

## Chapter 8

# The Development of Indonesian Nationalism and Controversies over the Issue of “Mixed Marriages” in the Twentieth-Century Dutch East Indies

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### Introduction

The rise of nationalist movements against colonial rule often involved efforts to reform the moral character of relationships between men and women. In the Dutch East Indies (present day Indonesia), European men and other foreigners alike often took local women as temporary wives and concubines before the turn of the twentieth century, when more and more European women began coming to the colonies with their husbands. Such cohabitation and intermarriage between Europeans and local women were two of the main sources of offspring in the European population of the colonial East Indies. The rise of the anti-prostitution and morality improvement movements in Europe from the end of the nineteenth century on and the development of Indonesian nationalism from the 1910s made the issues of concubinage and “mixed marriages” more visible in the mass media.

Like other Southeast Asian societies, it was the custom in Indonesia to recommend that foreign visitors cohabit with local girls as temporary wives, in order to establish ties of affiliation with local society [Reid 1988: 155; Andaya 1998]. The Dutch themselves also took advantage of this custom in their efforts to expand colonial rule, especially after slavery in the East Indies was abolished in 1860. A prospective Indonesian cohabitant was usually introduced to a European newcomer by the local chief or his predecessor and acted as both a housekeeper and common law wife for her master. Although she was not legally married according to European perceptions, she was a key person in managing her master’s household, supervising the domestic staff, and teaching him the local language and customs. These Indonesian cohabitants were usually called *nyai*, originally a respectful term of address to elder women among the Javanese [Njahi (Njai) 1919: 36].

The development of colonial activities by Europeans led them to revise their thinking about sexual morality and the like to better cope with non-European people in maintaining their superiority. The rise of new ideas about the role of women and prostitution in Europe during the latter part of the nineteenth century induced the European colonial authorities to reconsider their attitudes toward the administration of brothels and domestic

service for colonists. From the end of the 1870s on, the anti-prostitution movement in the Netherlands, calling for improved sexual morality, turned its attention to the cohabitation of European men with local women out of wedlock in the colonies [Ming 1983: 65–93; Abalihin 2003: 220–282]. These activists perceived the Indonesian custom to be immoral and degrading, and urged the Dutch colonial authorities to prohibit the practice among Europeans under their jurisdiction. This movement also influenced Indonesian nationalists during the 1910s–1930s to take a similar stand as one of their countermeasures in dealing with Dutch colonialism.

The research to date on gender in the East Indies has argued that colonialism brought a strong racial and national differentiation into relationships between men and women [Stoler 2002; Abalihin 2003: 400, 471–475]. As these studies suggest, *nyai* relationships and “mixed marriages” between Indonesians and foreigners became important issues among Indonesian nationalists, who strongly condemned the keeping of *nyai* by European and Chinese men in the East Indies [Onderzoek 1914: 25–27; Locher-Scholten 2000: 201], taking particular issue with marriages between Indonesian men and European women, claiming that their families were under the influence of Dutch imperialism [*Perempoean Bergerak* 1919; *Penerangan Islam* 1928]. Meanwhile, they did not oppose marriage between European men and Indonesian women, which accounted for about 90 percent of the total mixed marriages. Although colonial and colonized groups often became highly disturbed about intermarriage between their women and men of the other group, in general, why was that not particularly true in the East Indies? Could there be a relationship between opposition to the *nyai* custom and the perception of mixed marriages between Indonesian men and European women?

In order to answer these questions, this chapter will examine the changing image among Indonesians of male-female relationships during the first half of the twentieth century. Foreigners keeping *nyai* then deserting them after making their fortunes appeared to Indonesian nationalists as typical examples of colonists exploiting the wealth of Indonesia, in terms of both human and natural resources. Such a perception, in addition to the arguments made by Christian moralists, were influential in persuading Europeans cohabiting with local women to move into a state of wedlock, as shown by the increase in intermarriage between Europeans and Indonesians during the 1910s and 1920s. At the same time, the marginalization of *nyai* by Indonesian nationalists induced female intellectuals to question the motives of male leaders who were inclined to look down upon *nyai* and some of whom were married to European women. Indeed, the issues of *nyai* concubinage and “mixed marriages” between Indonesian men and European women were often linked together. The situation in Indonesia offers a very interesting example of the rise of Indonesian nationalism within a hybrid urban milieu being characterized by not only a strong distinction between “Indonesians” and “non-Indonesians” in male-female relationships, but also renewed buffers between the colonial and colonized through

intermarriages between Indonesian women and European men.

### 1. Changing Dutch Colonial Policy Regarding Cohabitation between Europeans and Indonesian Concubines

Colonial towns in Indonesia were no different than any other urban area of Southeast Asia in terms of their high degree of cosmopolitanism. Not only Europeans and indigenous peoples, but also Chinese, Arabs, Indians, Armenians, etc., all contributed in important ways to the economy and the social milieu [Berg 1886: 105–109; Abeyasekere 1987: 57–71; Mona Lohanda 1996: 1–104]. The number of European and Chinese newcomers to the East Indies increased as the Dutch colonial government expanded its rule over not only Java but also the other islands from the latter part of the nineteenth century. The number of the Europeans in the East Indies grew from 43,876 in 1860 to 91,142 in 1900 [*Volkstelling 1930 VI*: 18], while the Chinese population increased from 221,438 in 1860 to 537,316 in 1900 [*Volkstelling 1930 VII*: 48].

Up until the end of the nineteenth century, most European immigrants came to Indonesia without their spouses. For example, among the European population in the East Indies in 1880, men outnumbered women 40,684 to 19,585, in 1890, 47,733 to 25,895, and in 1900, 55,713 to 35,429 [*Volkstelling 1930 VI*: 31–32]. Under such conditions, well-off European and Chinese men kept Indonesian *nyai*. Even among the European colonial troops stationed in the East Indies, about a quarter of them lived with *nyai* in their barracks [Concubinaat 1913: 11; Ming 1983: 71].<sup>1</sup> It has been estimated that about a half of the European men in Indonesia were keeping *nyai* by the end of the nineteenth century [Marle 1951–52: 486].

In 1854, the Dutch authorities decided to re-categorize the colonial population of the East Indies into "Europeans," "Foreign Asians," and "Natives," and ruled that a child born between a European man and an Indonesian concubine would be granted European status if the father legally acknowledged it. If he refused, the child would be categorized as "Native." Under this statute, the larger number of children born out of such a relationship remained "Natives," due mainly to *nyai* not wanting their children to be acknowledged as Europeans out of fear that they would be separated in the course of their lives [Ming 1983: 78–79], although acknowledged children became no small part of the European community during the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> When a European cohabitant left the East Indies, it was

<sup>1</sup> Local women were introduced into barracks also by village and district chiefs [*Vereeniging* 1898: 66–68].

<sup>2</sup> The Dutch government had been very careful about its treatment of Eurasian communities in the East Indies, because 1) its members and locally born Europeans were not satisfied with the existing

customary to leave his household goods and a certain amount of money to his *nyai* and his children.<sup>3</sup> Some of these “abandoned” *nyai* would then become concubines of newly arrived Europeans, while others who successfully had accumulated savings during their cohabiting days opened small businesses at the local markets.

Under the Agrarian Law of 1870, the compulsory system of cultivation in the East Indies generally came to an end, with the exception of coffee cultivation in Sumatra and Sulawesi. This act enabled plantation companies to conclude contracts directly with the indigenous people in order to open cultivation. This new entrepreneurial opportunity was one of the causes of the increase in the number of European immigrants to the region; and the number of Indonesian cohabitants increased accordingly.

From around 1870, Calvinist moralists in Britain and Switzerland launched a movement to abolish the state regulation of prostitution, and the movement soon spread to the Netherlands at the end of the 1870s [Abalahin 2003: 221–222]. The movement’s ultimate aim was to criminalize prostitution altogether. The anti-prostitution and moral improvement movements began to urge the Dutch government to place a ban on prostitution in the East Indies and to stop Europeans from keeping concubines.

At the end of the nineteenth century, poverty among the people of the East Indies began to be discussed seriously among the Dutch politicians as having been caused by compulsory cultivation and liberal economic policy. Some claimed that the Netherlands owned the people of the East Indies “a debt of honour” for all the wealth which had been drained from the region [Ricklefs 1981: 143]. The Dutch government responded with policy changes at the turn of the twentieth century and introduced the “Ethical policy,” for the purpose of promoting Christianization, decentralization, and social welfare. This policy encouraged the anti-prostitution and morality improvement movements at home to become more involved in colonial society. In order to promote marriage between

order that did not allow them to share the political freedoms, including freedom of speech, that Europeans from the home country were granted and 2) they were restricted from holding office in the upper ranks of colonial bureaucracy [Blumberger 1939: 14–16]. Eurasians were furthermore prohibited from acquiring land in the East Indies under the Agrarian Law of 1870 which allowed only “the native” to possess it. For these reasons and others, poor Eurasians often became involved in smuggling opium and liquor, as well as organizing illegal gambling and prostitution rings. Among them there was no small number of orphans who had been abandoned by fathers of European descent. In 1872 the Dutch government set up an investigation committee to look into the issue of impoverishment among Europeans in the East Indies [Pauperisme 1919: 366–367]. In order to improve the situation, a primary and middle education system was introduced for them. Meanwhile, the Dutch government had not paid much attention to either *nyai* or unacknowledged offspring from the practice, mainly because they were not recognized as “Europeans.”

<sup>3</sup> If perchance a master did not comply with this custom, his dereliction of duty would be picked up by local newspapers and made public in an attempt to ruin his career [*Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* 1892; Nieuwenhuys 1959: 27].

cohabiting European men and Indonesian women, the colonial government introduced in 1898 a new regulation regarding mixed marriages, prescribing that the wife inherit the legal status of her husband [Nederburgh 1899: 1–5].

In 1904, the Governor-General van Heutsz circulated a memo warning colonial officials to be more prudent about keeping *nyai* [Java-Bode 1904], while the colonial army was ordered to provide larger living space for the European soldiers who kept *nyai* in the barracks and separate their quarters from those of single soldiers. The Dutch authorities also increased the allowance for newly arriving European troops to make it possible for their wives to accompany them from Europe [Concubinaat 1913; Exh. 19 Aug. 1915 no. 23]. Then in 1913 the Dutch authorities finally prohibited the keeping of concubines by European soldiers in their barracks, although non-European Muslim soldiers were allowed to have *nyai* as before [Exh. 6 Mei 1913 no. 74]. Furthermore, European soldiers who desired to keep *nyai* were strongly recommended to do so in wedlock. That same year, the Dutch government also prohibited prostitution in the East Indies, closing all the brothels which had operated under colonial regulation [Prostitutie 1919: 513; Abalain 2003: 265–266].

However, Europeans not directly affiliated with the colonial bureaucracy or the military continued as before to keep *nyai*. During the first three decades of the twentieth century, the number of Europeans immigrating to the East Indies was on the increase in the light of bright economic opportunities, to the tune of about 94,518 (men: 56,527) in 1905; 168,114 (men: 93,420) in 1920; 240,162 (men: 127,481) in 1930 [Volkstelling 1930 VI: 32]. Although more European women were coming to Indonesia than during the previous century, the number of Indonesian women who cohabited with Europeans by no means decreased. Rendezvous points for European men moved to canteens, cafés, and hotels run by the locally born Europeans or Chinese who were willing to introduce local girls to foreign newcomers [Abalain 2003: 268–271; Nieuwenhuys 2005: 15; Baay 2008: 148–149]. Also illegal brothels never disappeared, even after 1913. The police were hesitant to interfere in such affairs, because in order to intervene they were required to seek warrants from the local authorities, a procedure which was highly complicated [Prostitutie 1919: 513].

## **2. The Rise of the Indonesian Nationalist Movement and Controversies over the Issue of Male-Female Relationships**

The rise of the Indonesian nationalist movements was closely connected to the networks created by locally born Europeans in the East Indies for the awakening of an “Indies for *Indiers*” consciousness. As the number of newcomers to the East Indies from Europe increased from the latter part of the nineteenth century, locally born Europeans were not

only contemptuously branded “*Indo*” by newcomers but also driven from jobs by them. In their publications, which had been guaranteed freedom of the press since 1854, local Europeans condemned such newcomers as “sojourners” aiming only to get rich quick, then return to the motherland to live off their savings or pensions [Bosma and Raben 2008: 302]. Then beginning in the 1880s, they began to set up mutual aid organizations, one of which, the Indische Bond (Indies Union), was established in 1898 in Batavia for both the material and spiritual assistance to European residents in the East Indies [Blumberger 1939: 29–31]. Another was Insulinde, formed in 1907 in Bandung for the promotion of the welfare of mainly lower-class Indo-Europeans. Insulinde, having also contacts with Javanese intellectuals, revised its purpose in 1911 to include the development of both material and spiritual prosperity and welfare in the East Indies and the removal of obstacles and laws preventing such development [Blumberger 1939: 32]. Indo-Europeans also began to rally support among the Indonesian community, as shown by the opening of the membership of the State Railway Union, established in Semarang in 1906, to Indonesian railway workers in 1908, with its trade circular being published in both Dutch and Malay [Bosma and Raben 2008: 307].

In order to reunify these movements, Douwes Dekker, a Eurasian, and two Javanese, Tjipto Mangunkusumo and Suwardi Surjaningrat, organized the Indische Partij (Indies Party) in 1912 under the slogan “the Indies for the *Indiërs*,” who regarded the Indies as their motherland. The Indische Partij also approached Sarekat Islam (the Islamic Association), established at the end of 1911 by Javanese and Arab merchants to defend their commercial interests against the Chinese invigorated by the success of the Chinese Revolution [Blumberger 1931: 58–59; Shiraiishi 1990: 41]. Sarekat Islam was spreading over Java through the establishment of local branches and amassed about a hundred thousand followers by the end of 1912, mainly due to the deep dissatisfaction felt by Muslims towards their Chinese rivals and social unrest caused by a volcanic eruption and the outbreak of epidemics [Fukami 1996: 46–52].

By July of 1913 Sarekat Islam had three hundred thousand members with branches throughout Java and the other islands. The number of newspapers being edited by indigenous journalists outnumbered those edited by their Eurasian and Chinese counterparts by the end of 1913 [Adam 1995: 173–177]. Those newspapers frequently reported on the activities of the Association, often referring to it as “Sarekat Bumi Putra” [Exh. 31 Juli 1913 no. 22], reflecting their hopes for the improvement of the status of natives, emphasizing legal differences existing among Europeans, the Chinese, and the native population. The Sarekat Islam movement induced a lively debate over politics, modernization and progress through these publications, and issues regarding men and women became important topics, cohabitation between European men and local girls out of wedlock becoming one of the most popular themes in the debate over countermeasures to deal with Dutch colonialism.

The members of Sarekat Islam strongly condemned those Chinese and Europeans who kept Indonesian *nyai*, mainly on religious grounds, since the Quran prohibits cohabitation between the Muslim and non-Muslim [Ratu-Langie 1913: 21; Tjipto 1913]. At meetings held at branches in Batavia and Bandung during 1913, participants claimed that those who offered foreigners *nyai* from among their families should be refused membership [Assistant Resident 1913; *Onderzoek* 1914: 25–27]. In June of that year, the home of a Chinese resident of Surabaya who kept a *nyai* was attacked by Association members in an attempt to “rescue” the woman, resulting in the death of one household employee [*Bintang Soerabaja* 1913].

Such strong condemnation by Muslim leaders against *nyai* did give rise to counter arguments from non-Muslim nationalists, although the Indische Partij endeavored to cooperate as much as it could with Sarekat Islam in order to develop their movement. Tjipto Mangunkusumo wrote an article regarding Sarekat Islam’s stand against prostitution, questioning whether the Islamic religious principle alone was sufficient to solve the problems presented by the existence of *nyai* and “public girls” [Tjipto 1913].

It is well known that the native woman, who is found in the non-native circumstance, has a peculiar position. The man does not take her as a servant, but even when she becomes the mother of several of his children, she is still “native,” no matter what, and the man isolates her from the family.

Tjipto went on to argue that Sarekat Islam should also take non-Muslims into consideration and that the Association should redirect its activities to making *nyai* equal members of their adopted families.

The topic of *nyai* also became a hot issue in the local press, and Muslim leaders began to discuss the importance of educating indigenous women, lest they fall victim to the customs of *nyai* or prostitution. In the 20 November 1912 issue of *Pemberita Betawi*, one of the most popular newspapers in Batavia, one young Muslim leader under the byline of “L. van Casino” stressed the importance of the introduction of women’s education in order that they might master reading, writing, and arithmetic and decried the fact that many a local girl would likely become a *nyai* of some European out of her yearning for a better life, despite all the instability involved in such a decision, and the possibility of desertion and transformation from *nyai* to “public girl” [*Pemberita Betawi* 1912a, 1912c]. *Pemberita Betawi*, which began publication in December 1884 under a Eurasian editor by the name of J. Kieffer, had gained many readers among both the Eurasian and Indonesian communities [Adam 1995: 46, 175]. Consequently it offered a medium for Eurasians, Indonesian women, and Muslim leaders alike to air their opinions regarding the *nyai* controversy.

There is also an article contributed to *Pemberita Betawi* by a woman claiming to be

a *nyai* herself, in order to refute the Muslim leader who claimed that education was the key for girls to avoid the fate of concubinage. The writer, calling herself “A Faithful *Nyai*” (*Satoe Njai Jang Setia*), stated that she did not become a *nyai* in order to seek a better-life, as van Casino has assumed, but because her husband, an indigenous colonial official, was so unfaithful to her [*Pemberita Betawi* 1912b]. Although she loved him and believed that he was working diligently, he secretly ran up large gambling debts and then persistently asked her parents for the money to pay them off, resulting in her family having to liquidate most of their rice paddy holdings. Feeling betrayed by her husband, she then left him and returned home. Later she became the *nyai* of a European whose salary was much less than that of her husband. She described that her man appreciated her for helping him through his days of penury, and concluded that indigenous men needed to reflect upon their attitudes and morals before discussing how to educate girls. Similar contributions by native women also appeared at the beginning of 1913, arguing that Muslim leaders should consider the low moral standards of native Muslims as the reason for native girls becoming the concubines of foreigners [*Pemberita Betawi* 1913a, 1913b].

Such counter arguments were no doubt the collaborations between contributors and the Eurasian journalists who were well aware of public opinion current within both the indigenous and European communities at the time and knew how to make them newsworthy by arousing people’s concerns about Indonesian marital life and concubinage with foreigners.<sup>4</sup> *Pemberita Betawi*, however, was driven to close down in 1916, owing to a lack of competitiveness with native-run newspapers. Also the development of Sarekat Islam induced the Dutch authorities to consider the activities of the Indische Partij a threat to the colonial order, ordering the dissolution of the organization in September 1913 and banishing the three founders from the East Indies [Veur 2006: 269–270]. Its organ was also discontinued. These newspapers which defended *nyai* against Muslim rhetoric retreated from the scene.

### 3. Changing Perceptions of *Nyai* with the Growth of Socialist Movements

Sarekat Islam’s attitude towards *nyai* was forced to change as the influence of socialism grew within the Association beginning in the mid-1910s. In 1914, Dutch and Eurasian

<sup>4</sup> The articles contributed by “A Faithful *Nyai*” were also introduced in the 13 March 1913 issue of *Koloniaal Weekblad* (Colonial Weekly), which was published in the Netherlands as the organ of the East-West Association, an organization that had been founded at the end of the nineteenth century to inform the Dutch public about what was happening in the East and West Indies. The editor inserted the articles in a column entitled “What natives are saying,” and concluded that the Dutch should not think of a *nyai* as a drudge [*Koloniaal Weekblad* 1913].



socialists established the Indische Sociaal Democratische Vereeniging (Indies Social-Democratic Association, ISDV) in Semarang, in order to spread the socialist faith in the East Indies. Gaining Indonesian followers by leading railway union movements, ISDV approached Sarekat Islam by having their Muslim members join it, the Semarang branch expanding as a result to 1,700 members in 1916 and 20,000 the following year [McVey 1965: 23]. The establishment of Soviet Russia after the 1917 Russian Revolution excited the socialists in the East Indies, as Sarekat Islam Chairman Tjokroaminoto, in sympathy with the socialists embarked on a campaign against "sinful capitalism" in 1918 [Blumberger 1931: 65–68; Mobini-Kesheh 1999: 46].

Muslim leaders of Sarekat Islam perceived socialism as being compatible with Islam, claiming that "true socialism" is found in Islamic thought and that Muhammad embodied it [Tjokroaminoto 1966: 23–34]. Mohammad Hatta, one of the major nationalist leaders from the middle of the 1920s, relates in his biography that in 1920 Agus Salim, one of the main leaders of Sarekat Islam, preached that Islam included the major principles of socialism and that Islam was the socialism that Allah had revealed in a different way than Karl Marx. Salim's preaching induced Hatta to be eager to learn socialism through the teachings of Islam [Mohammad Hatta 1982: 84–88], making it highly probable that many Indonesian Muslims gained access to socialism through Islamic terminology.<sup>5</sup>

At the end of 1917, the ISDV urged soldiers and sailors of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army to establish a soviet in the colony, resulting in the formation of the Red Guardists, which were concomitantly crushed during 1918–19 by the colonial government, which also banished the major Dutch leaders of ISDV from the East Indies, resulting in the leadership of ISDV shifting into Indonesian hands and the name of the organization being changed to the Malay Perserikatan Kommunist di India (PKI; Communist Party in the East Indies) in 1920 [McVey 1965: 46]. Meanwhile, as the influence of socialism grew within Sarekat Islam, conflicts arose over leadership of the organization between socialists and pan-Islamists, the latter faction adopting a rule in 1921 that made it impossible for a Sarekat Islam member to join another party, resulting in the expulsion of members of PKI from Central Sarekat Islam, which began to withdraw from any significant political action, thus allowing PKI to become the major force on the political scene. In 1924 PKI renamed itself Partai Komunis Indonesia (Communist Party of Indonesia) and called for a struggle of national liberation from Dutch colonial rule [Blumberger 1931: 110–123; McVey 1965: 166–193].

The radicalization of PKI's political agenda alienated the Eurasian, Arab, and most of the Chinese communities, resulting in efforts to appeal to Javanese peasants and Muslim followers by conflating Javanese messianic expectations and Islamic principles with

<sup>5</sup> See also the case of Mohammad Misbach, a pious Muslim of Solo, who became an ardent member of the Communist Party of Indonesia [Shiraishi 1990: 249–298].

communism. After attracting many followers not only in Java but also in Sumatra, PKI engineered revolts against the colonial authorities in Batavia, Priangan, Banten, Solo, and West Sumatra during late 1926 and early 1927 [McVey 1965: 323–346], which were soon suppressed by the colonial authorities, resulting in the arrest of 13,000 suspected rebels and the dissolution of PKI. Nevertheless, nationalist movements calling for independence from colonial rule were reorganized under the leadership of Sukarno and other Indonesian elites, under whom socialism continued to be influential.

The growth of the socialist movement influenced nationalists to change their perceptions of *nyai*. Muslim leaders at the early stages of the Sarekat Islam movement had criticized *nyai* cohabitating with non-Muslim foreigners based on Islamic principles; however, with the rise of the idea of “sinful capitalism,” Sarekat Islam members began to perceive *nyai* as victims of capitalism along with socialists condemning *nyai* as slaves of money and puppets of capitalists [*Sinar Hindia* 1919a], leading to the marginalization of the status of *nyai*, who had traditionally been regarded as a de-facto spouses. In opposition arose female intellectuals who attacked such characterizations of *nyai* by their male counterparts as “elitist.” In Malay language periodicals geared to women readers published beginning in the mid-1910s, articles such as the critique of the views expressed by a socialist, S. Sastroamidjoyo, written by a woman calling herself Mariam for *Perempoean Bergerak* in 1919.

Sastroamidjoyo had vilified one *nyai* who wished to cohabit with a European by comparing her to the case of a Javanese low-class girl with aspirations of marrying a Javanese *priai* (nobleman), concluding that such cohabitation would never be successful owing to a lack of support from her husband’s colleagues [*Sinar Hindia* 1919b]. In her rebuttal, Mariam, who claimed belonging to the lower classes, argued that it is sinful capitalism that drives native girls to be *nyai* of Europeans and that male intellectuals who condemn the motives of *nyai* can often be observed marrying European women and singing the Dutch national anthem, exhibiting a serious lack of class-consciousness [*Perempoean Bergerak* 1919]. Here we also see *nyai* issues being debated within the context of intermarriage between Indonesian men and European women.

The image of *nyai* as a victim of colonialism was further confirmed when the case of ex-*nyai* Nji Anah came out in the nationalist newspapers during 1923 and 1924. Nji Anah had been the concubine of a Dutchman E. Grutteling, who worked for a tea plantation company in west Java, but was abruptly dismissed in 1922 after Grutteling found her playing cards with her male friends on his return home one day. Then Grutteling suffered from arsenic poisoning and eventually died. Anah was accused of poisoning him out of revenge, based on the testimony of Grutteling’s housekeeper that Anah had continued delivering medicine to his home even after her dismissal [*Locomotief* 1923; White 2004].

In January of 1923, Anah, then pregnant, was sentenced to death, a decision that was widely covered in a sensational fashion by the local press, with the nationalist media

strongly criticizing the judgement as excessive and vilifying the colonial government for continuing to allow European colonists to keep *nyai* out of wedlock [*Neratja* 1923a; *Pahlawan* 1923]. The Dutch authorities, being unable to ignore such strong public opinion, ordered a retrial, which revealed that the former decision was based upon testimony of the housekeeper which had been forced by the investigators, resulting in Anah’s acquittal in March of 1924.

Newspapers associated with PKI reported the process of the retrial in great detail [*Matahari* 1924; *Sinar Hindia* 1924], while thousands of Anah’s supporters gathered around the courthouse and portraits of the accused ex-*nyai* “sold like hot cakes” [*Neratja* 1923b]. When Anah was released in 1924, nationalist parties, such as PKI and Central Sarekat Islam, held celebrations portraying her as a victim of poverty and an unhappy marriage, which drove her to be a widow [*Locomotief* 1924]. No one dared to ask Anah to relate her own motives or her efforts to conciliate between Grutteling’s household and the local community.

#### 4. Concubinage and “Mixed Marriage”

As the gap widened between Indonesian nationalism and European and Chinese concerns over colonialism, “mixed marriage” between Indonesians and non-Indonesians became a more newsworthy issue in the local press, and for radical nationalists a pressing issue in the anti-colonial campaign. In 1919 two local nationalist newspapers, *Oetoesan Hindia* (edited by Tjokroaminoto) and *Darmo Kondo* took up the “mixed marriage” (*nikah tjampoeran*) of Dr. Radjiman, an Indonesian nationalist leader who was married to a European woman, debating the question of whether or not the marriage was really based upon true love [*Darmo Kondo* 1919; *Oetoesan Hindia* 1919]. *Oetoesan Hindia* went so far as to question whether Javanese people were really capable of falling in love with foreigners. The development of school education and the nationalist movement had forced a discussion of the importance of “true love,” *ketjintaan hati* or *tjinta lahir batin*, which were translations of the Dutch “de ware liefde.” Then in 1922, when a Javanese princess of the Pakualam royal family of Jogjakarta married a European, *Oetoesan Hindia* argued that European spouses often made use of mixed marriages with Indonesian girls in order to facilitate land deals with the native population [*Oetoesan Hindia* 1922].

Regardless of the doubts expressed by the nationalist press as to whether the Javanese were really capable of “falling in love” with foreigners, the number of such “mixed marriages” continued to increase. The Census of 1930 revealed that about 25 percent of the marriages consummated by European men in the East Indies during the

previous decade involved Indonesian women [*Volkstelling 1930 VI*: 66],<sup>6</sup> while the national average for 1924, 1926, and 27 rose to around 29 percent, the figures being generally higher in places where locally born Europeans were more concentrated [Marle 1951–52: 66]. At the same time, nearly 40 percent of the European men married to Indonesians were “newcomers,” most of whom were conjectured to be soldiers of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army, mostly hailing from the lower classes and feeling more comfortable living in local communities rather than hierarchical European neighborhoods [*De Preangerbode* 1932]. Although the figures slightly declined during the latter part of the 1930s, generally speaking, during that decade about 19 percent of European male marriages involved Indonesian women, a rate still higher than the 15 percent figure for 1905 [*Indisch Verslag* 1932: 41, 1934: 49, 1936: 51, 1937: 52, 1939: 54, 1941: 62].<sup>7</sup> Intermarriage between European men and Indonesian women was usually preceded by a concubine relationship, legal marriage being resorted to after the conception or birth of a child during cohabitation. From about 1920 on, it appears that nearly half of these cohabitants would eventually decide to marry.

While the image of *nyai* as victim of colonial oppression was being established in the nationalist press, *nyai* became more and more interesting for journalists interested in the interrelationship among love, nationalism, and colonial society in the modern era [Watson 1971: 420–23, 427–30; Tsuchiya 1991: 473–75]. Already from around the turn of the twentieth century, such *nyai* stories as *Tjerita Njai Dasima* (The Story of Njai Dasima, 1896), *Tjerita Nji Paina* (The Story of Nji Paina, 1900), and *Njai Isah* (1903), all of which had been written by Eurasian authors, had been published. The *nyai* depicted in these stories were described as extremely beautiful beings swaying to and fro between the indigenous and European communities and often falling victim to provocation or deception on the part of some villain or other. These *nyai* stories became so popular that they were often adapted for the stage [Pramoedya 2003: 47; Cohen 2006: 2]. In due course, Chinese and Indonesian journalists also began writing and publishing pieces concerning *nyai* [Tan King Tjan 1922; Pramoedya 1985], in which their protagonists were no longer described as passive beings, but rather as proactive heroines bravely coping with their surroundings.

<sup>6</sup> The census of 1930 reports mixed marriages over the past decade between Europeans and non-Europeans (including Chinese residents of the East Indies) in terms of the percent of total marriages involving Europeans: 1920: 20.97% (455 couples), 1921: 19.27% (408), 1922: 23.88% (462), 1923: 26.55% (455), 1924: 29.71% (524), 1925: 29.44% (567), 1926: 28.68% (506), 1927: 28.89% (576), 1928: 24.90% (513), 1929: 22.33% (507), 1930: 22.76% (481) [*Volkstelling 1930 VI*: 66]. Of these, marriages between Europeans and Chinese usually comprised 2–4 percent.

<sup>7</sup> The percent of total marriages between European men and Indonesian women during the 1930s: 1931: 22.60% (467), 1932: 22.94% (465), 1933: 21.94% (409), 1934: 19.72% (356), 1935: 17.68% (343), 1936: 20.61% (414), 1937: 16.24% (343), 1938: 16.49% (383), 1939: 14.76% (382), 1940: 15.13% (395).

The development of print capitalism not only helped to give rise to Indonesian nationalism, but also helped people to create highly diversified images of male-female relationships. Although the keeping of *nyai* by European colonial soldiers was prohibited, they still sought local concubines outside barrack life [Vellenga 1930: 29];<sup>8</sup> and of course Europeans not affiliated with the colonial bureaucracy were free to keep *nyai* as they pleased. That being said, during the 1920s and 1930s roughly half of the children born between European men and Indonesian women were born in wedlock [Marle 1951–52: 322], suggesting that the other half of those children borne by Indonesian mothers out of wedlock were still acknowledged by their European fathers.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, during those decades, the number of the European men who cohabited with Indonesian women as *nyai* remained constant, or perhaps increased. Also in the Chinese community of the East Indies in 1930, many men, who outnumbered women 748,997 to 484,217 [Volkstelling 1930 VII: 48], turned to *nyai* as their companions.

Despite the reality of the situation implied by the statistics, Indonesian nationalists never toned down their opposition to the keeping of *nyai* by foreigners. As early as 1923, when the court trials of Nji Anah were causing such a sensation among Indonesians, Agus Salim, a leader of the Sarekat Islam, appealed to the colonial government to enact a law prohibiting cohabitation between European men and Indonesian women [Neratja 1923a]. Then from the latter part of that decade female members of the Indonesian elite played a leading role in the movement opposing the *nyai* custom. At its second congress in 1929, Perikatan Perkempoean Isteri Indonesia (PPII; the Indonesian Women's Association) decided that it would request the colonial authorities to enact laws prohibiting illegal marriages to be passed by the Volksraad (People's Council) [Bahagia 1930; Fadjar Islam 1930], but the request was refused. The refusal by the colonial government to prohibit concubinage stimulated the nationalist press to sensationalize the misery suffered by a *nyai* deserted by a Dutch soldier in 1930 [Bahagia 1930; Isteri 1930], and as the number of the Indonesian newspapers increased to about 400 during the 1930s [Overzicht 1935, 1937], anti-*nyai* sentiment tended to spread wider and wider among the Indonesian public.

Meanwhile, the percentage of marriages between Indonesian men and European women increased to about 2 percent of the total marriages among Europeans in the East Indies during the 1930s, partly due to a decrease in the number of eligible European

<sup>8</sup> The Dutch colonial government in 1928 completely prohibited colonial troops including non-Christians and non-Europeans from keeping *nyai* in the barracks [De Militair 1928; Volksraad Zittingsjaar 1928–1929: 1973–74, 1982, 1986].

<sup>9</sup> Marle roughly estimates the internal increase in the European population (i.e., excluding new arrivals) during the period 1881–1940 in the East Indies as follows: by equalization, 16,500; by mixed marriage, 16,000; by birth from the mixed marriage, 29,000; by acknowledgement, 48,000; by birth from non-mixed marriage, 210,000 [Marle 1951–52: 500].

newcomers in the midst of the economic depression of 1929 and partly due to Indonesian men marrying Dutch women during their stay in the Netherlands [*Indisch Verslag* 1932: 41, 1934: 49, 1937: 52, 1939: 54, 1941: 62; Marle 1951–52: 341].<sup>10</sup> Mixed marriages continued to attract much attention from both the Indonesian and Dutch communities of the 1930s. Indonesian nationalists, especially female intellectuals, generally claimed that the marriages between Indonesian men and European women led to family life under the influence of Dutch imperialism, in which the offspring are forced to straddle the fence between Indonesia and the Netherlands [*Penerangan Islam* 1928; *Oetoesan Sumatra* 1931b; *Soeara Indonesia* 1931b]. Some further argued that such marriages humiliated Indonesian women [*Oetoesan Sumatra* 1931a; *Soeara Indonesia* 1931a]. These nationalists were of the general opinion that the main purpose of the marriage of a Dutch woman to an Indonesian elite male was to share her husband's wealth [*Soeara Indonesia* 1931c].<sup>11</sup> They nearly always cited such mixed marriages and the deserting of *nyai* by European men as typical examples of Dutch colonial exploitation of Indonesians.

The nationalists, on the other hand, tacitly permitted marriages between European men and Indonesian women. Neither did Indonesian Muslims explicitly condemn such marriages, although they strongly criticized the keeping of *nyai* either by European and Chinese men. As the above-mentioned comments on “mixed marriages” between European women and Indonesian men suggest, Indonesians highly regarded the role of mothers in family life. In other words, they perceived that conjugal life between Indonesian women and European men as being strongly influenced by the wives, although legally becoming Europeans by such unions, but generally wished to live in the East Indies for life with their families [Baay 2008: 125–126 and 148–149].

The Indonesian nationalist movements had difficulties in coping with the Dutch after the revolt of the PKI. The colonial authorities strictly checked their activities throughout the 1930s, except for those involving cooperation with the colonial government. Under such circumstances, Indonesian nationalists endeavored to collaborate with Eurasians in order to advance their movements [Pluvier 1953: 87 and 107]. At that time

<sup>10</sup> The numbers of the mixed marriages between Indonesian men and European women from 1930 to 1940 are as follows: 6 in 1930; 24 in 1931; 39 in 1932; 24 in 1933; 36 in 1934; 33 in 1935; 43 in 1936; 29 in 1937; 23 in 1938; 35 in 1939; 20 in 1940.

<sup>11</sup> Regarding these arguments, some of the contemporary Christian and anti-racism newspapers expressed the opinion that such mixed marriages were the result of contact between East and West and that there was no serious problem with them [*Persamaan* 1935a]. They questioned why people could oppose marriage between Indonesian men and Dutch women, while the custom of keeping *nyai* was still in practice and marriages between European men and Indonesian women were not at all rare [*Persamaan* 1935b]. Also Sutomo, one of the main nationalist leaders, who had a Dutch wife, claimed that not only he but also one active Indian nationalist leader of Sengupta whose wife was British did not let mixed marriage tone down his nationalist spirit [*Bintang Mataram* 1930].

the Eurasian population was no longer socio-economically superior to the Indonesians, because of both the increase in educated Indonesians and the introduction of equal pay for public servants irrespective of the legal differences between Europeans and Natives [Blumberger 1939: 49; Bosma 2005: 89]. For example, during his political exile on Banda, Soetan Sjahrir, a nationalist leader, observed that during the 1930s the Eurasians, with the exception of the very few who after retirement went to Holland to live on their savings and pensions, were generally on equal social terms with the Indonesians [Soetan Sjahrir 1949: 157–158]; and families of European husbands and Indonesian wives appeared to Indonesian nationalists as being very close to the Indonesian end of the social scale. One Indonesian Christian newspaper applauded such unions as being much better arrangements than remaining in a state of concubinage [*Bintang Timoer* 1931], even urging Europeans, Chinese, and Arabs to marry their Indonesian women instead of continuing to treat them as *nyai* [Darmo Kondo 1932; *Bintang Timoer* 1935].

The increase in the intermarriages between European women and Indonesian men, on the other hand, caused worry among the Dutch authorities about the status of European wives after wedlock, for among Indonesian Muslims, divorce through repudiation by the man was relatively easy, as shown by a divorce rate of 5 percent as compared to 1.5 percent in the Netherlands [Locher-Scholten 2000: 189]. In response, the colonial government drafted the Ordinance on Registered Marriages, imposing monogamy, civil marriage registration instead of relying on the *penghulu* (Muslim official who conducted marriage and divorce ceremonies), divorce through civil litigation, and marriageable age limitations [Ontwerp-Regeling 1937].

When the draft of the Ordinance was shown to major Indonesian nationalist women leaders in June of 1937, prior to introduction in the Volksraad [Conferentie 1937], there was no explicit opposition at first, but soon Indonesian Muslims began to strongly attack the proposed law on the grounds that it interfered with Islamic religious affairs, which up to that time the Dutch colonial government had refrained from [Benda 1958: 87–94; Locher-Scholten 2000: 200–207]. In order to rally Indonesian Muslims in protest against the Ordinance, activists took up the *nyai* issue, questioning why the Dutch authorities wished to protect only European women and not Indonesian *nyai* from possible abandonment [Moehammad Hasan 1937; *Pandji Islam* 1937; *Pedoman Masjarakat* 1939]. The anti-*nyai* campaign became one of the most effective ways of uniting the Indonesian Muslim community, which had been divided on such issues as monogamy vs. polygamy, divorce rights, and the proper age of marriage.

The protests resulted in establishing in September 1937 *Madjlisul Isulamil a'laa Indonesia* (MIAI; Great Islamic Council of Indonesia), which most of the Islamic associations in the East Indies joined [Benda 1958: 90]. *Nyai* and intermarriage between Indonesian men and European women therefore formed one set of male-female issues not only among nationalists, but also among Indonesian Muslims. Under such circumstances,

the Dutch authorities withdrew the Ordinance proposal in 1938, while Indonesian Muslims further appealed to the government to prohibit by ordinance the concubinage of Indonesian women to European men, but no legislative steps were ever taken.

### Concluding Remarks

Introducing Indonesian women as concubines (*nyai*) to foreigners had been one of the traditional customs in Indonesia, providing them as merchants, translators, and/or housekeepers playing a significant role as mediators between foreigners and local society. Dutch colonial officials who did not accompany their spouses also kept *nyai* until the turn of the twentieth century, but were forced to change their attitude towards the practice at the urging of moral crusaders from the latter part of the nineteenth century on. Nevertheless, such an attitude had little effect on the number of *nyai* cohabiting with newcomers, which in fact increased, while the situation of women themselves became more and more precarious owing to the disappearance of the intermediary role played by local chiefs. *Nyai* also became a highly controversial figure for journalists and nationalists alike during the first half of the twentieth century.

Indonesian nationalists not only condemned the keeping of *nyai* by foreigners but also attacked the psychological character of the men involved, attitudes of whom some female intellectuals called “male elitist,” given the fact that some of the vilifiers were married to European women. Such female leaders insisted from the 1910s that “mixed marriage,” between Indonesian men and European women, should be condemned for delaying the development of Indonesian nationalism.

Despite the controversy, Indonesian *nyai* by no means retreated from the colonial scene, as urban hybrid circumstances continued to embrace the custom of the cohabitation between local girls and foreign visitors. While it can not be denied that there were many women being forced into concubinage due to either poverty or compulsory association by foreign employers, as the existing literature suggests [Ming 1983: 73–74; Lucas 1986: 86–87], Indo-European communities, newspapers, novels, and theater drama helped local girls, including the so-called “victimized” *nyai*, to create more diversified images about gender relations to cope with concubinage. The existing literature is inclined to argue that Dutch colonialism and Indonesian nationalism drastically transformed the hybrid urban milieu of the East Indies from around 1920 [Couperus 1924: 140–145; Nieuwenhuys 1959]. However, the Indonesian case suggests that such a set of ever adapting cultural circumstances continued to flourish right up until the last stage of the colonial era. The clearer the differences among the Indonesian, European, and Chinese became, the more important became the role of local women as mediators in a pluralistic society.

The Indonesian nationalists never toned down their opposition to concubinage, so



long as the practice existed among foreigners and Indonesian women, and such anti-*nyai* campaigns helped to promote MIAI when the Dutch endeavored to enact the Ordinance on Registered Marriages in 1937. This Muslim action may have been an influential blow to the *nyai* custom, for during 1937–39, both the number of the intermarriages between Indonesians and Europeans and the number of the children born from Indonesian mothers acknowledged by Europeans decreased [*Indisch Verslag* 1939: 54, 64; Marle 1951–52: 496]. In any case, it is clear that the intermediary role of “mixed marriages” in the East Indies was drawing to an end. Eurasians, the products of such unions, were now generally choosing European identities, although most wished to live in the East Indies for life. The development of Indonesian nationalism, Dutch colonial policies, and the development of transportation induced both European and Chinese foreigners to reside within their own communities and preserve their own cultures. Colonial society was being more and more divided from within [Furnivall 1939; Doorn 1983]. Furthermore, the advent of the Japanese invasion and occupation, the Asia-Pacific War, and the postwar Indonesian Revolution resulted in choosing national loyalty and obliterating ethnic ambiguities [Taylor 1983: 158]. Although mixed marriages and keeping of *nyai* by foreigners continued to exist during these periods of upheaval, they all but disappeared from public scrutiny and debate.

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