Mulih nDjowo: Repatriation and Nostalgia for Home Among the Javanese of Suriname

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Repatriation and Nostalgia for Home Among the Javanese of Suriname

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The intriguing history of Javanese indentured immigrants in Suriname has been told by a number of historians, and is a key project of the Caribbean Expert Center at the KITLV in Leiden. The Javanese presence in Suriname dates from the period between 1890 and 1939, when almost 33,000 migrants from the Sundanese region of West Java and the north coast cities of Semarang and Surabaya were recruited from the Netherlands East Indies to fill the gap left by the abolition of slavery in the coffee and sugar plantations of the Netherlands’ South American colony. Many descendants of those contract labourers still live in Suriname today.

Less documented than the story of Javanese immigration to Suriname itself is the experience of the over 1,000 Javanese Surinamese who repatriated to Indonesia in 1954. A number of those repatriates are still alive, although those that can still remember the voyage from Suriname and the establishment of a new community in a village in West Sumatra are now quite elderly. In this paper I tell the stories of five of those repatriates, four of whom now live in Java. The fifth has passed away.

Towards repatriation

Early moves towards repatriation were doomed, largely, it seems, by messianism and political corruption. The first person to promise to return the Javanese to their homeland was the political activist Anton De Kom, a Creole teacher, who began agitating for repatriation among the Javanese in Suriname in the early 1930s. Claiming a direct connection to the Dutch queen and to Gandhi, and regarded by many Javanese as a Ratu Adil, a righteous prince sent to end their exile in Suriname, De Kom was eventually arrested in 1933 and exiled to the Netherlands (Hoefte 1998: 181-2).

Subsequently, the first Javanese political party to be established in Suriname, Kaum Tani Persatuan Indonesia, KTPI (The Indonesian Farmers’ Union), which was founded by Ideng Soemita in 1947, had a key platform of mulih nDjowo – repatriation to Java (Suparlan 1995: 226). Like De Kom, Soemita apparently tapped into the homesickness felt by many Javanese and their desire to ‘return to the land of their ancestors “if only to be buried in consecrated soil”’ (Hoefte 1998: 65). KTPI members wishing to be repatriated were invited to contribute money towards the cost of the journey. Many did so and made their way, virtually penniless, to Paramaribo, the capital of Suriname, to wait for the ship to arrive. It never did. According to some reports, a number of KTPI leaders had, however, become inexplicably wealthy (Suparlan 1995: 234).


2 As records in the Stichting Surinaams Museum in Paramaribo indicate, the description of these immigrants as ‘Javanese’ refers to their geographical, rather than ethnic, origins.

3 Humphrey Kariodimedjo pointed out in an interview that Ideng Soemita was Sundanese, not Javanese, but that in Suriname the distinction between Sundanese and Javanese was lost, especially from the perspective of other ethnic groups, for whom a ‘Javanese’ was a ‘person from the island of Java’.
General elections were held in 1950, after which Suriname became an autonomous region within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Automatically all citizens of Suriname became Dutch citizens, ‘with the exception of those who refused it’\(^4\) (Hardjo 1989: 23). Soon afterwards the Indonesian government sent a senior statesman, R.M. Abikusno Tjokrosujoso (leader of PSSI, the Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia, the Islamic Association Party of Indonesia\(^5\)), to Suriname to ascertain the level of interest in ‘returning’ to Indonesia. Many – some reports suggesting up to 75 per cent (Sardjan 2012: 4; Zacharias 1996: 10; Hardjo 1989: 23) – of the 40,000 Javanese in Suriname at the time did not wish to become Dutch citizens, preferring to become Indonesian citizens, and expressing a desire to ‘go home’ to Indonesia, even if it meant doing so at their own expense. In the wake of this development, the year 1951 saw the establishment of the Jajasan ke Tanah Air, JTA, the Homeland Foundation, whose mission was mulih nDjowo.

After registering those Indonesian citizens in Suriname who wished to return to Indonesia, the next two years were spent undertaking the huge task of preparing for the journey – including finding a ship. A delegation funded by the Indonesian government was sent to Indonesia to discuss repatriation. Its members met with President Soekarno, Vice-President Hatta and Prime Minister Sjahrir, who promised 2.5 hectares of land per household to those planning to repatriate. However, ostensibly because of overpopulation and land shortages in Java, this land would not in fact be in Java, but rather in Lampung in Sumatra, which had been established as a transmigration destination during the colonial period. The report of this delegation, presented to an audience of around 1,500 people at the Bellevue Theatre in Paramaribo, was not exactly favourable. It alluded to the remoteness of their intended destination in Indonesia, as well as the fact that it was located in dense jungle. Transforming it into a village would require ‘money, hard work and unfailing tenacity’\(^6\) (Hardjo 1989: 32). Furthermore, Salikin Hardjo, who would later lead the 1954 repatriation, gave a pessimistic picture of Indonesia in general: ‘I told them about the situation in Indonesia, that it still was bad. That there was fighting, there was no money for the workers and the people were still as poor as they were in earlier times’\(^7\) (Breunissen 2001: 63). However, the audience was undeterred in their desire to repatriate, reportedly responding in unison, ‘Good or bad, Indonesia is our country’\(^8\) (Hardjo 1989: 32).

It was planned that a second wave of repatriates would follow the first ship, so some people left behind family members when they boarded the Langkoeas\(^9\), which set sail on 4 January 1954 carrying 1014 people, 646 of whom had been born in Suriname.\(^11\) As events transpired, the Langkoeas was in fact the only ship that would make the journey.

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\(^4\) kecuali mereka yang menolak kewarganegaraan Belanda itu  
\(^5\) Tjokrosujoso was also ‘something of a maverick’, according to Daniel Lev (1972: 36).  
\(^6\) biaya, kerja keras, dan keuletan yang tidak tanggung-tanggung  
\(^7\) Ik vertelde over de situatie in Indonesie, dat die nog slecht was. Dat er nog werd gevochten, er geen geld was voor de arbeiders en de mensen nog even arm waren als vroeger.  
\(^8\) Baik atau buruk, Indonesia adalah negara kita  
\(^9\) The Langkoeas had been converted to a kapal haji, a transport ship for Muslim pilgrims to Mecca. When it was chartered by the mulih nDjowo group it was docked in Amsterdam.  
\(^10\) Some reports (e.g. Zacharias 1996) say 3 January.  
\(^11\) By the time the ship reached Indonesia the passengers numbered 1018, with the birth of 4 babies during the voyage. One of the babies, a girl, was named Langsinem, after the name of the ship.
After taking into consideration a number of factors (including, according to Sarmoedjie Sardjan, the fact that there were ‘too many elephants’ in Lampung\(^{12}\)), and apparently in line with a new policy to settle Javanese transmigrants in the Pasaman district of West Sumatra,\(^{13}\) the Indonesian government determined that the repatriates should establish their settlement in Tongar in West Sumatra, rather than in Lampung. It was a decision the repatriates were informed of ‘at the last minute’ according to Atmidjan Sastro.\(^{14}\) Despite their disappointment that the government provided only 1.5 hectares of land per household, rather than the promised 2.5, the repatriates eventually established a settlement in Tongar that was reportedly praised by Vice-President Hatta as a ‘model village’. However, the process of building that ‘model village’ was fraught with difficulties and when the PRRI/Permesta rebellion broke out in 1957,\(^{15}\) some of the repatriates began to wonder whether it had been such a good idea to return to an island that was so different from Java. Many people left Tongar to try their luck elsewhere, such as with Caltex in Riau, Portland Cement in Padang and in Jakarta. Many young people left Tongar because they saw no future there. Some Christians left because they had been prohibited from building a church by the Minangkabau elders.

In this paper I tell the stories of five of those repatriates: Sarmoedjie Sardjan, Atmidjan Sastro, Yohannes Kariodimedjo, Humphrey Kariodimedjo and Saliman Kasanrawi. Yohannes (John) Kariodimedjo, one of the leaders of the repatriation, passed away in 2007. The others, including Yohannes’s son Humphrey, all now live in Java. Based on interviews conducted in September 2012, the paper makes a contribution to the literature on migration, diaspora and Javanese identity by providing some insight into the ways in which migrants reconcile ethnicity and nationality. It reveals the mythologising that is part of the imagining of, and the pull towards, the homeland and examines the displacement and disorientation that can accompany the idealised ‘return home’. Above all, it suggests that there is no one master narrative that can encapsulate the migrant experience. In this way, the paper extends and complements the work done by Lisa Djasmadi, Rosemarijn Hoefte and Hariette Mingoen in their 2010 study *Migration and Cultural Heritage* (Leiden: KITLV).

The journey

What had been envisaged as the vanguard group of Surinamese repatriates embarked on their journey ‘home’ to Indonesia on 4 January 1954 aboard the cargo ship *Langkoeas*. The voyage was led by three office bearers in the JTA: Yohannes Wagino Kariodimedjo (Vice-Chairman), Frans Ngatmin Soemopawiro (Secretary) and Atmidjan Sastro (Treasurer). The chairman of JTA, Salikin Hardjo, had already repatriated to Indonesia with his family in 1953. Adult passengers on the *Langkoeas* were equipped with skills and experience in fields appropriate to the establishment of

\(^{12}\) Personal communication, 7 September 2012.

\(^{13}\) Atmidjan Sastro, personal communication, 12 September 2012.

\(^{14}\) Personal communication, 12 September 2012.

\(^{15}\) Centred in Manado, Sulawesi, PRRI/Permesta was a rebel movement declared by civil and military leaders on 2 March 1957. The rebellion arose for a number of reasons. Some ethnic groups in Sulawesi and central Sumatra felt that Jakarta-centred government policies were stifling their local economies, which in turn limited any opportunities for regional development. There was also animosity towards the Javanese, the most numerous and influential ethnic group in the new unitary state of Indonesia. See Leirissa (1991) and Harvey (1977).
a new settlement: construction, electricity, mechanics and agriculture. There were also medical professionals and teachers.

According to a report by the local newspaper *De West*, as the ship prepared to leave the port of Paramaribo, thousands of local people, among them Creoles, Indians and Chinese, along with the Javanese who were staying behind, lined the sidewalk around the harbour to watch the historic event. Hundreds of boats surrounded the ship, setting off fireworks and waving flags. The well-wishers wept as they bade farewell, many of the Javanese among them promising to join the repatriates in the next ‘wave’ of repatriation.\(^\text{16}\)

In relating his account of that day, almost 60 years after the event, Sarmoedjie Sardjan still becomes emotional. He recalls the poignancy of seeing husbands leaving their wives behind, and in one case a young wife leaving her husband. Families were split up and, as in Sarmoedjie’s own case, children as young as 12 left their parents and siblings behind to embark on the long journey to Indonesia. Of the 1014 embarking passengers, 399 were teenagers or children born in Suriname.

The cost of the repatriation was borne by the repatriates themselves, an indication that only those of considerable means were able to make the journey. As well as the fare, the passengers contributed to the cost of foodstuffs – including 35 tons of rice – and agricultural equipment, motor vehicles, diesel engines and other heavy equipment for establishing their new lives in Sumatra. Because the ship was equipped with only folding beds, each passenger was asked to bring their own thin mattress. Atmidjan Sastro speaks fondly of the convivial atmosphere on board, and the privilege of travelling on their ‘own ship’ with a crew of Indonesians from Surabaya. There was a full set of *gamelan* on board and Saturday nights were enlivened with *ludruk* performances. The children received lessons conducted in Indonesian, and the Muslims attended regular Koranic recitation classes.

After a month-long voyage via Cape Town the ship docked at the port of Teluk Bayur in Padang, Sumatra, on 5 February 1954,\(^\text{17}\) a date now commemorated as the anniversary of their return. The travellers then embarked on a 24 hour bus trip to Tongar,\(^\text{18}\) 180 kilometres from Padang Pasaman and just north of the equator, arriving there on 12 February. The local *wali nagari* (village head) held an official welcoming ceremony for the repatriates on 15 February, an event attended by the Chief of the Bureau of Transmigration of Central Sumatra and a number of local government officials.

**Tongar**

Tongar village lay deep in the jungle and nothing had been prepared for the new inhabitants. The response of one repatriate sums up the feeling of all on arrival there: ‘Tongar was not what we expected, not what we had been promised’\(^\text{19}\) (Breunissen 2001: 77). The repatriates were temporarily housed in wooden barracks, partitioned by bamboo screens into rooms three by three metres in dimension – hardly amenable conditions, especially for those with large families. They then had to build their own houses. There were no schools and the nearest market was a basic affair in

\(^{16}\) It was later to become a point of contention that the chairman of JTA, Salikin Hardjo, returned to Indonesia not by ship but by plane, leaving the logistics of the long sea journey to Yohannes Kariiodimedjo, Atmidjan Sastro and Frans Soemopawiro (Zacharias 1996: 36).

\(^{17}\) 4 February according to Zacharias (1996).

\(^{18}\) This journey now takes 4-5 hours.

\(^{19}\) *Tongar was niet wat wij verwachtten, was niet wat ons beloofd was.*
Simpang Empat, five kilometres away. There was no public transport, so shopping
and entertainment in Simpang Empat entailed a long trek on foot.

Wild animals were another challenge, particularly at night. Tigers paid the
occasional visit; gibbons made their raucous presence known, and wild boars
destroyed the first attempts at planting crops. The repatriates became despondent,
some expressing a desire to move to a more hospitable location, others even hinting at
a wish to go back to Suriname. Many felt bitter towards Salikin Hardjo, who, as well
as promising viable land, had reportedly told the repatriates when they were planning
their journey, ‘Here you eat one serving, but in Indonesia you can eat five. Do not
bring gold because there is a lot of gold in Indonesia’20 (Djasmadi, Hoefte and

During the planning of the repatriation, the Indonesian government had
promised to provide arable land and land for housing of 2.5 hectares per family. The
land each family in fact received, 20 metres by 40 metres, was barely enough on
which to build a house, the cost of which was borne by the household. Nonetheless,
the JTA stuck to its mission of ‘developing, with advanced methods, an agricultural
enterprise’21 (Hardjo 1989: 46), and within a few months there were 198 houses, a
school, a clinic (with a midwife who had been brought from Suriname), a meeting
hall, a mosque, a sports field, storage for crops, a rice hulling mill, a factory
producing cassava flour and a repair workshop. The village was largely self-
sufficient, with farmers growing rice, soybeans, corn and cassava.

The repatriates had to adjust to a new diet. Used to bread and Indian-style roti,
and in particular a breakfast of bread soaked in milk, the children especially were not
fond of the apem, cakes made of steamed rice flour, that became their daily staple in
Tongar. They didn’t like the texture, and complained that the apem smelt of the
gunnysacks in which the rice had been stored.

The returnees earned a reputation for hard work, self-discipline and
perseverance. This was attributed to their upbringing and education under the Dutch,
something that only a very small elite in Indonesia had experienced. But the shortage
of land, compounded by the lack of employment opportunities, led an increasing
number of the repatriates – many of whom were professionals with no agricultural
background – to leave Tongar in search of better prospects elsewhere.

The exodus was accelerated in 1958, when the outbreak of the PRRI/Permesta
rebellion took its toll. Many of the young people left Tongar for Pekanbaru, Padang,
Medan, Jambi, Palembang, Jakarta and other areas. Salikin Hardjo (1989: 64)
describes the impact of the PRRI/Permesta rebellion on the settlement as ‘shattering’
not only the efforts of the farmers in Tongar and the activities of the JTA, but
‘everything’. Everything came to a standstill. He describes poignantly the feelings of
one repatriate farmer, Pak Karto:

Living as an emigrant [in Suriname] he had felt oppressed. Now in his own
country he was trapped ... He trembled with fear and anxiety. That was
understandable. Tongar had been cut off; its inhabitants felt as if they were in

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20 Di sini kamu makan seporsi, namun di Indonesia bisa makan lima porsi. Tidak usah bawa emas,
karena banyak emas di Indonesia. Salikin Hardjo was born in Malang, Java and migrated with his
family to Suriname in 1920; his father worked in the bauxite industry. In the 1930s he wrote, under the
pseudonym Bok Sark, highly critical articles about the colonial administration and the way Javanese
contract workers in Suriname were treated. Hardjo died in Tongar in 1993.

21 membangun pertanian dengan cara yang agak lebih maju
a prisoner-of-war camp, where if things turn out badly you can lose your life and no-one is accountable (Hardjo 1989: 65).

For two years the residents of Tongar were afraid to venture into the fields, which were some distance away from the village, on account of the gun-toting militia who roamed there. Eventually the jungle began to encroach on their fields, and their coffee, clove and rubber crops were destroyed by fire. The village itself was not spared and was subjected to pillaging of machinery, spare parts and livestock. Hardjo (1989: 65) describes it as the ‘law of the state being replaced by the law of the jungle’. In order to earn a living many of the villagers began selling clothing, jewellery and roofing iron; their meals comprised cassava and boiled bananas.

The situation was compounded even further by the arrival in Tongar of 1,000 transmigrants, who had been evacuated from the nearby district of Koto Baru. The repatriates ‘did not have it in their hearts to turn away their fellow countrymen who had committed no crime and shared their fate’ (Hardjo 1989: 65). The little they had – the cassava they’d manage to save from the fires, the primary school, the meeting hall – they shared with the new arrivals. When the PRRI/Permesta rebellion ended in 1959, Tongar had been devastated by the two years of conflict. It was now the poorest village in Pasaman District.

The plan had always been for the first voyage to be followed by successive repatriations from Suriname to Indonesia (supported, where necessary, by loans from the JTA), but this was thwarted by the tension and eventual severing of diplomatic relations (in 1960) between Indonesia and the Netherlands over claims to West Irian. After diplomatic relations had been restored, and even after the opening of respective embassies in Jakarta and Paramaribo, the momentum for mulih nDjowo seems to have been lost. The experiences of the pioneering repatriates may have contributed to this loss of momentum but there seems to have been little communication between the repatriates in Indonesia and their kinsfolk back in Suriname. Clearly the JTA had no money left to pay for another ship, and the Indonesian government was not going to pay for one. Perhaps the key to the failure of the dream is what Zacharias (1996: 14) calls the ‘inherent risk of a program founded on human idealism’. Little remained of the tolerance and harmony that had been forged back in Suriname; eventually the JTA disappeared without trace, although Hardjo stayed on in Tongar in his capacity as wali jorong (hamlet chief) to work on the village’s redevelopment. Hardjo’s daughter, Haryanti, born in Tongar in 1955, still lives there.

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23 hukum negara sudah digantung dengan hukum rimba
24 (b)eratlah rasanya untuk menolak sesama bangsa yang tak berdosa dan yang senasib itu
25 risiko program yang mengandung idealisme kemanusiaan
The repatriates

Sarmoedjie Sardjan

The eighth of ten children, Sarmoedjie was born in 1943 in the Suriname village of Sidoredjo, part of the rice-producing district of Nickeri. He was raised by foster parents and came to Tongar in 1954 with his widowed foster father, Pak Sardjan. He was confident that his biological parents and nine siblings would follow in a year or two, but this never eventuated. When asked why he was the one chosen to join his foster father, he replied ‘I wasn’t chosen … We were asked, “Who wants to go?”’.

Like most of the other repatriates, Sarmoedjie arrived in Tongar speaking only Javanese and the Indonesian he had been taught on the ship, so becoming fluent in Indonesian was a priority. His readiness to learn Indonesian, combined with the strong work ethic that he had acquired in Suriname, meant that Sarmoedjie readily found work, even while he was still completing his schooling. He reports that he became aware at an early age of a reality that his foster father had to confront: ‘If I don’t work, I will not be able to eat.’

While Sarmoedjie was one of the many who left Tongar, in his case to attend high school in Padang and then to join the Indonesian navy in 1967, Pak Sardjan stayed on, eventually remarrying but not having any more children. Sarmoedjie’s wife, Nurmi, who was also born in Suriname, repatriated to Tongar as a five-year-old with her parents. She and Sarmoedjie did not become acquainted until the 1960s when he returned to Tongar on leave from the Military Academy in Surabaya, where he was studying. Unlike Sarmoedjie, she has never been back to Suriname, not for lack of interest, but because of the prohibitive cost of travelling there from Indonesia. Once Sarmoedjie had finished school and embarked on a military career, a permanent return to Suriname was really not feasible. Despite the pull of a large extended family there, there were too many unknowns, in particular uncertainty about what type of work he could get in Suriname.

Sarmoedjie’s family remains dispersed. Some family members are still living in Suriname and others are in the Netherlands. Sarmoedjie is the only one living in Indonesia, with Nurmi, his three children and four grandchildren. He is quite unequivocal in his belief that this breakup of the families of former Javanese contract labourers in Suriname is directly attributable to the colonial enterprise.

Sarmoedjie did not return to Suriname until 2010, at the invitation of tvOne, a private television station based in East Jakarta, which had taken an interest in a report he had written on the Javanese in Suriname entitled Sejarah dan Perjuangan Para Mantan Tenagakerja Indonesia (TKI) Asal Indonesia, di Suriname (The History and Struggle of Former Indonesian Workers in Suriname). When asked whether that 2010 trip was for him kembali (returning) or pulang (going home), he replied ‘Kembali’. His Suriname family, however, were disappointed that, after an absence of 50 years he was only in Suriname for 10 days! So his official visit in 2010 was followed up by a much longer three month family visit in 2011. Sarmoedjie reports his confusion when, upon arrival at Paramaribo’s Johan Adolf Pengel International Airport, he was
met by a party of dozens of relatives he did not recognise or had never met, being greeted as Opa (Grandpa) by great-nieces and great-nephews whom he barely knew existed. The celebration of his 68th birthday, held in Paramaribo, was attended by more than 1,000 people.

As documented by Raymond Chickrie (2009), among others, Javanese Muslims in Suriname are divided into *wong madhep ngulon* (West-orientating people) and *wong madhep ngetan* (East-orientating people), in reference to the fact that many of the original immigrants built their mosques in Suriname facing West, as they had in Java, whereas the longitude of Suriname dictates that Mecca is in fact to the East. It was only in the 1930s that people began to realise that the Kaaba was not located to the West, but to the northeast of Suriname. A group led by Pak Samsi of the Surinamese Islamic organisation *Sahabatul Islam* then began to encourage people to change the direction of prayer from West to East; those who did so became the more orthodox Muslim group. Sarmoedjie reported with some amusement that, during his 2011 visit to Suriname, when he was staying with his nephew, the nephew prayed facing west while at the same time he, Sarmoedjie, prayed facing east.

Dutch, the official language of Suriname, is the language of the workplace, public functions and the media. The more informal *lingua franca* is Sranan Tongo, the language Lockard (1971: 56) referred to as ‘Negro-English’, and which is spoken and understood by many Javanese. Most Javanese in Suriname also speak or at least understand what Hoeft (1998: 169) calls ‘Surinamese-Javanese’, a form of the *ngoko* Javanese spoken in Java. While ‘Surinamese-Javanese’ is similar to Javanese in phonology, morphology and syntax, it has adopted many loan words from Sranan Tongo. Very few Javanese in Suriname speak *kromo* Javanese. Sarmoedjie, a citizen of Indonesia since 1954, still speaks Sranan Tongo and a little Dutch, which proved useful during his 2011 visit with family for whom Indonesian and Javanese, as it is currently spoken in Indonesia, are effectively foreign languages. Sarmoedjie related that, although he still remembered Sranan Tongo from his early childhood in Suriname, he refreshed it while serving in the Indonesian navy when, stationed for four years in the late 1980s in Holland, he became acquainted with members of the local Surinamese community, who used Sranan Tongo as their language of communication.

Having re-connected with his family in Suriname, Sarmoedjie, keen to continue the connection and now in retirement, has established an export business trading with Suriname and other Caribbean countries.

**Yohannes Wagino Kariodimedjo**

Born in Suriname in 1921, Yohannes (John) Wagino Kariodimedjo was a founding member in 1947 of *Pergerakan Bangsa Indonesia Suriname*, PBIS (Movement of Indonesian Nationals in Suriname), an organisation that was not a political party, but an association focussed on raising the educational standards and improving the health and economic conditions of Javanese people in Suriname (Ismael 1955: 241). Interestingly, given Kariodimedjo’s later key role in repatriation, Suparlan (1995: 234) reports that PBIS opposed the notion of *mulih nDjowo*, declaring instead that ‘the Javanese in Suriname should stay for the time being, especially in light of the fact that Indonesia had just recently won its independence and would not be able to handle the arrival of so many Javanese from Suriname’.

After working for some years in the accounts section of a number of companies in Suriname, Kariodimedjo became a member of parliament in 1948, with
the brief of representing the interests of the Javanese in Suriname. He was the youngest person ever elected to the Suriname parliament. After only ten months in the position, he put a motion of no-confidence in the Dutch government because of the ‘Police Actions’ carried out in Yogyakarta. The motion was unanimously supported and forwarded to Amsterdam.

In August 1950, after Abikusno Tjokrosujoso’s visit to Suriname, Kariodimedjo was asked to head the first Indonesian consular office in Suriname. His first task was to find a building to house the office, which eventually occupied five rooms of the Palace Hotel in Paramaribo.

As a former leader of mulih nDjowo, Yohannes Kariodimedjo later in life recalled Tongar as a manifestation of his patriotic sentiments. After ten months in Tongar he was yet to build his own house. His family of ten was still living in a one-room hut, because their father had been so busy assisting others to build their houses. However, in November 1954, in an incident described by JTA chairman Salikin Hardjo (1989: 63) as ‘a private matter and nothing to do with the organisation’, Kariodimedjo, Sastro and Ngatmin were accused by a group of residents of embezzling JTA funds. While there seems to be agreement that the accusations were ill-founded, Kariodimedjo’s decision to ride it out in Tongar nevertheless led to death threats against him. With Sastro and Ngatmin, and followed later by his wife and children, he fled to Medan where, after a period of time working with the Reformed Church, he quickly found employment with Shell (later to become Pertamina). Yohannes Wagino Kariodimedjo died on 8 July 2007 and is buried in Pakem, Kaliurang, Yogyakarta.

**Atmidjan Sastro**

Atmidjan Sastro was born in Suriname in 1929. In 1954, at the age of 25, and one week after his marriage, he was one of the leaders of the mulih nDjowo movement, repatriating to Indonesia with his entire family. He describes the moment he and the other repatriates first set eyes on Tongar at 7pm on 12 February 1954, after the long bus ride from Padang. There was nothing there; there were no houses, only bedeng, the temporary barracks built to accommodate them. Some people wept, but despite his young age, Sastro took charge, ordering food from the district head, and instructing everyone to sleep in the vehicles for that first night. Work started in earnest the next morning, when everyone pitched in to begin building permanent houses.

Sastro recounts that one of the bitterest things the new settlers faced was the fact that, despite its bleakness and remoteness, the land they were occupying was not free land. It was owned by the local Minangkabau ninik mamak (clan head) so the repatriates would never be able to either own it or have complete control over it.

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27 The ‘Police Actions’ were two major military campaigns mounted by the Dutch military during this 1945-49 Revolution. The Dutch used the term ‘police actions’ to indicate that they regarded the conflict as an internal matter of law and order. The first ‘Police Action’ in July and August 1947 retook large parts of Java and Sumatra. The second, in December 1948 and January 1949 resulted in the Dutch capturing Yogyakarta, which was the Republican capital (Luttikhuis and Moses 2012: 266).

28 *soal pribadi dan tidak ada sangkut pautnya dengan organisasi*
Sastro was so upset that he personally went to Jakarta to speak to Sukarno about it. Sukarno sent Buya Hamka\(^{29}\) and Vice-President Hatta to Tongar to try to come to some sort of agreement, but to no avail. *Adat*, customary law, prevailed. ‘In West Sumatra,’ Sastro says, ‘adat is stronger than anything else.’ (Sastro added that nowadays things have changed, and *adat* seems not to not hold sway in the way it used to. Land has been sold – perhaps, he speculated, to the Chinese.)

The culture clash emerges in Salikin Hardjo’s memoir, which cites Frans Soemopawiro’s observations on, among other things, difference in dress (the Minangkabau were ‘almost naked’, the Javanese wore jeans; the Minangkabau went barefoot, the Javanese wore shoes) and work practices (the Minangkabau used small axes, the Javanese used big ones). But, he adds, ‘Gradually we came to appreciate their way of life’\(^{30}\) (Breunissen 2001: 88).

Sastro did not make specific mention of the embezzlement affair involving himself and his friend and fellow JTA office-bearer Yohannes Kariodimedjo. He simply reported that Caltex in Pekanbaru was looking for staff with the skills he possessed, so he moved from Tongar to begin working for Caltex. This was followed by periods of employment with the Department of Finance and with Bank Indonesia (Javaanse Bank at the time).

A turning point in Sastro’s sense of himself as an Indonesian citizen came during the PRRI/Permesta rebellion when he was jailed, without any legal proceedings, ostensibly because he was Javanese (although he added without elaborating, ‘or maybe there was something else’). After his release from jail, again without any legal proceedings, he returned to work at Bank Indonesia. In 1967 he took the significant step of returning to Surinam, leaving his five children behind in Indonesia. He lived in Suriname (visiting Indonesia every year), running a business importing Indonesian products for the local Javanese community, until 2007, when he returned to Indonesia, where he now lives with his wife Viliya in Jakarta. When asked whether he would like to go back to Surinam again, his reply was equivocal: ‘Here or there, it’s all the same to me.’ However, during our interview he frequently referred to the importance of ‘roots’, using the English word, adding, ‘I would be lying if I said I never wanted to go back to Suriname.’ All Sastro’s children have been to Suriname. The youngest attended high school there for seven years, intending to enrol in medical school there but returning to Indonesia after the coup in Suriname in 1980.\(^{31}\)

Like Sarmoedjie, Sastro still speaks Sranan Tongo, and maintains that it should have become the national language of Suriname. Indeed, before his repatriation he had put forward a formal proposal to that effect, but it was rejected. In daily conversation he and his wife still speak Dutch most of the time.\(^{32}\) When asked about Javanese culture in twenty-first century Suriname, Sastro replied that in his

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\(^{29}\) Author, Islamic activist and politician, Buya Hamka was leader of the Indonesian Defence Force in 1947 and elected representative of the Muslim Masyumi party in the 1955 Indonesian general election. (The title *Buya* is an honorific derived from the Arabic word *Abuya* meaning Father or someone respectable.)

\(^{30}\) *Wij beseften geleidelijk aan de waarde van hun manier van leven*

\(^{31}\) On 25 February 1980, a military coup in Suriname overthrew the democratically-elected government and declared a socialist republic. Suriname is now a constitutional democracy under the leadership of President Desire Delano Bouterse (elected in 2010). In a rather bizarre repeat of history, it was Bouterse who led the 1980 coup. He is now back in power in a different guise.

\(^{32}\) Despite Sastro’s assertions that his (Javanese) Suriname-born wife, Viliya, who was present at our interview, ‘understands no Indonesian at all, only Minang’, she demonstrated perfect mastery of the Indonesian language in my conversation with her!
view Javanese culture is stronger in Suriname than it is in Indonesia. The Javanese practice of *gotong royong* (mutual assistance), for example, is practised more widely in Suriname than it is in Indonesia. (‘Over there, if you build a house, it’s finished in a day!’ he declared.) Interestingly, the meal I ate at Pak Sastro’s house comprised not rice but *roti canai*, the Indian-influenced flatbread served with *masala* curry that in Indonesia is more commonly associated with Malay, Minangkabau and Acehnese cooking than with Javanese cuisine. Sastro’s wife described the dish (known in Suriname as simply *roti*) as ‘a Suriname specialty’, always served to guests, and Sastro declared Surinamese *roti* to be superior to any *roti* served in India.

**Humphrey Kariodimedjo**

Born in Suriname in 1946, Humphrey Kariodimedjo, the fourth of Yohannes Wagino Kariodimedjo’s thirteen offspring, was one of the 399 children on board the *Langkoeas* when it left Paramaribo for Sumatra in 1954. Despite having left Suriname at such a young age, and even though he was born of Javanese parents, as a young man Humphrey felt himself ‘a stranger to Javanese culture’. Javanese culture was something he had to actively learn, along with the Javanese language, so in many ways he is a ‘self-taught’ Javanese. This was something he put his mind to after his calling to the church led to him becoming a minister in the *Gereja Kristen Jawa*, the Javanese (Protestant) Christian Church. Humphrey’s study of Javanese culture included an in-depth study of *kejawen*, the Javanese belief system that continues to have a strong following in Suriname. Having acquired, through learning, a deep understanding of Javanese culture, Humphrey now regards as crucial the notion that, wherever in the world they may be, Javanese do not allow *kepaten obor* – literally, the extinguishing of the torch – that is, the family tree and the links to the ancestors must never be broken.

The whole Kariodimedjo family repatriated to Tongar. Humphrey commented that the motivation to repatriate was prompted in part by the family’s sometimes feeling marginalised in Suriname because they were Christian. In his view, the cultural differences between the Afro-Surinamese, the Hindustanis (the term used in Suriname to refer to Indians) and the Javanese in Suriname were significant enough to be isolating. When he was a child in Suriname he recalls little interaction between ethnic groups, except in the city. While there was no disharmony between the groups,

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33 Clifford Geertz (1983: 211) locates *gotong royong* as part of ‘(a)n enormous inventory of highly specific and often quite intricate institutions for effecting the cooperation in work, politics, and personal relationships alike, vaguely gathered under culturally charged and fairly well indefinable value-images - *rukun* (“mutual adjustment”), *gotong royong* (“joint bearing of burdens”), *tolong-menolong* (“reciprocal assistance”) …’

34 Named after Humphrey Bogart, this informant is henceforth referred to as ‘Humphrey’ to distinguish him from his father.

35 Sometimes translated as ‘Javanism’ and apparently popular partly because of its lack of institutionalised structures and partly because of, at one level, its simplicity, *kejawen* is essentially a metaphysical search for harmony within one’s inner self, connection with the universe, and with an Almighty God. See Woodward (1988).
he says, there was no interaction either. He did, however, know of people who were mocked for being Javanese (because they were considered under-educated). Humphrey told the story reported by van der Kroef (1951: 674-5) of the Javanese being looked down on in the early days, in particular by the Creoles, who described them as *lau-lau Javanesi* (stupid Javanese) and made comments to them like *Kan, sang joe sabi joe kong dja nanga karta joe neckie* (Man, you don’t know anything; you came here with a card around your neck). During our interview Humphrey often alluded to the importance to the Javanese of *tepo seliro*, which broadly refers to harmony and grace, and not doing something one would not want done to oneself. He reported that in Suriname the Javanese felt keenly the lack of *tepo seliro* among other ethnic groups. Despite these challenges, in Humphrey’s view the Javanese in Suriname never lost their sense of identity. There were some, however, who became ‘more Dutch than the Dutch’.

Humphrey also spoke at length about the reasons that his ancestors and others had left Java to go to Suriname. He commented that it is important to stress that the decision to migrate to Suriname, even for those who did so of their own accord, did not signal hatred of their home country. His own grandparents went to Suriname of their own accord, after his grandfather was defeated in the local *kelurahan* (sub-district) elections. He then became a *lurah* in Suriname. This is consistent with the observations made by Ismael (1955: 33-43) that there were many reasons for people going to Suriname of their own free will. For some, it was even a big adventure.

Unlike Sarmoedjie, who harbours a residual resentment towards the Dutch colonial enterprise, Humphrey feels no animosity towards the Dutch and said he was treated well as a child in Suriname.

For Humphrey, as for most of the repatriated Surinamers and their families, the most prohibitive factor in considering a visit to Suriname is the sheer cost of travel. Travelling to Suriname is considerably more expensive than visiting Europe or Mecca, for example. Humphrey has been back to Suriname once, in 1995; he commented that while there he communicated in English, Javanese and Sranan Tongo. Neither of his children, now aged 30 and 32, has ever been to Suriname, nor have they expressed any interest in doing so.

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36 This contrasts with the situation I found in Suriname in 2009, where cultural pluralism was accompanied by a remarkably high level of ethnic and religious harmony. See Allen (2012: 201).
37 In the case of some of Parsudi Suparlan’s informants, this led to a degree of conformity to Creole culture, largely for self-preservation: ‘The Creoles are rough. If we treat them with politeness, as we treat other Javanese, and with *ngalah* (yielding) behaviour to whatever they are doing to us, they tread on us. We have to respond to them in their ways of treating us.’ (Suparlan 1995:109)
38 These are very similar sentiments, as Humphrey pointed out, to those in expressed in Matthew 7:12 in the New Testament: ‘So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.’
Saliman Kasanrawi

Currently living with his daughter in Yogyakarta, Saliman Kasanrawi was born in Suriname, in the plantation district of Commewijne, in 1929. His father was born in Yogyakarta and his mother in Wonosobo. Both migrated to Suriname at the age of 16, on different boats, to work as contract labourers on the Marienburg plantation. Saliman recalls his father’s skill as a dalang, a shadow puppeteer, and at reciting the Javanese tembang, or sung poems.

At the age of 24, Saliman repatriated to Indonesia on the Langkoes. He left behind in Suriname a young wife and an eight months old son. They did not want to leave Suriname at that time but it was planned that they would follow on a later ship. That never eventuated, and it was not until 2007, more than 50 years later, that Saliman saw his son again, when the latter made a visit to Indonesia. In the interim Saliman had married for a second time in Indonesia, a union that produced three children. The pain caused by this fracture in his family life is still felt very keenly by Saliman, who told me that he had never ceased to beg forgiveness for the hurt he believed he had caused.

When Saliman spoke of his repatriation to Indonesia, he used the word pulang (going home). There was no doubt in his mind that, despite having been born and raised in Suriname, and despite his parents and sister remaining there, ‘home’ was Indonesia, even though, by his own admission, he knew little about it before he left Suriname: ‘I didn’t know that Indonesia was big; I thought it was a small place.’ On his only return visit to Suriname, a trip funded by his parents in 1979 (by which time Saliman’s son had moved to Holland), his father tried unsuccessfully to convince him to stay permanently.

As he told me his story, it became clear that Saliman Kasanrawi’s life has been shaped by several key factors. First, he was a restless young man, moving first from Tongar to work in Pekanbaru, then to a project in Jakarta, then to Balikpapan and Palangkaraya in Kalimantan. From there he moved back to contracts with Caltex in Duri, in Riau Province in Sumatra (still home to a large settlement of Suriname repatriates and their descendants) and Dumai, also in Riau. He then took a position with a Japanese company, but claims that their employment practices were discriminatory. He also worked for some time in Bougainville.

Second, he has always striven for self-improvement. He reports proudly that on a particular contract in Jakarta, and another in Palembang, he ‘held an important position’. When I visited him in Yogyakarta he was sitting on his front porch reading his third newspaper for the day, something he does every day to keep himself abreast with world news. The anecdotes of many repatriates reflect a strong sense of a drive towards high achievement, and upward social mobility, to compensate for the lowly status of their forbears in Suriname, a stigma many of them still feel keenly. In striving to overcome that perceived stigma, the repatriates and their descendants have created for themselves a form of cultural capital.

Third, Saliman loved an adventure. This was perhaps the key reason he left Suriname in the first place. At the time of the PRRI/Permesta rebellion he was working for the company Thiess Australia on a coal enterprise in Palembang. Unlike
Atmidjan Sastro’s experience, Saliman reports that it was not the Javanese-Surinamese who were targeted by the rebels, but the *orang Jawa asli*, the ‘native’ Javanese. Nonetheless, because of the danger of ambush, he and his co-workers were advised that certain areas were off-limits. They chose to ignore the warning. When one of their machines broke down, it was Saliman who returned to Duri for parts, leaving his Australian co-workers in the jungle. They were ambushed and all their food and supplies were stolen. One of the Australians ended up in hospital in Dumai, bribing his way out of trouble and escaping through the jungle under the cover of night.

**Concluding remarks**

As Mary Chamberlain reminds us (1998: 1), ‘(i)nternational migration strikes at the heart of nationhood and the nation-state, questioning the civic virtue of loyalty, the political certainty of citizenship, the patriotic basis of identity and the geographic security of the border.’ In Indonesia, where, in the past, one’s citizenship could be modified by one’s ethnicity and political allegiance, migration can challenge the notion of *tanah air* (the motherland) and who has legitimate claim to it. It can interrupt ‘perceptions of collective belonging and destiny’ (Kopijn 1998: 110).

Each of the case studies presented in this paper speaks in some ways to those uncertainties and insecurities. Humphrey Kariodimedjo had to ‘learn’ how to be a Javanese; Atmidjan and Viliya Sastro, both now in their eighties, still express a nostalgia for Suriname. Sarmoedjie Sardjan found himself questioning what it meant to be Surinamese-Javanese after his extended trip to Suriname three years ago. Saliman Kasanrawi can still be moved to tears by the circumstances and consequences of his repatriation. Furthermore, by returning to the land of their ancestors, a land they nonetheless called ‘home’, the people interviewed in this study were, like other repatriates, engaging in a sort of ‘double migration’, often finding themselves alien in the place that they wanted to call home.

Of particular relevance is the fact that, just as their forbears in Suriname had different understandings about what it meant to ‘be Javanese’ in Suriname (Kopijn 1998: 111), so too the group landing in Sumatra in 1954 had little idea about what it meant to be ‘Indonesian’ or to be Javanese in Indonesia. The 1018 passengers on board the *Langkoeas* were a heterogeneous group. What bound them was less their ethnicity and more their desire to ‘go home’ (and there were a variety of interpretations of what that might mean as well). Just as their forbears had done, they formed a bond with their shipmates that had more to do with future aspirations than with ethnicity. In Suriname the term *djadji* was used to describe a group of people who had arrived on the same boat, and the *djadji* often became a family substitute, continuing through subsequent generations. This seems to have been the case for those who took the journey ‘home’ as well.

The ethnicity of the Javanese repatriates was largely constructed upon their arrival in Suriname, and was arguably defined more by what they were not (not Minangkabau, not PRRI, no longer Surinamese) than by what they were. This is exemplified in the case of Humphrey Kariodimedjo, a ‘self-taught’ Javanese who now has an anthropologist’s understanding of the complexities of Javanese culture.40

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39 I have engaged with theories of identity and diaspora in relation to this issue in Allen (2012).
40 The question of the elision of Sundanese identity in this process awaits investigation with repatriates who were of Sundanese origin. To this point, I have been unable to locate informants in this category.
In modern parlance, the repatriates of 1954, those who were successful in their ambition to *mulih nDjowo*, were ‘living the dream’. While other Javanese ‘made up several scenarios to return to their place of birth, while never realising them’ (Kopijn 1998: 112), the passengers on the *Langkoes* had made the dream come true. While not quite as utopian as, for example, William Lane’s ‘New Australia’, the socialist settlement founded in Paraguay in 1893, there are parallels between the problems faced by both, namely leadership, relations with local people and mismanagement. Ultimately, for the Javanese attempting to develop a viable settlement in Tongar, the biggest problem was the gap between the ‘myth of return’ and the realities of life in a settlement in the jungle.

However as noted above, none of the material on the repatriation experience written by Hardjo and others distinguishes between Javanese and Sundanese.
Bibliography


