

Justice in Thought

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Translator's Introduction

Christopher Hulshof

Just prior to midnight on August 17, 2019, over twenty tear gas canisters blasted through the windows of a college dormitory in Surabaya, Indonesia. Military personnel clad in black riot-gear forced through the barricaded doors as frightened students fell to the ground. As the clock struck twelve and the calendar flipped to Indonesia's Independence Day, forty-three Papuan students were dragged from the premises and escorted through an angry mob that had gathered outside. Student members of the rightist groups Islam Defenders Front (FPI) & Pemuda Pancasila (PP) had surrounded the building and began chanting racial slurs, threatening violence, and singing the Indonesian national anthem after a story about an Indonesian flag being found in a gutter near the dorms went viral on social media.¹

Peaceful protests calling for Papuan independence the preceding day had been met with violence. Across Java, Indonesia's most populous island and center of political power, civil militias attacked Papuan protestors as police stood idly by. Meanwhile, politicians such as Malang's deputy mayor

¹ Ivany Atina Arbi, Wahyoe Boediwardhana, and Benny Mawel, "Papuan students on Java face increased pressure from Islamist, nationalist groups," *The Jakarta Post*, 19 August 2019, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2019/08/19/papuan-students-on-java-face-increased-pressures-from-islamist-far-right-groups.html>; Helen Davidson, "Indonesia arrests dozens of West Papuans over claim flag was thrown in sewer," *The Guardian*, 18 August 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/18/indonesia-arrests-dozens-of-west-papuans-over-claim-flag-was-thrown-in-sewer>; "Indonesia urges calm in Papua after two weeks of protests," *Reuters*, 30 August 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-indonesia-papua/indonesia-urges-calm-in-papua-after-two-weeks-of-protests-idUKKCN1VK1BS>.

Sofan Edi Jarwoko called for the forced expulsion of all Papuan students from the island.² Papua had joined the union in 1969 following a corrupt vote which saw only 1,063 ballots cast, roughly 0.1% of the population. Since then, the continued militarization of the region to protect multinational corporations' exploitation of natural resources has paralleled a critical lack of support from Jakarta for infrastructure development and human resources, resulting in a low-level insurgency which has resulted in at least half a million Papuan deaths, 40,000 internal refugees, and periodic protests from Papuan citizens living in other regions of the nation.³

Rebellion against the government on Java due to inequalities between the center and the periphery has been a hallmark of Indonesian history. In 1957, less than a decade after the culmination of the war for independence against the Netherlands, the Permesta (Perjuangan Semesta, or Universal Struggle) rebellion embroiled Sulawesi. The following year, the PRRI (Pemerintah Revolusioner Republik Indonesia, or Rev-

² Tasha Wibawa, "West Papuan students barricaded, detained and tear-gassed by police on Indonesian 'freedom' day," *ABC News*, 18 August 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-08-19/west-papuans-barricaded-arrested-teargassed-by-indonesian-police/11424990>.

³ Sebastian Strangio, "Adriana Elisabeth on the Conflict in West Papua," *The Diplomat*, 27 July 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/07/adriana-elisabeth-on-the-conflict-in-west-papua/>; "Indonesia's Papua province children starving in a land of gold," *BBC News*, 13 February 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-42985439>; Richard C. Paddock, "'Free Papua Movement' Intensifies Amid Escalating Violence," *New York Times*, 12 December 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/12/world/asia/west-papua-independence.html>; APR Editor, "Jakarta sends 21,000 troops to Papua over last three years, says KNPB," *Asia Pacific Report*, 15 March 2021, <https://asiapacificreport.nz/2021/03/15/jakarta-sends-21000-troops-to-papua-over-last-three-years-says-knpb>; Susan Sands, "West Papua: Forgotten War, Unwanted People," *Cultural Survival Quarterly Magazine* (June 1991), <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/west-papua-forgotten-war-unwanted-people>.

olutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia) rebellion lunged the island of Sumatra into revolt.⁴ In 1976, a near thirty-year insurgency began in Aceh which only came to an end due a tsunami that devastated the area in 2004.⁵ And in one of the most egregious human rights violations in modern history, the failed attempt to colonize Timor-Leste resulted in the death of nearly 20% of the region's population.⁶

The persistence of political, economic, and social inequalities between Java and the outer islands has continued to beset ethnic minority communities across the nation. Indonesia is now the sixth country of greatest wealth inequality in the world, with much of that wealth concentrated on Java.⁷ Since the introduction of decentralization reforms in 1999, district governments have been responsible for the financ-

⁴ Amelia Liwe, "Remembering Permesta," *Inside Indonesia*, 16 December 2010, <https://www.insideindonesia.org/remembering-permesta>; The "Outer Island Rebellions" erupted largely over a disproportionate amount of Indonesia's resources being extracted from islands outside of the political center in Java without sufficient investment being put back into the local economic and human resource infrastructures of those islands - a persistent problem which still plagues Papua today.

⁵ Michelle Ann Miller, "The conflict in Aceh: Context, precursors and catalysts," *Accord 20* (September 2008), <https://www.c-r.org/accord/aceh-indonesia/conflict-aceh-context-precursors-and-catalysts>; John Aglionby, "Legacy of tsunami brings peace to Aceh," *The Guardian*, 14 August 2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/aug/15/indonesia.tsunami2004>.

⁶ "Timestream: East Timor Genocide," *Genocide Watch*, 19 April 2019, <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/timestream-east-timor-genocide>; Alison Rourke, "East Timor: Indonesia's invasion and the long road to independence," *The Guardian*, 29 August 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/30/east-timor-indonesias-invasion-and-the-long-road-to-independence>.

⁷ "Indonesia," *World Inequality Database*, <https://wid.world/country/indonesia/>; Luke Gibson, "Towards a more equal Indonesia," *Oxfam International*, 23 February 2017, <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/towards-more-equal-indonesia>.

ing of public education. While the Indonesian government has touted a three-fold increase in education spending in just over a decade, that spending has been largely linked to the concentration of wealth on Java, where each of the nation's top 10 ranked universities reside.⁸ As a result, students in Jakarta consistently score over ten percentage points higher on the National Exams than their counterparts on islands such as Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Papua.⁹

As a lecturer at Kutai Kartanegara University in East Kalimantan, Muhammad Dudi Hari Saputra has witnessed these inequalities firsthand and has strived to champion social justice through public engagement. In the following article, written for the popular Indonesian social commentary website Geotimes in 2017, Saputra puts the inequalities in Indonesia's education system on blast by targeting the hierarchical nature of the country's intellectual culture. The article opens with a well-known quote from the father of Indonesian literature, Pramoedya Ananta Toer. The Nobel Prize nominated author's words, taken from the novel *Bumi Manusia* (This Earth of Mankind), which was adapted in 2019 into a top 5 Indonesian box office hit, implores intellectual introspection as the first step in the path towards social justice.

Anchored by these famous words, Saputra critically examines the fallacy of thought that has created a stifling hierarchy of educational gradations in Indonesia. The article pauses pe-

⁸ Samer Al-Samarrai, "In Indonesia, Tackling Education Inequality Through Better Governance," *World Bank*, 18 November 2013, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/indonesia-tackling-education-inequality-through-better-governance>; R.F. Farrasa, "The 20 Best Universities in Indonesia Webometrics Rank 2021," *Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture*, 28 July 2021, <https://l1dikti13.kemdikbud.go.id/2021/07/28/20-universitas-terbaik-di-indonesia-versi-webometrics-rank-2021/>.

⁹ "Diagnosis of National Exam Results," *Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture*, <http://118.98.227.96/RaporUN/>.

riodically for quotes from famous figures in Indonesia, such as respected public intellectual Bambang Sugiharto and religious leader Ali ibn Abi Talib, effectively insulating the author's blistering critiques from scrutiny and rendering the message more palatable to a public audience. Saputra then thoughtfully returns to the opening quote to connect the inequality in the public's mindset to the physical disparities in educational resources across the country.

The article concludes with a lingering query for readers to ponder - What is the reason that Papuans are not entitled to the same quality of education as students in the metropolitan centers on Java? However, by singling out Papuans, the author inquires about far more than education, linking his critical analysis of Indonesian intellectual hierarchies to the injustices perpetrated upon Papua by the nation's center of power. If political leaders and students on college campuses across Java can't first learn to treat Indonesian citizens in regions like Papua justly in their thoughts, then how can their deeds ever break down the barriers of inequality and injustice that plague the nation?

Justice in Thought¹⁰

Muhammad Dudi Hari Saputra

“An educated person must first of all learn to act justly in their thoughts, then later in their deeds.” (Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *This Earth of Mankind*, 1975)

This phrase always rings in my mind, inspiring me. Yet at the same time, the phrase tugs at my heartstrings because intellectual injustice is most often perpetrated by those who consider themselves educated.

The phenomenon of fallacy (an error in thought) is that I am a professor therefore I am better than others who hold a PhD, or that since I have a PhD I am better than one with a Master's degree, or that since I have a Master's degree I am better than one with a Bachelor's degree, or that since I have a Bachelor's degree I am better than those who do not have any degree.

Intellectual gradations are interpreted as a hierarchy, which stifles. This is not even to mention the phenomenon of thinking that “since I graduated from here, I am better than graduates from there.”

Somehow the measure of one's personal achievements becomes a criterion for truth. Like Bambang Sugiharto's sarcastic remarks: You may be right, but because you are nobody, you are considered inconsequential. Meanwhile, if a fallacious statement comes from a professor's mouth, it is “considered” true and logical.

¹⁰ Originally published in Indonesian as, “Adil Sejak Dari Pikiran,” *Geotimes*, 13 October 2017, <https://geotimes.id/opini/adil-sejak-dari-pikiran/>

It is a flashback to what Ali ibn Abi Talib once said: Pay attention to what is said, not who says it.

This simple sentence has a strong epistemological basis in objectivity – that the measure of truth is not based on who makes a statement, but the statement's rationality and its correlation with facts. Namely, whether the statement is able to explain something in accordance with reality.

In my personal intellectual journey, it is not infrequent that I more often find people who have a depth of knowledge and broad insight because they have learned through informal, autodidactic processes. Their lack of formal degree or title actually makes them humbler and provides them with the capacity to more freely explore the reality of what actually happens.

In other words, there are too many theories. In fact, to the extent that theories become a barrier to the reality of what actually happens. Metaphorically, science is used as a hijab or barrier of sorts.

I recall asking Ferizal Ramli about the quality of education in Germany – which university should one go to? He replied that all universities in Germany were of equal quality.

So, what about Indonesia? Whether we realize it or not, the phenomenon of intellectual egotism still exists. People [who graduate from prestigious universities] consider themselves better than others who may have graduated from a less prestigious university.

The phenomenon goes beyond one's mindset or image. A disparity in the quality of universities in Indonesia actually exists, and it contributes to the uneven quality of human resources throughout our beloved archipelago.

How could there possibly be equitable development and education across the country if the most gifted educators only focus on their alma maters or prestigious universities in big cities which have the best facilities?

So, how can we act justly in our thoughts, and especially our deeds, if we continue to maintain systemic mechanisms of inequality which force intellectuals to gather in one place, without any conscious effort to spread the benefits of education to every corner of the country?

What is the reason that Papuans are not entitled to the same quality of education as students in Surabaya, Bandung, Yogyakarta, or Jakarta?

About the Author and Translator

Muhammad Dudi Hari Saputra is a public scholar and lecturer at Kutai Kartanegara University in Tenggarong, East Kalimantan. He has been featured in numerous Indonesian media outlets, including *Indonesiana*, *Geotimes*, the *Jakarta Post*, and *Ahlulbait Indonesia*. His public scholarship covers a range of important topics in Indonesia, such as barriers to democratic freedoms, corruption of scholars, the nature of violence and peace, political oligarchies, and religious inclusivity.

Christopher Hulshof earned his BA at the University of California-Berkeley in 2018, is currently pursuing a PhD in History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and is the Director of Community Engagement for GETSEA (the Graduate Education and Training in Southeast Asian Studies consortium). His research focuses on the reassertion of peripheral agency in the U.S. Empire, with an emphasis on 20th century Southeast Asia.