



# Leadership in Conflict: East Java Elites in the Time of Revolution (1945-1950)

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**Abstract.** This article analyzes the elite groups that existed in the regions during the Revolution, in particular, the elites in East Java to examine these disputes and group tensions. This article shall analyze the status of East Java's privileged groups and map their leadership style during a competition for power by using archive and spoken sources from 1945 to 1949. This study reveals that the Indonesian Revolution was not singular. Multiple groups were involved in power contestation and tried to formulate the shape of the Republic. This research is expected to encourage other local studies on the Revolution showing the dynamics, diversity, and contestation of power in that era.

**Keywords:** Leadership, East Java Elites, Revolution

## 1 Background

The Independence Revolution (1945-1949) represents a sacred period in Indonesian historiography. In textbooks, this era is characterized by heroic narratives that spotlight the war against the Dutch to defend independence. While such narratives are constructed to build a sense of nationalism, they also downplay the fact that the Indonesian Revolution was filled with complexities and tensions among various groups over the establishment of the Republic. In other words, it is erroneous to presume that the revolution was supported by all political parties in the nation [1]. In the early days of independence, disputes over regional identities and missions were exacerbated by their impact on relations between centers and regions [2].

This article analyzes the elite groups that existed in the regions during the Revolution, in particular, the elites in East Java to examine these disputes and group tensions. This article shall analyze the status of East Java's privileged groups and map their leadership style during a competition for power by using archive and spoken sources from 1945 to 1949. These elites were either in support of each other or at odds with each other in terms of their views on Indonesia's position—some supported republican rule, while others favored a return to Dutch colonial rule in East Java. These elites had their own goals at stake. However, the ultimate motive of their movements was for personal gain, i.e. to gain a position or power in their regions.

The emergence of elites in East Java during the revolutionary period had a significant impact on people's lives. Social, politics and economic life were at the heart of this

influence. Competition among the elite groups also had an impact on the development of Indonesia, in addition to affecting people's lives.

## 2 Elite Leadership Models in State-Building Competition

East Java elites were competing with one another to achieve their objectives as a state formation process took place during the revolution. The civilian, military, communist, East Java State (NJT), and Madurese State (NM) elites competed with each other. However, not all movements made by these elites were supported by the people in East Java, such as the competition between the civilian elite who sided with the republic and the elite of the East Java State (NJT). The NJT elite itself lacked support from the people, but they were able to survive because they received support from the Dutch military [3].

### 2.1 The Leadership Model of NJT Elites

A number of people were included in this elite category. Some of them were R.T.P. Kusumonegoro, Sjarif Hidayat, Indra Kusuma, Sumarto, Suhari Hadinoto, Major R. Abd. Rifai, and R.S. Bintoro. The underlying reason for the placement of these elite names was their role in siding with the Dutch and their disappointment with the Republic of Indonesia [3]. Not only did it stop there, but these elites also lacked the support of the people of East Java because of their role in dealing with the colonizers and concerned themselves with getting a seat of power [3].

### 2.2 The Leadership Model of NM Elites

One such example is Tjakraningrat, known as Raden Adipati Ario Tjakraningrat XIII, who was one of the many elites (*sentana*) or *priayi* (the nobles under the royal family) in Madura. Having the original name Raden Soerjowinoto, he was a descendant of the first Bangkalan Regent Prince, Tjakra Adiningrat. Soerjowinoto or Tjakraningrat XIII was the third Regent of Bangkalan who served from 1918 to 1948. After Indonesian independence, Soerjowinoto was appointed as Resident of Madura [3]. However, when the Dutch gained control of the entire Madura region, these elites, including Soerjowinoto, turned away from the Republic of Indonesia and supported the Dutch.

These elites sought to revive feudalism in Madura, which was also in line with the political interests of the Dutch. On the political side, Madurese elites attempted to break away from the shadow of Mataram's domination. After the Dutch Military Aggression in 1947, a referendum was held in Madura to determine the position of Madura. Out of 219,660 people attending the referendum, 90.82 percent approved of Madura establishing its own state [4]. On 20 February 1948, the Governor General of the Dutch East Indies officially acknowledged the establishment of the State of Madura and appointed Soerjowinoto or Tjakraningrat XIII to be the State Mayor of Madura [5], [6].

The appointment of Tjakraningrat XIII as the State Mayor of Madura became a breath of fresh air for the Madurese *sentana* (noble people) to allow feudalism in Madura to resume. This was proven by the appointment of descendants, relatives, and confidants of Tjakraningrat XIII to occupy important positions in Madura. The example was the appointment of Raden Sis Tjakraningrat, who was the son of Tjakraningrat XIII to serve as Regent of Bangkalan. However, the reign was short-lived due to political opposition by the Madurese people. In the end, the State of Madura was dismissed and joined the Republic of Indonesia based on the Decree of the President of RIS on 19 March 1950 [7].

In short, the aristocracy and nobility that had been dormant since the Japanese occupation was revived by Tjakraningrat during the early days of the revolution by cooperating with the Dutch. The strategy was to cooperate with the Recomba (the Dutch version of the emergency government) [8]. However, there was a turning point: the decline of the political role, economic decline, and moral weakness of the Cakraningrat dynasty [3]. From this problem, the colonial government provided assistance in the form of access to education for the dynasty. To summarize, the dynasty in the Cakraningrat era was heavily laden with feudalistic leadership models. Thus, feudalism was so prominent that some of the non-cooperative elites disagreed, and began to flee to Java [3].

### 2.3 The Leadership Model of Communist Elites

In addition to Tjakraningrat, one of the powerful elites in the East Java region was Tan Malaka. Tan Malaka was originally the name of a traditional title given after his mother's lineage; his birth name was Ibrahim. His name was changed to Sutan Ibrahim Datuk Tan Malaka when the title was bestowed [9]. Due to his affiliation with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), Tan Malaka himself cannot be dissociated as a national communist figure. By influencing the political parties and implementing Tan Malakai's policy agenda, a National Communist Party set up the State Investigation Agency (Bapen) of the Republic of Indonesia for seeking positions within the government, police force, and army.

Radical nationalism, which opposed diplomacy and negotiations with the Dutch, was a defining trait of the national communist faction, of which Tan Malaka was the representative [3]. They gathered a large mass base in many cities in East Java such as Madiun, Malang, and Besuki Karesidenan. Tan Malaka proposed a seven-point plan known as the Minimum Program in January 1946 when the group met in Purwokerto, and later at the next meeting held in Solo, they formed a *volksfront* called *Persatuan Perjuangan* (PP). Sukarno, Hatta, and Sjahrir rejected the Minimum Program proposed by Tan Malaka. The PP was dissatisfied and some of their supporters embarked on political maneuvers, indicating that the movement by the PP showed that power was a very important political target.

The communist leadership model can be assessed from the extent of the mass system implemented by Tan Malaka in maintaining party members, goals, and tactics planned by the party. Through Tan Malaka's speech on the merger of the three parties, his ideas managed to seep into the cadres and officials of the Murba Party when launching the political agenda. Of all the strategies, Tan Malaka's approach to reaching the ranks of

the branches, sub-branches, and the center was particularly striking, with its emphasis on agitation and propaganda. A term used by Tan Malaka to name the technique was *Taktik Murba*. This expression was written in Tan Malaka's speech quoted from the Chinese who said that "Agitation is stronger than a bullet" [10]. On closer examination, the roots of the ideas expressed in the manifestation of the Murba Party reveal that the leadership model in this communist elite practiced Marxism.

## 2.4 Armed Civilian Elites

Sutomo, or more commonly known as Bung Tomo, was another elite group of civilians participating in the armed struggle. He was born in Blauran Village, Surabaya, on October 3, 1920 [11]. Bung Tomo had a great deal of influence in East Java, as well as at national level during the revolution. He established the Indonesian People's Revolutionary Front, also known as BPRI, on October 12, 1945. This action was taken after the youth and the people had weapons confiscated from the Japanese occupation. During the revolution in East Java, Bung Tomo had different attitudes from the government regarding diplomacy with the Dutch.

He delivered many speeches about his rejection of negotiations and always stirred up the people's spirit. In response, President Soekarno, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, ordered the Commander-in-Chief of the Indonesian National Army to halt Bung Tomo's speeches on the radio and in public [12]. The ban was in effect from December 17, 1947, until it was revoked on January 27, 1948 [12]. Furthermore, Amir Syarifuddin began to boycott Bung Tomo's speeches, which had a great influence on the nationalist circles in Surabaya, because they could affect the Security Council and the future of Indonesian diplomacy in the eyes of the world. [13] Syarifuddin requested Bung Tomo to decide between him continuing to be a General but not allowed to deliver speeches, or ceasing to be a General but allowed to give his speeches. Bung Tomo responded with "*Persetan, ora dadi jenderal, ya ora patheken*" which means "Screw it, if I do not become a general, then I will not get sick with yaws, leprosy" [3]. His speech was such a powerful one that the government forbade members of the army to listen to it [14].

Bung Tomo was an elite who represented the general's disregard for power. To him, power was not the number one priority during the 1<sup>st</sup> military aggression. His number one priority, after all, was to be able to evict the invaders and declare Indonesian freedom. His demeanor was evident in his response to the speech ban imposed by the government at the time.

## 2.5 Regular Civilian Elites

The elites described in this context were those who were not part of the high-ranking officials in the bumiputra government structure during the Dutch era [3]. In line with Heather Sutherland's statement, these elites were an elite group that included young colonels in the officer corps [15]. This elite group had a leadership model that tended to be self-sufficient, like the youth's attitude of burning passion, fiery courage.

## 2.6 Political-Military Elites

Rebels, unafraid of death, and insurgents; these are probably the most appropriate words to describe the elites. Such things can be reasonably assumed because of the tough attitude and unwillingness to comply with the norms which characterized them [3]. Nevertheless, even behind all the traits that contradicted normality, the elites fully embraced and adhered to a value that was challenging to do, which was to consistently not cooperate with the Dutch. A good example to illustrate the attitudes of leadership models such as the embedding of the adjectives mentioned earlier can be found in Major Sabaruddin's personality. He was a major who was very loyal to the nationalistic ideologies of the Republic of Indonesia.

## 2.7 Regular Military Elites

The group that prioritized Islamic ideologies as a benchmark in determining actions was the leadership model adopted by the regular military elite. Along with emphasizing Islamic reasoning, this elite also engaged their nationalistic backgrounds by having a tendency to be tolerant of local cultures [3]. There were several people who tended to have views that led to the three concepts of thought employed in the leadership model, including Colonel Sungkono, Lieutenant Colonel Suwondo, and Lieutenant Colonel Surachmad [16]. Sungkono was born in Purbalingga, on January 1, 1911, as the second child of Tawireja and Rinten [17]. Following the independence of the Republic of Indonesia, he was appointed as the commander of the People's Security Agency (BKR) of Surabaya. His duties as BKR commander were to fight for and uphold the proclamation. His prominent career became apparent as he was responsible for the defense and security of the entire city. Later, his career soared to become the chairman of the Joint Defense Command of Division V/VI/VII of the Republic of Indonesian Army (TRI) of East Java to become the Military Governor of East Java.

At the time, Sungkono was confronted with the first and second military aggressions organized by the Dutch. During the second military aggression in East Java on December 19, 1948, he coordinated the entire potential in East Java to execute guerrilla warfare. Later, when the PKI revolted in Madiun in 1948, Sungkono along with the armed forces and the people suppressed the rebellion and restored the condition of East Java. On November 1, 1948, he was appointed as Commander of Brawijaya Division I of East Java to confront the Dutch and rearguard insurgents.

## 3 CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the Indonesian Revolution was not singular. Multiple groups were involved in power contestation and tried to formulate the shape of the Republic. Certain elite groups were keen to preserve the feudalistic power structure and worked with the Dutch to realize this, as seen in the case of the State of Madura and Tjakraaningrat. On the other hand, the elites who sought to realize the Republic's independence also shared different views on the mechanisms needed to accomplish the goal. The differences occurred because of their socio-political backgrounds, not to mention

their ideologies. The communists, for example, were among those who advocated mass power in the realization of the state. The military elites were also diverse—some relying on Islamic values, while others tended to be confrontational with no thought of political diplomacy. This research is expected to encourage other local studies on the Revolution showing the dynamics, diversity, and contestation of power in that era.

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