



Voluntary Participation, State Involvement: Indonesian Propaganda in the
Struggle for Maintaining Independence, 1945 – 1949

M.Y. Zara

SUMMARY

This dissertation focused on the propaganda activities carried out domestically and internationally by the Republic of Indonesia and its supporters during the Indonesian revolution (1945-1949). Rather than focusing on well-known aspects of the revolution, such as violence and diplomacy, this dissertation adds to our knowledge about propaganda during decolonization and the state formation process. This dissertation offers a novel approach to understanding the Republic's efforts to sustain its independence

The sources used for this study comprise numerous collections in Indonesian, Javanese, English, and Dutch, which are housed at the National Archive of the Republic of Indonesia, the National Archive of the Netherlands, and NIOD in Amsterdam. It extensively covers newspapers and magazines, and never-before-used propaganda materials such as posters, photographs, pamphlets, and booklets, issued by pro-Republic supporters in Indonesia, Australia, the Netherlands, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Propaganda was a strategic tool used to motivate the Indonesian populace, which comprised various ethnic and racial groups, to trust the self-appointed Republican government, and to call for their participation in the Republic's political agendas. They were asked to support the Republic at every level of society and to fight the Republic's enemies, such as the Dutch, the British, and, later in 1948, the communists.

Other studies tend to focus on the use of propaganda in authoritarian states, like Nazi Germany, or in established states where the government has a near-absolute grip on mass communications media, such as propaganda in the USA and Great Britain during the First and Second World Wars. In contrast to the above-mentioned studies, this dissertation investigates the use of propaganda in a state recently born and faced with enormous internal difficulties which hampered its propagandistic abilities.

This study challenges the idea, suggested by most studies on propaganda, that the success of political propaganda depends heavily on the existence of a centralized authority, total control over the most advanced communication media, state-led outright censorship, and professional propagandists.

Pro-Republic propaganda during the Indonesian struggle to retain independence was primarily characterized by cooperation between state and non-state entities, rather than being orchestrated entirely by the state. This was a practical solution for both parties, who claimed to support independence but at the same time were not in favor of a state-dominated propaganda campaign. It is interesting to underline that given that both the Republican high officials and the media professionals like journalists and radio broadcasters were depicted in the Japanese-sponsored media as Japanese collaborators by the Dutch; they worked together voluntarily to combat this portrayal. Outright control and censorship were beyond their reach, suffering as they did from a lack of manpower and facilities.

Indonesian propaganda focused on variable ideals which depended largely on the prevailing conditions. At the beginning of the revolution, the main issue was the need to convince the world that the independence was genuine and the aspiration of the majority of Indonesians. Indonesian propaganda therefore focused on refuting the general belief that most of the Republican officials were Japanese henchmen, by stressing that the aspiration to independence had been prevalent for decades and that the Japanese role in it was minimal. Another aim was to show the public the efficacy of the Republican government by highlighting its capability to run the country effectively. The outbreak of armed clashes between Indonesian revolutionaries and the Japanese, the British and their auxiliaries, and Dutch troops finally led Indonesian propagandists to endorse and justify the use of violence against these aggressive foreigners.

Indonesian propaganda approached various audiences, both in Indonesia and abroad. In Indonesia, despite the fact that much Republican propaganda was addressed to the *rakyat* (people), the propaganda was in fact specifically tailored to each societal group regarded essential to the Republic. Each group was approached differently. Among groups specifically targeted by Republican propaganda were the minorities (the Chinese, Ambonese and Menadonese), professionals (civil servants, media professionals), the youth (both male and female), and the opposition groups. Participation of non-government actors was essential, as they often represented those parts of society at which the propaganda was leveled. Propaganda by insiders ensured that the issues involved were made more relevant and appealing to the targeted audience.

International communities were also among the primary targets of Indonesian propaganda, largely aided by the presence of politically aware and voluntarily participating Indonesian nationalist activists abroad. In the Arab world, for instance, Indonesian students, by virtue of their Islamic background and their ability to speak Arabic, concentrated on raising awareness among Arabic people (as well as Indonesians visiting or living there) about the Republic of Indonesia. They also, by associating Indonesia's struggle for independence with the struggle of the Arabs, in particular the Egyptians, against the British occupation of their country, called for solidarity among all people oppressed by Western colonialism and imperialism.

Although this study lacks comprehensive measurement of the impact of Republic propaganda, it contributes significantly to the understanding of the practice of political propaganda in a nascent state whose capabilities in persuasive communication were largely hampered by numerous internal and external problems.