Religious resistance and secular politics
Laying the foundations of the Indonesian state
(1945-1947)

We didn’t want to leave West Java behind, we didn’t want to see the ummah and the Indonesian people in West Java become slaves of the evil Dutch, we didn’t have the heart to listen to the moans of the Republicans who wished to retreat to Yogya[karta]. [...] for whom were we withdrawing to Yogya? And what would we do, then, if the Dutch took Yogya as well? What would be the fate of the people left behind? Wasn’t that a betrayal? [...] Eventually, with resolute hearts, we decided not to join the withdrawal to Yogya and to continue instead the resistance against the occupying Dutch soldiers, joining the Sabilillah group in West Java.¹

Japan had made new concessions to Islamic groups in the social and religious fields, but it quickly stepped back when it came to determining the position of Islam in the new state, fully delegating the definition of such relation to local leaders. In late April 1945 Japan formed the Komite Nasional Indonesia Pusat (KNIP, Preparatory Committee for Independence), with the intention of initiating a debate about the ideological foundations of the future Indonesian state. On an increasingly dynamic political stage, the inexperienced leaders of Muhammadiyah, Nahdatul Ulama and Masyumi were quickly sidelined by the nationalist elite. When in May the debate became polarized around the question of whether Indonesia should be an Islamic or a secular state, Soekarno’s camp emerged as the winner.²

The conclusive speech, delivered by Soekarno on 1 June, ignored the controversy that had dominated the committee’s sessions and proclaimed, in the name of national interest, unity and harmony, that Indonesia was to be built on the Pancasila, or the five

¹ Confession of Sjarif Hidajat, Darul Islam member, arrested on 2 July 1961. ‘Confession letter of Sjarif Hidajat, former member of Kartosuwiryo’s group’, 10 September 1961, Penumpasan DI-JaBar, [folii], Arsip Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia [hereafter AABRI DI], Jakarta.
principles of kebangsaan (nationalism), perkemanusiaan (humanitarianism), permusyawaratan-perwakilan (deliberation among representatives), kesejahteraan (social welfare) and ketuhanan (belief in One God).³

A smaller committee was arranged to address the complaints coming from the Islamic faction and to ease emerging frictions. On 22 June the participants reached a common declaration meant to serve as the new constitution’s preamble. While it did not recognize the idea of an Islamic state, this version of the constitution accepted sharia law by affirming ‘the obligation for adherents of Islam to practise Islamic law’.⁴

This clear reference to Islam in the constitutional preamble prompted a reaction from the Christian representatives, and that sentence – later to become known as the Piagam Jakarta (Jakarta Charter) – disappeared from the final draft presented on 13 July, being replaced instead with a declaration of freedom of religion. The members of the Islamic faction had intended to further debate these changes, but as Japan was losing ground in the Pacific and would soon capitulate, Indonesian politicians felt compelled to accelerate their preparations for independence and to work with what they had. By 7 August the committee had been cleansed of all Japanese members, and on the 11th, in the aftermath of the explosion of the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan reassured Soekarno and Hatta that independence would be granted on the 24th of that month.

This chapter analyses the end of Japanese rule in Indonesia, the return of the Dutch and the dynamics surrounding Soekarno’s establishment of the Indonesian Republic. I focus in particular on Masyumi’s reaction to Soekarno’s decision to declare Indonesia a non-confessional state and on his readiness to re-engage in diplomatic talks with the Dutch. Kartosuwiryo had been sidelined in 1944, but we see him now returning to the political scene, first as Masyumi’s executive committee secretary (in 1945), and then as a party representative at the KNIP (1946 and 1947) and a candidate for the post of junior Minister of Defence (July 1947).
