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# The Overlooked Impact of the Round Table Conference: Indonesian Citizenship among the Javanese-Surinamese Community (1949–1975)

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### Abstract

This article examines an overlooked consequence of the Round Table Conference: the adoption and later decline of Indonesian citizenship among the Javanese-Surinamese community from 1949 to 1975. In the early post-sovereignty years, many Javanese-Surinamese chose Indonesian nationality because they imagined Indonesia as their ancestral homeland and expected attention from the new state. Using the historical method of topic selection, heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography, the study draws on newspapers, sociological works, and related historical literature. The findings show that Indonesia did not ignore the community, as seen in the establishment of its representation in Paramaribo in 1951. However, the Javanese-Surinamese were never a major priority in Indonesia's early postcolonial agenda. As Indonesian domestic and foreign priorities shifted and Surinamese integration deepened, enthusiasm for Indonesian citizenship steadily weakened.

### Keywords

Round Table Conference; Indonesian citizenship; Javanese-Surinamese diaspora

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## Introduction

The signing of the Round Table Conference (RTC) on 27 December 1949 by Prime Minister Mohammad Hatta on behalf of the Republic of the United States of Indonesia (RIS) and Queen Juliana on behalf of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in The Hague enabled the Indonesian people to feel a sense of freedom after four years of revolutionary turmoil. The Netherlands, which had previously fought hard to re-establish the Dutch East Indies, officially recognized Indonesia as a state in federal form. In Jakarta, the transfer of sovereignty from the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the RIS was carried out by A.H.J. Lovink, High Representative of the Dutch Crown, and Sultan Hamengkubuwana IX for the RIS. The victory of the Indonesian Revolution brought new hope not only for people in Indonesia but also for the Javanese-Surinamese community across the Atlantic, who came to feel integrated into a single nation, namely Indonesia (Ismael, 1955).

During the Indonesian Revolution (1945–1949), the spirit of revolution resonated not only in Indonesia but also among the Javanese in Suriname, who actively celebrated the birth of the new state in their ancestral homeland (Dwipusrandito, 1984). Suriname, a Dutch colony in South America, had a significant Javanese population in 1949, amounting to 19.74%, after the Hindustani population at 32.96% and the Creole population at 42.27% (Ismael, 1955). Bitter experiences under punitive sanctions within the contract labor system (1890–1931) made the Javanese in Suriname view Indonesia as a savior from the ancestral land and strengthened their self-confidence in facing difficult lives in Suriname (Suparlan, 1995). For that reason, leaving Suriname and returning home became a major aspiration among the Javanese there (Hardjo, 1989). Many contract laborers had also been recruited to Suriname through kidnapping, meaning that many had not even been able to say goodbye to their families before departure (Dwipusrandito, 1984). The abolition of contract labor by the Dutch colonial government in Suriname in 1931 opened a new stage in which the Javanese-Surinamese became free to choose their residence and employment (Rizal, Kusno, Buwana, & Sakti, 2025).

Indonesian independence and Dutch recognition of Indonesian sovereignty made the dream of returning to Java even stronger among the Javanese in Suriname (Susanti, 2016). Yet a problem emerged after the RTC. According to its results, the Netherlands formally recognized Indonesian independence, but one consequence was a dilemma over citizenship: the Javanese in Suriname had to choose between Indonesian and Dutch nationality.

Since 1939, the Javanese in Suriname had received land from the Dutch colonial government and had the right to establish villages according to the Javanese rural system on that land (Hoefte, 1998). They had also enjoyed the right to vote for members of the Surinamese parliament (Staten van Suriname) since the 1949 general election (Suparlan, 1995). In that election, a Javanese political movement called Kaum Tani Persatuan Indonesia (KTPI) succeeded in sending two representatives to parliament, Iding Soemita and Karamat Ali. At the same time, concerns over ethnic tension began to spread alongside discussions of Surinamese independence (Dew, Sedney, Meel, Kartokromo, in Meel, 2011).

The issue of Indonesian citizenship among the Javanese-Surinamese community as an impact of the RTC is worth examining because it reveals a concrete example of the Indonesian government's response to the nationalism of Nusantara diasporas abroad in the early years after sovereignty recognition. In the early 1950s, 75% of the Javanese in Suriname reportedly chose Indonesian citizenship (Hardjo, 1989). However, Suparlan (1995) found that by 1973 only about 20% of ethnic Javanese in Suriname still held Indonesian nationality. This study therefore asks why the number of Indonesian citizens among the Javanese-Surinamese community declined.

## Method

This study is based on Kuntowijoyo's historical method (2005), which includes topic selection, heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The topic was chosen because the history of the Indonesian diaspora deserves greater scholarly attention. Indonesian historians have rarely treated diaspora history as a central research subject (Lisandhi, Yayusman, Syahid, & Riskianingrum, 2020), even though globalization has intensified inter-state connectivity (Puspita, 2025). Drawing on a 2006 World Bank Institute study, Lisandhi et al. (2020) cite the examples of the Indian and Chinese diasporas, which can open market resources and investment flows. Likewise, the Indonesian Diaspora Congress in Los Angeles in 2012 shows the Indonesian government's awareness of the importance of diaspora communities for national development, an awareness inspired in part by India's active engagement with its diaspora (Meel, 2017).

At the heuristic stage, both primary and secondary sources were collected. The primary sources comprise newspapers published in Suriname from the Delpher.nl collection for the period 1946–1975; the writings of Salikin Hardjo, a leader of the Pergerakan Bangsa Indonesia Suriname (PBIS), which was active from 1946 to 1954; and the works of two Indonesian sociologists who recorded their observations and experiences in Suriname, namely Yusuf Ismael, who visited Suriname in the early 1950s and wrote *Indonesia Pada Lautan Atlantik*, and Parsudi Suparlan, who visited Suriname in 1971 for dissertation research later published as *The Javanese in Suriname: Ethnicity in an Ethnically Plural Society*. The source base also includes contemporaneous magazine material available through Google Books, especially *Mimbar Penerangan* (1953). Secondary sources consist of books, journal articles, and newspapers in digital and print form. After collection, the sources were subjected to external criticism to test authenticity and internal criticism to assess credibility (Arifin, 2023). The next stage was interpretation, both analytical and synthetic, before the study was written as historiography (Madjid & Wahyudhi, 2014; Padiatra, 2020).

The study uses the perspectives of diaspora nationalism and the postcolonial state. To examine diaspora nationalism, the article draws on Anderson's (1992) discussion of Lord Acton's statement that 'exile is the nursery of nationality,' which Anderson interprets as meaning that the homeland becomes an imaginative space viewed from afar in idealized form. Meanwhile, Chatterjee (1993) argues that a state that has ended colonialism can rise as a modern state by positioning itself against the former colonial power. In this article, diaspora nationalism refers to the choice of Indonesian citizenship among the Javanese diaspora, while the postcolonial state refers to Indonesia's condition in the early years after sovereignty recognition.

## Results and Discussion

### The Citizenship Question among the Javanese-Surinamese Community

The proclamation of Indonesian independence on 17 August 1945 marked a new hope for the formation of an independent state free from colonial rule. Nevertheless, the arrival of Britain on behalf of the Allies, followed by episodes of conflict with the Dutch, meant that the new state remained under constant threat. The bad experience of segregation under colonialism shaped the thinking of Indonesian independence leaders, who came to uphold freedom for all colonized nations. This commitment was embodied in the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution, which champions independence and the abolition of colonialism throughout the world.

The promise of Indonesian independence acquired a strong foundation among the Javanese-Surinamese. A wave of support for Indonesian independence emerged because a sense of shared homeland filled the aspirations of this community. Ismael (1955) notes that enthusiasm for Indonesian independence in Suriname became intense: taxis in Paramaribo displayed the red-and-white flag, and photographs of Soekarno sold in large numbers. This enthusiasm also produced two political movements based among the Javanese-Surinamese: KTPI and PBIS. KTPI promoted the repatriation of the Javanese-Surinamese to Indonesia, whereas PBIS advocated that they remain in Suriname and focus on programs aimed at improving human resources (Meel, 2011). According to Hardjo (1989), the establishment of KTPI and PBIS reflected analysis of Dutch postwar plans to grant limited independence to all Dutch colonies. Despite different emphases, both movements supported Indonesian independence.

In 1949, KTPI and PBIS participated in the election for the Surinamese parliament. Adult Javanese-Surinamese were able to vote because they were regarded as Dutch subjects (Suparlan, 1995). KTPI, with its program of *Mulih Njawa* (returning to Java), won two parliamentary seats through Iding Soemita and Karamat Ali. Soemita had first become well known while working as a male nurse on the Marienburg plantation in 1925–1930, where he advocated for workers' rights, sought doctors for pregnant women, and promoted treatment for trachoma (Choenni, 2021). Karamat Ali, a lawyer of Hindustani background, accompanied Soemita in KTPI's leadership (Suparlan, 1995). PBIS, by contrast, failed to secure a seat. In 1951 its leader, Salikin Mardi Hardjo, founded the Yayasan Tanah Air (YTA) to accommodate Javanese-Surinamese who wished to return to Java.

The citizenship issue became clearer after the RTC. Following the conference, the Javanese-Surinamese faced two options, Dutch or Indonesian nationality (Suparlan, 1995). Weak attachment to Suriname meant that many of them felt little desire to remain there (Ismael, 1955). An unusual contrast appeared between KTPI and PBIS: KTPI urged the community to choose Indonesian nationality even though Soemita himself chose Dutch citizenship because he represented the Javanese-Surinamese in parliament, while many PBIS members chose Dutch citizenship even though Hardjo himself chose Indonesian citizenship (Hoefte & Mingoen, 2022).

The citizenship issue between the Netherlands and Indonesia after the recognition of Indonesian sovereignty had been regulated in the second plenary session of the RTC on 2 November 1949 in The Hague. Ismael (1955) refers to Article 4 as the provision that made the issue urgent. Article 4 of Round Table Conference: Result as Accepted in the Second Plenary Meeting held on 02 November 1949 in the Ridderzaal at The Hague reads as follows:

“(1) Without prejudice to the provisions of paragraph 2 below, Netherlands Subject non-Netherlanders (Nederlandse onderdanen-niet-Nederlanders) who are of age and who, immediately before transfer of sovereignty, belonged to indigenous populations of Indonesia shall acquire Indonesian nationality; but if they are born outside Indonesia and reside in the Netherlands or in a territory not under the jurisdiction of either partner in the Union, they shall, within the limit therefor stipulated, be entitled to state that they prefer Netherlands nationality. (2) The subjects of the Netherlands referred to in paragraph 1 above who are residents of Suriname or of the Netherlands Antilles shall:”

“A. If they were born outside the Kingdom, acquire Indonesian nationality but may, within the limit therefor stipulated, state that they prefer Netherlands nationality;”

“B. If they were born within the Kingdom, retain Netherlands nationality but may, within the limit therefor stipulated, state that they prefer Indonesian nationality.”

In other words, adult Netherlands subjects of Indonesian origin living in Suriname or the Netherlands Antilles had to make a formal choice of nationality under conditions specified by the agreement. Those born outside the Kingdom would obtain Indonesian nationality unless they declared a preference for Dutch nationality within the prescribed period.

From Article 4 it follows that people of Indonesian origin born either inside or outside the Dutch Kingdom had a limited period in which to choose Indonesian or Dutch nationality. To clarify this time limit, Suparlan (1995) also refers to Article 13 of the RTC, which states:

“Wherever the preceding articles mention ‘the time limit therefor stipulated,’ these words shall apply to a period of two years from the transfer of sovereignty.”

Efforts to provide the Javanese-Surinamese with the option of choosing Dutch or Indonesian nationality were then undertaken by the Dutch colonial government in Suriname. Hardjo (1989) states that forms for accepting or rejecting Dutch nationality were distributed across Suriname’s districts, and that around 75% of the Javanese-Surinamese rejected Dutch citizenship.

At the same time, the Dutch colonial authorities in Suriname attempted to persuade the Javanese-Surinamese to choose Dutch nationality. By tracing Antara news archives from 1954, Susanti (2016) shows that the Dutch feared losing diligent and inexpensive labor from the Javanese community, and therefore tried to induce them to choose Dutch citizenship, including through fingerprint-based endorsement. Since the contract-labor era, Javanese laborers had indeed tended to accept low wages (Hoefte, 1998).

A report from Paramaribo in *De Gooi- en Eemlander* (7 December 1951), titled ‘Vele duizenden Javanen in Suriname willen terug naar Indonesie: Nog maar twee hebben de Nederlandse nationaliteit aangenomen,’ stated that most Javanese-Surinamese still chose Indonesian citizenship; according to the newspaper, of 35,000 Javanese-Surinamese only two had chosen Dutch nationality. Ismael (1955) explains that one common obstacle in choosing Indonesian citizenship was the absence of proof that these people had been born in Indonesia. The same report also claimed that the desire of the Javanese-Surinamese to return to Indonesia would not significantly affect Suriname’s manufacturing production, because many Javanese workers met their daily needs as casual day laborers. Ismael (1955) notes the strong spirit of mutual aid among the Javanese-Surinamese, which kept applications for social assistance relatively low, and also observes that Javanese farmers were diligent taxpayers. Thus, the report reinforces Ismael’s argument that the Javanese-Surinamese were generally viewed as peaceful and unproblematic, with the result that Surinamese officials paid them limited attention.

Meanwhile, *Het Nieuws: Algemeen Dagblad* (8 November 1951), in an article titled ‘De Indonesier En Het Burgerschap,’ argued that the Javanese-Surinamese—referred to there as Indonesians—should remain in Suriname and criticized the claim that their repatriation would not matter for the Surinamese economy. The article maintained that although the Javanese-Surinamese often focused on meeting their own economic needs, Suriname’s small population made their presence important to national development.

### **Factors behind the Decline of Indonesian Citizenship among the Javanese-Surinamese**

In fact, the Indonesian government had paid attention to the Javanese-Surinamese at least since the RTC. De West, in an article titled ‘R.M. Abikusno Tjorkrosujoso’ (4 November 1949), reported that the Indonesian envoy R.M. Abikoeno Tjokrosuejoso visited Suriname and advised Indonesian citizens there to remain in Suriname temporarily because conditions in Indonesia did not yet permit their return. Abikoeno’s visit took place in October 1949, after

which the Javanese-Surinamese frequently sent requests to the Indonesian government asking to be repatriated to Indonesia (Ismael, 1955).

In Suriname, post-revolutionary Indonesia appeared idealized. Yet Rizal et al. (2025) argue that Indonesian nationalism in Suriname did not generate large-scale physical conflict during the revolution, unlike conditions in Indonesia itself, where the revolutionary period was highly unstable. This idealized image of Indonesia was likely shaped by limited information among the Javanese-Surinamese. Ismael (1955) records that on 5 March 1950, at a meeting in Moengo, a prominent KTPI figure whom he calls Sibopo reported on his January 1950 visit to Indonesia. According to Ismael, Sibopo described Indonesia as entirely prosperous: houses were in good condition, bridges were undamaged, and tattered clothes were fit only for scarecrows in the rice fields. Hardjo (1989), however, emphasized that Indonesia was still in a stage of reconstruction after the revolutionary victory, so PBIS members who wished to return needed careful preparation in order to contribute to national development once back in Indonesia.



Image 1. R. Soedarto Hadinoto and Family  
(Source: De West 28 Juli 1951, via Delpher.nl )

By mid-1951, the Indonesian government had opened a representation office in Suriname in the form of a commissariat. *De Tijd*, in an article titled 'Indon. commissaris voor Suriname' (16 July 1951), reported that the first consul was R. Soedarto Hadinoto, who departed for Suriname in July 1951. According to *De West* in 'Indonesisch Commissariaat in Suriname' (14 April 1951), the Republic of Indonesia Commissariat in Paramaribo was placed under the High Commissariat in The Hague. In *Nieuwe Haarlemsche Courant* (27 July 1951), in an article titled 'Indon. Commissariaat te Paramaribo?', Hadinoto explained that the Javanese-Surinamese had repeatedly asked Indonesia to establish a representation office in Suriname, making an investigation into their condition necessary. He also estimated that many of them saw Indonesia as an idealized new country, even though in his view it was better for them to remain in Suriname temporarily than to move immediately to Indonesia. This estimate may have been influenced by Ismael's report of Sibopo's description of Indonesia.

Debates over citizenship continued. Suparlan (1995) notes that the debate among Javanese-Surinamese who were reluctant to choose Dutch nationality lasted from 1949 to 1951. This posed a dilemma for Surinamese authorities because acceptance of Indonesian citizenship by the Javanese-Surinamese would mean that one-fifth of Suriname's population were foreigners

(Ismael, 1955). Mitrassing, as cited by Suparlan (1995), states that in 1951 the Republic of Indonesia Commissariat in Paramaribo and KTPI opposed a resolution declaring that Javanese-Surinamese who did not identify themselves as Dutch citizens would be treated as foreigners and would therefore lose the right to vote. KTPI's official position on the matter was expressed by Iding Soemita and Karamat Ali in *De West*, in the article 'K.T.P.I. - Communiqué' (1 November 1951), where they invoked the spirit of the Indonesia–Netherlands Union agreement as the basis for arguing that Javanese-Surinamese who chose Indonesian nationality should enjoy the same rights as Surinamese people who chose Dutch nationality and should not be treated as foreigners.

Later developments show that, in order to provide accurate information about conditions in Indonesia, the Republic of Indonesia Commissariat in Paramaribo opened an Information Section on 29 October 1951, as announced in an advertisement in *De West: nieuwsblad uit en voor Suriname* (3 November 1951). Anyone could obtain information on Indonesia there from 07:30 to 13:30 and from 18:00 to 22:00 Suriname time.



Image 2. Advertisement of the Republic of Indonesia Commissariat in *De West*, 03 November 1951 (Source: Delpher.nl)

In 1953, Salsono, an employee of the Ministry of Information assigned to the Republic of Indonesia Commissariat in Paramaribo, reported in *Mimbar Penerangan* (13 January 1953) in an article titled 'Surat dari Luar Negeri' that the Javanese-Surinamese showed enormous enthusiasm for Indonesia. He wrote that when he arrived in Suriname on 26 November 1952, hundreds of people welcomed him from Zandery Airport onward. He also reported that many Javanese-Surinamese gathered at his hotel to ask for certainty about returning to Indonesia, while others repeatedly came to his office and home to hear news about conditions in Indonesia.

For the Republic of Indonesia Commissariat, the citizenship choice of the Javanese in Suriname was also quite dilematic. Suparlan (1995) notes that the Commissariat in Paramaribo actually supported the Javanese-Surinamese in choosing Dutch nationality. In terms of its work program, the Commissariat focused on cultural and social activities and on raising political awareness, especially among members of the Javanese-Surinamese community who held Indonesian citizenship (Meel, 2011). At the same time, the YTA founded by Salikin Hardjo became a pioneering organization in building relations with the Commissariat in Paramaribo,

and its program was to assist Javanese-Surinamese who wished to return to Indonesia (Hardjo, 1989).

A firm Dutch decision regarding nationality was issued in 1954, creating a new dilemma for the Javanese-Surinamese. In the same year, relations between Indonesia and the Netherlands grew tense over West Irian. As a result, the Dutch Minister of Justice, Donker, issued decisions in *Gouvernementsblad* 1954 nos. 92 and 103, which tightened the procedure for obtaining and retaining Dutch nationality; in Suriname, applications could be submitted to the Surinamese government through district commissioners according to one's place of residence (Suparlan, 1995). As Indonesia–Netherlands relations further deteriorated over West Irian, the Indonesian government closed the Republic of Indonesia Commissariat in Paramaribo from 1958 to 1964 and reopened it in 1964 as a Consulate General (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2024).

By the 1960s, Indonesian citizenship no longer attracted the same enthusiasm among the Javanese-Surinamese as it had in the early 1950s. Meel (2011) argues that by the late 1960s a younger Javanese-Surinamese generation had been exposed to Western culture through transistor radios, cinemas, easier access to Paramaribo, and more frequent use of Sranan Tongo and Dutch, the languages of administration and education. This may have strengthened their ties to Suriname more than those of the earlier generation. Suparlan (1995) notes that according to the 1973 registration book of the Indonesian Consulate General in Paramaribo, only about 20% of the Javanese-Surinamese still held Indonesian nationality. Supratikto (2021) likewise points to the community's capacity to integrate into Surinamese society. Suparlan (1995) identifies three reasons why Indonesian citizenship declined among the Javanese-Surinamese, namely that the slogan of returning to Java (*Mulih Njawa*) was no longer popular for three reasons:

First, letters from Javanese-Surinamese who were repatriated to Indonesia in 1954 reported that life there did not match their expectations, so it was better to remain in Suriname. Second, the political tragedy of 1965 caused some people to worry about security conditions in Indonesia. Third, KPTI began to campaign for the choice of Dutch nationality in order to gain votes in general elections, on the condition that Javanese-Surinamese would still be able to visit Indonesia as tourists.

Even so, these factors did not mean that the ties between the Javanese-Surinamese and Indonesia had been severed. Dwipusrandito (1984) describes activities of the Indonesian Consulate General in Paramaribo, such as night fairs where handicrafts including Jepara carvings sold very well, and exhibitions of Bagong Kussudiardjo's paintings—both naturalistic and modern—which sold for hundreds of dollars, unlike exhibitions in Brazil and Argentina where Javanese culture was less familiar and sales were limited. Even paintings sold on Jakarta sidewalks for Rp. 10,000 could fetch 100 dollars in Suriname. Suparlan (1995) also notes that the Indonesian Consulate General in Paramaribo paid steady attention to the quality of life of the Javanese-Surinamese. Fanatic attachment to Indonesia may have endured because of this attention. Dwipusrandito (1984) also records that when the Javanese singer Waldjinah visited Suriname, thousands of Javanese-Surinamese men and women welcomed her at Zandery Airport, and many women cried in her embrace because they saw her as a symbol of their ancestral homeland.

The fundamental reason for the decline of Indonesian citizenship among the Javanese-Surinamese was that Indonesian politics in the early independence period was not focused on Suriname, even though it did not ignore the community's existence. Hardjo (1989) reports that the Republic of Indonesia Commissariat in Paramaribo formed an eight-member delegation

representing the Javanese-Surinamese community—S.M. Hardjo, S. Wongso, Achmad Drgaman, Iding Soemita, Muslim, Diposoewignyo, M. Samsi, and Argadikarta. At the expense of the Indonesian government, these eight delegates traveled to Indonesia and met President Soekarno, Social Minister Panji Soeroso, Agriculture Minister Kasimo, Public Works Secretary General Gunung Iskandar, and Sunaryo from the Foreign Affairs Section of the DPR-RI. Hardjo (1989) concludes from those meetings that the Indonesian government was willing to receive Indonesian citizens from abroad, but that orientation and clear planning were necessary first because the number of Indonesian citizens in Suriname was large.

More generally, however, the Indonesian government's attention was not centered on the Javanese-Surinamese. After the RTC, Indonesian domestic politics focused on containing the potential disintegration of the state, from ideological conflict to the separatist movements that proliferated in the 1950s. In foreign policy, Indonesia between 1950 and 1963 prioritized the West Irian issue, which remained under Dutch colonial control. Indeed, West Irian was the RTC outcome that most often drew the Indonesian government's attention. Throughout 1950–1963 Indonesia was occupied with mobilizing international support to recover West Irian from the Netherlands. One important form of this diplomatic mobilization was the 1955 Asian-African Conference in Bandung, whose resolutions endorsed Indonesia's struggle for West Irian (Anwar, 2004).

During Guided Democracy (1959–1966), President Soekarno further developed the politics of the 'lighthouse' (politik mercusuar). This policy aimed to introduce Indonesia as a new country that had successfully achieved independence through strong unity (Nugroho & Fuji, 2020). It sought to make Indonesia a beacon for the Newly Emerging Forces (NEFO) (Sumarto, 2022). Countries categorized as NEFO were generally newly independent states regarded as new world forces (Raharjo & Jati, 2019). Their rivals were the Old Established Forces (OLDEFO), usually Western bloc countries whose economies were associated with capitalism (Sumarto, 2022). One expression of the NEFO campaign was the GANEFO (Games of the New Emerging Forces), a major sporting event held in 1963 to rival the Olympics. In the long term, however, this lighthouse policy imposed a heavy burden on Indonesia's economy and contributed to inflation of 600% (Tamma, 2020).

This was followed by the policy of confrontation with Malaysia in 1964–1966, intended to thwart the formation of Malaysia, which President Soekarno considered dangerous for Indonesia (Rohayatin, 2021). The confrontation exhausted Indonesia and ended only after Soekarno's fall in 1966 amid the political turmoil that had begun the previous year. Thus, Indonesian domestic and foreign policy between 1949 and 1966 did not place the Javanese-Surinamese among the government's main priorities.

Another major factor behind the decline of Indonesian citizenship among the Javanese-Surinamese was the absence of a visit by the Indonesian president in the 1950s and 1960s, when enthusiasm for Indonesian citizenship was still relatively high. President Soekarno, whose name was popular in Suriname, never visited the country. Yet when he visited Brazil in 1959, *Het Nieuws* (11 May 1959), in an article titled 'Drie Uit Suriname Zullen Soekarno in Rio Begroten,' reported that the Indonesian Embassy in Rio de Janeiro invited three representatives of pro-Indonesian organizations among the Javanese-Surinamese—Djojoprajitno, Argadikaria, and Saimo—to meet Soekarno in Brazil. *Het Nieuws* (23 May 1959), in 'Djojo and Saimo Terug,' later reported that Djojoprajitno and Saimo had met Soekarno and discussed the condition of the Javanese-Surinamese with Foreign Minister Soebandrio, although the discussion did not produce a definite commitment. From September 1965 onward, Dutch-

language newspapers also frequently reported plans for a Soekarno visit to Suriname. Amigoe di Curacao (8 September 1965), in 'Reisroute Soekarno via Suriname naar Mexico,' reported that an Indonesian brigadier general had come to Suriname to prepare for Soekarno's visit on his way to Mexico. Het Vrije Volk (14 September 1965), in 'Suriname mag pres. Soekarno ontvangen,' stated that Soekarno wished to stop in Suriname after the non-aligned conference in Algiers, and that the Dutch government did not object and had already consulted the Surinamese government, which had enjoyed autonomy since 1954. The same report stated that Soekarno would speak with prominent Indonesians in Suriname and with Surinamese officials without Dutch participation.

De Tijd De Maasbode (18 September 1965), in 'Den Haag gepolst bezoek Soekarno aan Suriname,' further reported that the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had asked the Dutch government about the possibility of President Soekarno visiting Suriname. Twentsch dagblad Tubantia (18 September 1965), in 'Soekarno naar Suriname?,' suggested that no official statement had yet been issued by Indonesia confirming such a visit. Amigoe di Curacao (14 October 1966), in 'Pres. Soekarno Naar Mexico,' reported the postponement of Soekarno's visit to Mexico, which also implied the postponement of his stop in Suriname. The political turmoil in Indonesia after 30 September 1965 likely caused this postponement. With Soeharto's rise to power in 1966, Soekarno's visit to Suriname was never realized, either during or after his presidency.



Image 3. The Javanese-Surinamese Community Delegation Group met President Soekarno in Het Nieuws: Algemeen Dagblad 09 Februari 1952 (Source: Delpher.nl)

The absence of a Soekarno visit gradually reduced the influence of Indonesia's leading independence figure on the growth of Indonesian nationalism in Suriname. Rizal et al. (2025) argue that Indonesian nationalism in Suriname was peaceful and did not produce a revolution there. Consequently, memories of the Indonesian struggle for independence in Suriname depended largely on news from Indonesia during the revolutionary years (1945–1949), without direct experience of war in Indonesia itself.

In later developments, on the eve of Suriname's independence on 25 November 1975, a dispute emerged between two Javanese political figures, Paul Somohardjo and Willy Soemita, the son of Iding Soemita. Somohardjo, fearing unrest if Suriname became independent from the Netherlands, campaigned for migration to the Netherlands, whereas Willy, who had led KTPI, supported Surinamese independence (Meel, 2011). By the 1970s, therefore, the issue of Indonesian citizenship had lost its earlier emotional force among the Javanese-Surinamese.

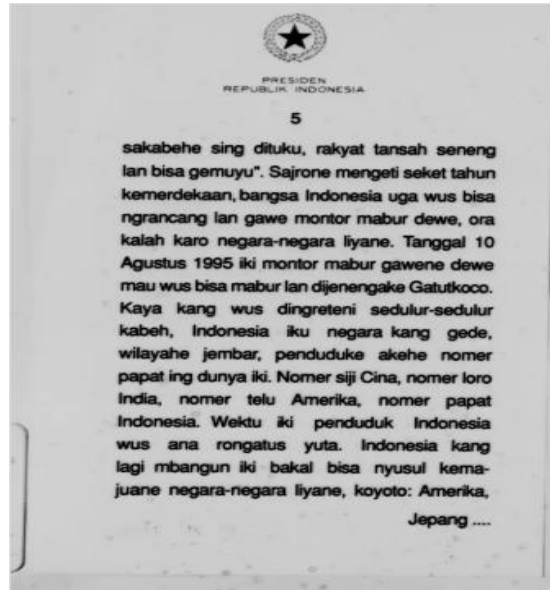


Image 4. Page 5 of President Soeharto's Javanese speech in Suriname containing information about Indonesia's success in making the Gatotkaca aircraft  
(Source: soehartolibrary.id/)

In 1975, Indonesia raised its diplomatic representation in Suriname from a Consulate General to an Embassy. President Soeharto visited Suriname in 1995. One important moment during that visit was his speech in Javanese before the Javanese-Surinamese community on 28 October 1995. The speech began by conveying greetings from the Indonesian people to the people of Suriname and continued with a narrative of Indonesian history from the war of independence to prosperity under the New Order, including mention of the Indonesian-made aircraft Gatotkaca and Indonesia's readiness to follow advanced countries such as the United States, Japan, and Germany. This is a translation of that President Soeharto's speech:

“Everything that was purchased, the people were happy and joyful. In connection with the 50th anniversary of independence, the Indonesian nation was also able to design and build its own aircraft, not inferior to other countries. On August 10, 1995, this plane that we made could fly and was named Gatotkoco (Gathotkaca). As you all know, Indonesia is a large country, with a vast territory, and the fourth largest population in the world. Number one is China, number two is India, number three is America, and number four is Indonesia. Currently, Indonesia's population is already 200 million. Indonesia, which is developing, will be able to catch up with the progress of other countries, such as America, Japan...” (President Soeharto's Javanese Speech in 1995, from Soehartolibrary.id)

Yet Soeharto's 1995 visit appears to have come too late. The Javanese-Surinamese had long since left behind the euphoria of choosing Indonesian nationality. Since Suriname had become independent in 1975, choosing Surinamese citizenship made more sense for them than choosing Indonesian nationality across a vast geographic distance.

As Dominicus Supratikto, Indonesian ambassador to Suriname from 2015 to 2018, stated in a 2021 *Maestro Channels* interview (50:24–50:37), ‘When I arrived in Suriname and checked the embassy documents, there were no longer any ethnic Javanese-Surinamese who still held Indonesian passports.’ Historically, then, Indonesian citizenship had indeed once become a

source of enthusiasm among the Javanese-Surinamese, but over time it ceased to be their preferred option.

### **Conclusion**

The RTC agreement signed on 27 December 1949 led the Netherlands to recognize Indonesian sovereignty. Even so, the Javanese-Surinamese community, which had existed in Suriname since 1890, experienced a strong euphoria surrounding Indonesian independence. Indonesian citizenship became the choice of most Javanese-Surinamese because trauma under colonialism stimulated a powerful sense of national attachment to the new state in the land of birth or ancestral homeland. This condition prompted the Indonesian government to pay attention to the community in 1949 by sending Abikoesno Tjokrosoejoso to Suriname. Eventually, the Indonesian government formally established the Republic of Indonesia Commissariat in Paramaribo in 1951.

Thus, the Indonesian government did not ignore the existence of the Javanese-Surinamese. However, Indonesia's early post-sovereignty condition kept the government occupied with domestic problems, the struggle for West Irian, lighthouse politics, and confrontation with Malaysia. President Soekarno's plan to visit Suriname also failed because of political turmoil in Indonesia after September 1965. Over time, renouncing Indonesian citizenship became the choice of most Javanese-Surinamese.

Soeharto's visit to Suriname in 1995 was warmly welcomed by the Javanese-Surinamese, but the euphoria surrounding Indonesian nationality had long since passed. Moreover, Suriname in the early 1950s differed fundamentally from Suriname in 1995, especially in terms of independence. Since 1975, Suriname has been fully independent from the Netherlands, so the choice of the Javanese-Surinamese to become Surinamese citizens was a logical one for remaining in Suriname and participating actively in the country's development.

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