

How Colonial Governance Incite Indonesian Nationalism

Name: Mikha Arvi Marvello. P

E-Mail: mikhabackup@gmail.com

Affiliation: Universitas Nasional

Abstract:

Surabaya during the late 19th to early 20th Century was a period marked by Dutch Colonial domination in the city governance of the Dutch East Indies. During this period a trend of colonial modernity form the basis of colonial rule in which everything from its social, economic, and political rule mainly serves the interest of colonial powers. As such, its no wonder why such period was often considered a time when European residents had more powers than the average Indonesia Natives.

This led to a series of riot and resistance from the local demanding more representation and equal opportunity from the locals. Such events were made possible due to the clever political maneuver made by many other native political actors and its organization. Events like this highlights the overlooked role of nationalist movement and the engagement at the local level as a way to resist colonial powers.

In the context of Surabaya during the colonial period, it serves as an example where local politics serves as a powerful tool in asserting native or Indonesia rights and also as a means where nationalist ideas and movement can grow from mere thoughts to an organized ideology as a way to represent the people living under oppression from colonial rule.

Key Words: Surabaya, Colonial, Nationalist

Historical Context

Surabaya emerged as a significant center of commerce and industry in the Dutch East Indies during the late 19th century. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the implementation of liberal colonial policies in 1870 attracted European capital and migrants, transforming Surabaya into a bustling urban center. By 1930, Surabaya's population had surged to approximately 341,000, with native Indonesians constituting about 79.6% of the population. This demographic shift underscored the city's diverse racial composition and highlighted the tensions between colonial authorities and local populations.

In 1906, the Gemeenteraad van Soerabaja (Surabaya City Council) was formally established as part of the Decentralization Law of 1903. The council had 15 seats reserved for European members, with 8 appointed by the government and 7 elected by registered city-dwellers. Three native officials were also appointed to the council to "educate" the natives about European democratic institutions

The establishment of the Gemeenteraad van Soerabaja (Surabaya City Council) in 1906 marked a pivotal moment in colonial governance. Although intended to foster local participation, the council predominantly represented European interests, reflecting the overarching power dynamics of colonial rule. The limited representation for native Indonesians further exacerbated tensions, as they were systematically excluded from meaningful political participation.

This systemic exclusion fueled resentment among Indonesian nationalists, prompting them to seek alternative avenues for political expression. The persistent calls for equitable representation and social justice echoed throughout nationalist discourse, highlighting the enduring struggle against colonial oppression.

Nationalist Politics

The rise of Indonesian nationalism in Surabaya can be traced through various political movements that emerged during this period. Notably, figures like J.K. Lengkong advocated for equitable representation within the city council, challenging the dominance of European members. The debates surrounding Lengkong's proposals highlighted the frustrations of indigenous populations regarding their political rights and social conditions.

In January 1931, council member J.K. Lengkong initiated a debate regarding equitable representation in the council. He proposed increasing the number of seats for native

representatives and removing taxes and property prerequisites for voting. However, Mayor W.A.H. Fuchter suspended Lengkong's proposals, arguing that the distribution of seats was not determined by local economic conditions alone but by other factors beyond the council's authority

Indonesian nationalists utilized various platforms to voice their concerns about colonial governance. Publications such as *Proletar* played a crucial role in mobilizing public sentiment against colonial policies that marginalized native voices. These publications emphasized collective action and encouraged citizens to resist capitalist exploitation while advocating for improved living conditions.

Nationalist Organization

The interplay between different social groups significantly influenced the trajectory of nationalist politics in Surabaya. While some nationalist factions sought to engage with colonial institutions, others adopted more radical approaches. For instance, members of the Indonesian Study Club, led by Dr. Soetomo, participated in city council activities despite facing systemic limitations. Their involvement exemplified a strategic approach to navigating colonial politics while advocating for indigenous rights.

Education played a pivotal role in shaping nationalist consciousness among the Indonesian elite in Surabaya. The emergence of educated native Indonesians who engaged in political discourse marked a significant shift in the dynamics of urban governance. Institutions like the Indonesian Study Club, led by Dr. Soetomo, became crucial spaces for intellectual engagement and political activism.

Grassroots Mobilization and Collective Action

The rise of grassroots movements marked another critical aspect of Indonesian nationalism in Surabaya. Various social groups, including labor unions and student organizations, mobilized to advocate for improved living conditions and political rights. These collective actions reflected a growing consciousness among ordinary citizens regarding their role in shaping urban governance.

Conversely, communist groups distanced themselves from formal political structures, opting instead for grassroots mobilization. This divergence in strategies reflected broader ideological differences within the nationalist movement and underscored the complexities of political engagement in a colonial context.

Labor unions emerged as significant players in the nationalist movement, organizing protests against exploitative practices by colonial employers. The Proletar newspaper highlighted these efforts, emphasizing the importance of solidarity among workers to challenge capitalist exploitation. This grassroots mobilization not only addressed immediate concerns but also contributed to a broader narrative of resistance against colonial oppression.

The collaboration between different social groups demonstrated the interconnectedness of various movements within Surabaya's nationalist landscape. While some factions pursued formal political engagement through institutions like the city council, others opted for direct action to challenge colonial authority.

Challenges to Nationalist Aspirations

Despite their efforts to assert political agency, Indonesian nationalists encountered significant challenges from both colonial authorities and European citizens. The political mechanisms established by colonial powers often reinforced existing inequalities, limiting opportunities for meaningful participation by native Indonesians. Moreover, European fears regarding rising nationalist sentiments prompted defensive reactions that stifled progressive reforms.

The resignation of Dr. Soetomo and his colleagues from the city council exemplified the tensions between nationalist aspirations and colonial governance structures. Their departure sparked political turmoil and highlighted the precarious position of indigenous representatives within a system designed to uphold European dominance.

The overrepresentation of Europeans in local governance structures created systemic barriers that hindered effective participation by native Indonesians. This imbalance was evident during debates within the city council, where proposals for equitable representation were met with resistance from European members who argued that their dominance was justified due to their contributions to urban development.

The dismissal of proposals aimed at increasing native representation highlighted the entrenched power dynamics within colonial governance. Council members often framed their arguments around racial superiority, reinforcing discriminatory attitudes that marginalized indigenous voices.

Participation in Governance

Dr. Soetomo's engagement in the city council represented a strategic approach to navigating colonial politics. His resignation, along with that of his colleagues, was not merely an act of protest but a calculated maneuver to highlight the inadequacies of colonial governance and rally support for broader nationalist goals. This act resonated with many who viewed the city council as a platform for advocating social justice and political representation.

The response from other political factions, including the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), underscored the interconnectedness of various nationalist movements. The support from Proletar and other publications reflected a growing consciousness among Indonesians about the need for collective action against colonial oppression.

The Role of Media in Nationalist Mobilization

Media played a crucial role in shaping public discourse and mobilizing support for nationalist causes in Surabaya. Newspapers such as Proletar served as platforms for articulating grievances against colonial policies and advocating for improved living conditions. The dissemination of information through these publications was instrumental in fostering a sense of solidarity among diverse social groups, including students, labor unions, and intellectuals.

Publications as Tools for Change

The articles published in Proletar exemplified how nationalists framed their struggles within the context of urban governance. By addressing issues such as labor rights and social justice, these publications not only informed the public but also galvanized action against exploitative practices by colonial authorities and European capitalists.

The emphasis on collective action resonated with contemporary movements, highlighting a continuity in the struggle for rights and representation throughout Indonesia's history. This historical perspective underscores the importance of understanding how past movements inform current political dynamics.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the history of Surabaya during the late colonial period illustrates how nationalist politics emerged as a response to systemic inequalities within colonial governance. Through

collective actions, public discourse, and strategic engagement with colonial institutions, Indonesian nationalists sought to reshape their environment and assert their rights as citizens.

This exploration underscores the significance of local contexts in understanding broader national narratives. As Surabaya navigated its identity as a colonial city, it became a microcosm of Indonesia's evolving political landscape—a testament to the resilience and agency of its people amid colonial modernity. The legacy of these struggles continues to resonate today, reminding us of the enduring impact of historical movements on contemporary society.

Ultimately, this study emphasizes that understanding nationalism requires an appreciation for local dynamics and grassroots activism that shaped colonial governance in colonial cities like Surabaya. By examining these complexities, we gain deeper insights into Indonesia's historical trajectory toward independence—a journey marked by resilience, unity, and an unwavering quest for justice against colonial oppression.