Xarim as secretary. The most active political parties in Sumatra at the time, Sarekat Islam and N.I.P. (the former Indische Partij), as well as many local associations in West Sumatra, Tapanuli, East Sumatra and Aceh, sent delegates to the conference. Its radical tone was expressed in a number of resolutions, including one calling for 'a speedy grant of autonomy to Sumatra, because Sumatra hopes for a liberation of the Indies from the tutelage of the Netherlands' (IPO, 1922, II, pp. 42-4; Abdullah, 1971, p. 31). Thereafter, however, the movement declined very rapidly. One reason was the radicalism which brought imprisonment to some of the activists and which frightened some established leaders. Another was the difficulty in agreeing to a headquarters or a leadership which was truly representative. More important still was the fact that the more reforms were demanded of the Dutch government, the more the community of interest with nationalist organizations throughout the Indies became apparent.

Like most of the politicians involved in the Sumatra unity movement, the JSB also moved increasingly into the mainstream of Indonesian nationalism. From 1926 it attended a series of national youth conferences, and it had lost any real dynamic of its own long before it fused into Pemuda Indonesia in 1931. One of the factors which delayed this fusion was the splitting away of a Jong Batak organization in 1926. The Toba Batak students had decided that they would develop their own relationship with Indonesian nationalism as Bataks, rather than through the mediation of what they saw (with some justification) as a Minangkabau-dominated organization. In the more intense spirit of nationalism after 1926 that seemed for many others the obvious path to take.

A sceptic might reasonably point out that the Dutch took up the question of Sumatran autonomy only once they were quite sure that Indonesian political leaders had laid it down. By 1930 the locus of popular politics was firmly that of Indonesian nationalism, and it was the colonial government which moved

cumbrously towards establishing a single 'Province' of Sumatra as one of six large units for the colony. Although the government now said that it wanted to encourage the feelings of 'Sumatraness' which it discerned (van der Harst, 1945, pp. 46-8), nothing was done to this end. The creation of the province, legislated in 1936 and made effective in 1938, was entirely a matter of reorganizing administrative functions. Nothing was done to establish any representative element - even to the extent of the powerless provincial councils in Java. As with every discussion of Sumatran unity, the most difficult question in these colonial debates was that of the capital. Padang was first chosen, and Palembang was considered, but eventually it was at Medan that the first Governor of Sumatra established his residence and offices (*ibid.*, pp. 70-2). The choice emphasized the primacy of European commercial and administrative interests.

SUMATRA IN ISOLATION, 1943-5

As is well known, the Japanese occupation began with a complete denial of Indonesian unity. Instead Sumatra and Malaya were regarded as a unit, 'the nuclear zone of the Empire's plans for the Southern Area', and administered as such by the Japanese 25th Army. The capital of this new unit was Syonan (Singapore), reflecting the economic realities of the 19th Century better than the political and cultural ones of the 20th. This experiment broke down mainly as a result of increasing Japanese communications difficulties between islands, but also because the legal and political systems on the two sides of the Straits were by now far apart. In May 1943 the link with Malaya was broken, and the 25th Army took charge of Sumatra alone. Now the capital was shifted to Bukittinggi, not so much in deference to the 'cultural centre' of Sumatra, as some Minangkabaus liked to claim, as out of strategic calculations.

The slogan favoured by the 25th Army thereafter was 'Sumatera Baru' - New Sumatra. All links between Indonesians in Sumatra and those in other islands were cut, and no talk of Indonesian nationalism was allowed. Until the last moment, however, the Japanese did virtually nothing to develop a positive Sumatran

identity to fill this gap. The administration was very decentralized, with each residency (shu) having to develop its own economy and its own consultative bodies. Only in a few pan-Sumatran specialist schools and a couple of all-Sumatra delegations to Japan could Sumatrans from different residencies gather to develop a common strategy or feeling. It cannot have helped encourage a Sumatran political leadership when the outspoken leader of the all-Sumatra delegation to Japan in October 1943, T.M. Hasan (of Glumpang Payung, Aceh), was executed by the Kenpeitai less than a year later.

Only in the last four months of the Occupation did the 25th Army leadership bestir itself at all to develop a pan-Sumatran leadership, and then only as a way of resisting unwelcome pressure from Tokyo to move towards Indonesian independence. On 24 March 1945 it was announced that a Sumatran Central Advisory Council (Chuo Sangi In) would be set up -- almost two years after its Java equivalent. At the end of May the Gunseikanbu (Military Administration) in Bukittinggi announced its choice of leaders for this council. The chairman would be Engku Mohammad Sjafei, the Minangkabau educational reformer who had become the most prominent politician in West Sumatra under the Japanese. Its secretary was another Minangkabau, Djameluddin Adinegoro, probably the leading Indonesian journalist of his day. He was moved from Medan to Bukittinggi to take up his duties. The two vice-chairmen were Teuku Njak Arif and Mr Abdul Abbas, chairman of the representative councils in Aceh and Lampung respectively. During June and July these men began to be promoted in the Japanese controlled press as the empat serangkai (four-in-one) of Sumatra, comparable to the better-known quadrumvirate in Java (Reid, 1971, pp. 27-8).

The single meeting of the Sumatra Central Advisory Council, for 5 days ending 2 July 1945, was of considerable significance as the first ever conference representing all major social and political forces in Sumatra. It made a number of demands for rapid development of popular, military, and educational bodies at Sumatran level, and it undoubtedly helped to legitimize for the first time a genuine Sumatran leadership -- in which Dr A.K. Gani, a Minangkabau politician resident in Palembang, and the

Toba Batak leader Dr Ferdinand Lumbantobing joined the empat serangkai above. The spirit of the meeting appeared to favour a stronger and more self-governing Sumatra, but to oppose the 25th Army's attempts to separate the island altogether from the independent Indonesia decided upon by Tokyo.

THE SUMATRAN PROVINCE OF THE INDONESIAN REPUBLIC

Despite the crudeness and belatedness with which the 25th Army went about preparing an autonomous Sumatra, the Sumatra government would have amounted to something had these preparations been build upon the Republic which followed. But for reasons which are still unclear, the three delegates of Sumatra sent to the independence preparation meetings in Jakarta in mid-August 1945 were not the leaders who had been groomed in Bukittinggi. Instead the Japanese sent Mr Abas from Lampung, and two Medan intellectuals who had played little part in the Sumatran preparations, Dr M. Amir (the guiding light of JSB in its most flourishing years) and Mr T. Hasan. In the hasty arrangements after the independence proclamation in Jakarta, Dr Amir was able to ensure that Medan, not Bukittinggi, was designated the capital of the Republican Province of Sumatra, and that the little-known Acehnese, Mr Hasan, was appointed as Governor. Dr Amir, a non-active member of Sukarno's first cabinet, was named Deputy Governor of Sumatra in December.

Neither West Sumatra nor Palembang was impressed with the decisions made in Jakarta, nor with the leadership provided by Hasan and Amir in Medan. In the first months of independence Sjafei and Adinegoro in West Sumatra and Dr Gani in Palembang both issued proclamations on behalf of Sumatra as a whole, leaving no doubt of their impatience at the slowness of Hasan to do anything to set up a Republican Government. Their claims to rival leadership were given some legitimation by Gani's appointment to represent the PNI State Party and later the Republican Army in Sumatra, and by Adinegoro's to represent the Republican Information Ministry in Sumatra.

In short, the all-Sumatra leadership of the Republic had very little support in the island as a whole. In this it contrasted with the Japanese-designated leaders in each Residency of

Sumatra (except East Sumatra, where there was none), who were all able to assume control fairly smoothly after independence. It was an accident which turned out extremely fortunate for the eventual unity of Indonesia that no strong Sumatran leadership had been developed by the Japanese and confirmed by the Republic (Reid, 1971).

Hasan and Amir, particularly the latter, did appear to seek 'autonomy concerning internal and external affairs' for Sumatra (Amir, cited ibid., p. 41). After a visit to Java in December 1945 Amir gave a press conference declaring that 'the government of the Republic in Java considers Sumatra as being politically and economically independent of Java, and at liberty to take any action which does not run counter to the interests of the Republic' (WIS 13, WO 172/9893). He appears to have been thinking of a loose Indonesian confederation. However he was forced to repudiate statements such as these very quickly by youth activists (pemuda) who were suspicious of any signs of separatism on the part of the older generation. Particularly during the first half of 1946 pemuda organizations in East Sumatra regularly intimidated the official Republican leadership, and denied it of much real power. Dr Amir himself was so dismayed by his own ineffectiveness that he defected to the Allies in April 1946, complaining 'There is not the least unity in Sumatra -- There is not one instrument of authority' (cited Reid, 1979, p. 244).

In fact an all-Sumatran government was beginning to assume some substance at about this time, but more as a link between the Residencies and Jogjakarta than as an independent power centre. Stirred by reports of chaos in Sumatra, particularly East Sumatra, the first Central Government delegation toured the island in April led by Amir Sjarifuddin. The ministers attended the first meeting of the all-Sumatra representative council (KNI) in Bukittinggi, which helped provide some legitimacy for Hasan as Governor, and elected a working committee to assist him. In June and July the members of this working committee began to converge in Pematang Siantar, which had been selected as the new Sumatran capital to replace Allied-dominated Medan. Heads of various all-Sumatra Departments were also appointed to

reside there. Thereafter missions from Jogjakarta were repeated regularly in an attempt to strengthen the Republican position by working through this all-Sumatra government. Since the Dutch government had announced in early May that it could not recognize Republican claims over Sumatra in view of the chaos reigning there, it became a high priority of the Republic to demonstrate stability and control. Vice-President Hatta himself began a tour of Sumatra with Governor Hasan in June 1947, and remained there throughout the first Dutch military action.

While Jogjakarta attempted to strengthen the weak Sumatra Province government, politicians within Sumatra itself consistently demanded its abolition. For Central and South Sumatra the capital was far too remote, and even in the North pemuda groups took more notice of central government delegations than of the Sumatran governor. The plunder of the East Sumatran rajas and the lucrative smuggling trade to Singapore gave a smell of corruption to many levels of government in Republican Sumatra, so that a preference developed for government which was either close enough to be controlled, or remote enough (in Java) to be assumed guiltless. The first meeting of the Sumatran KNI began the process of devolution by deciding for three sub-governors, in North, Central and South Sumatra, to be responsible to the governor. These sub-governors had hardly begun to function, however, before they were overtaken by the Dutch military action and a shift to military zones (Daerah Militer). The military action also speeded the return of the Sumatran capital to Bukittinggi under Hatta's guidance (Van Langenberg, 1976, pp. 569, 667-8).

The complete dismemberment of the Sumatran Province into three provinces of North, Central and South was proposed by the all-Sumatra assembly at its May 1947 meeting in Bukittinggi. Given the crisis caused by the Dutch military action, however, nothing was done to implement this until April 1948, when a law (UU 10 of 1948) was passed by the Republican parliament bringing an official end to Sumatra's decade as an administrative unit. Three provinces were established in Sumatra, each under a Governor assisted by an executive board elected by a representative assembly (DPR). Mr S.M. Amin, a lawyer of

Mandailing origin but Acehese residence, became the first Governor of North Sumatra on 19 June 1948. Despite much debate between Tapanuli and Aceh over the site for the North Sumatran capital (given the Dutch occupation of most of East Sumatra), Amin remained at Kutaraja (Banda Aceh), (Republik Indonesia, 1953, pp. 183-4).

FEDERAL/DUTCH HOPES

The Dutch strategy for outflanking the Republic through a federally constituted Indonesia had also involved from the beginning a pan-Sumatran entity of some sort. Dutch plans called for large states in Sumatra, Borneo, and Eastern Indonesia (the only one successfully created), each made up on an elaborate configuration of smaller autonomous ethnic units. As early as February 1947, however, a perceptive Dutch memorandum (Idenberg, 27-ii-1947) acknowledged that the Dutch were powerless to woo Sumatra away from Java since it was precisely the common opposition to Dutch influence which drove the two islands together. Even were the anti-Dutch struggle to end, Idenberg conceded, 'it would in practice be very difficult to bring a government of its own into being in Sumatra which had the support of the Sumatran people' (*ibid.*, p. 577). For none of the four major groupings in Sumatra was the idea of a strong Sumatran government really attractive. The South Sumatrans on the whole feared Minangkabau domination more than they feared Java; the Minangkabau, although seeing themselves as natural leaders of Sumatra in a general way, could not bring themselves to accept the legitimacy of any state structure or leadership; the Batak and the Acehese, the other two groupings, could not be very enthusiastic about any political structure in which they were not dominant. All, in other words, 'would rather relate to the half-magical idea of an Indonesian Republic than to the much more real character of a Greater Sumatra in which they would have to accept the influence of other Sumatrans' (*ibid.* p. 582). The Director of General Affairs concluded that it would be extremely difficult to involve a Sumatran unit of any sort in a federal structure, in which Sumatra would pay most of the bills but Sumatrans would be outnumbered.

As soon as one comes to the substantial ordering of Indonesian relationships one comes up against contradictions, which are easier to resolve in a provisional sense through an emotional phenomenon like the Indonesian Republic than in an organized political structure (*ibid.*, p. 584).

The all-Sumatra conferences organized by the federalists in 1949 seemed destined to fulfil this prophecy. Dr Tengku Mansur, the first JSB chairman, had become the head of the Dutch-backed State of East Sumatra (NST) in January 1948, governing the area which had been occupied by Dutch troops the previous year. He was predictably enthusiastic about a strong and united Sumatra, and he was well supported by his counterpart in the State of South Sumatra, Abdul Malik. On 29 March they succeeded in bringing together for a 'Muktamar Sumatera' in Medan, 84 delegates from 16 regions. Only Aceh and Nias, neither of which had been occupied by Dutch troops in the 'Second Police Action', were unrepresented (Van Langenberg, 1976, pp. 765-76).

Dr Mansur's opening speech was remarkably reminiscent of the emphasis of JSB, stressing unity rather than division. His metaphor for Sumatra was a pillar on which the great building of federal Indonesia had to rest. But 'a pillar which is built of stones will fall apart and lack strength ... we must work to provide the cement to bind those stones' (cited Republik Indonesia, 1953, p. 296). Yet the conference was unable to agree on anything more than an intention 'to create a Sumatra which is strong and united', and a decision to meet again (*ibid.*, pp. 322-4). Ethnic and regional rivalries dogged the whole conference, with most delegations more concerned to strengthen the autonomy of their respective regions than to sacrifice any powers to a Sumatran government. The second 'Muktamar Sumatera' did meet in Medan on 28 May, and opted for a 'provisional federation' in Sumatra as part of federal Indonesia. Yet only a week after this hesitant decision was taken it was torpedoed by the principal sponsor of the whole movement, the State of East Sumatra, whose assembly rejected NST participation in a Sumatran federation because this would comprise its own independence (Van Langenberg, 1976, p. 500). Even those who in principle believed in federalism, in other words, could not construct a Sumatran unit.

CONCLUSION

In the long run the Republic found that even the smaller Provinces of North, Central and South Sumatra were too full of contradictions to stay together. Each split until provincial boundaries came to replicate for the most part the old ethnic boundaries which had formed Residencies under Dutch administration. North Sumatra is the principal exception. Its two pre-war constituents, East Sumatra and Tapanuli, were each so ethnically divided that a more complex multi-ethnic North Sumatra appeared to have fewer objections. Perhaps partly for similar reasons, Medan retains some ambitions to act as a focus for all of Sumatra (e.g. Koanda Sumatera, 1969; Meuraxa, 1974).

The history of the PRRI rebellion only confirms the theme of this essay, that it has been easier for Sumatrans in modern times to relate to a distant government in Java than a close one in Sumatra. There are many advantages from a scholarly point of view in looking at Sumatra as a whole, but we will never be able to see it in isolation from its neighbours -- any more than Sumatrans themselves have done.

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