

## CLASS AND ETHNIC CONFLICT IN INDONESIA'S DECOLONIZATION PROCESS: A STUDY OF EAST SUMATRA

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This article examines the class and ethnic conflicts that characterized the later stage of the Indonesian National Revolution in a region with a particularly complex social composition--the former Residency of East Sumatra. It focuses in particular on the forces that made possible the establishment (with Dutch support) of an "autonomous" state in East Sumatra, the so-called Negara Sumatera Timur (NST), which lasted from December 1947 to August 1950. It also suggests that the way in which these forces were mobilized and articulated politically contributed significantly to the state's eventual demise, and left behind deep antagonisms which continue to affect the region's politics today.

The original "mass" base for the NST had been produced out of the enormous structural changes resulting from Dutch colonial rule between 1870 and 1942. Three ethnolinguistic groups in East Sumatra--Malays, Simalungun and Karo--quite consciously viewed themselves as the indigenous inhabitants (*orang asli*) of the region. The Malays and Simalungun particularly felt themselves threatened by the flood of immigrants--Javanese, Chinese, Toba Batak, and others--which had poured into the area since the development there of a vast plantation economy from the end of the nineteenth century. At the same time, these *orang asli* were divided among themselves, insofar as the Malays had, since the advent of colonial rule, been politically dominant, and expected to maintain that dominance within the NST.

Superimposed on these interests, and crosscutting them to some extent, were those of the "traditional" local aristocracies (often termed the *kerajaan*),<sup>1</sup> through whom the Dutch ruled, and who, in many cases, had derived vast wealth from the plantation economy. In sometimes uneasy alliance with these aristocracies were important elements of the former Netherlands Indies colonial Establishment, both Dutch and "native."

In a period of revolutionary upheaval, the *kerajaan* (especially the Malay *kerajaan*) attempted to defend their class and ethnic interests by mobilizing support from their fellow "ethnics," promoting the NST as a bulwark for the defense of ethnic interests. Political exclusion of the immigrant communities, however, served to deepen their identification with the revolutionary Republic, and led eventually--when the Dutch finally withdrew at the end of 1949--to the rapid collapse of the NST and the extinction of the *kerajaan* as a political force. In the process, the interests of the ethnic Malays were most adversely affected, leaving powerful

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1. *Kerajaan*--a Malay term literally meaning "being in the state of having a raja." See Anthony Crothers Milner, "The Malay Raja: A Study of Malay Political Culture in East Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula in the Early Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1977), p. 17. In the following analysis a distinction is made between the *kerajaan* as a "class" of hereditary aristocrats and the ruling families of the East Coast "native states," i.e., the sultans and raja.

Map 1

"NATIVE STATES" IN EAST SUMATRA 1945

Malay

- a. Hamperan Perak (Deli)
- b. Sunggal (Deli)
- c. Sukapiring (Deli)
- d. Senembah (Deli)
- e. Percut (Deli)
- f. Bedagai (Deli)
- g. Padang (Deli)
- h. Indrapura
- i. Tanah Datar
- j. Pasisir

- k. Limapuluh
- l. Sukudua

Karo

- m. Kutabuluh
- n. Sarinembah
- o. Lingga
- p. Suka
- q. Barusjahe

Simalungun

- r. Dolok Silau
- s. Silimakuta
- t. Purba
- v. Raya
- w. Pane
- x. Siantar
- y. Tanah Jawa



residues of ethnic resentment which have not ceased to leave their mark on the political life of "East Sumatra."

### *The Colonial Pattern*

Between 1870 and 1942 the territories and populations of some forty-one principalities located on the northern and central east coast of Sumatra, comprising three main ethnic communities--Malay, Karo Batak, and Simalungun Batak--were incorporated into the Netherlands East Indies empire. Contractual agreements were entered into between local rulers and the Indies government, whereby the principalities (reduced in number from forty-one to thirty-four) were granted nominal status as "self-governing [native] states" (*zelfbesturende landschappen*), given fixed territorial boundaries, and eventually linked together as the Residency of Sumatra's East Coast.<sup>2</sup> The Malay, Karo, and Simalungun Batak communities were together granted recognition by the new colonial authorities as the "native" population of the residency, with special rights to land (*tanah*) and preeminence in customary law (*adat*).<sup>3</sup>

While the "traditional," precolonial polities and social institutions were being incorporated within the colonial system, those same seventy-odd years saw the demographic, cultural and class patterns of East Sumatran society change markedly.<sup>4</sup>

#### 2. The forty-one principalities consisted of:

- A. The five Malay sultanates of Langkat, Deli, Serdang, Asahan, and Siak.
- B. Twenty-four smaller Malay principalities, namely: Indrapura; Tanah Datar; Pasisir; Limapuluh; Sukudua; Kualuh; Bilah; Panai; Kotapinang; Pelalawan; Bedagai; Padang; the five Rokan states of Tambusai, Kepenuhan, Rambah, Kuntuh Dar Es Salaam, and Rokan Empat; the two Kampar Kiri states of Rantau and Sengingi; and the five Deli *urung* of Hamparan Perak, Sunggal, Sukapiring, Senembah, and Percut.
- C. The five Karo *sibayak* of Kutabuluh, Lingga, Sarinembah, Suka, and Barusjahe.
- D. The seven Simalungun "kingdoms" of Silimakuta, Dolok Silau, Purba, Raya, Pane, Siantar, and Tanah Jawa.

Under the contractual agreements the five Deli *urung* plus Bedagai and Padang were all made part of the Deli sultanate, reducing the number of "self-governing" states within the residency to thirty-four.

On the "self-governing" status of the principalities and the contracts, see Anthony Reid, *The Blood of the People: Revolution and the End of Traditional Rule in Northern Sumatra* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 46-56; William Joseph O'Malley, "Indonesia in the Great Depression: A Study of East Sumatra and Jogjakarta in the 1930's" (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1977), pp. 109-26; Madahi, *Sedikit "Sejarah Perkembangan Hak Hak Suku Melayu Atas Tanah di Sumatera Timur" (Tahun 1800-1975)* (Jakarta: Badan Pembinaan Hukum Nasional, 1978), pp. 30 ff.; H. Mohammad Said, *Suatu Zaman Gelap di Deli. Koeli Kontrak Tempo Doeloe Dengan Derita dan Kemarahannya* (Medan: Waspada, 1977), pp. 23-54; W. H. M. Schadee, *Geschiedenis van Sumatra's Oostkust* (Amsterdam: Oostkust van Sumatra Instituut, 1918), vol. 1; and Michael van Langenberg, "North Sumatra under Dutch Colonial Rule: Aspects of Structural Change" (Part One) in *Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs*, 11, 1 (January-June, 1977), pp. 74-110; and (Part Two) in *ibid.*, 11, 2 (July-December, 1977), pp. 45-86.

3. On these special rights, see Mahadi, *Sedikit*; and Reid, *Blood*, ch. 3.

4. On the changes outlined below, see Reid, *Blood*, ch. 3; Said, *Suatu Zaman*; O'Malley, "Indonesia," ch. 3; Thee Kian-wie, *Plantation Agriculture and Export*

By 1930, for example, the large-scale immigration of Chinese, Javanese, and other ethnic groups, from other parts of Sumatra and beyond, into the booming plantation-based economy of the Residency had reduced the orang asli to a minority of the population.<sup>5</sup> A new, westernized town and plantation-based elite had replaced the previous "feudalistic," rural elites of the precolonial principalities. This new colonial Establishment, made up of two tiers or levels--the European planters, businessmen, and government officials at the top and below them the orang asli aristocracies, the western-educated Indonesian professionals (doctors, lawyers, senior civil servants, etc.), and the wealthier Chinese and Indian merchants--collectively encompassed markedly different interests and articulated different social values from its predecessors. Only the orang asli aristocracies provided any sort of continuity with the precolonial past, while at the same time constituting an anachronism within the strongly "modernist" present which this Establishment as a whole represented.

### *The Declaration of Independence*

On August 17, 1945 Indonesian national independence was proclaimed in Jakarta. More than a month later, on September 30, the independence declaration was repeated at a rally of young nationalists in Medan, the capital of the East Coast Residency. But support for this declaration of independence among the East Sumatra aristocracies was conspicuous by its absence. The Malay sultans, *datuk* and *tengku*, the Simalungun *raja*, and many of the Karo *sibayak* and *raja* were clearly anticipating the return of the Dutch to help restore pre-War "normalcy." As a result, tension between these aristocracies, or *kerajaan*, and the more militant sectors of the Indonesian nationalist movement (the *pergerakan*) increased rapidly, and the lines between them became ever more sharply drawn.<sup>6</sup> The Malay sultans, in

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*Growth: An Economic History of East Sumatra, 1863-1942* (Jakarta: National Institute of Economic and Social Research, 1977); Michael van Langenberg, "North Sumatra 1942-1945: The Onset of a National Revolution," in *Southeast Asia under Japanese Occupation*, ed. Alfred W. McCoy, Monograph Series no. 22 (New Haven: Yale Southeast Asian Studies, 1980), pp. 33-45; and "North Sumatra under Dutch Rule," Parts One and Two; Karl J. Pelzer, *Planter and Peasant: Colonial Policy and the Agrarian Struggle in East Sumatra 1863-1947* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1978).

5. The Indonesian ("native") population of East Sumatra in 1930 totaled 1,470,395, of which Malays accounted for only 22.77 percent, Karo Batak 9.89 percent, and Simalungun Batak 6.47 percent. Thus the three orang asli ethnic groups were a minority of 39.13 percent. The largest single ethnic group in the Residency was the Javanese who made up 40.11 percent of the total Indonesian population. The orang asli had also been reduced to minorities in the sultanates of Deli, Langkat, Serdang, and Asahan, in four of the smaller Malay states (Sukudua, Limapuluh, Kotapinang, and Bila), and in three of the Simalungun "kingdoms" (Tanah Jawa, Siantar, and Pane). See *Volkstelling 1930* (Batavia: Departement van Economische Zaken, 1935), Part IV. Pelzer, *Planter*, p. 63, gives the ethnic Malay population of East Sumatra in 1930 as only 15 percent of the total Indonesian population of the region. However, this figure seems at variance with the percentages given on page 167 of the census (above).

6. On the development of the Indonesian nationalist movement in East Sumatra, and its antipathy towards the *kerajaan*, see Reid, *Blood*, pp. 38 ff.; Said, *Suatu Zaman*, pp. 113 ff.; O'Malley, "Indonesia"; Hamka, *Kenang-kenangan Hidup* (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1966); Julia Niblett, "The Development of Nationalist Activity 1926-1931: An East Sumatra Case Study" (B.A. thesis, University of Syd-

particular, had long been notorious for their wealth, extravagant life-styles, arrogance, and economic mismanagement.<sup>7</sup> The kerajaan as a whole were determined to defend the interests of both their class and their ethnic groups against what they saw as a new, expansionist, Javanese-dominated Indonesian state. The pergerakan, on the other hand, were equally determined that what for them was a feudal, collaborationist elite had to be removed if Indonesia's national independence was to be defended effectively against Dutch attempts to restore their colonial hegemony.

In March 1946 these tensions finally exploded into open violence. Throughout most of the twenty-five "native states"<sup>8</sup> armed pergerakan groups went on the attack. Many aristocrats were killed and hundreds arrested. The kingdoms and native states were declared abolished. Land was nationalized in the name of the Republic of Indonesia. All special class, ethnic, and communal land rights were abrogated. For the pergerakan militants this was the start of a "Social Revolution" essential if East Sumatra was to be freed from colonial overlordship and to join the larger Indonesian National Revolution. The besieged kerajaan and their supporters, on the other hand, saw themselves as victims of "terrorist" violence unleashed by "Communist" extremists for the sole purpose of seizing land, personal property, and political power from the hands of the lawful owners of property and the legitimate holders of power. Although the basic cleavage was between kerajaan and pergerakan, subsidiary ethnic, religious, and ideological antagonisms divided both sides, making the Social Revolution an enormously complex and chaotic phenomenon.<sup>9</sup>

Without coherent leadership or clear-cut long-term objectives, the Social Revolution quickly lost momentum and petered out by mid-1946.<sup>10</sup> During the next

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ney, 1978); Karen Entwistle, "The 'Pergerakan' Movement in East Sumatra 1938-1942" (B.A. thesis, University of Sydney, 1979); and Michael van Langenberg, "National Revolution in North Sumatra: Sumatera Timur and Tapanuli 1942-1950" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Sydney, 1976), pp. 118-425.

7. See Reid, *Blood*, pp. 50-53.

8. During the Japanese occupation Siak, Pelalawan, the five Rokan states, and the two Kampar Kiri states had been removed from the territorial jurisdiction of the East Coast Residency, leaving only twenty-five "native states" within the Residency's boundaries. It is these twenty-five states with which this article is concerned. See Map 1.

9. For accounts of developments in East Sumatra from the start of the Japanese occupation in 1942 until the outbreak of the Social Revolution, see Anthony Reid, "The Japanese Occupation and Rival Indonesian Elites: Northern Sumatra in 1942," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 35, 1 (November 1975), pp. 49-61; "The Birth of the Republic in Sumatra," *Indonesia*, 12 (October 1971), pp. 21-46; and *Blood*, passim; Anthony Reid and Shiraishi Saya (eds.), "Rural Unrest in Sumatra, 1942: A Japanese Report," *Indonesia*, 21 (April 1976), pp. 115-33; Mohammad Said, "What was the 'Social Revolution of 1946' in East Sumatra?" *Indonesia*, 15 (April 1973), pp. 145-86; Hamka, *Kenang-kenangan*; Tengku Lukman Sinar, "The East Coast of Sumatra under the Japanese Heel," *Sumatra Research Bulletin*, 1, 2 (May 1972), pp. 29-43; PRIMA [Pejuang Republik Indonesia Medan Area], Biro Sejarah, *Medan Area Mengisi Proklamasi. Perjuangan Kemerdekaan dalam Wilayah Sumatera Utara* (Medan: Badan Musyawarah PRIMA, 1976), vol. 1, passim; van Langenberg, "National" and "North Sumatra 1942-1945."

10. For detailed accounts and analyses of the events of the Social Revolution, see Reid, *Blood*, pp. 185 ff.; Said, "What was the 'Social Revolution'"; PRIMA, *Medan*; and van Langenberg, "National," pp. 426-87.

twelve months, as both the local pergerakan and the larger Indonesian nationalist movement were forced increasingly onto the defensive under pressure from first British, and then Dutch, military forces, the kerajaan elite moved to regain its lost power and resources. With Dutch sponsorship and protection a political movement for the establishment of an "autonomous" East Sumatra state took shape. The concerns most overtly represented within this movement were: the position of the "traditional" hereditary aristocracies; the maintenance of an economy based upon the pre-War structure of large-scale plantation production financed by a high level of foreign capital investment; protection of the special land rights of the orang asli; and the predominance of an emphatically Malay "national" culture.<sup>11</sup>

### *Special Region Autonomy*

Since April 1946 those leaders of the East Sumatra kerajaan who had survived the Social Revolution had beset the Dutch authorities in Medan, Jakarta, and Holland with accounts of the sufferings of the orang asli at the hands of Republican "extremists" and with continual affirmations of loyalty to the Dutch crown. They demanded that the Netherlands government intervene in East Sumatra to restore "law and order" and the "customary rights" of the orang asli.<sup>12</sup> By early 1947 the Dutch authorities were responding favorably to these entreaties.<sup>13</sup>

Most of the East Sumatra kerajaan and the overwhelming majority of the Malay, Chinese, and Eurasian communities in East Sumatra deliberately placed their futures in the hands of the Dutch. By April 1947 that future was taking shape in the form of plans being jointly constructed by the Dutch and the kerajaan to restore pre-War economic "prosperity" and political "stability" to the region through the establishment of an orang asli (and especially Malay)-controlled East Sumatra state, protected by Dutch arms and living off a revived plantation economy.<sup>14</sup>

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11. A more detailed narrative of the events outlined in this article, from the establishment of the East Sumatra state movement until the eventual collapse of the state itself in August 1950, is given in my "National," pp. 488 ff.

12. See letter from Rapolsum [Regeeringsadviseur voor Politieke Zaken op Sumatra] Medan to Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, Batavia, No. 453/Z.G., December 1, 1947 (Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague [hereafter referred to as ARA]).

13. Letter from Directeur Nefis, Batavia to Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, Batavia, April 2, 1946; Letter from Tengku Abdoellah Hod Dewa Sjachdan of Langkat to Minister van Overzeesche Gebiedsdeelen, The Hague, May 5, 1946 (Archives of the former Ministerie van Koloniën held in the Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken, The Hague [hereafter referred to as BZ]); Letter from Gouverneur, Chief C.O. NICA Sumatra, Medan (AMACAB), to Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, Batavia, June 16, 1946 (BZ); Memorandum from Nefis, Singapore, to Directeur Nefis, Batavia, November 16, 1946 (BZ); Letters from Consulaat-Generaal der Nederlanden, Singapore, to Directeur Nefis, Batavia, January 15, 1947, March 18 and 20, 1947 (BZ); and Memorandum from Directeur-Generaal Algemeene Zaken, Batavia, to Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, Batavia, April 1, 1947 (BZ).

14. See: Letter from Rapolsum, Medan, to Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, Batavia, No. 27/Geh., April 26, 1947 (BZ); Memorandum from Directeur-Generaal Algemeene Zaken, Batavia, to Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, Batavia, No. 882/Geh., April 10, 1947 (BZ); Nefis, Medan, "Politiek en Economisch overzicht van Noord-Sumatra 16-31 Mei 1947" (BZ), p. 1; and Recomba [Regeeringscommissaris voor Bestuurs-aangelegenheden--Government Commissioner for Administrative Affairs], Medan, "Rapport van den Recomba voor Noord-Sumatra over Augustus 1947" (ARA), p. 2.

Paradoxically, however, these plans sought to avoid the restoration of the sultans and raja to their pre-War political positions. Both the Dutch and more Westernized sector of the kerajaan regarded the former rulers as obstacles to a modern future, above all as impediments to the appearance of "democracy" which the planners were keen to maintain in any future East Sumatra state.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the traditional rulers were not entirely dispensable. The Malay sultans, in particular, continued to symbolize fundamental values underlying the proposed state, namely a self-conscious Malay ethnic identity.<sup>16</sup> Even if their pre-War power had declined, they still remained functionally important to their communities and were able to act in defense of their own interests. Early in 1947 the Sultan of Deli, then in Holland to press his case for Dutch intervention to restore "stability" in East Sumatra, expressed these values succinctly:

I shall certainly return to Deli, when that will be I am not certain. The position of the Sultan of Deli is No. 2 of my aspirations, No. 1 is and remains "ALAM MELAJOE" (the Malay World), a Malay territory reorganized and democratized, but based on *Malay Adat*, free from the Republic of Indonesia. Following my discussions in Holland I have reason to hold fast to this ideal. I shall do my best, God protect the Malays. I shall now work in this direction, I am not optimistic, I only do my duty as a *Malay Nationalist*, the ultimate result lies in God's hands.<sup>17</sup>

On the morning of July 21, 1947 Dutch military forces in East Sumatra moved out of their Medan Area enclave and launched a major coordinated offensive against the Republican-controlled regions in the Residency. By August 8, they had occupied the entire region between the Serangan river to the north and the Asahan river to the south.<sup>18</sup> The Dutch forces then halted in response to the ceasefire order issued by the United Nations Security Council. In the course of their operations Dutch troops freed hundreds who had been interned since the Social Revolution in March 1946, including the sultans of Langkat, Serdang, and Asahan, the Simalungun raja of Siantar and Tanah Jawa, dozens of members of the Malay, Karo, and Simalungun kerajaan, and many former senior colonial civil servants.

Barely ten days after the start of the Dutch military offensive, and before the Dutch occupation of most of the Residency had been completed, a mass meeting took place in Medan to demand the establishment of an autonomous East Sumatra state. Speakers at the meeting attacked the leaders of the Republic of Indonesia for

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15. Letters from Rapolsom, Medan, to Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, Batavia, No. 27/Geh., April 26, 1947 and No. 44/Geh., May 24, 1947(BZ); Memorandum from Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, Batavia, to Directeur Kabinet and Directeur-Generaal Algemeene Zaken, Batavia, June 10, 1947 (BZ); Letter from Gouvernements Secretaris, Batavia, to Consul-Generaal der Nederlanden, Singapore, No. 1662, June 12, 1947 (BZ). See also Reid, *Blood*, pp. 52 and 261.

16. The concept of kerajaan indicates the importance of the ruler to Malay ideas of a polity, and the centrality of the ruler to Malay cultural identity. The ruler is the symbolic personification of the community's values and historical traditions. See Milner, "Malay," ch. 7.

17. Letter from Sultan of Deli to his secretary in Singapore, appended to letter from Consulaat-Generaal der Nederlanden, Singapore, to Directeur Nefis, Batavia, January 15, 1947 (BZ). Emphases added.

18. See Map 2. On the Dutch military offensive in East Sumatra, part of the first so-called "Police Action" against the Republic, see van Langenberg, "National," pp. 577-80.

having sanctioned murder and pillage during and after the Social Revolution and called for the setting up of an autonomous East Sumatran Special Region (Daerah Istimewa Sumatera Timur). The chairman read out a petition on behalf of the orang asli communities, calling on the Netherlands Indies government to recognize East Sumatra as an autonomous state within an independent federal Indonesia, in accordance with the terms of the recently concluded Linggajati Agreement.<sup>19</sup> The meeting concluded with the formation of a Committee for an East Sumatra Special Region (Comite Daerah Istimewa Sumatera Timur--Comite DIST), headed by a prominent kerajaan member of the Medan Establishment, Tengku Dr. Mansoer.<sup>20</sup> In the next few days similar mass meetings were held in several other towns, notably in Binjai (Langkat), Lubuk Pakam (Serdang), and Pematang Siantar (Simalungun).<sup>21</sup> These meetings marked the beginnings of the final stage in plans for setting up an East Sumatra state. When the Dutch military action ended on August 8, this final stage was well under way.<sup>22</sup>

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19. On the Linggajati agreement, see Anthony Reid, *The Indonesian National Revolution 1945-1950* (Hawthorn: Longman Australia, 1974), pp. 96 and 109-12; and Charles Wolf, Jr., *The Indonesian Story* (New York: John Day, 1948), pp. 175-78.

20. Mansoer (1897-1955) was an uncle of Sultan Saiboen of Asahan. He had received his medical training at the medical school for natives (STOVIA) in Batavia where from 1917 to 1919 he had been the founding president of the quasi-nationalist student organization Jong Sumatra. He then went to Leiden for further medical studies, and there married a Dutch woman. After returning to Medan he established a considerable reputation as a surgeon and writer of medical texts. In the late 1930s he was active in establishing an East Sumatra Association (Persatuan Sumatera Timur--PST) which aimed at promoting the educational and material development of the orang asli peoples. In 1940 he became its chairman. In March 1945 he was made chairman of the Japanese-established advisory council (*shū sangi-kai*) for the East Sumatra Residency. On the prewar PST, see Reid, *Blood*, pp. 68-70. The other members of the Comite DIST were: Tengku Hafas (Malay), Tengku Mr. Dzulkarnain (Malay), Datuk Hafiz Haberham (Malay), Djomat Purba (Simalungun), Raja Sembiring Meliala (Karo), Tengku M. Bahar (Malay), Mr. Djaidin Purba (Simalungun), Raja Silimakuta (Simalungun), Madja Purba (Simalungun), Anak Raja Pane (Simalungun), Raja Kaliamsjah Sinaga (Simalungun), and Orang Kaya Ramli (Malay). Indonesia, Kementerian Penerangan, *Republik Indonesia: Propinsi Sumatera Utara* (Jakarta, 1954?), p. 216 (hereafter referred to as *Propinsi*). Also on the establishment of the Comite DIST, see *Medan Bulletin*, August 1, 1947; Badan Penerangan Negara Soematera Timoer, *Negara Soematera Timoer Sepintas Laloe* (Medan, 1948), p. 8; Oostkust van Sumatra Instituut, *Kroniek*, 1947, p. 36 [hereafter referred to as *Kroniek*]. All the members of the Comite were of unmistakably kerajaan and Establishment origins.

21. *Propinsi*, p. 216; *Negara Soematera Timoer Sepintas Laloe*, p. 9; and Recomba Medan, "Rapport van den Recomba voor Noord-Sumatra over Augustus 1947" (ARA), pp. 3-4.

22. Two days after the Comite DIST rally in Medan the Recomba for North Sumatra noted that while the East Sumatra state movement was still mostly limited to the kerajaan and the ethnic Malay sector of the population, some support for it was being mobilized by Simalungun leaders around Pematang Siantar. He added, however, that with the emergence of the movement, coupled with the release from internment of the sultans of Langkat and Asahan and the impending return to Medan of the Sultan of Deli, the "problem" of the restoration of the traditional kingdoms "will immediately come to the fore." Letter from Recomba, Medan to Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, Batavia, No. 405/P.Z., August 2, 1947 (BZ).



### *Formulating a Program*

With the success of Dutch arms few among the supporters of the Komite DIST would have disagreed in principle about the most important and immediate tasks ahead. As a propaganda booklet published some two years after the East Sumatra state had been established declared: "Once East Sumatra had been purged of irresponsible groups, as a result of the Netherlands Army's police action in July 1947, this entire region had to be reconstructed from scratch."<sup>23</sup> The basic goal was a polity "purged" of Indonesian nationalist elements, and with institutions and values once again firmly rooted in tradition (notwithstanding the concepts of "modernization" to which some sections of the DIST movement were seriously committed). The consensus was for a state firmly under control of orang asli (particularly Malay) elites to guarantee the maintenance of traditional orang asli rights and privileges; this state would preserve a profitable relationship with foreign capital via the plantation economy, and would defend its territorial integrity through a close alliance with Dutch arms.

A semblance of an orang asli communal and cultural identity had already emerged in East Sumatra prior to the Japanese occupation, despite differences resulting from conflicting class, ethnic, and religious interests. It was a consciousness of being "sons of the soil," a nascent East Sumatran "nationalism" in the face of the large immigrant population that had grown up in the residency since the 1870s.<sup>24</sup> These sentiments now took organized political form in opposition to the Republic of Indonesia, which was seen, in the light of its overwhelming support from the Javanese and Toba Batak ethnic communities, to be acting deliberately in support of non-orang asli interests.<sup>25</sup>

Once the UN-negotiated ceasefire had come into effect on August 8, 1947, Dutch officials in Medan, in conjunction with the Komite DIST leaders, immediately began setting up a non-Republican bureaucracy. Netherlands Indies officials, all Dutchmen, were made district heads (Assistant Residents) for Langkat, Deli, Serdang, Asahan, Simalungun, and Karoland, with the specific task of establishing and operating new regional administrations.<sup>26</sup> Prominent local Komite DIST supporters were made mayors of the three largest cities in the Residency--Medan, Pematang Siantar, and Tebingtinggi.<sup>27</sup> Two senior Indies civil servants became permanent advisors to the Komite DIST.<sup>28</sup>

On August 25, 1947 members of the Komite DIST, other prominent supporters of the East Sumatra state movement, and senior Dutch officials met at the home of Dr. Mansoer in Medan to discuss the basic conditions under which the proposed state would be established. The Dutch officials, concerned with international

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23. Djabatan Penerangan Negara Sumatera Timur, *Bukti* (Medan, 1949), p. 10.

24. See van Langenberg, "North Sumatra under Dutch Rule" (Part Two), pp. 75-76.

25. This ethnic support for the Republic is examined in van Langenberg, "National," passim.

26. Recomba, Medan, "Verslag betreffende de politieke en economische toestand van het bezetgebied van de Oostkust van Sumatra. Afgestloten op ultimo September 1947" (BZ), p. 1.

27. *Waspada* (Medan), September 8, 1947.

28. These two men, G. J. Forch and G. van Gelder, had previously been senior officials of the Netherlands military intelligence service in Medan.

opinion, were insistent that the state be "democratic" to the extent that all vestiges of "feudalism," i.e., residual powers remaining in the hands of the hereditary rulers, would have to be abolished, and all possible popular support be cultivated and represented.<sup>29</sup>

Most of the Komite DIST, including Mansoer, accepted Dutch proposals for the virtual disbanding of the traditional kingdoms. Since the Social Revolution, they were only too aware of the strength of anti-kerajaan feeling amongst large sections of the East Sumatra population, including even the Simalungun and Karo orang asli communities.<sup>30</sup> As the senior Indies government official in East Sumatra noted in September 1947:

The Simalungun Bataks, Tobas and Karo Bataks, who will struggle by word and deed for a more or less democratic polity, will certainly withdraw [from the East Sumatran state movement] if they get the impression that they have been fitted before the cart of the coastal Malay sultans, for whom they hold not a grain of sympathy, particularly not for the Sultan of Deli.<sup>31</sup>

But "democracy," or broadening the popular base of the proposed state, had its limits. The Komite DIST leaders were uninterested in "democracy" if this involved any watering down of the principle of orang asli, and particularly Malay, dominance.

As a result of agreement between the Dutch and DIST leaders at the August 25 meeting, the size of the Komite was increased both to broaden its ethnic composition and reduce its kerajaan flavor. The nine new members included representatives of the Toba Batak, Chinese, and East Indonesian (Menadonese, Ambonese, and Timorese) communities. But since three of the Simalungun kerajaan members of the initial Komite withdrew while four additional Malay members were appointed, the new Komite ended up being even more Malay-dominated than its predecessor.<sup>32</sup>

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29. On August 11 the Lt. Governor-General, Hubertus van Mook, noted that the future of the traditional royal families in East Sumatra would have to await further developments, as it was still unclear if they would be able to play any active part in a modernized political structure in the Residency. He suggested that, in view of this, priority should be given to educating younger members of the royal families so that they would be able to gather popular support as leaders beyond the narrow confines of their respective traditional kingdoms. At the same time, van Mook informed the brother of the Sultan of Langkat that restoration of the East Sumatra sultanates would only be effected under "modernized" conditions. Memorandum from Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, Batavia, to Procureur-Generaal, Batavia, August 11, 1947 (ARA).

30. See Reid, *Blood*, pp. 218 ff.; and van Langenberg, "National," pp. 426 ff.

31. Letter from Recomba, Medan, to Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, Batavia, No. 136/Geh., September 13, 1947 (BZ). Three days later he remarked that any attempt to incorporate the traditional Malay kingdoms within an East Sumatra state would only serve to create "problems" in Simalungun and Tanah Karo. See Letter from Recomba, Medan, to Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, Batavia No. 699/P.Z., September 16, 1947 (ARA).

32. Apart from the four Malays, the additional members of the Komite were made up of three Toba Batak, two Chinese and one Menadonese, one Ambonese and one Timorese. These twelve new members were: Florencius Lumbantobing (Toba), Dr. F. J. Nainggolan (Toba), H. F. Sitompul (Toba), Tan Boen Djin (Chinese), Tan Wee Beng (Chinese), M. Lalisang (Menadonese), C. B. M. Manusiwa (Ambonese), A. H. F. Rotty (Timorese), Abdul Wahab (Malay), Sajoeti (Malay), Mohamad Noeh (Malay), and Datuk Kamil (Malay). Thus in the new twenty-two member Komite

The expanded Comite also did not include even one representative of the largest single ethnic group in the Residency--the Javanese. The three Toba Batak representatives, moreover, were all from a very small group of Toba intellectuals who, because of their obvious preferences for speaking Dutch and for a conspicuously Western life-style, had been victims of pergerakan radicalism during and after the Social Revolution. As a result, they had become deeply alienated from the Indonesian Republic. These people in no way reflected popular Toba support for the proposed East Sumatra state. On the contrary, at the mass level, ethnic conflict between the orang asli and the Toba Batak communities in East Sumatra was by now intense.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, the absence of Javanese representation accurately reflected the almost complete lack of popular support among the Javanese for the DIST movement.<sup>34</sup>

Among the Chinese in East Sumatra, however, support for DIST increased during August 1947, as a direct result of the continuing attacks by remnants of Republican armed groups still operating in the Residency.<sup>35</sup> Most Chinese in East Sumatra were by now eager to see the setting up of the East Sumatran state under Dutch military protection, with its promise of a return to the security and prosperity of pre-War days. In return, Comite DIST leaders supported demands by Chinese community leaders that the Chinese security force, the Poh An Tui, be strengthened.<sup>36</sup> Notwithstanding anti-Chinese sentiments which many Comite DIST and orang asli community leaders may have held privately, they recognized the crucial importance of the Chinese-controlled sector of the regional economy to the state being envisaged by the DIST planners.

Indeed, the rehabilitation of the plantation economy quickly came to occupy most of the attention of the Dutch administrations in Medan and Jakarta, and of the Comite DIST. All parties realized that the viability of the East Sumatra state would depend on the revival of the plantation economy. As for the plantation

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there were fourteen orang asli representatives (ten Malay, three Simalungun, and one Karo). Regeerings Voorlichtingsdienst, Batavia, Relaas No. 1201, October 8, 1947, "Oostkust van Sumatra" (ARA), p. 4.

33. See letter from Rapolsum, Medan, to Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, Batavia, No. 453/Z.G., December 1, 1947 (ARA).

34. At the end of September 1947, Dr. Mansoer, at a meeting with Lt. Governor-General van Mook in Medan, is alleged to have admitted that the Comite had not been able to induce any prominent Javanese in East Sumatra to join it. See *Pro-pinsi*, p. 218. This virtually total lack of Javanese support for the Comite DIST has been confirmed by a number of informants with reason to have been sympathetic to one or other side of the kerajaan-pergerakan conflict.

35. Such attacks were frequently reported in the Chinese press at the time. See translations of such reports during August 1947 in Nefis, Batavia, "Chinese Pers (N.E.I.)," No. 68/1947 (BZ).

36. The Poh An Tui had been established at the beginning of 1946 by the Allied military command in Medan, as a local volunteer Chinese security force responsible for maintaining order in the Chinese sectors of the city. By September 1947 its strength had reached about 1,000, made up of fifteen regional units in Langkat, Deli, Serdang, Simalungun, and Tanah Karo. It had by then become virtually an ancillary arm of the Dutch military forces in the Residency. See letter from Territorial tevens Troepen-commandant "Z" Brigade, Medan, to Commandant van het Leger, Batavia, No. 5563/THO/NI/U, September 16, 1947 (Archives of the Ministerie van Defensie, The Hague).

companies, they wanted to return their investments to profitability as quickly as possible.

By the second half of September 1947, as discussions between the Komite DIST and the Indies authorities proceeded, restoration of the plantation economy became integral to questions about the overall political future of the region. Most of the foreign estate companies had either reopened their offices, or had established representatives, in Medan. The two pre-War planters' associations, AVROS and DPV, were once again functioning and busy with plans for reopening the plantations.<sup>37</sup> By November, regular discussions had begun between the Indies government, the Komite DIST, AVROS, and the DPV on the question of plantation rehabilitation, in particular the problem of how the squatting *ladang* (dry rice) farmers were to be removed.<sup>38</sup>

If rehabilitation of the plantation economy was a central issue to the DIST movement, so too was the future of the former native states and the position of their ruling families. The initial acceptance by the Komite DIST of Dutch insistence on a "de-feudalized" East Sumatran state soon produced a major split in the ranks of the DIST movement, expressed by the establishment of two rival political parties: one representing the more modernist, antifeudal position taken by the Komite DIST leadership, the other representing those more concerned with the preservation of traditions and the pre-War status quo.

The former, the Party of the Special Region of East Sumatra (Partai Daerah Istimewa Sumatera Timur--Pardist) was sponsored and led by members of the Komite DIST.<sup>39</sup> The party's first public announcement declared that:

"PARDIST" has been formed out of the secret associations "S.S." (Siap Sedia) and "P.S.T." (Persatuan Sumatera Timur) which have been active since the Japanese Army occupied Indonesia. . . .

At the time of the Japanese surrender and the establishment of the Republic of Indonesia, the aims and purposes which we have already experienced together, when the majority of us experienced the acts of tyranny, these secret associations, which had at first disbanded, were reactivated in order to free our compatriots and those of the East Sumatra people who since that time had been held in internment by the Republic of Indonesia, even though

37. Recomba, Medan; "Verslag betreffende de politieke en economische toestand van het bezetgebied van de Oostkust van Sumatra. Afgesloten op ultimo September 1947" (BZ), pp. 3 and 9; "Kort verslag van de vergadering van het Bestuur der AVROS te Medan," September 9, 1947 (BZ). The DPV (Deli Planters Vereeniging--Deli Planters' Association) had been established in 1879 as an association of tobacco planters. AVROS (Algemene Vereeniging van der Rubberplanters ter Oostkust van Sumatra--General Association of the East Coast of Sumatra Rubber Planters) was established in 1910.

38. "Samenvatting van het verhandelde op de vergadering gehouden op . . . 13 November 1947 . . . in de Landschapsvergaderzaal Soekamoelia, Medan"; Letter from Voorzitter van de AVROS, Medan, to Recomba voor Sumatra's Oostkust, November 24, 1947. On the increase in squatter cultivation of plantation lands since the 1930s, see van Langenberg, "National," pp. 118 ff.

39. Dr. Mansoer became Patron of Pardist. Datuk Hafiz Haberham, the Pardist First Chairman, was also a member of the Komite DIST. Altogether nine members of the Komite were on the Pardist leadership council. With the eventual establishment of the East Sumatra state in 1948 the party changed its name to Partai Negara Sumatera Timur--Parnest.

the Republic of Indonesia itself had been unable to prove them guilty of any offense. . . .

These secret associations have played their part in speeding up the long desired release of these Republican prisoners, in cooperation with the Netherlands Army. . . .

"PARDIST" is a party of the PEOPLE. All inhabitants irrespective of descent, religion or ethnicity, may become members of the party.

"PARDIST" firmly and resolutely opposes the reestablishment of the government of the Republic of Indonesia in East Sumatra.

"PARDIST" supports the KOMITE Daerah Istimewa Soematera Timoer which has now been formed from leaders from the above two secret associations.

"PARDIST" is willing to become the kernel of the KOMITE Daerah Istimewa Soematera Timoer.<sup>40</sup>

The second party, calling itself the National Party of East Sumatra (Partai Nasional Sumatera Timur--PNST), was formed in Medan on September 8 by a group of Malay kerajaan (mostly related to the royal families of Deli, Langkat, and Serdang). Many had been interned during the Social Revolution. A "History" and a "Statement of Principles" of the PNST, issued by the party at the end of September, clearly expresses the perceptions and ideals that flowed from the recent experiences of most of those actively engaged in the East Sumatra state movement:

In March 1946 leaders of the Republic of Indonesia together with their followers organized a movement which they called the Social Revolution. . . . they seized governmental power, killed, kidnapped, robbed, raped, and carried out other illegal actions against thousands of people from all ethnic groups, a large proportion of whom were the Native Inhabitants of East Sumatra [Boemipoetera Soematera Timoer] from all strata (men, women, and children). . . . this movement had been organized for the purpose of seizing our motherland East Sumatra by destroying the power of our people, killing those who held power (those who governed)--those who had become leaders in accordance with the customary law--interning the intellectuals, impoverishing our people, dividing other ethnic groups from our own and making false allegations of feudalism. . . .

Because of this . . . we would quickly establish an association [*serikat*] which would have as its aims:

- a. to unite the natives of East Sumatra within a single party so that, although not a large [ethnic] group, they will not vanish within the society at large;
- b. to create consciousness of our customs and traditions and the special privileges consonant with the times;
- c. to press for positions of responsibility for its members;
- d. to withdraw East Sumatra from the Republic.<sup>41</sup>

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40. Pardist, Medan, "Partai Daerah Istimewa Soematera Timoer (Pardist) telah Ben-tok," September 27, 1947 (ARA).

41. *Riwayat Partai Nasional Soematera Timoer Didirikan*, appended to letter from Pengoeroes Besar PNST, Medan, to Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, No. 120, October 1, 1947 (ARA).

The party's "Statement of Principles" took a strong anti-Java line, while stressing the desire for close economic and cultural ties with Holland and for the creation of an independent *Sumatran* state within an eventual Indonesian federation.<sup>42</sup>

The differences between the two parties were quite apparent. Pardist, as the political child of the Komite DIST, was formed to articulate and mobilize popular support for the ideals of an East Sumatra state in the form agreed upon between the Komite and the Dutch authorities. As such, it consciously avoided emphasizing the ideals of Malay and kerajaan hegemony promoted by the hardliners in the PNST.<sup>43</sup> The PNST had come into being as a result of fears (justifiable in the circumstances) among the Malay royal families that both the Dutch and the Komite DIST had already decided upon their political extinction. The sponsors and leaders of the PNST were determined to restore and preserve the pre-War rights and privileges of the Malay ruling families, if necessary in direct political opposition to the Komite DIST.<sup>44</sup>

In stressing the differences between the two parties one should not overlook the fundamental values they represented in common. Both reflected a strong Malay/orang asli consciousness. Pardist may have sought to deny any ethnic coloring, but the interests it represented were quite clearly those of the orang asli. It may not have been as raucously Malay-centered as the PNST, yet the party leadership was clearly Malay-dominated. Moreover, bitter memories of the Social Revolution of 1946 loomed just as large in the public statements of Pardist leaders as they did in those of the PNST.

Dutch concern to minimize kerajaan influence in the Komite DIST, and in any future East Sumatran state, featured prominently in discussions between the Komite and a high-level Indies government delegation, led by Lieutenant Governor-General van Mook, held in Medan on September 30. Mansoer, on behalf of the Komite, supported this Dutch concern, pointing out that even though the Komite included many members of the traditional ruling families:

Here there has been a Social Revolution. Here the Sultans do not possess de facto powers. The Komite is not against the traditional rulers, but it is intended to make perfectly clear the basic democratic nature of this region. . . . We do not oppose the traditional rulers. But today we believe it to be both unnecessary and dangerous for us to include representatives of the Sultans on the Komite.<sup>45</sup>

The discussions concluded, on October 3, with agreement on the basic structure for an autonomous East Sumatran state to be established within a federal state

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42. *Beginsel-Programma Dari Partai Nasional Soematera Timoer*, appended to *ibid.*

43. See Reid, *Blood*, p. 261.

44. Memorandum from Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, Batavia, to Directeur Kabinet, Batavia, No. 3346/AgSU, October 4, 1947 (ARA). Two days after the formation of the PNST the Sultan of Deli requested, on behalf of the traditional rulers, that the Indies government clarify just what the future position of the rulers would be and whether the government was prepared to abide by the terms of the pre-War "long contracts" with the Malay rulers. See letter from Rapolsum, Medan, to HVK, Batavia, No. 120/Z.G., December 18, 1948 (ARA). The PNST subsequently split into "hard" and "soft"-line factions. The latter, a minority, argued that protection of the traditional kingdoms should not mean a restoration of "feudalism." See Recomba, Medan, "Verslag betreffende de politieke en economische toestand in de Negara Soematera Timoer over de maand Maart 1948" (ARA), p. 3.

45. Cited in *Propinsi*, pp. 218-19.

of Indonesia.<sup>46</sup> The agreement firmly excluded the traditional rulers from positions of any political consequence in the proposed state by virtue of hereditary rights alone.<sup>47</sup> Five days later a decree of the Lt. Governor-General of the Indies provided for a further enlarged Comite DIST to become a Provisional Representative Council (Dewan Sementara), pending the final establishment of the autonomous state. As for the traditional kingdoms, a decision on their future status was deferred. In the meantime all their residual powers would be exercised jointly by the Netherlands Indies administration and the Dewan Sementara.<sup>48</sup>

The decree brought immediate reaction. The Sultan of Langkat proposed to the Lt. Governor-General:

Custom and tradition can only be made strong again in this region if the traditional kingdoms in East Sumatra are themselves made strong once again, because they are the pillars of the adat here. . . .

In my opinion the governmental structure most suitable for East Sumatra is: for all the [traditional] self-governing kingdoms in East Sumatra to be joined into a federation. . . .

Decisions of the [legislative] council would have to be approved by the abovementioned federation of rulers and they would be implemented in each kingdom in the name of the ruler of that particular kingdom.

Therefore, I am of the opinion that the decisions of such a people's Council must firstly be filtered through a council of traditional rulers because I know that the people of this country are insufficiently educated to consider fully the consequences of a law or the effects of its implementation.<sup>49</sup>

It was a vain plea for a cause already effectively lost. Given the glare of international attention then being focused upon their actions in Indonesia, the Dutch were disinclined to commit their limited resources to the support of such patently "colonialist" institutions as the pre-War native states of East Sumatra.

In the meantime, the Dewan Sementara was formed with eighteen members from the Comite DIST plus ten new members, including representatives for the Javanese, Dutch, Eurasian, and Indian communities. All members of the new Dewan were appointed specifically as representatives of particular ethnic/racial communities. However, with three Dutch representatives to just one Javanese, the changes were

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46. Recomba, Medan, "Verslag betreffende de politieke en economische toestand van het bezetgebied van de Oostkust van Sumatra over de maand October 1947" (BZ), p. 1. On the development of Dutch plans for a federal Indonesian state after the Japanese surrender, see A. Arthur Schiller, *The Formation of Federal Indonesia* (The Hague: van Hoeve, 1955), pp. 18-25.

47. The day after the Medan talks had concluded, the Lt. Governor-General advised the Netherlands Indies cabinet that restoration of the East Sumatran kingdoms should be avoided, for two reasons: it would lead to serious ethnic conflict, especially between Malays and Batak; and the "moderate" Malay intellectuals were strongly opposed to the conservatism of the sultans and raja. See Memorandum from Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, Batavia, to Directeur Kabinet, Batavia, No. 3346/AgSU, October 4, 1947 (ARA).

48. Besluit Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, No. 3, October 8, 1947 (*Staatsblad* No. 176/1947). The full text is given in *Kroniek*, 1947, p. 37, and *Propinsi*, p. 221.

49. Letter from Sultan of Langkat to Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, Batavia, October 1947 (ARA).

less than democratic. Moreover, with eleven Malay, two Simalungun, and two Karo Batak representatives in the twenty-eight-member house, orang asli and especially Malay dominance was maintained. At least twelve of the members belonged to the orang asli kerajaan, while all twenty-eight were typical representatives of the pre-War colonial Establishment.<sup>50</sup>

Between November 27 and December 5, 1947, constitutional talks were held in Jakarta between the provisional executive of the new state and the Indies government. There was amicable agreement on the question of constitutional status within a future federal state of Indonesia.<sup>51</sup> At the final session, however, the question of ethnic control opened up some fundamental differences between the Dutch and the Komite DIST. The latter stood firm in their determination to ensure that control of the state remained in the hands of the Malay/orang asli ruling elite. (Earlier, two senior Indies officials in Medan had been highly critical of the ethnocentrism of Komite DIST leaders.)<sup>52</sup> The Dutch pressed the DIST delegation to guarantee that all non-Malay ethnic groups would be given proper representation in any future government. Mansoer agreed, but went on to distinguish specifically between those who were recent immigrants to the region and those who had been there sufficiently long to become absorbed into the orang asli cultures. Using the Toba Bataks as an example, he differentiated between those who had lived in East Sumatra for more than forty years, and consequently were culturally "integrated," and those who had migrated more recently and who refused to accept the customs and traditions of the regions in which they settled. The latter, he implied, warranted no consideration for franchise or political equality.<sup>53</sup>

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50. Members of Komite DIST appointed to the new Dewan Sementara were: Tengku Hafas (Malay), Orang Kaya Ramli (Malay), Datuk Kamil (Malay), Datuk Hafiz Habersham (Malay), Abdul Wahab (Malay), Sajoeti (Malay), Mohamad Noeh (Malay), Tengku M. Bahar (Malay), Florencius Lumbantobing (Toba), Dr. F. J. Nainggolan (Toba), H. F. Sitompul (Toba), Djaidin Purba (Simalungun), Djomat Purba (Simalungun), Raja Meliala Sembiring (Karo), C. B. W. Manusiwa (East Indonesia), A. H. F. Rotty (East Indonesia), Tan Boen Djin (Chinese), Tan Wee Beng (Chinese). The additional members appointed were: Tengku Bahriun (Malay), Orang Kaja Djafar (Malay), Abdul Rahman (Malay), C. J. J. Hoogenboom (Dutch), D. P. van Meerten (Dutch), P. W. Janssen (Dutch), Neroes Ginting Soeka (Karo), R. M. Soedardjadi (Javanese), F. Enkorama (Eurasian), and Partap Singh (Indian). *Bukti*, p. 22.

51. "Notulen bespreking ontwerp-statuuat Soematera Timoer," November 27 and 28, December 1 and 2, 1947 (BZ).

52. Letter from Recomba, Medan to Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, Batavia, No. 488, November 21, 1947 (BZ); and letter from Rapolsom, Medan to Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, Batavia, No. 451/Geh., November 25, 1947 (BZ).

53. "Notulen bespreking ontwerp-statuuat Soematera Timoer," December 5, 1947 (BZ). Mansur's forty-year residency period seems to have been merely an arbitrary figure used to illustrate a point. Certainly the distinction between culturally "integrated" and nonintegrated communities seems to have been one generally held by all the orang asli members of the Komite DIST. The notion of cultural integration of non-orang asli was well understood in Malay society, which had a long tradition of accepting non-Malays into its ranks provided that the latter converted to Islam and accepted and complied with Malay adat. See Tengku Lukman Sinar, "The Impact of Dutch Colonialism on the Malay Coastal States on the East Coast of Sumatra during the Nineteenth Century," in *Papers of the Dutch-Indonesian Historical Conference 19 to 22 May 1976* (Leiden/Jakarta, 1978), p. 180.



### *The East Sumatran State*

On December 25, 1947 a second decree by the Lt. Governor-General, "Concerning the Recognition of the State of East Sumatra," established the former Special Region (Daerah Istimewa) as the State of East Sumatra (Negara Sumatera Timur--NST).<sup>54</sup> On January 29, 1948 the NST was officially proclaimed in Medan at a ceremony held in the Dewan Sementara. Watched by hundreds of official guests, the former chairman of the Komite DIST, Dr. Mansoer, was installed as Head of State (Wali Negara). The yellow, white, and green NST flag was officially unfurled for the first time.

On December 31, the Dewan Sementara passed a "Law Concerning the State Organization of the Negara Sumatera Timur" which approved and ratified the constitutional decree, subject to further changes which might be proposed by the Netherlands government.<sup>55</sup> The haste with which the constitutional provisions were drawn up is obvious at first reading. The structure of the state and its governing institutions are set out in the broadest of terms. Offices and functions are defined in only the most cursory fashion. So far as orang asli interests were concerned, the constitution remained silent, apart from a brief reference to the requirement that the Head of State have "special ties with East Sumatra, by reasons of history, descent, and custom. . . ."

The NST constitution laid out the very simplest pattern of governmental institutions. Legislative and executive powers were to reside in three institutions: a Dewan Perwakilan (Representative Council) of fifty members; a Badan Amanah (Advisory/Executive Council); and the Head of State, the Wali Negara, elected by the Dewan for a term of five years. In addition to the Badan Amanah, the Wali Negara would be assisted by a five-member cabinet.<sup>56</sup>

In mid-February 1948 the Indies government commenced the transference of governmental powers to the NST. A further decree of the Lt. Governor-General confirmed the legal existence of NST government institutions.<sup>57</sup> On March 9, general responsibility for internal civilian government was transferred from the Netherlands Indies to the NST government.<sup>58</sup> Pending the formation of the federal Indonesian state, of which the NST would be a constituent entity, the NST government was made responsible to a (Dutch) Crown Commissioner (Commissaris van de Kroon).<sup>59</sup>

54. Gouvernementsbesluit No. 3, October 8, 1947 (*Staatsblad* No. 176/1947). See *Lampiran 2 Bagian jang kedoea Kearah Ketertiban Hoekoem Baroe di Indonesia* (Batavia: Kolff, n.d.), pp. 148-50.

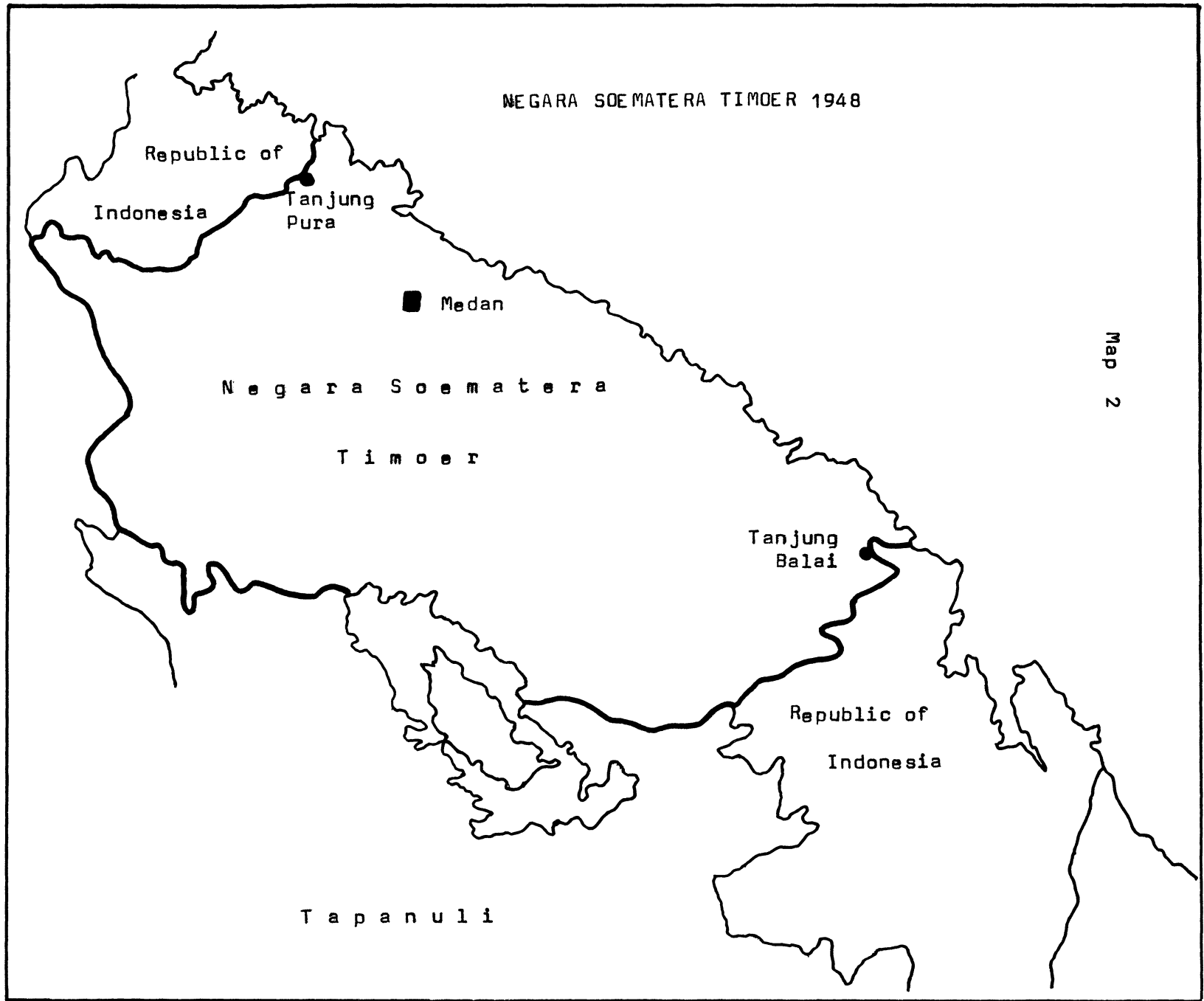
55. "Peratoeran Soesoenan Tata Negara Soematera Timoer," *Oendang 2 Dewan NST*, No. 1, December 31, 1947. The full text of the law is given in *ibid.*, pp. 158-81.

56. R. Sumarsono, "Satu Ichtisar dari Sedjarah Perobahan Ketatanegaraan pada waktu ini," in *Bestuursvraagstukken. Soal 2 Pemerintahan*, 1, 3 (1949), p. 396.

57. Besluit van de Luitenant Gouverneur-Generaal van Nederlands-Indië, No. 1, February 16, 1948 (*Staatsblad* No. 41/1948). See *ibid.*, pp. 151-57. Also, Recomba, Medan, "Verslag . . . Oostkust van Sumatra over de maand Februari 1948" (BZ), p. 1.

58. Gouvernementsbesluit No. 6, March 9, 1948 (*Staatsblad* No. 64/1948). At the same time as internal security powers were transferred to the NST government, the Indies authorities ordered the disbanding of the Poh An Tui in East Sumatra.

59. *Kroniek*, 1948-49, pp. 31-32. On the office of the Crown Commissioner at this time, see Schiller, *Formation*, p. 36.



NEGARA SOEMATERA TIMOER 1948

Republic of  
Indonesia  
Tanjung  
Pura

■ Medan

N e g a r a S o e m a t e r a  
T i m o e r

Tanjung  
Balai

Republic of  
Indonesia

T a p a n u l i

Map 2

Leadership of the NST was firmly in the hands of members of an orang asli elite overwhelmingly of kerajaan origin, aside from the important supervisory role exercised by Dutch officials. Commenting on the composition of the executive and civil service leadership of the NST, the Indies Government Advisor for Political Affairs for Sumatra, Dr. van de Velde, remarked:

The Wali Negara himself and all the Indonesian dignitaries, with the exception of two, are from the sultanate families and the two exceptions are non-Sumatrans, viz., East Indonesians. Moreover, two of the department heads, Tengku Bahriun and Tengku Sulung, are brothers of Tengku Dzulkarnain, so it is no wonder that the Republican press talks about a "feudal clique."<sup>60</sup>

Dr. Mansoer's speech to the first session of the Dewan Perwakilan, on March 15, illustrated glaringly the aristocratic values of the NST leadership by his patronizing distinction between "us" (the rulers) and "them" (the ruled). Once again the Social Revolution did not escape bitter reference.<sup>61</sup>

The NST elite had moved quickly to revive some of the important institutional expressions of pre-Social Revolution "normalcy." One was the Dutch language and an identification with Dutch culture. Dutch joined Malay as an official language for the conduct of government business. In August and September 1948 an Orange Festival (*Oranjefeest*) was held throughout the NST to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the reign of Queen Wilhelmina and the accession of Juliana to the Dutch throne. Led by NST government leaders, the festivities were held in grand style, far outstripping those held to mark the establishment of the NST itself.<sup>62</sup> Those key institutions in the day-to-day functioning of colonial rule before 1942--the Medan Club, the Medan Golf Club, and the Deli Yacht Club--had all been reopened. Through them the survivors of the pre-War colonial Establishment planned policies for and helped to administer the NST. It was not uncommon for Dutch officials to comment specifically on the "Dutchness" of the cultural milieu surrounding the NST elite. One senior Dutch official, for example, wrote at the time:

The Wali Negara, Dr. Mansoer, is undoubtedly a man of quality, who combines intelligence with bonhomie. He is to an important degree Holland-oriented, such that one hears him use the term "we Hollanders" in casual conversation.<sup>63</sup>

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60. Letter from Rapolsum, Medan to Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, Batavia, No. 36/Z.G., February 27, 1948 (ARA). The five-member cabinet appointed by Dr. Mansoer consisted of: the Sultan of Asahan, Tengku Bahriun, Tengku Hafas, and the two Indies government advisors to the Komite DIST, Forch and van Gelder. The seven-member Advisory/Executive Council consisted of Tengku Bahar (Malay), Datuk Kamil (Malay), Raja Kalijamsjah Sinaga (Simalungun), Raja Meliala Sembiring (Karo), Tan Boen Djin (Chinese), D. P. van Meerten (Dutch), and A. H. Rotty (East Indonesia). *Negara Soematera Timoer Sepintas Laloe*, pp. 27-28.

61. The full text of Mansoer's speech is given in *Negara Soematera Timoer, Pidato Wali Negara Soematera Timoer pada ketika pembukaan sidang pertama Dewan Perwakilan 15-3-1948* (Medan, 1948), and *Propinsi*, pp. 223-29.

62. See *Kroniek*, 1948-49, pp. 281-85.

63. Algemeen Vertegenwoordiger van de Secretaris van Staat voor Economische Zaken, Batavia, "Besprekingen te Medan/Jhr. Mr. C. H. V. de Villeneuve 12-16 December 1948" (BZ), p. 2.

### *The Land Problem*

Ethnic antagonisms in East Sumatra had long been focused upon the question of communal land rights and infringements by the plantation economy upon those rights.<sup>64</sup> Since the Japanese occupation in 1942 there had been a rapid decline in the plantation economy. Vast areas of plantation land had been turned over to small-holder cultivation by former plantation laborers, most of whom were Javanese. By the beginning of 1948 thousands of hectares of former plantation land were being cultivated by such "squatter" farmers.<sup>65</sup> The leaders of the East Sumatra state movement were determined that the squatters be removed, the plantations returned to commercial production, and the special orang asli usage rights to plantation land restored.<sup>66</sup>

After 1947, the squatter settlements were scenes of frequent violence. In Deli groups of militant Malay youth began attacking and attempting to evict non-Malay farmers, both Javanese and Karo, from land they regarded as traditionally Malay.<sup>67</sup> These attacks led to a widening incidence of violent clashes between Malay and non-Malay farmers.<sup>68</sup> One effect of this violence was further to diminish support for the NST among the non-Malay orang asli. Not only Javanese and Toba, but also Karo and Simalungun peasant farmers responded more and more favorably to calls from Republican activists to resist the reimposition of Dutch colonialism and Malay feudalism.

The authorities were thus faced with a "land problem"<sup>69</sup> that not only frustrated their attempts to give the state a viable economic base, but had become a highly emotional issue. The result was a "tough" stance and frequent overreaction by Malay leaders in the NST government.<sup>70</sup> Police and plantation guards

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64. See Reid, *Blood*, pp. 48 ff.; Reid and Shiraishi, eds., "Rural"; O'Malley, "Indonesia," pp. 131 ff.; and van Langenberg, "North Sumatra 1942-1945."

65. H. G. van der Weij, "The Deli Tobacco Cultivation and Its Recovery," *The Economic Review of Indonesia*, 1, 12 (December 1947), pp. 189-91.

66. In November 1947 the Komite DIST had given an undertaking to the DPV to support the removal of squatters and the restoration of the land concerned to the tobacco plantations. See Recomba, Medan, "Verslag . . . Negara Soematera Timoer . . . April 1948" (ARA), p. 5. The orang asli usage rights referred to here are the so-called *jaluran* rights to plantation lands. See Pelzer, *Planter*, pp. 66-85, and R. C. de Iongh, "The Guardians of the Land: Sultans, Planters, Farmers and Tobacco Land in East Sumatra," in *Austrina*, ed. R. A. Davis (Sydney: Oriental Society of Australia, 1981).

67. Tengku Lukman Sinar, "Tragedi Tanah Djaluran di Sumatera Utara" (unpublished ms., 1972), p. 15.

68. See *Waspada*, April 10, 18, and 29, 1948.

69. See Recomba, Medan, "Verslag . . . Negara Soematera Timoer . . . April 1948" (ARA), pp. 5-7, and "Verslag . . . Mei 1948" (ARA), pp. 4-5, 10, and 15.

70. Senior NST government leaders began demanding firm action to evict the squatters. At the Dewan NST session on May 10, 1948, the Director of the NST Cabinet, Tengku Hafas, pointing to the Republican sympathies of the squatter communities, urged their physical removal. *Kroniek*, 1948-49, pp. 54-55. The question of Malay land rights soon had produced a militant, antigovernment minority within the NST ruling elite. Led by activists from the PNST, it attacked the NST government for failing to pursue the recovery of Malay lands with sufficient vigor. By the end of January 1949 an East Sumatra People's Party (Partai Ra'yat Sumatera Timur--PRST)

began arresting and evicting squatter farmers. Bulldozers were sent in to dig up the farms and demolish buildings.<sup>71</sup> By 1949, the NST and the Malays were clearly losing the struggle. No sooner were evicted squatters released from custody and police or plantation guards moved than the land in question would be reoccupied and cultivation recommenced. With squatter resistance increasingly being organized by Republican activists, the pattern of eviction and reoccupation soon became ritualistic.<sup>72</sup> The more the NST government and the plantation companies tried to evict squatters the stronger and more widespread peasant support for the Republican political alternative to the NST became.

The land problem not only undermined the NST's legitimacy as the defender of orang asli, as distinct from specifically Malay, rights, but also threatened the very base of the NST economy. Since the conclusion of the Dutch military action in 1947 a great deal of effort on the part of the Dutch, the Comite DIST (and NST leadership), and the plantation companies had gone into effecting a restoration of the pre-War economy.<sup>73</sup> By the end of 1947 most of the plantations had been brought within Dutch-controlled (and subsequently NST) territory.<sup>74</sup> Some 208 plantations were soon afterwards returned to their former owners.<sup>75</sup>

The high incidence of squatter cultivation, however, not only limited the acreage that could in practice be returned to commercial cultivation but was also the cause of a severe labor shortage. The thousands of former plantation workers who had become squatter farmers were disinclined to return to the lower status occupation of full-time wage labor employment.<sup>76</sup> Both the planters' associations,

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had been formed for this purpose. It accused the NST of having abandoned the rights of Malay farmers to non-Malay and foreign corporations. Algemeen Secretaris, Wali Negara van Soematera Timoer, "Verslag . . . over de maand Januari 1949" (BZ), pp. 7-8.

71. See *Waspada*, June 1, 17, 23, and 28, 1948; and Ketetapan Wali Negara Soematera Timoer No. 16, June 23, 1948, in *Warta Rasmi Negara Soematera Timoer* No. 14/1948; and Haliman, "Sumbangan untuk Mempeladjarai Pertentangan antara Golongan-Golongan di Sumatera Utara" (B.A. thesis, Universitas Sumatera Utara, 1957), p. 76.

72. See *Waspada*, June 30, 1948; and Hoofd van het Bureau der Landinrichting, Bogor, "Reisrapport No. 10 naar de Negara Soematera Timoer van 27 t/m 31 Juli 1948," pp. 11-13.

73. See Algemeen Vertegenwoordiger van de Secretaris van Staat voor Economische Zaken, Batavia, "Besprekingen te Medan/Jhr. Mr. C. H. V. de Villeneuve 12-16 December 1948" (BZ), p. 1.

74. See P. M. Prillwitz, "Production Possibilities of the Estates within the Demarcation Lines in Java and Sumatra," *The Economic Review of Indonesia*, 2, 3 (1948), p. 34. Details of particular plantations restored to their former owners during 1947 are given in *The Economic Review of Indonesia*, 1, 9 (1947), pp. 138-39.

75. The 208 consisted of 113 rubber, 41 tobacco, 15 tea, 14 oil palm, 7 coconut, and 5 fiber plantations. Of these, 163 (86 rubber, 35 tobacco, 15 tea, 15 oil palm, 7 coconut, and 5 fiber) had been partially restored to production. Recomba, Medan, "Verslag . . . Negara Soematera Timoer . . . Februari 1948" (BZ), p. 5. See also *The Economic Review of Indonesia*, 2, 4 (1948), p. 54; and J. G. J. A. Maas, "The Recovery of the Perennial Export Crops in East Sumatra," *The Economic Review of Indonesia*, 2, 1 (1948), pp. 1-4.

76. Between March 1942 and January 1948 the number of full-time plantation work-

AVROS and DPV, urged a resumption of the importation of contract labor from Java. However, the prospect of a further increase in the non-orang asli population of East Sumatra contradicted the basic rationale for the existence of the NST. Its leaders therefore firmly refused to countenance such a solution.<sup>77</sup> The problem remained unresolved while mutual irritation between the two planters' associations and the NST increased. As a result, AVROS and the DPV both began to qualify their support for the NST and turned towards improving relations with the Republic.<sup>78</sup>

### *Ending the Native States*

Meanwhile, the second half of 1948 saw the formal dismantling of the structure of autonomous "native states," which began when the newly established Interim Federal Government of Indonesia<sup>79</sup> effected the final transfer of specific governmental powers from the Netherlands Indies government to that of the NST.<sup>80</sup> These powers included those formerly enjoyed by the native rulers. On July 19, 1948, the Dewan NST legislated the transfer of all the rulers' residual political authority and administrative functions to the NST government.<sup>81</sup>

In spite of, and because of, these developments the kerajaan ruling families began organizing in defense of their interests. In Deli two political organizations,

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ers in East Sumatra dropped from 208,800 to 72,400. Recomba, Medan, "Verslag . . . Negara Soematera Timoer . . . Mei 1948" (ARA), p. 7. Between January and October 1948, as the number of plantations restored to production increased rapidly, the workforce increased to over 160,000. Ibid., p. 7; Algemeen Secretaris, Wali Negara van Soematera Timoer, Medan, "Verslag . . . September 1948," p. 14 and "Politieke . . . verslag . . . November 1948" (BZ), p. 16. Yet even this increase in labor fell far short of company expectations. In October 1948 the AVROS chairman announced that a "serious" labor shortage still existed on the plantations. See *Waspada*, October 29, 1948. A detailed breakdown of the plantation workforce as of the end of May 1948, according to plantation company and type of plantation, is given in Algemeen Secretaris, Wali Negara van Soematera Timoer, Medan, "Verslag . . . Juli 1948," Bijlage II (BZ), pp. 1-3.

77. Letter from Voorzitter van de AVROS, Medan, to Hoofd van het Departement van Bestuur van de NST, Medan, No. 94, January 18, 1949, and Letter from Rapolsum, Medan, to Directeur Kabinet, Batavia, October 15, 1948 (ARA).

78. This mounting dispute between the planters' associations and the NST is extensively documented in Ged. HVK Soematera Timoer, Medan, "Maandrapport over September 1949" (ARA), pp. 8-10; Letter from Ged. HVK, Medan to HVK, Batavia, No. 831/Z.G., November 21, 1949 (ARA); Brieftelegram from Ged. HVK, Medan to HVK, Batavia, No. 780, October 22, 1949 (BZ); Letter from HVK, Batavia, to Algemeen Secretaris, Batavia, No. 164, December 9, 1949 (BZ); Telegram from Regvind., Batavia to Ged. HVK, Medan, No. 8708, September 27, 1949 (ARA); and Codetelegram from Ged. HVK, Medan to Regvind., Batavia, No. 4665, October 18, 1949 (ARA).

79. See Schiller, *Formation*, p. 45.

80. *Staatsblad* Nos. 125-131/1948, 157-159/1948, 175/1948, 184/1948, 221/1948, and 320/1948.

81. "Oendang2 Dewan NST 'Penjerahan Kekoeasaan Keradjaan dan Alat2 Goebernoemen,'" in *Warta Rasmi Negara Soematera Timoer*, No. 17/1948. See also Schiller, *Formation*, p. 325.

led by senior members of the Deli kerajaan, were formed for this purpose. The Party of the People of Deli (Partai Anak Deli--Padi) was formed to represent the special political interests of subjects of the Deli sultanate. It called for a federation of East Sumatra kingdoms, along Malayan lines. The Deli Union (Deli Sepakat), under the personal patronage of the sultan, presented itself as the protector of the cultural values underlying the political aims of Padi.<sup>82</sup> Shortly afterwards Deli Union fused with the first of the pro-sultanate parties, the PNST.<sup>83</sup> By February 1949, similar unions (sepakat) had been formed for the Serdang and Langkat sultanates. Called the Partai Serdang Sepakat and the Partai Langkat Sepakat, they pressed essentially the same demands as those of their counterparts in Deli.<sup>84</sup>

The Sultan of Deli now publicly took up the case for the traditional kingdoms, reiterating demands that the kingdoms be reorganized into a federation on the Malayan model. Together with other rulers, he pressed the Dutch to continue recognition of the rights guaranteed the kingdoms under the pre-War contracts.<sup>85</sup> On January 29, 1949 a resolution to this effect was issued in the name of the Kingdom of Deli and signed by the sultan, the members of the royal council (*raad van landsgroten*) and by the regional chiefs for Bedagai and Padang. The resolution, presented to the Dutch Crown Commissioner in Medan, demanded that, pending a final decision on the future status of the traditional kingdoms within the proposed federal Indonesian state, all pre-War autonomous powers be restored immediately to the sultanate.<sup>86</sup>

On February 20, the Sultan of Deli convened a meeting of eleven prominent orang asli rulers (those of Asahan, Langkat, Serdang, Kualuh Leidong, Indrapura, Kotapinang, Limapuluh, Tanah Datar, Siantar, and Sukudua) at his palace. The rulers agreed that some joint action in defense of the kingdoms was imperative. On March 1, they submitted a joint resolution to the Netherlands Indies and Interim Federal Indonesia governments, which reiterated previous assertions as to the continued legality of the contracts between the East Sumatra kingdoms and the Indies government. The rulers declared their support for and commitment to the terms of the contracts. The resolution also repeated the earlier proposal by the Sultan of Langkat for the establishment of a council of rulers and adat chiefs as an essential institution within the NST political structure.<sup>87</sup>

The question of the status of the kingdoms remained at the forefront of political debate within the NST over the next year. But the rulers' demands met with

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82. On Padi and Deli Sepakat, see Recomba, Medan, "Verslag betreffende de politieke en economische toestand in de Negara Soematera Timoer over de maand Maart 1948" (ARA), pp. 3-4; and Algemeen Secretaris, Wali Negara van Soematera Timoer, Medan, "Maandverslag betreffende de politieke en economische toestand in de Negara Soematera Timoer over de maand Augustus 1948" (BZ), p. 2.

83. Recomba, Medan, "Verslag . . . Negara Soematera Timoer . . . Mei 1948" (ARA), pp. 2-3.

84. Algemeen Secretaris, Wali Negara van Soematera Timoer, Medan, "Verslag . . . over de maand Februari 1949" (BZ), p. 2.

85. *Waspada*, June 19 and July 19, 1948.

86. Raad van Landsgroten Keradjaan Negeri Deli, Medan, Kepoatoesan 29 Januari 1949, appended to letter from Comkrost, Medan, to HVK, Batavia, No. 389, February 1, 1949 (ARA).

87. Sultan of Deli et al. to HVK, Batavia, March 2, 1949 (ARA).

firm opposition from key figures in the NST regime,<sup>88</sup> who insisted that any recognition of "autonomous" kingdoms would seriously compromise the territorial sovereignty of the East Sumatran state. Dr. Mansoer, in particular, showed little inclination to compromise with the rulers' demands. In his opening speech to the Dewan NST session on March 21, 1949 he laid special emphasis on the need for the former kingdoms to be absorbed into the NST polity, in order to ensure complete autonomy for the NST itself.<sup>89</sup>

By late 1949, as the transfer of sovereignty to an independent Indonesia was becoming imminent, the debate came to a rapid end. A clear majority of members of the Dewan NST (notably the non-Malay members) had made it known that they would reject any attempt at restoration of the kingdoms.<sup>90</sup> The "native states" were clearly relics of a past era, and their restoration a lost cause. By mid-1950, even that most ardent champion of the traditional kingdoms, the Sultan of Deli, was prepared to announce that he no longer had any objections to the dissolution of both the "native states" and the NST itself and the establishment of a unitary, independent Indonesian republic (provided East Sumatra was granted adequate autonomy within it).<sup>91</sup>

### *Defending the Orang Asli*

If the question of the future of the native states had split the orang asli elite once the NST had been established, there was no such dissension concerning that elite's commitment to orang asli hegemony. At the end of 1948, for example, the General Representative of the Secretary for Economic Affairs in the Interim Federal Indonesian Government, reporting on the operations of the NST administration, wrote that:

. . . Indonesian political authority rests upon and stems from one group: the Malays. They scrupulously exclude the "foreign" Indonesian elements (Bataks, Javanese) from this milieu; the Chinese are allowed to participate. So it is too with the (in fact appointed) Negara Council. Not unjustly then has East Sumatra acquired the alternative name of Mansoerije [Mansoerland].<sup>92</sup>

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88. For accounts of these debates, see Algemeen Secretaris, Wali Negara van Soematera Timoer, Medan, "Verslag . . . Maart 1949" (BZ), p. 2, and "Verslag . . . April 1949" (BZ), p. 3; Letter from Rapolsum, Medan, to Secretaris van Staat voor Zelfbestuurszaken, Batavia, No. 120/Z.G., January 18, 1949 (ARA); Letter from HVK, Batavia, to Minog., Hague, No. 1407/Geh., March 10, 1949 (ARA); and Letter from Comkrost, Medan, to Algemeen Secretaris, Batavia, No. 470/Geh., March 15, 1949 (ARA).

89. Algemeen Secretaris, Wali Negara van Soematera Timoer, Medan, "Verslag . . . Maart 1949" (BZ), pp. 2-4.

90. Ged. HVK Soematera Timoer, Medan, "Maandrapport over September 1949" (ARA), p. 1.

91. *Merdeka*, July 25, 1950.

92. Algemeen Vertegenwoordiger van de Secretaris van Staat voor Economische Zaken, Batavia, "Besprekingen te Medan/Jhr. Mr. C. H. V. de Villeneuve 12-16 December 1948" (BZ), p. 2. On the popular reference at the time to the NST as Negara Mansoerije (Mansoer Land), See Louis Vrooland, *Indonesië. Een Tropen-journaal* (Amsterdam: Scheltens & Giltay, 1950), p. 193.



The first session of the Dewan NST in March 1948 had resolved to increase the size of the council from twenty-eight to thirty-five and to provide a more equitable ethnic "balance." The number of Karo representatives was increased from two to five, of Simalungun representatives from two to four, and of Javanese from one to four. The number of Malay representatives was reduced from eleven to nine, and an additional seat was provided for ethnic groups not specifically represented in the Dewan.<sup>93</sup> This move was effected primarily in response to Dutch pressure for greater democratization of the political system, but also because of Karo and Simalungun demands for greater representation of the non-Malay orang asli. Yet this expansion and change in Dewan NST in fact made no difference to the reality of specifically Malay and generally orang asli dominance of the government; the changes were purely cosmetic.

The largest single ethnic group in East Sumatra, the Javanese, remained excluded from serious participation in government decision making. This exclusion was maintained not only because the size of the ethnic Javanese population in the region posed an obvious threat to orang asli interests but also because of the way in which many NST leaders, given their colonial Establishment orientation, tended to view the Javanese in East Sumatra. In their eyes, the mass of the Javanese community were mere coolies, indentured laborers, who up till now had been simply pawns in the hands of Republican leaders in Java and of communists and extremists in Sumatra. By considering the Javanese as uneducated, politically naive and, hence, easily "managed" by whoever controlled the political system as a whole, they saw little need for anything more than token gestures. The Toba Batak were a much more immediate threat to the communal interests which the NST sought to protect. Socially aggressive, relatively well educated, and communally cohesive via the mutually reinforcing institutions of clan and church, the Toba Batak had begun moving in increasing numbers into East Sumatra since the Japanese occupation.<sup>94</sup> Many orang asli had long viewed the Toba Batak in East Sumatra as little more than an advance guard for tens of thousands of their compatriots over the border in Tapanuli who were waiting for an opportunity to descend upon and seize the riches of the east coast. Consequently, so far as the NST elite were concerned, the Toba had to be denied access to any real political power within the NST, but at the same time sufficiently accommodated to minimize their alienation.

It was a strategy with little hope of success. Not only did the long-standing communal hostilities between the Toba and the orang asli ensure that the great majority of Toba in East Sumatra remained committed supporters of the Republic, but even those few Toba who had been prepared to back the East Sumatra state movement soon became disillusioned with what that state was offering them.<sup>95</sup> As

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93. Algemeen Secretaris, Wali Negara van Soematera Timoer, Medan, "Verslag betreffende de politieke en economische toestand in de Negara Soematera Timoer over de maand Juli 1948" (BZ), p. 1.

94. See Paul B. Pedersen, "Religion as the Basis of Social Change among the Bataks of North Sumatra" (Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1969), and Clark E. Cunningham, *Postwar Migrations of the Toba Bataks to East Sumatra*, Cultural Report Series No. 5 (New Haven: Yale Southeast Asian Studies, 1958).

95. At the end of February 1948 the Rapolsum had complained to the Lt. Governor-General that the anti-Toba prejudices of many NST leaders were alienating a large minority of the population. He criticized NST leaders with "feudal" backgrounds for being unable to construct a sufficiently "democratic" polity. See letter from Rapolsum, Medan, to Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, Batavia, No. 36/Z.G., February 27, 1948 (ARA). Early in April the Crown Commissioner in Medan reported that

a result, soon after the formation of the NST these Toba established a political party specifically to act for the protection of the interests of all Tapanuli Batak in East Sumatra. The party, the Tapanuli Association (Persatuan Tapanuli--Perta) had two main objectives: first, to counter the continued protection of orang asli privilege within the NST and the detrimental effects this was having on the interests of local Tapanuli Batak and, second, the establishment of a Batak state in Tapanuli along the lines of the NST.<sup>96</sup>

It was virtually inevitable that establishment of the NST would heighten communal hostilities between the orang asli and other ethnic groups in East Sumatra, and heighten support for the Republic of Indonesia among the non-orang asli communities.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, the obvious kerajaan dominance of the NST, notwithstanding the diminution of the rulers' powers, helped to spread anti-NST feeling into the ranks of the non-Malay orang asli as well. Already long-established anti-kerajaan movements among the Karo and Simalungun acted as important mobilizers of mass opposition to what was seen by many as a restoration of the old "feudal" colonial system.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, Dutch insistence on the NST having at least some of the trappings of a pluralist democracy ensured the continued existence of a legal pro-Republican political opposition through which such ethnic and class-based anti-NST sentiments could be organized.<sup>99</sup>

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the "problem" of achieving adequate Toba participation in the NST political system had still not been solved. See Recomba, Medan, "Verslag . . . Negara Soematera Timoer . . . Maart 1948" (ARA), p. 2. Shortly after this, the Rapolsum reported that Toba leaders were accusing those of the orang asli communities of refusing to contemplate an equitable alliance between the NST and Tapanuli out of a fear that the Tapanuli Batak, because of their greater energy and intellectual strength, would eventually seize the leadership of the NST. "It is nevertheless known," he added, "that the Negara was brought into existence by the actions of the Malay intellectuals and that representation and participation of the Javanese and Batak communities in the legislative council and the government leaves much to be desired." Letter from Rapolsum, Medan, to Lt. Gouverneur-Generaal, Batavia, No. 16/Z.G., April 21, 1948 (ARA).

96. Recomba, Medan, "Verslag . . . Negara Soematera Timoer . . . Maart 1948" (ARA), p. 2.

97. In mid-December 1948 the Rapolsum had reported that the political leaders of the NST were deliberately applying a policy of orang asli domination of the government and the exclusion of all other ethnic groups. Letter from Rapolsum, Medan, to HVK, Batavia, No. 120/Z.G., December 18, 1948 (ARA).

98. On the development of anti-kerajaan movements among the Karo and Simalungun, see Niblett, "The Development of Nationalist Activity," pp. 37-40; Entwistle, "The Pergerakan Movement," passim; Reid, "The Japanese Occupation and Rival Indonesian Elites," and *Blood*, pp. 38 ff.; Reid and Shiraishi, "Rural Unrest"; van Langenberg, "North Sumatra 1942-1945," and "National," passim. On the important role of the Karo in the collapse of the NST during the first half of 1950, see van Langenberg, "National," pp. 821 ff.

99. This Republican opposition found its focus in a National Front (Front Nasional). On the Front Nasional's activities within the NST, see van Langenberg, "National," pp. 646-51. The opposition also spread widely through "nonpolitical" organizations such as the Muhammadiyah, the Batak Christian churches (particularly the Toba Batak church), the Taman Siswa, peasants' associations, and a wide range of communal social organizations such as ethnic, clan, and adat associations, as well as clubs and other societies. Reports of such activities are given in *Waspada*, Septem-

### *The End of the NST*

By the beginning of 1950, with the departure of Dutch military forces and the transfer of sovereignty to the new federal government, the NST undoubtedly enjoyed the committed support of the ethnic Malay population. But that was all. The overwhelming majority of the non-Malay ethnic communities were supporters of the Republican alternative, and together they made up a large majority of the total population of East Sumatra. In the urban kampungs, on the plantations, and in the villages, hundreds of thousands of such people saw the NST as simply a restoration of the pre-War colonial condition, compounded by a resurgent Malay feudalism.<sup>100</sup>

Anti-Malay, anti-kerajaan and anti-Dutch sentiments fused in a common feeling of antipathy towards the NST in the minds of those who by 1950 had chosen to commit their loyalties to the Republic of Indonesia. Moreover, many of these people believed the NST was frustrating material aspirations which had developed since the Japanese occupation. Javanese plantation laborers, Tapanuli Batak migrants, Karo and Simalungun Batak disaffected with their traditional rulers, all had material expectations of independence (*merdeka*) which were in direct contradiction with the aims of those who led and supported the NST. By promising to redistribute the vast foreign and sectionally controlled resources, the Republic appeared to offer hopes for the realization of these aspirations.

From early December 1949 (as sovereignty was being finally transferred by the Dutch) organized anti-NST activity mushroomed. By the end of January 1950 a mass-based, vocal anti-NST movement was active throughout the territory. It encompassed political parties, trade unions, religious organizations, youth and women's groups, as well as cultural and ethnic associations. Mass demonstrations, public meetings and resolutions, strikes, occupation of plantation lands, were all aimed at the destruction of the NST.<sup>101</sup> The labor unions, led by the East Sumatra Regional Committee of the All-Indonesian Trade Union Federation (Panitia Daerah Vaksentral Seluruh Indonesia Sumatera Timur), began strike action in opposition to the NST

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ber 27, October 15, and November 11, 1947, March 3 and 4, May 14, and June 30, 1948; Rapolsum, Medan, "Politiek Verslag van Sumatra over Maart 1948" (ARA), p. 3; Recomba, Medan, "Verslag . . . Negara Soematera Timoer . . . Maart 1948" (ARA), pp. 4-5, and "Verslag . . . Mei 1948" (ARA), pp. 1-2; and Letter from Rapolsum, Medan, to Directeur Kabinet, Batavia, October 15, 1948 (ARA). At the same time there was also an active Republican press, led by two of the largest daily newspapers in Medan, *Mimbar Umum* and *Waspada*. Dutch estimates placed the average daily circulations of these two papers at 2,000 and 1,800 copies respectively. Readership of each paper would have been at least ten times this. Recomba, Medan, "Verslag . . . Negara Soematera Timoer . . . Mei 1948" (ARA), pp. 9-12. There were also a number of weeklies and monthlies published in several towns in the NST: for example, *Waktoe*, *Pedoman*, *Setaraf*, *Angkatan Muda*, *Berita Front Nasional*, *Pemuda*, *Merdeka*, *Mimbar*, and *Mimbar Islam*. Details of this Republican opposition within the NST are given in van Langenberg, "National," pp. 630 ff.

100. In October 1948 the Rapolsum reported that political support for the NST outside the Medan area was very low, despite the propaganda efforts of the NST government. See Letter from Rapolsum, Medan, to Directeur Kabinet, Batavia, October 15, 1948 (ARA).

101. For a detailed account of the developments during the first eight months of 1950 leading to the eventual dissolution of the NST, see van Langenberg, "National," pp. 840-917.

government. The main farmers' organizations--Serikat Tani, Gerakan Tani, and Barisan Tani Indonesia--promoted further occupation of the plantation lands, presenting them as "rewards of the Revolution [*hadiah revolusi*]." <sup>102</sup> In the first three months of independence in 1950 still more erstwhile plantation workers joined the big population of squatter farmers cultivating former estate lands. They in turn were joined by Tapanuli Batak living in Simalungun, by Karo in Langkat and Deli, by newly arrived migrants from Tapanuli itself and by others from the Karo highlands. In their thousands these people moved onto the plantation lands bordering the highways from Medan to Tebingtinggi, Tanjung Balai, and Rantau Prapat in the south; to Binjai and Tanjung Pura in the north; and on to the estates surrounding Medan itself. <sup>103</sup> In Tanah Karo, Asahan, and Labuhan Batu, local anti-NST organizations held mass rallies demanding separation of those regions from the NST and incorporation into a unitary Republic of Indonesia. <sup>104</sup> Support and protection for such anti-NST rallies were provided by Republican military units.

On February 6, 1950 the Director of the NST Cabinet, Tengku Hafas, announced that this state of affairs had "given rise to internal conflicts which have destroyed our unity." <sup>105</sup> By early May, the Dewan NST had agreed to negotiations with the federal Indonesian government on the eventual incorporation of East Sumatra into a unitary state. <sup>106</sup> Dr. Mansoer empowered the federal government and Prime Minister Hatta to act on behalf of the NST in negotiations for the setting up of the unitary state. <sup>107</sup> On August 13, 1950 the NST effectively came to an end when the Dewan NST approved legislation dissolving the state and incorporating East Sumatra into a unitary Republic of Indonesia. <sup>108</sup>

### Conclusion

The NST was one of the last two Dutch-established regional states within federal Indonesia to be dismantled. That it survived longer than all but one of the other states suggests a relatively strong and resilient internal structure. <sup>109</sup> But

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102. *Waspada*, March 11, 22, and 28, April 5 and 8, August 19 and 31, 1950. Also Sinar, "Tragedi," p. 13; and John C. Sutter, "Indonesianisasi: Politics in a Changing Economy 1940-1955" (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1959), p. 273. This view of former plantation land as a *hadiah revolusi* was confirmed by several informants, particularly Toba and Karo Batak, in interviews conducted between 1969 and 1971. See also Cunningham, *Postwar*, p. 108.

103. I. J. Kasimo and Jusuf Muda Dalam, "Pelaporan. Penyelidikan di Sumatera Timur tentang soal tanah<sup>2</sup> perkebunan dan pemakaian tanah<sup>2</sup> bekas perkebunan oleh rakyat" (Jakarta, May 1950) ("Kasimo Report"); Ahmad Fauzi Ridwan, "Sekitar Perkembangan Hukum Tanah Dalam Tindjauan Masa Lampau dan Datang (Sebelum UUPA 1960)" (B.A. thesis, Universitas Sumatera Utara, 1965), p. 61; Sinar, "Tragedi," p. 13; and Cunningham, *Postwar*, p. 92.

104. The movement in Tanah Karo became known by its watchword Aksi Tuntutan Rakyat (Action for the People's Demands). See van Langenberg, "National," pp. 856 ff.

105. *Waspada*, February 7, 1950.

106. *Ibid.*, May 12, 1950.

107. *Ibid.*, May 15, 1950, and *Merdeka*, May 15, 1950.

108. *Propinsi*, pp. 397-98.

109. See Herbert Feith, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), p. 73 n. 43.

its survival had been possible mainly because the NST leaders had been able to exploit the concern of the federal Indonesian government, and especially that of Prime Minister Hatta, to ensure an orderly and stable transition to a unitary state. NST leaders utilized the huge importance of East Sumatra to the national economy to reinforce Hatta's concern for social and economic stability. The intensity of political opposition to the NST within East Sumatra in the early months of 1950, against the recent background of the violent Social Revolution of 1946, raised the specter of this vital region falling once again into the hands of "radicals" and "extremists." For Hatta and his supporters in Jakarta it was important that the NST government be preserved right up to the time it could be replaced by a reasonably strong moderate Republican administration. In the end that moderate administration was set up under the control of the local military command and under the supervision of a Military Governor.

The brief history of the NST serves to demonstrate that the years of National Revolution (1945-50) were as important for the *formation* of a national identity as for its assertion. The ethnic and class conflicts which gave birth to and helped destroy the NST were intimately connected to the question of national identity. The politics of 1947-50 in East Sumatra were to a great extent about the definition, acceptance, or rejection of an Indonesian national identity. In the process not only was East Sumatra finally incorporated into the Indonesian nation-state, but the Indonesian nation-state itself began to be incorporated into the cultural "worlds" of East Sumatra.

If ethnic and class antagonisms were important elements in the immediate decolonizing process in East Sumatra, they have remained as destabilizing forces in post-colonial regional and national politics in Indonesia. During the 1950s and early 1960s political conflicts over the conditions of wage labor and access to farming land occurred frequently in East Sumatra. These conflicts were most overtly manifested in strikes and the occupation of plantation lands.<sup>110</sup> At the same time, ethnic conflict between orang asli and non-orang asli, and between Malays and non-Malays has been a continuing feature of internal politics within East Sumatra and of center-regional political relations between Jakarta and East Sumatra.<sup>111</sup>

In the mid-1950s orang asli resentment against what they saw as increasing Toba Batak control of the provincial political economy brought about a brief re-appearance of the East Sumatra state movement.<sup>112</sup> "Land rights" (*hak-hak tanah*)

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110. See numerous reports in the Medan daily *Waspada* between 1950 and 1965. Also D. J. Blake, "Labour Shortage and Unemployment in North-East Sumatra," *Malayan Economic Review*, 7, 2 (October 1962), pp. 106-18; and "The Estates and Economic Development in North-East Sumatra," *ibid.*, 8, 11 (April 1963), pp. 98-110; Cunningham, *Postwar*; Haliman, "Sumbangan"; J. A. C. Mackie, "Indonesia's Government Estates and Their Masters," *Pacific Affairs*, 34, 4 (Winter 1962), pp. 337-60; Douglas Paauw, ed., *Prospects for East Sumatran Plantation Industries*, Monograph Series No. 3 (New Haven: Yale Southeast Asian Studies, 1962); Karl J. Pelzer, "The Agrarian Conflict in East Sumatra," *Pacific Affairs*, 30, 2 (Summer 1957), pp. 151-59; R. A. Sianipar, ed., *Konperensi Pertama Pertanian se-Sumatera Utara* (Medan: Kemudi, 1958); Sutter, "Indonesianisasi," pp. 725-26; K. Tobing, *Sumatera Utara* (Jakarta: Lintasan Masa, 1953); and *Monografi Daerah Sumatera Timur* (Pematang Siantar: Fakultas Ekonomi Universitas Nommensen, 1964).

111. John R. W. Smail, "The Military Politics of North Sumatra, December 1956-October 1957," *Indonesia*, 6 (October 1968), pp. 128-87; and Feith, *Decline*, pp. 520-38.

112. In late 1956, an East Sumatra People's Congress (Kongres Rakyat Sumatera

and the "land problem" (*soal tanah*) have remained a central political issue in East Sumatra since the formation of the unitary Republic of Indonesia thirty years ago. They have provided continuing stimulus to ethnic conflicts in the region, and vice-versa. The intensity of the "land problem" in East Sumatra during the early 1950s was directly responsible for the fall of at least one cabinet.<sup>113</sup> In 1953, an Organization for the Struggle of the Guardians of the Land in Indonesia (Badan Perjuangan Rakyat Penunggu Indonesia--BPRPI) was formed by a group of Malay, Karo, and Simalungun community leaders to reassert the special rights of the orang asli to plantation lands in East Sumatra.<sup>114</sup> In 1972, the BPRPI organized several attempts to cultivate "adat" land unilaterally, resulting in clashes with police, local authorities, and non-Malay farmers, and the arrest of BPRPI leaders.<sup>115</sup> In June 1980, the "land problem" surfaced once again as regional government authorities and supporters of the BPRPI clashed over rights to land now controlled by state tobacco plantations.<sup>116</sup> The issue of special orang asli customary rights remains far from settled. And although the kerajaan are now a long-dead cause, ethnic and "cultural" interests with which the kerajaan were once intertwined continue to be vigorously pursued.

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Timur--KRST) was formed to press for the political separation of East Sumatra from Tapanuli and the establishment of an East Sumatran province. By mid-1957, a more militant extension of the KRST had been formed. Though it represented the same interests as the KRST, the new organization, calling itself the Body Demanding East Sumatran Autonomy (Badan Penuntut Otonomi Sumatera Timur--Bapost), pressed its case much more militantly. The Bapost leadership included people from both the top echelons of the KRST and the old NST. Financial support was alleged to have come from Dutch commercial interests and from the Sultan of Deli. On KRST and Bapost, see Smail, "Military," pp. 165-70; and R. W. Liddle, *Ethnicity, Party and National Integration: An Indonesian Case Study* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 189-96.

113. Feith, *Decline*, pp. 294-96; and *Waspada*, October 8 and 13, 1955.

114. The first chairman of the BPRPI was Ustadz Abdul Kadir, from the Deli kerajaan and a long-time activist for special Malay and orang asli rights in East Sumatra. He had been at the forefront of campaigns in the 1940s to evict non-Malays from what were considered Malay adat lands.

115. See reports in *Sinar Indonesia Baru* (Medan), August 9 and 16, 1972; *Waspada*, August 12, 1972; and *Mingguan Mimbar Umum* (Medan), August 13, 1972.

116. See *Waspada*, June 19, 21, and 25, 1980.