'Here, everything speaks of struggle, resistance, hatred. Everything, except for the people.'  
– Dr. J. Thijssen (1933).

In May 2010 I told some friends in Juroung that I was about to leave for the West coast to conduct some interviews. I received different reactions. 'It is very good that you go there,' one said. 'It is a very beautiful part of Aceh, very interesting, and very different from here. You should go and see for yourself'. Another agreed, but added that I should be 'careful' (hati-hati). 'Why should I be careful?,' I asked. 'Because there is a lot of witchcraft over there (banyak ilmu gaib di Aceh Barat)', he said. The others nodded fervently. One of them asked mockingly: 'Are you scared?' 'No', I said, 'should I be?' He then told us a story. His nephew drove to Meulaboh once, where he was invited into a roadside coffee shop by people he had not met before. He refused politely, and had a drink at the neighbouring place instead. 'This must have made someone angry', my friend said, 'because once he had finished his drink and tried to get up again, his chair was sticking to his behind, and his glass was sticking to his hand!' We all laughed, especially because my friend was acting out the whole story as he was telling it. The conversation ended in a serious tone. 'Just be careful where you go, what you eat or drink, and to whom you speak. Some people come back sick. Or worse.'

Black magic was a basic concern in both Juroung and Blang Daruet. However, for many of my interlocutors the West coast represented a place where the boundary between the visible world and the occult was particularly thin. This idea is rooted in a much older notion that, for many centuries, has categorised the West coast as an inaccessible, wild and relatively untrodden settler space. In the colonial period, this image was reproduced, and adapted to the progressive discourse of 'development'. In his Land en Volk van Atjeh ('The land and people of Aceh'; 1939), former Resident of Aceh J. Jongeijans described the journey along the West coast as an adventure: a challenging ride over poor roads and wild river crossings, filled with spectacular coastal panoramas and tangible reminders of the war. Readers are told about the legendary origins of Tapaktuan, the vast coastal territory south of Meulaboh. Tuan, 'saint of the sea', chased a dragon into the sea, leaving behind his footprint (tapak) on the beach, as well as two impressive rock formations in the form of a hat and a stick. 'A fisherman will never approach this koepiah (head covering) or toengkat (stick) deliberately, because this will bring bad luck. But should the wind and current take him in this direction by chance, and should his prao touch either one [of these rocks], it is a good sign'. The contrast with his description of the North coast is stark. Rather than the wonders of nature, remnants of war, or the perseverance of traditional beliefs, Jongeijans makes note of immense rice fields, modern irrigation, fat buffaloes, crowded markets, busy workshops, a jetty for freighters, oil industry, plantations, as well as the 'amusing, cosmopolitan' town of Kuala Simpang marked by the influx of foreign capital.

This chapter focuses on these associative binaries: West-North, wild-domesticated, dangerous-safe, backward-developed, heretical-orthodox. My main question is how these binaries were reproduced, adapted, and magnified in the colonial period. In particular, I am interested in investigating the historical connection between this discourse and the practice of framing 'Acehnese' ethno-religious identity in scripturalist, rather than pluralist or syncretist terms. Seen from the perspective of Batavia, the whole of Aceh was a
frontier region, that was to be civilised. But both Dutch administrators and indigenous elites experienced this process as gradual and unpredictable, constructing this cultural and geographic dichotomy along the way.

In the 1920s, a social and intellectual distinction emerged in Aceh, similar to other parts of the archipelago and the Muslim world more broadly, between a current of progressive, or ‘modernist’ Islam, and a counter-current of conservative, or ‘traditionalist’ ulama. Reformist activists (who were sometimes referred to as the *kaum muda*, or ‘young group’, in contrast to the *kaum tua*, or ‘old group’) regarded a scripturalist attitude toward Islam as a key condition for the creation of a Muslim modernity. In Aceh, a broad spectrum of associations, ranging from small, short-lived interest groups or ‘reading clubs’ to professionally ran regional branches of large activist organisations operating across Indonesia, began to influence social life, especially in urban contexts. These groups were part, in turn, of a much broader expansion of the public sphere (known in the broader context of (colonial) Indonesia as the *pergerakan*). This diversity has been driven from memory, however, by the activities of one group, called the Persatuan Ulama-Ulama Seluruh Aceh (‘All-Acehnese Organisation of Ulama’), or PUSA. Founded in 1939 by a group of reformist ulama from Aceh Besar and the North coast, PUSA was kindred to Muhammadiyah, the association of Muslim modernists founded almost two decades earlier in Yogyakarta. Its initial intention, in the words of a Dutch observer present at its foundational conference, was ‘to join together all those involved in Muhammadan education, to raise the level of [Islamic education] (…), to standardize it more or less, and adapt it to the demands of modern times’.¹ What distinguished the PUSA from other modernist organisations was its regionalist focus, and its transformation, in the course of the Japanese occupation and the subsequent Revolution, from a religious and educational movement into a powerful political and military factor.

In the literature about Aceh the PUSA-legacy of Islamic scripturalism has been invariably regarded as the major, or even single ‘indigenous’ expression of Acehnese modernity.² In this framework, PUSA has been presented as a logical, even ‘inevitable’ reaction to colonialism. Rather than to view the colonial encounter primarily from the perspective of the events that followed it, however, I suggest approaching it as something which, by most of its contemporaries, must have been experienced as an open-ended process. While it is true that public expressions of modernity were increasingly influenced by definitions of ‘true Islam’, modernity existed in countless tonalities. This remains hidden from view, however, when we keep looking at history solely from the perspective of the ‘next war coming’ (Blom 2008). It is most crucial, then, to investigate the dichotomous discourses guiding Aceh on its ‘path to modernity’, and to deconstruct, simultaneously, the meaning of the very terms ‘Aceh’ and ‘Acehnese’.

This chapter consists of four parts. The first and second section deal with the nature of Dutch colonialism in Aceh. I discuss the transition in the 1920s and 1930s from military to civil rule, its effect on colonial ideas about Acehnese indigeneity, and the formation of a Dutch-Acehnese Islam-policy, all of this against the background of

¹ ‘Politiek verslag Atjeh en Onderhoorigheden over het 1e halfjaar 1939’, signed J. Hueting, Koetaradja, 25 August 1939; Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Ministerie van Koloniën: Politieke Verslagen en Berichten uit de Buitengewesten, nummer toegang 2.10.52.01, inventarisnummer 7, microfiche 106.
² Piekaar, in his book about the Japanese occupation, stated that the PUSA was both distinctly modern, and a product of the ‘pure, religious character’ of the ‘sramòë Meukah’ (the Veranda of Mecca) (Piekaar 1949:18). Subsequent works, including that of Aspinall (2009), Isa Sulaiman (1985), Morris (1983), Reid (1979), and Siegel (1969) have also narrowed down the Acehnese colonial experience, pitting a communal, ‘Acehnese’ adherence to piety and religiously motivated (violent) resistance against the political dominance of ‘outsiders’.
continuing outbreaks of anti-Dutch violence. In the third and fourth section I move away from the focus on the state, drawing attention to religious practices, associational life and Islamic activism, including the establishment of the PUSA.

**From military occupation to civil government**

As a conclusion to his mission to Aceh in the early 1890s, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje wrote a political advice to the Dutch military government, in which he argued that the ruthless persecution of hostile ulama, and anyone who might potentially associate with them, was the only possible way to keep the inherently ill-disposed Acehnese population under control. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the ‘Aceh report’ (Atjeh-verslag) was turned, by a succession of Dutch administrators, into a political doctrine, which was commonly referred to as the ‘Aceh policy’ (Atjeh-politiek). The Aceh policy consisted of three elements. Firstly, it stipulated that the ‘adat chiefs’ were recognised as the natural rulers in their respective realms. In return for their loyalty, and after signing an official contract (the Korte Verklaring or ‘Short Statement’), they were allowed to function as zelfbestuurders (‘self-rulers’) under the authority of the colonial government. The zelfbestuurders were responsible for matters of law and order within their domains, resolving conflicts between ‘natives’ in indigenous courts (musapat), based on adat law (that is, as long as these conflicts did not concern matters of state security). Secondly, the Aceh policy implied a gradual abolition of military rule. In the course of years, a range of civil institutions was established to regulate and stimulate the economy, improve communication and infrastructure, and advance a system of Dutch style education. Thirdly, it ensured an ongoing and uncompromising military crackdown on every form of organised resistance, and on all parties or individuals suspected of disseminating the ‘seeds’ of kafir-hatred among the population. Thus, Dutch military police (the marechaussee) continued to patrol remote areas, and to chase down small, persevering bands of armed rebels through the forests and mountains until the very end of Dutch colonial rule. I will move on by discussing two central, and connected ideological aspects of Dutch colonial rule in Aceh: the idea that Aceh needed to be ‘normalised’, and the construction of Acehnese indigeneity.

*Normalising* Aceh

Shortly after the destruction of the kraton in 1874, and Sultan Mahmud Syah’s death (of cholera), the Dutch began distinguishing administratively between Aceh Besar, the area thought to have stood under ‘direct rule’ of the Sultan, and its ‘dependencies’ (D: onderhoorigheden). The design was to place Aceh Besar under direct control of the colonial government (although the possibility was left open that, in the future, this area would be governed by a royal descendent under authority of the Dutch), and to leave all

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3 The Aceh report was commissioned by General Van Heutsz, and signed 23 May 1892 (for the full text, see Gobée and Adriaanse 1967-65:147-125). Although, in later years, Dutch administrators frequently mentioned Snouck Hurgronje’s ethnography De Atjehers (1893-95) as the main authoritative work of reference, it was the original advice, rather than the more nuanced scholarly work, which informed Dutch colonial policy up until the first centuries of the twentieth century. I will return to the differences between both texts in the next section.

4 Of course, the strategy of indirect rule was not specific to Aceh, but a general feature of Dutch colonial rule. For different perspectives on this with regard to the particular question of continuity between the pre-colonial and colonial periods, see, e.g., Schulte Nordholt 1996 (focusing on Bali) and Henley 2004 (focusing on North Sulawesi).
other areas in the hands of the *zelfbestuurders*. Until the early twentieth century, the structure of the colonial government was subject to numerous reforms, as a result of changing circumstances of the war. An important year was 1904, when Captain G.C.E. van Daalen led a brutal military campaign into the interior, through which, in the view of the Dutch at least, Aceh was fully ‘annexed’, and became ‘constitutionally’ part of Netherlands East Indies territory (Kreemer 1922-23:170). In the same year, a judicial regulation was established, which emphasized that, in the area outside Aceh Besar, the indigenous population would remain subjected to indigenous law. At the same time, the system of the *musapat*, the indigenous courts found in Aceh Besar, was copied in its basic form to the rest of the province (I will return to the *musapat* system in more detail in the next section). In 1914, a governmental structure was established which would stay roughly the same until the end of the colonial period. The province *Atjeh en Onderhoorigheden* was administered by a Governor, and divided into five districts (*afdeelingen*), each placed under the authority of a District Head (‘Assistent Resident’). Districts were in turn subdivided in (five or six) sub-districts, each headed by a Controleur.5

In 1918 A.G.H. Van Sluys was installed as the first non-military governor of Aceh in almost thirty years.6 He set about dealing with a number of issues which, until the late 1910s, had been impossible. One problem was that, due to the atrocities of the war and the restrictions enforced by the Dutch, Aceh had become a place of outmigration. Many people had fled from the violence, or decided to seek better economic opportunities, in the nearby Malay peninsula, where rubber and tin mining sectors were booming.7 In 1909 government inspector F.A. Liefbrinck had reported that several thousand Acehnese had migrated to Penang, the Malayan mainland, and Pulau Langkawi. In 1921 the Advisor for Native Affairs, R.A. Kern, stated that the number probably lay between 10,000 and 20,000.8 Both investigators cited grievances against the colonial regime – including ongoing violence against the population, forced labour, limitation of movement, and the burden of taxes – as the most important cause for this outflux. Van Sluys decided that these emigrants should be given an incentive to return.9 Among possible measures, he

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5 In 1914 there were five districts: the ‘directly governed’ area of Groot-Atjeh (Aceh Besar), with as administrative capital Koeta Radja (Banda Aceh), North coast of Aceh (Lhokseumawe), East coast of Aceh (Langsa; and including Gayo), West coast of Aceh (Meulaboh), and the Alaslands (Kutacane). In 1922, which is the situation shown on map 3, Pidie became a separate district, with Sigli as capital. Gayo and Alas were merged into one district, with as capital Takengon. Kreemer 1922-23:1.67-77, I.173-74.

6 Two subsequent civil governors were installed in the 1880s, but these were followed by a succession of ‘civil-military’ commanders after the Dutch position deteriorated again. In contrast to other regions in Indonesia, military rule in Aceh was never completely abolished. Up until the Japanese occupation in 1942, a number of regencies remained to be placed formally under military command (see, e.g. Van der Doel 1994:85-78).

7 With regard to the extensive trade between Penang and Aceh in the nineteenth century, and the support for anti-Dutch resistance of Acehnese residing organised in Penang, see Reid 1969. Recently, Eric Tagliacozzo (2005) added to this an account of the continuation of this trade in the twentieth century, much of which was declared by Dutch to be illicit, and thus ‘formally’ as contraband.


9 Beside its symbolical value, the return of emigrants was also though of as a means to stimulate the Acehnese economy. Some recent migrants were known to be quite wealthy. In the late 1920s there was an active attempt to lure Acehnese migrants back by petitioning the influential Pedirese scholar, and former Penang resident, Tengku di Balei, just after his return to Pidie. According to the Dutch government, Teungku di Balei was the ‘most important [Acehnese?] ulama on the opposite side’. Nota
argued for a relaxation of the Dutch passport system (created in 1889 to limit the ‘natives’ freedom of movement) and suspension of the forced labour system. What the region needed more than anything else, according to the Governor, was ‘peace, and again, peace’.¹⁰ Aceh, he believed, was ready to be normalised.

There were obstacles on the road. A particularly elusive form of disruption, at least in the eyes of the Dutch, were the attacks known among Europeans across the archipelago as the ‘Aceh-murders’ (D: Atjehmoorden). This term was commonly used for the persistent suicide-attacks directed at the lives of Dutch residents, committed by individual Acehnese hoping to become syahid (martyrs to the Islamic faith). The Dutch persistently described these assaults as the symptom of a condition that was comparable to ‘amok’. In contrast to amok, however, the Aceh murders were perceived as a conscious act, committed by people who, in the words of former resident J. Jongejans (1939:321), worked ‘eclectically, choosing [their] victim and choosing [their] location’. Administrators such as Van Sluys and Jongejans saw the Aceh murders as a phenomenon related to, but also distinct from, the Aceh war. Their perception was informed by a (unilateral) conviction that the war had come to an end around 1910, after the last remaining centres of organized resistance were crushed. The transition from military to civil rule meant that, in theory, the individual attacks on Europeans could no longer be categorized as ‘acts of war’. Instead, they were registered as separate incidents, which were in need of an alternative explanation. Although some administrators regarded the ongoing attacks as a logical result of the social and psychological exhaustion caused by the war, an increasing number was unconvinced. Frustrated that they continued to occur, even though political and economic stability in Aceh was clearly increasing, they accentuated the more primordial traits of the Acehnese race.

One of these traits was an inclination to lunacy. In 1920 Van Sluys ordered two investigations into the phenomenon of the Aceh murders, one by a psychiatrist, F.H. Van Loon, and one by the Advisor of Native Affairs, R.A. Kern. Both concluded that, although a straightforward causal relation with lunacy could not be found, there seemed to be a particular susceptibility for ‘imbalance’ in the Acehnese mind.¹¹ Causes for this were sought in the trauma of the war, and the ‘anarchic’ state characterizing the Acehnese polity in the decades before the Dutch invasion (see Kreemer 1922-23:1.230; Snouck Hurgronje 1893-95:1.68-69). In 1923, on the tiny island of Sabang just off the coast at Banda Aceh, an asylum was built which, in the course of years, grew out to become the largest of its kind in the Netherlands East Indies. Although, in the end, the hospital treated few perpetrators of Aceh murders (and at times perhaps none at all), Dutch administrators and local zelfbestuurders were convinced of its usefulness in the process of advancing security and ‘normalcy’ in Acehnese society. According to the institute’s first director, J.A. Latumeten, among the patients there were those who committed to religious exaltation, claimed to be a prophet, showed recalcitrant behaviour in front of chiefs, went roaming, expressed threats, or were simply ‘a-social’ (Zentgraaff 1928:268-69). In 1932 Governor Philips stated that the asylum ‘is not only there for the intake of lunatics, but can also be used to

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take those suspected of lunacy into observation'. Although the reason for this was to prevent their 'observation' in jails (places 'unsuitable' for them), it also gave the government and the chiefs a powerful new instrument for pre-emptive action against undesirable types.12

The use of civil disciplinary instruments, such as the Sabang asylum, does not mean that the colonial state in Aceh was all-powerful, or that its agents knew at all times exactly what they were doing. Like elsewhere in the Netherlands East Indies, colonial policy in Aceh was directed at maintaining order and security, and protecting Dutch economic interests. But the ways in which these policies were implemented were often ambiguous.13 In their dealings with the Aceh murders, Dutch administrators were often confronted with the fact that supposedly 'rational' approaches to order keeping conflicted with local realities. Central, in this context, was the question whether the perpetrators of the Aceh murders should be put in hospital or in prison – a dilemma which was never really resolved. This ambiguity extended to the judicial sphere more generally. According to Governor O.M. Goedhart (1925-30), a 'fair', or 'rationalised' judicial system should 'change the inner conviction of the Acehnese [toward the Dutch] in a favourable direction'. Yet, taking into account the conservative Acehnese mentality, 'much water would have to find its way through the Aceh river to the ocean' before this was really possible. Goedhart thought that the Dutch should restrain from interfering in the daily lives of the Acehnese. At the same time, it was the focus on security which probably affected the Acehnese' daily lives most directly.14

If Dutch civil rule in late colonial Aceh was directed at the idea of restoring 'normality', there was also considerable uncertainty about how to pursue this objective. On the one hand there were clearly limits to the extent to which colonial morality could be enforced, causing colonial practices to be characterised by insecurity, doubt and fear, as much as by a sense of real power. On the other hand, the self-conscious tone marking Dutch views of Acehnese racial and cultural traits concealed the fact that it was often quite difficult to determine what, in effect, distinguished the 'Acehnese' character from that of other groups. Let me continue by discussing this point in somewhat more detail.

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13 Recently the domain of order and security in colonial contexts has been subjected to critical scrutiny. Although the authority of the Dutch colonial state rested for an important part on violence and intimidation (Schulte Nordholt 2003a), modern institutions were simultaneously directed at containing violence through routine practices of order keeping and the development of a modern legal system. As Marieke Bloembergen (2009) has shown in her study of the colonial police force, one of the main problems was that the expansion of state control appeared to generate the use of violence rather than make it disappear. Rather than describing a progressive process of modern state disciplining on basis of the gathering of knowledge, Bloembergen pointed out the dilemmas which confronted police officers in their daily practices.

14 Goedhart argued that a 'rigorous application of warrants, provisions and regulations etc.' was unwanted, and that the Acehnese should be left 'free to manage their lives as they see fit'. Also, both Goedhart and Philips claimed that, during the Muslim fasting month, the interference should be reduced to the most essential (since 'the people and chiefs are at that time particularly irritable'). However, this did not apply to the 'poenascirulure', the traditional practice of increased security patrolling during the fasting month, which was to be continued unabatedly. 'Memorie van Overgave van O.M. Goedhart, aftredend Gouverneur van Atjeh en Onderhooigeheden', Koeta Radja, 30 May 1929, pp. 6-9, 43. NL-HaNa, Koloniën/Memories van Overgave, 2.10.39, inv. nr. 158; Memorie van Overgave van A.H. Philips, aftredend Gouverneur van Atjeh en Onderhooigeheden, 31 May 1932, p. 19. NL-HaNa, Koloniën/Memories van Overgave, 2.10.39, inv. nr. 159.
The question of Acehnese indigeneity

The Acehnese were seen by the Dutch as a ‘mixed people’, whose faces and figures revealed ‘pre-Indic’ features, as well as the influence of Arab, Batak, Minangkabau, Malay, and Chinese blood. Another important element was the influx of slaves from the islands of Nias and Simeulue, who were brought to Aceh as the concubines of chiefs. The most important signs of ‘Acehnenesess’, then, was the combination of the Acehnese language and the adherence to Islam. These were the criteria used in the 1930 census, which stated that Aceh accommodated a population of little under a million people, of whom about 820,000 were ethnically Acehnese. This figure made them the third largest ethnic group on Sumatra after the Minangkabau and the Batak.\(^{15}\) Despite the apparent clarity of numbers, however, ethnic boundaries in the region were contested, and continuously redrawn. To paraphrase Heather Sutherland, ethnicity in Aceh was a ‘very real force’, but also ‘adjustable’. Like Malay identity in South Sulawesi, Acehnese ethnic identity was ‘contingent, and driven by personal strategies and constraining contexts’ (Sutherland 2001:420).

The province that was officially known as ‘Atjeh en Onderhoorigheden’ (‘Aceh and Dependencies’) was a multi-ethnic composite. On the East and on the West coasts, centuries of commercial and agricultural activities had drawn immigrants from different directions. The result was an ever-changing mix of people. Pulau Banyak, a small island group located just off the coast of South Aceh, and regarded today as one of the most remote parts of Aceh, was an extraordinarily diverse place, where the slave trade and extensive and lucrative coconut plantations attracted people of Malay, Acehnese, Batak, Nias, and Mandailing descent.\(^{16}\) The East coast, which included the districts Idi, Langsa, and Temiang, was equally varied. In the nineteenth century this area became inhabited by Acehnese and Malay speaking communities of pepper planters, who lived alongside, and mixed with, Batak communities from North Sumatra and the highlands. Ethnic diversity was reflected in the titles used by local chiefs and village leaders. For example, a 1925 petition of local adat leaders from two tiny, mixed Acehnese-Batak, Malay-speaking districts was signed with a great variety of titles, including Datuk, Imam, Panglima, Bintara, Penghulu, Laksamana, Nyak, Keuchik, Muda, Leube, Teungku, Peuteua, Hakim, Orangkaya, and Pakeh.\(^{17}\) In the early twentieth century the East coast was the only part of

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\(^{15}\) ‘Acehnese’, according to the census, included the people from Singkil (on the West coast) and the people from Tamiang (on the East coast), as well as ‘islanders’ (orang poelau) from Simeulue and the Banyak islands. Further, the census counted (roughly) 50,000 Gayo and 13,000 Alas, 60,000 Javanese, 8,000 Minangkabau and 7,000 Batak in Aceh. Interestingly, the population of the provincial capital Koetaradja (Banda Aceh), counted only 12 percent Acehnese (the largest group being the Javanese, with 32 per cent). This was true only for the ‘kota’. The population of the sub-distict (Onderafdeeling) Koetaradja, which included the villages in the direct hinterland of the town, consisted of 80 per cent Acehnese. \textit{Volkstelling 1930 in Nederlandsch-Indië} (‘Census of 1930 in the Netherlands-Indies’), uitgevoerd door het Departement van Landbouw, Nijverheid en Handel en Departement van Economische Zaken, Nederlandsch-Indië (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1933-1936). Including a summary in English.

\(^{16}\) Steinbuch, 'Nota over de invoering van het inlandsche gemeentewezen in de onderafdeeling Singkel, Meulaboh', 14 April 1925, pp. 67-68. Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia (henceforth ANRI), Koleksi Binnenlandsch Bestuur, nr. inv. 1156.

\(^{17}\) In 1925 a meeting was held with community leaders from the bordering districts of Karang and Bandahara, to organise the succession of the deceased zelfbestuurder of Karang, T.Radja Silan, who in 1906 had been made responsible for the temporary government of Bandahara as well. In an attempt to prevent the unpopular son of the previous Bandahara ruler to ‘claim back’ his territory, Bandahara chiefs
Aceh province planted with industrial cash crops, such as rubber and palm oil, as a result of which a large stream of Javanese and Chinese indentured labourers was added to the blend (Zentgraaff 1928:217).

Dutch travellers noted ethnic differences as they travelled into Aceh overland, using the Dutch-built road or railroad leading along the North coast from Medan to Banda Aceh. Typically, the first thing they mentioned was the dwindling of the pepper gardens in the East coast district, where large rubber and palm oil estates, owned by European and Japanese investors, had emerged instead. A. Visser, an administrator posted in Kuala Simpang in 1935, was struck by the Javanese settler communities, and the 'typical Javanese kampongs in the middle of the Sumatran land' (Visser 1982:20-21). R. Broersma, an agricultural specialist, wrote that Temiang was 'essentially not an Acehnese district', because there seemed to be more Chinese than Acehnese (Broersma 1925:12). Along the East coast, both Chinese and Acehnese were employed in plantations and various industries (such as timber yards). Both groups were also involved in trade (Ibid:21-23). Nonetheless, Broersma saw the Acehnese primarily as farmers:

Close to a dense forest, a Chinese timber enterprise has been established. Then, finally a small house can be seen, some gardens and a bit of rice field, apparently of an Acehnese. The few Acehnese here are scattered. They lead an autonomous existence and do not sell their padi. Next to one of the small houses, a woman – Acehnese, because she works in pants – is busy thumping padi using the familiar Acehnese stamping tool (Ibid:13).

Further to the west, the Acehnese influence became larger. Langsa, the next district on the route, was described by Broersma as more mixed. Here, the Acehnese had even become the majority. On the market of Peureulak (Perlak), Broersma saw both Chinese and Acehnese wholesale buyers (Ibid:33). He also wrote that, in the East coast district, the Acehnese seemed to get along 'wonderfully well' with the Chinese, although there was no sign of intermarriage (Ibid:20). 'The Chinese have their residences in the forest close to the depots; some have a Chinese wife, most of them have a Javanese [wife]' (Ibid:23). Nonetheless, according to Broersma the real 'characteristics of Aceh' were encountered from Peureulak onwards (Ibid: 25). When another civil servant, J.J. van der Velde, travelled the route in 1928, he wrote:

Until reaching Langsa we travelled through an area which looked much like Deli in the East coast, with a lot of rubber plantations. After this, the terrain changed. For the first time I saw the real Acehnese landscape, the kampongs with many banana- and betelnut-palms and large, widely protruding bamboo chairs, the rice fields with buffaloes, often with big white birds sitting on them. On the tiny stations I saw many Acehnese men, women and children in their special clothes, the women wearing black pants, the men with head scarves or colourful kopiah, which look like upside down flowerpots (Van der Velde 1982:13).

According to Henri Zentgraaff, a journalist who knew the region well having served in the military during the Aceh war, East Aceh was not a place of 'real Acehnese', for these were found only beyond the town of Idr.
The problem of distinguishing 'real' Acehnese was not suddenly over once the border with the East coast was crossed. A particularly difficult question for some local administrators was how to distinguish between 'proper' Acehnese (from Aceh Besar) and Pedirese (from Pidie). A 1917 report about the sub-district of Sigli stated that the Pedirese were closely related to the 'Acehnese proper', but that there were particular differences in language and adat. For example, the Pedirese did not seem to be organised in clans (*kaum*), such as Snouck Hurgronje had famously described it for the inhabitants of Aceh Besar (Snouck Hurgronje 1893-95:46-54). Equally problematic was the distinction between 'Acehnese' and 'Klings'. Kling, or Indian Muslim communities had gradually, yet unevenly, fused into Acehnese society, and their absorption was seen as a sensitive topic. According to Snouck Hurgronje, in the 1890s it was widely acknowledged that, in Aceh Besar and on the East coast, 'the numerousness of Klingalese had produced more mixed-Klingalese [basterd-Klinganezen] than are recognised as such today'. At the same time, he stated that *Kling* was virtually synonymous with *oereueng dagang* (trader), as a term denoting 'strangers' (Snouck Hurgronje 1893-95:20). A 1926 report about the district of Meureudu (northeast of Sigli) stated that 'blood feuds' between Acehnese and Klings occurred 'quite often'. At the same time, the author acknowledged the complex nature of the matter:

Behind the Meureudu market (*keude*) lies a whole village (*kampong*) of half-bloods. [The village] Meunasah Deah Kling and a large part of the traders of this market are also of Klingalese descent. Acceptance of full-blood Klingalese by the population is noticed here and there. The language they speak is not purely Pedirese Acehnese, and more similar to Pasai Acehnese. The population of the sub-district Meureudu particularly does not seem to descend primarily from Pidie, in contrast to the populations of the sub-districts Pante Radja and Trieng Gading.

A 1934 report about Sigli stated that, taking into account the countenance of the Pedirese, undoubtedly there had been 'strong mingling with Klingalese blood.' This was a sensitive matter, the report continued, for the suggestion alone might be perceived by the Pedirese as an insult. 'Still, the mixing continues', the author stated. 'Many Muhammadan Klingalese decide to marry Acehnese women, and are consequently fully absorbed in the community; without exception, children born from these marriages speak both Acehnese and Malay'. For the Dutch, the important question was juridical: should this group be categorised as 'foreign orientals' or as 'natives'? A government ruling stipulated that every Klingalese descendant in the male line should be considered a 'foreign oriental'. However, the

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18 The expression 'kaum Pidie' was quite common on the West coast, but it seems that this was simply meant to designate colonists of Pedirese descent (rather than a form of clan-like identification, like in Aceh Besar). See, e.g., J.K. Klerks, 'Memorie van Overgave van de onderafdeeling Sigil', aangevuld door P. Reinking (1934), p. 59, NL-HaNa, Koloniën/Memories van Overgave, 2.10.39, inv. nr. 610.
19 According to a 1929 report by the same author, trade on this market was 'primarily Chinese'. A 1922 report by a different author but about the same district, makes mention of regular hostility against 'non-indigenous natives', particularly Chinese, yet says nothing about Klings. J.J.A.M. Beaumont, Vervolg Memorie van Overgave van de onderafdeeling Meureude (1922), NL-HaNa, Koloniën/Memories van Overgave, 2.10.39, inv. nr. 594; K.H. de Boer, Memorie van Overgave van de onderafdeeling Meureude (1926), NL-HaNa, Koloniën/Memories van Overgave, 2.10.39, inv. nr. 595; K.H. de Boer, Memorie van Overgave van de Onderafdeeling Meureude (1929), NL-HaNa, Koloniën/Memories van Overgave, 2.10.39, inv. nr. 597.
population seemed to regard these people as ‘fully accepted and dissolved within the Native community’.20

A special position in Acehnese society was taken by people of Arab descent, who formed the second major category of Muslim immigrants. On the one hand, Arabs were the ultimate ‘outsiders’. This was true especially for the sayid communities (descendents of the Prophet), who practiced a form of semi-endogamy by refusing to marry off daughters to non-sayids. As we have seen in the previous chapter, in the pre-colonial period important positions at the Acehnese court, including that of Sultan, were occasionally occupied by sayids. The most powerful official at the Acehnese court in 1873 (the year of the Dutch invasion), Syahbandar Habib Abdurrahman Zahir, was a sayid. Snouck Hurgronje wrote about the sayid caste as a separate social category in Acehnese society (Snouck Hurgronje 1893-95:1.159-60). At the same time, however, Arab and Persian origins were part and parcel of Acehnese myths of descent, making the Arab ‘element’ an inextricable part of Acehnese identity.

Like the Klings, many recent descendents of Arab traders had blended into Acehnese society. There was, however, occasional trouble with the Arab community, particularly in Banda Aceh, where the largest number of Arabs was found. A 1933 political report mentioned a ‘long-standing’ conflict in the Kampung Peulanggahan (today part of Kampung Jawa), between ‘Acehnese natives’ and a local ‘Arab group’. The report, which says little about the origins of the conflict, explains how the situation escalated after the Arabs announced their intention of burying a ‘fellow countryman’ (landgenoot) in the wakaf of Teungku di Andjong (which Snouck Hurgronje described as the most revered of all holy graves in Aceh).21 The warden of the wakaf, called Mohamed Ali, objected to this plan. Apparently, the Controleur of Banda Aceh chose to side with the Arabs, and ordered the burial to take place as planned. Intervention by the police was needed to ensure protection after ‘a part of the gampong took on a threatening attitude’.22

A very different situation was described by the Dutch on the West coast. Instead of ‘fusion’ or ‘absorption’, the Dutch spoke of ‘cohabitation’ or ‘symbiosis’ between the Acehnese and Malay speaking communities here. From the early eighteenth century onwards, the West coast of Sumatra had been colonised by Acehnese and Minangkabau settlers, all of whom were attracted by the exploitation of pepper plantations and gold mines. This led, at times, to violent conflict and dislocation, often to the advantage of Acehnese warlords, who eventually succeeded in pushing back most Minangkabau to Tapaktuan. Both on the West and on the South coast, consecutive pepper booms led to the creation of hybrid statelets, which were referred to in most Dutch reports as ‘Malay’, or

20 Klerks, ‘Memorie van Overgave’, p. 59. A 1927 report about the subdistrict of Meureudu mentions that, ‘nowadays, the real Klings (meaning male descendents in the male line) should be regarded as non-natives (vreemdelingen)’. Jongejans (1939:70) commented that ‘the Acehnese does not consider it to be a compliment’ when he is reminded of ‘Klingalese descent’. To a certain extent, this is still the case today, as people may jokingly (and potentially abusively) refer to the seemingly ‘Indian descent’ of fellow Acehnese of a conspicuously dark complexion.

21 See Snouck Hurgronje 1893-95:1.160-61. Teungku Andjong was the nickname (andjong means ‘annex’, or ‘outhouse’) of a sayid named Aboe Bakr bin Hoesain Bil-Faqih. Snouck gives no additional information, but he must have lived around the second half of the eighteenth century. His wife, whose grave was located next to that of Teungku Andjong, and who was also revered as a saint, reportedly died in 1820. Snouck Hurgronje’s observation is interesting, because today the grave of Syiah Kuala is generally considered to be the most important, or at least the most well-known and most frequently visited, holy grave in Aceh.

22 ‘Verslag betreffende den politieken toestand in het gouvernement Atjeh en Onderhoorigheden gedurende het jaar 1933’, 25 February 1934, NL-HaNa, Politieke Verslagen Buitengewesten, 2.10.52.01, inv. nr. 7, microfiche 105.
mixed 'Malay-Acehnese'.

23 About Meulaboh, Jongejans wrote that it was already quite 'Acehnese' before the coming of the Dutch. Like Aceh Besar, the region was led by an uleebalang and subdivided in mukim each headed by an imeum (Jongejans 1939:287). Still, non-Acehnese speaking communities persisted even here (and still do, up until this day).

According to Snouck Hurgronje, in Aceh Besar people of 'impure descent' hailing from the West coast were sometimes disdainfully referred to as aneu' djamee ('descendants from guests'), aneu' Rawa ('people from Rawa'), or Mante (a kind of mythical, wild, coarse and uncivilized forest dwellers) (Snouck Hurgronje 1893-95:1:19-20).24 By the Dutch, 'non-Acehnese' communities on the West coast were invariably denoted as 'Malay', even though it seems probable that most of them were originally Minangkabau. As part of an attempt to design an effective strategy for organising indirect rule in West Aceh, Dutch accounts moreover reified the differences between Acehnese and Malay/Minangkabau adat. Typically, Acehnese adat was signified as a patriarchal, territorial, 'single-chief' system of rule, strongly influenced by a (partial) adoption of Islamic law. In contrast, 'Malay' adat constituted a matriarchal, clan-based system of multiple chiefs incompatible with Islamic law. Dutch administrators generally preferred the Acehnese system, which was thought to make indirect rule more simple and effective (a view strengthened by Snouck Hurgronje's adage of strengthening the position of adat law). The main reason for this preference was that, more than Malay adat, Acehnese adat was seen as less antithetical to Islam, and thus better able to neutralise its more dangerous expressions. Thus, colonial administrators sought to transform 'Malay' styles of rule into forms that, supposedly, were more in accordance with the 'Acehnese' system. Jongejans stated that even the 'originally Minangkabau' states in Tapaktuan gradually evolved 'to follow the patriarchal form of Acehnese institutions, to which we have contributed in even stronger measure by replacing the multiple chief system by one based on single chiefs'.

On the ground, the situation remained unvaryingly complex. A 1935 report about West Aceh emphasised that 'the Malay race had not been lost or dissolved into that of the Acehnese' but rather lived in symbiosis with it. A particularly stubborn example was the

24 In most Malay sources the term 'Rawas' probably denotes (the descendents of) emigrants from what is today the Rao (or 'Rau') district in West Sumatra. While, in the nineteenth century, the Rawas had a reputation for being devout Muslims, the term was also associated with violent raids and plunder, particularly in the context of the Malay peninsula. The orang rau were involved in the Padri War, as they fought against the Dutch, and were sometimes also called 'Rincis' - a term adapted from the name Tuanku Nan Rinceh, one of the most radical Padri leaders. At the end of the war, the Padris were 'said to have retreated northwards to the Rawa region. This region was finally conquered in 1835, and it appears that numerous people fled from the Rawa country to East Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula.' (Milner 1978:147)
25 The Dutch preference for a 'single-chief' system was not new, but rooted in the complex history of Dutch, Acehnese, and Minangkabau interactions on (and off) the West coast, between Trumon and Baros. The Banyak islands are a good example. When the Dutch first came to this area in the late eighteenth century, the islands were ruled by multiple chiefs, probably of Minangkabau descent, who carried the title 'Datuk'. In the early nineteenth century, they were frequently attacked by Pedirese, who had established themselves in Trumon, and were looking primarily for slaves to work in the pepper gardens on the mainland. Apparently, in the mid-1820s the inhabitants of Pulau Banyak and the 'Malays' (Minangkabau?) of Baros sought an alliance with the Dutch to expel the Acehnese. One of the outcomes of this process was the establishment of a single chief to represent the Banyak islands, and make negotiations with the Dutch easier. With help from Trumon, the Acehnese were eventually driven away. See De Klerck 1912:144-49; Steinbuch, 'Nota over de invoering van het inlandsche gemeentewezen in de onderafdeeling Singkel', pp. 66-68.
district of Meuke, which was led by a kind of diarchy comprised by an Acehnese and a Malay chief, a situation described by the author as 'peculiar'.

Besides these immediate political concerns, the Dutch policy of making the West coast more ‘Acehnese’ was grounded in a geographic concept of ‘Aceh’, which was engraved in Dutch administrative memory through earlier engagements with the Sultanate. A revealing example is the political integration of Singkil, a territory between Tapaktuan and Tapanuli. In the early nineteenth century the ports on this part of the coast prospered because of the demand for pepper by traders from India, Penang, and America. In the 1830s, the Dutch approached this area on basis of a policy of containment. With the disruptive Padri War fresh in mind, local administrators and military were wary of the port of Singkil, and the shifting loyalties of its powerful Acehnese chief Leube Tapa, also known as Teuku Singkil. In 1840 Singkil was taken by force, ‘annexed’ to the Netherlands East Indies, and added to the Tapanuli district. Leube Tapa was expelled. Moving upstream along the Singkil river, Dutch military forces encountered a diversity of communities, governed by chiefs of Acehnese, Malay, Nias, Batak and Mandailing background. The strongest of these was Teuku Mohamed Arief, a son of Leube Tapa. According to Dutch reports, some of these chiefs requested the Dutch for protection against their ‘shared Acehnese enemy’. Instead, the Dutch decided to recognise all of them as autonomous rulers under Dutch authority, an act which was symbolised by the gift of an official ‘sceptre’ decorated with a silver handle. Only two of them, the chiefs of Tanjung Mas and Tualang, were given a sceptre with a golden handle, by which the Dutch acknowledged the oldest appointments of these chiefdoms by the Sultan of Aceh. Thus, Acehnese authority in Singkil was recognised already in 1840, even though it was not before 1905 that the territory was added to the province Aceh en Onderhoorigheden.

**Good Islam, bad Islam**

The earliest Dutch-language ethnographic description of an Acehnese community known to me is a memoir entitled *Atjeh en de Atjehers* (‘Aceh and the Acehnese’), published in 1877 by the naval officer J.A. Kruyt. Between 1873 and 1875 Kruyt served on board a warship patrolling the waters of the North and East coasts. On 5 May 1873 his ship dropped anchor at the dock of Idi, one of the most important pepper ports on the North coast. The chief of Idi was seeking an alliance with the Dutch, in return for protection against the aggression of the Sultan of Aceh, as well as its ally (and Idi’s main competitor) Simpang Ulim.

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26 J. Pauw, ‘Vervolg Memorie van Overgave van de afdeeling Westkust van Atjeh’ (1935), NL-HaNa, Koloniën/Memories van Overgave, 2.10.39, inv. nr. 652.
27 Steinbuch, ‘Nota over de invoering van het inlandsche gemeentewezen in de onderafdeeling Singkel’, p. 4.
28 In the 1870s Idi Besar and Simpang Ulim were two of the most prosperous Acehnese regencies on the East coast. They consisted mainly of settler communities from Aceh Besar and the North coast. According to Kruyt, Edi’s wealth increased suddenly when people from Pasai and Gigieng settled there. In relation to this newly developed self-consciousness, the chiefs stopped paying tribute to Aceh. In 1871 Simpang Ulim, populated mainly by people from Aceh Besar, attacked Idi multiple times, ‘probably with the approval of the Sultan or his officials’. In 1871 Simpang Ulim imposed a blockade, which was violently broken up by two steamers equipped especially for the task by Chinese traders from Penang, who feared the loss of their trade with Idi. This episode was reason for the chief of Idi to dispatch and envoy to Riau, and offer to the Dutch the ‘sovereignty over his land, and thus obtain the protection and peace, of which he was continuously deprived by the Acehnese government and its neighbours’. The Dutch could not accept this invitation, for it would go against the treaty with Aceh from 1857. Once the Netherlands were officially in war with Aceh, in 1873, the situation changed, and the chiefs again petitioned the Dutch. As a
According to Kruyt's description, religious practice in Idi was based on a combination of scriptural norms and an adherence to a belief in the supernatural. The people in Idi were diligent in prayer and the fast, and seemed to keep strictly to particular Quranic prescriptions, such as the rejection of eating pork. In maintaining such norms, they were encouraged by a 'large number of priests [i.e. haji’s]', which was 'growing as a result of the yearly journeys of the Acehnese to Mecca' (Ibid.:67). The travellers to the Hejaz did not, however, keep the majority in Idi from believing fervently in 'miraculous events', 'visions and dreams', the apparition of 'ghosts', 'spirits' and 'monsters', the possibility of obtaining supernatural powers such as invulnerability (kabah), talismans (jimat) as well as other magical objects and forms of divine protection. The town itself was thought to be founded on the instigation of a dangerous supernatural being, called 'Ma-Edi', who had 'only one breast protruding in the form of a cinnamon bread or mortar-shell, and fiery eyes the size of coconuts' (ibid: 67-68). Twenty years later, Julius Jacobs, in an ethnography of village life in Aceh Besar, wrote that, in the explanation of natural phenomena such as moon eclipses, 'general Muhammadan considerations' were 'mixed with the original demonism' (Jacobs 1894:1.393).

Snouck Hurgronje's De Atjehers described a similar fusion of Islamic teachings and pre-Islamic, or 'animist' beliefs. What made this text fundamentally different from earlier ethnographic accounts, however, except for being more extensive and systematic, was its tendency of subjecting the description of such variegated practices to a (politically useful) dichotomy between an acceptable, rational, and 'true' understanding of Islamic law and its potentially dangerous and unpredictable aberrations. According to Snouck Hurgronje, 'proper' Islamic scholarship was built on the three main 'pillars' of Islamic doctrine (tauhid), law (fiqh) and mysticism (tassawuf). According to his observations, the 'dogmatic' study of mysticism was not particularly popular in Aceh, at least not in comparison to the many expressions of outrightly 'heretical' beliefs and practices (Snouck Hurgronje 1893-95:II.1-20). Thus, he concluded that, from a 'legal' point of view, the Acehnese followed the 'orthodox' Shafi'i school, and from a 'mystical' point of view, Acehnese religious life represented a 'direct continuation of Hamzah's heresy'. Mystical traditions were subdivided by Snouck Hurgronje on basis of a continuum running from 'orthodox' forms, which included the teachings of the Naqshbandiyyah tarekat, to the beliefs and practices that could be placed wholly outside the Islamic tradition. The latter included the pursuit of a state of 'unity' with God (A: eleumee sale), as well as a range of other 'ilmu’s', including the use of spells and formulas (rajah), special prayers (do’a), magical objects, amulets (jimat), and the explanation of signs, omens (alamat) and dreams (Snouck Hurgronje, 1893-95: II.1-20; 33-49).

With regard to the question of Acehnese 'fanaticism', De Atjehers was a more nuanced text than the original Aceh report, and its political impact was therefore more indirect. 'False doctrine' (valsche leer), according to Snouck Hurgronje, was associated with the restoration of peace in Great Aceh' (Gobee and Adriaanse 1957-65:1.95). Just like the Aceh
with ‘fanaticism’ (geestdrijverij), which might in turn incite violent resistance. While some expressions of mysticism were considered harmless, such as rateb (chanting religious formulas) or seudati (a kind of dancing and chanting contest performed by young boys), the opposite was the case with the practices linked to invulnerability (A: eleumee keubaj), invisibility, martial arts, the control over weapons and ammunition, and the practice of bringing warriors into a state of religious ecstasy. Administratively, Snouck’s view was useful in the sense that it distinguished between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Islamic practices, thus offering an intellectual instrument for the creation of a state-sanctioned discourse of Islamic orthodoxy. This discourse was created, reproduced and further elaborated in the final decades of colonial rule, in close cooperation with the religious experts intent on denouncing such mystical expressions as ‘heretical’.

Obviously, this debate took place to a large extent in the legal sphere. As noted already, in colonial Aceh justice was organized in different ways. In the ‘directly administered’ area of Aceh Besar, it depended on a system of musapat (indigenous courts) based on a combination of religious laws and institutions, and indigenous customs. Law was administered by the local ulee balang or panglima sagi, while an ulama (specialist of Islamic law) or kali (judge) was commonly present in the capacity of ‘advisor’. Sessions were chaired by a local Dutch administrator (Assistant Resident, or Controleur), who thus exercised some control. The musapat dealt mostly with matters of family law, such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance, but they were also entitled to handle conflicts related to ownership and business, conflicts and personal feuds, and even criminal cases, such as theft, assault and murder, as long as these conflicts did not involve Europeans, ‘foreign orientals’, or matters of (state) security. In 1904 the musapat system also became the norm in the ‘self-administered’ areas (zelfbestuursgebieden, or Onderhoorigheden), with the difference that, in these areas, meetings were chaired by the zelfbestuurders. Except for their title and government income, local chiefs thus derived local authority from the right to administer justice.

In 1919 Van Sluys made two decisions. Firstly, he narrowed down the 1904 regulation, making family and inheritance law the sole responsibility of zelfbestuurders (cancelling the possibility of further appeal). This reform was reversed by his successor A.M. Hens, who feared the unrestrained interference of the zelfbestuurders, and the possibility of abusing this regulation for personal enrichment. Instead, he decided that ‘religious law’ should be seen as part and parcel of ‘indigenous law’. A second decision by
Van Sluys did hold. This concerned the establishment of the so-called ‘Raad Oelama’ (Ulama Council). Van Sluys' basic concern was the lack of an expert clergy as part of the colonial system. Unlike Java, which had a 'Raad Agama' (Religious Council), no independent religious judiciary existed in Aceh, partly because it was thought to undermine the chiefs’ authority, and partly because it might evolve into a platform for charismatic and ill-disposed ulama to mobilise the population against the colonial establishment. The obvious downside was that the Dutch administration had very little insight into intellectual discussions taking place among Islamic scholars, or in what was being taught in religious schools. In 1922 Governor Van Sluys wrote to the Governor General in Batavia that, because of the absence of any kind of meaningful mediation between the colonial government and the dynamics of the religious life of 'natives', it was very difficult for his government to survey the dissemination of 'forbidden' and 'unfavourable' religious teachings. He argued that a 'unity' in religious judgements would entail 'stability in the religious consciousness [of the population]', and that it 'should be considered as desirable to compile some prominent ulama's in a council, so that no more confusion may emerge about their verdicts'. At the time, however, the decision to establish an ulama council was closely connected to the (failed) reform of giving zelfbestuurders full authority over religious law, as Van Sluys saw the Council as a means for the government to judge conflicts 'exclusively' on basis of Islamic law, 'untainted', one might say, by adat.

The Raad Oelama was not an independent court, but a consultative body, which was supposed to give the Governor advice whenever he felt inclined to take decisions touching on religious matters. It was comprised of two permanent advisers, chosen on the basis of their loyalty to the Dutch, and supplemented for each case with five or six other ulama. The first permanent advisor was Teungku Syaikh Brahim, the khatib of the Great Mosque in Banda Aceh, and the son of Teungku Syaikh Marahaban, a well-known ulama from Pidie who had lived and studied in Mecca for years, and who had been one of the first to accept Dutch colonial rule. Unlike his father, Teungku Syaikh Brahim was not particularly learned. While he had some basic knowledge of the law, he was unable to read the Arabic-language kitab, a basic prerequisite for religious study. His main expertise was in reciting the Quran 'according to all the rules of the art'. The second member was Tuanku Raja Keumala, a member of the royal family, and one of the richest and most powerful uleebalang in Aceh.

Tuanku Raja Keumala was regarded as more learned than Teungku Syaikh Brahim. An adversary of 'non-Muslim rule', he was 'aware' that, for the time being, 'Muhammadan authority (...) was not a practical possibility'. He was also regarded as revered by the people and devoid of political leanings. The main reason, perhaps, why

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34 Van Sluys wrote to the Governor-General: 'The surveillance of Muhammadan religious education is a very difficult issue. Currently the surveillance is carried out by the District heads and the zelfbestuurders, but it is clear that it does not function properly. In the meantime, unfavourable teachings are of course forbidden. The surveillance will only improve when the level of indigenous rule in the zelfbesturen increases. In this respect as well, the Raad Oelama is very useful.' Van Sluys aan Gouverneur-Generaal in Batavia', 18 maart 1922, NL-HaNa, Politieke Verslagen Buitengewesten, 2.10.52.01, inv. nr. 6, microfiche 90.


36 Van Sluys, 'Nota', Bijlage No. IV 'De Raad Oelama'.

37 Tuanku Raja Keumala was son of Tuanku Asem, who was the uncle and guardian of the last Sultan, Muhammad Daud Syah.
Tuanku Raja Keumala was thought to be the right candidate to fill the post of religious advisor, was that he had declared himself to be strictly against the forms of ‘heretical mysticism’ regarded so suspiciously by the Dutch.

Although the establishment of the Raad Oelama seemed to serve a practical goal, there was also a marked ambivalence in Van Sluys’ initiative:

First and foremostly, it is important to guarantee the independent position of Tuanku Raja Keumala. Should his job be turned into a government office, or should he assume the air of an official clergyman, the bond affiliating him with the ulama party would certainly be broken.

It is necessary to keep strictly to the purely consultative character of his position. There is certainly reason to believe that he might be pleased if his decisions, whether or not taken in consultation with other ulama’s, were to become more and more authoritative, so that the so-called Raad Agama would eventually become a kind of higher court of the *uleebalang* (...). His position must never have such a character.38

The Raad Oelama was able to exert some influence throughout the 1920s. After the death of Tuanku Raja Keumala in 1930, however, no successor was appointed, and the Council was discontinued. Much later, and just before the Japanese occupation in 1942, Tuanku Abdul Azis, the imam of the Great Mosque Baiturrahman, was appointed by the Dutch as Chief Penghulu (D: *Hofdipanghoeloe*) of the Landraad of Koetaradja, in which capacity he also functioned as an (unofficial) religious advisor to the government. In January 1943, his function was continued and expanded by the Japanese, who appointed him as official advisor (J: *sōdan yakū*) of religious affairs in the whole of Aceh (*nasihat pemerintah dalam oeroesan Islam oentoek seloeroe Atjeh*) (Piekaar 1949:205).39

The jurisdiction of the *musapat* did not include matters of public order and state security. Yet, in this domain the good Islam/bad Islam distinction seems to have been equally pervasive, and closely connected to the way in which the Aceh War developed. From the 1920s onward, violence in the densely populated areas of Aceh Besar and the North coast diminished, which meant that the Dutch were able to concentrate on the pacification of other areas. In the mid-1920s and mid-1930s, political unrest and violent outbreaks on the West coast became an important concern. Remaining bands of resistance fighters, such as the legendary Tripa and Seuneu’am gangs, were thought to roam the mountains there.40 In 1929 Governor Goedhart spoke of the ‘neglect’ and the ‘isolation’ of the West coast. People were ‘too isolated there (...). Thus the old mentality (D: *oude geest*)

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38 Van Sluys, ‘Nota’, Bijlage IV ‘Raad Oelama’, p. 7. In this context, Van Sluys also referred to the example set in the nineteenth century by Habib Abdooerahman, and the Balai Meuhakamah (see this dissertation, chapter 2). The Raad Oelama, Van Sluys argued, should under no circumstances take a form similar to this institution, lest its members obtain a comparable authoritative position as the Habib.

39 According to Piekaar, the ‘broken contact’ between the colonial government and the *ulama* was one of the main reasons why the Dutch were unable to anticipate the danger vested in the PUSA. Having to rely exclusively, after the death of Tuanku Raja Keumala, on the information given by the *uleebalang* ‘the government gradually lost contact with this group that was so important in society. As we have seen (...) the consequences made themselves felt. The unofficial mobilization of Toeangku Abdul Azis came too late to repair the broken contact’ (Piekaar 1949:274). According to Piekaar, the decision by the Japanese to reinstall Tuanku Raja Keumala as an official advisor was a sign of the fact that they were careful not to make the same mistake as the Dutch.

40 The Tripa and Seuneu’am ‘gangs’ (D: *bendes*) consisted of men and women and were either led or inspired by (the activities of) Teuku Radja Tampo, a long-time guerrilla leader and half-brother of Teuku Moeda Mat Said, an important resistance leader during the Aceh War. In the late 1920s this man was regarded by the Dutch as one of the most dangerous resistance leaders remaining in the whole of Aceh. See, e.g., ‘Memorie van Overgave van aftredend Gouverneur O.M. Goedhart’, pp. 47-52.
has been maintained.’ In 1936 Governor Van Aken wrote that a major priority of the colonial administration was to ‘open up’ these areas to the ‘enlightening’ effects of western-style education and modernisation. Key to this process was the construction of roads that could be used by cars and trucks, connecting the North coast with the West coast. A coastal road was envisioned joining the entire region. At the same time, North and West coasts were to be linked by roads running through the mountains: one from Bireuen via Takengon and Blang Kejeren to Tapaktuan (on the South coast), and one, called the ‘transversal road’ (D: Transversaalweg) from Sigli via Tangse to Meulaboh (on the West coast). At the end of the Dutch period, the road along the West coast ran from Banda Aceh all the way to Rundeng in Singkel.42

While the colonial government was thus busy building the infrastructure needed for the ‘modernization’ of West Aceh, in the forests and mountains intersected by these new roads the dirtier work of pacification took place. In early 1926 a group of over 60 men attacked a Dutch military barracks in Blangpidie, the mountainous region in between Meulaboh and Tapaktuan. According to a Dutch report, the assault was led by a religious teacher called Teungku Peukan.43 Not much is mentioned in the report about this man’s background, except that ‘eventually he had been able to acquire the title of Teungku because of his piety and by providing religious education’. Teungku Peukan was married to a daughter of his uncle, a Minangkabau called Haji Wahid, who had come from West Sumatra to Tapaktuan as a little boy. Haji Wahid’s father was a famous tiger hunter, who, in the late nineteenth century, had been summoned by the chief of Manggeng (a district south of Blangpidie) to clear the area of a number of tigers causing trouble to the people there. ‘When this was done’, the report narrates, ‘the promised reward of 500 Acehnese dollars failed to materialise, and instead [Haji Wahid] was granted the rights over some wastelands in the region. This [land] was developed by father and son, as a result of which [Haji Wahid] gradually obtained some say over the territory.’

These allocations brought Haji Wahid to petition the Dutch for the rights over the chiefdom of Manggeng. This claim was denied, causing relations to turn sour at a later stage.44 In 1924 Haji Wahid received a tax assessment from the district authorities. ‘Surely, the assessment could be called moderate,’ the report stated, ‘yet Haji Wahid felt offended by the fact that he received one. He saw in this a denial of the services offered to the land by his father, and, through his father, by himself.’ Refusing to pay, he was summoned to the office of the Assistent Resident. Instead of going there himself, he sent his son in law, Teungku Peukan. ‘Performing this task rather inappropriately, Teungku Peukan was given a fine; when he could not, or did not want to pay, he underwent a substitute sentence in prison.’ At this point, the situation escalated:

In the meantime, Haji Wahid had paid his taxes, hoping that his son in law would set free. He soon noticed, however, that this was in vain. Very much embittered at our Government and

41 ‘Memorie van Overgave van aftredend Gouverneur O.M. Goedhart’, p. 8; A.Ph. van Aken, Memorie van Overgave van het Gouvernement Atjeh (1936), NL-HaNa, Koloniën/Memories van Overgave, 2.10.39, inv. nr. 160, p. 27.
42 At the moment of the Japanese invasion, the government was getting close to the completion of the Transversaalweg, and had just started work on the ‘final’ link necessary to ‘unlock’ the West coast: the connection between Singkil and Sidikalang (Tapanuli), which would join together Western Aceh with the Karo highlands in North Sumatra (Piekaar 1949:28-29).
43 ‘De politieke toestand in het gouvernement Atjeh en Onderhoorigheden gedurende het jaar 1926’, 7 February 1927, NL-HaNa, Politieke Verslagen Buitengewesten, 2.10.52.01, inv. nr. 7, microfische 93.
44 ‘Kort verslag omtrent de gebeurtenissen in het Gouvernement Atjeh en Onderhoorigheden gedurende de maand April 1924’, NL-HaNa, Politieke Verslagen Buitengewesten, 2.10.52.0, inv. nr. 6, microfische 92.
the Zelfbestuurder of Manggeng, and 'maloe' [ashamed] about the treatment suffered, he
stayed for some time at Aloëe Pakoe in the house of Teungku Peukan’s brother, Haji Jahja,
where, after the expiration of the sentence of Teungku Peukan, consultation took place among
the three about what to do next. Haji Wahid succeeded in persuading both his ‘kemanakans’
cousins] to become ‘muslimins’ [fighters for the Islamic cause]. The ‘Kompeuni’ had forgotten
the services he had offered; they had deprived him of his ‘kehormatan’ [honor]; he had now
become an honourless man.

For six months, nothing conspicuous happened in Manggeng, but in neighbouring districts
the situation was festering. Intelligence reports later suggested that, in the first half of the
year, a number of ‘meetings’ were held in the district of Tapaktuan, at which potential
action ‘against the Kompeuni’ was discussed.\(^45\) Apparently there was a connection
between these meetings and violence breaking out in neighbouring districts. In late July
more such ‘meetings’ were held in the sub-district of Meuke, with no consequence except
for an individual attack on a Dutch soldier by a certain ‘Moedin’, who ‘turned out to have
spent some months in jail in Tapaktuan because of lunacy, and is still not normal’. This,
however, was a minor issue compared to the events unfurling in Manggeng one month
later. On the evening of 8 September, a kenduri (communal meal) was held by Teungku
Peukan and his followers, at which he declared that the Imam Mahdi had descended in his
person, and that the Day of Judgment was drawing near. The next day, his party moved to
Blangpidie, but only after ‘the men had been given holy water to drink, and their klewang
had been blessed’. During the march to the bivouac, one of Teungku Peukan’s sons walked
in front with a ‘Prang Sabil’ flag in his hands.\(^46\) Teungku Peukan himself was stripped to
the waist, and wore ‘numerous amulets’ around his neck. The march was completed
‘under the mumble of the confession of faith’. On the morning of 10 September the barrack
was attacked. In the confrontation most of the attackers, including Teungku Peukan, were
killed, as well as a few Dutch soldiers.

In the following weeks the surviving attackers were hunted by the Dutch military. Most
were captured. During the interrogations, they said that ‘they believed in the
statement of Teungku Peukan’ that he was sent by God, and that, ‘as good Muslims, they
had yielded to the pressure to fight for the cause of Islam’. Interestingly, the report also
mentions that many of the attackers, including Teungku Peukan himself, once had been
members of the (Indonesia-wide) association of Islamic traders and intellectuals Sarekat
Islam. Of these, some had changed to the West Sumatran modernist movement Soematra
Thawalib once a branch had appeared in Tapaktuan in 1920 (these movements will be
discussed in more detail in the next section). Since it was known of some Sumatra
Thawalib leaders in West Sumatra that they championed communist motivations, the
suspicion arose that a ‘communist motive’ might explain the resistance in the region.
However, this was ‘only an assumption’ and the report ends by concluding that ‘it is more
plausible to ascribe the resistance (…) to the fact that one man rose up, who was brani
[brave] enough to (…) offer resistance to the hated Kaphé, of whose superior power one
was no longer convinced.’

45 These tensions were closely connected to the Dutch policy of changing administrative boundaries. It
was the intention of the government to take the subdistrict of Kluet out of the ‘self-governing’ regency of
Tapaktuan, and merge it with Trumon, in the directly administered territory of Singkil, to become the
temporary subdistrict ‘South Aceh’ (Zuidelijke Atjehsche landschappen). ‘Kort verslag April 1924’;
46 According to the report, the flag carried by Teungku Peukan’s troop showed Quranic texts, pictures of
a ‘stick and bladed weapons’, and a ‘statement that Allah had first chosen Teukoe Angkasah, then Teukoe
Tjoet Ali en now him, Teungku Peukan.’ Thus, it made clear that the activities of Teukoe Angkasah en
Tjoet Ali in South Aceh had proven to be ‘infectious’.

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Limited attention to ideological motives other than the ‘typical’ Acehnese hatred for ‘unbelievers’ is a clear pattern in Dutch reports about the violent eruptions on the West coast in the mid-1920s. Two years before the outbreak in Manggeng, in April 1924, a government report mentioned the discovery of a ‘conspiracy’ against colonial rule in the region of Dayah, north of Calang. While the Dutch seemed uncertain about what this ‘conspiracy’ entailed exactly, the report was rather straightforward about its cause. Interrogations had uncovered that the ‘religious fanaticism and ignorant credulity of the still primitive population of the region of Daya’ was the main reason for the unrest. A 1931 report warned against the ideas of a certain Teungku Raman from South Aceh, which were believed to deviate from the teachings ‘established by all the other teungku’s in Kloeët as right’. Two years later he was pre-emptively arrested. The report stated:

Apparantly, the adherents of these teachings easily go into a kind of religious ecstasy and although the teachings as such may not be regarded as dangerous, in practice the result is that some of the adherents cannot control themselves and may proceed (...) to acts which may disturb peace and order in a particular area.

Teungku Raman appeared before the musapat of South Aceh, in order to ‘take responsibility for the consequences of the tarikat spread by him, and the dissemination of which he had been warned against repeatedly by the chiefs.’ The report also reiterated, rather cryptically, that his teachings may not be dangerous itself, but could ‘lead to excess.’

These events took place in a particular geographic context (the West coast, ranging roughly from Lhong, south of Lhoknga, and the sub-district of Kluet, just before the border with Singkil, South Aceh) and in a particular time frame (the 1920s, when the colonial state was being asserted, more insistently than before, across the province). As such, they tell us something about the way in which ‘Aceh’ came to be imagined and defined as an ethnic, religious, and geographical ‘entity’. Particularly interesting is the use by Dutch soldiers, scholars, and administrators of the term ‘isolation’. In political reports about, and analyses of, (particular places in) in Aceh, two different meanings were attached to this term. The first referred to the geographic ‘isolation’ of the whole of Aceh as a colonial ‘frontier’. The second referred to the Acehnese as a supposedly inward looking ethnic group, living in close proximity with other groups in a multi-ethnic setting. These different meanings became increasingly intertwined, up to a point that, when civil government institutions had taken over most of the responsibilities of military commanders, they were thoroughly conflated.

According to Snouck Hurgronje, who was quoted time and time again in the reports and letter of administrators, Aceh had always been an ‘isolated’ place. The Acehnese had never learnt to live in association with ‘differently-minded’ (D: andersdenkenden). Even ‘foreign’ Muslims, such as Arabs and Kelings, felt annoyed about Acehnese arrogance and ‘self-satisfaction’. Political and diplomatic relations, crafted in past centuries between Aceh and other parts of the world, had failed to make the Acehnese conscious of their own ‘inferiority’ (Snouck Hurgronje, 1893-95:1.174, II.372-3). These

47 ‘Kort verslag April 1924’.
48 ‘Verslag betreffende den politieken toestand in het governement Atjeh en Onderhoorigheden gedurende het eerste halfjaar 1931’, 8 August 1931, NL-HaNa, Politieke Verslagen Buitengewesten, 2.10.52.01, inv. nr. 7, microfische 103.
49 ‘Verslag betreffenden den politieke toestand in het governement Atjeh en Onderhoorigheden gedurende het 1e halfjaar 1933’, 9 October 1933, NL-HaNa, Politieke Verslagen Buitengewesten, 2.10.52.01, inv. nr. 7, microfische 105.
ideas were reproduced by later authors, such as Kern, who stated that 'influences from outside, except for the centre of Islam' were 'largely lost' on the Acehnese people. Statements like these were typical of the Dutch administrators throughout the colonial period, largely irrespective of the great social changes taking place from the 1920s onwards, including the impact of the Malay-language press.51 As a result, political reports trying to grasp and articulate the Acehnese 'condition' structurally framed 'external influence' either in terms of 'western-style' modernisation, or suspicious political currents, such as communism, nationalism, and pan-Islamic sentiments.

Still, some places in Aceh were perceived to be more isolated than others. As the Dutch worked to unlock the particularly remote West and South coasts, they worried at the same time about the porous nature of the border with Tapanuli, the province located in between Aceh and West Sumatra. In this sense, then, the Dutch notion of 'isolation' might also be translated as 'difficult to control', for West Aceh was, simultaneously, 'inaccessible' and influenced by an ongoing stream of traffic along the West coast of Sumatra, which was as busy as it was variegated. Intelligence reports are full of 'unreliable' or 'unpredictable elements' (a concept including political activists, tarekat leaders, and religious teachers and proselytisers) moving back and forth, across the mountains, between Pidie and the West coast, but especially between West Aceh and West Sumatra. A case in point was Teuku Abdul Latif, a Sarekat Islam activist regarded as a risk factor in West Sumatra and Aceh at the same time. One report stated that it was 'useless' to try and keep an eye on this person's movements alone, for he was working primarily with messengers. 'Neither here, nor in West Sumatra, would it be possible to regulate individuals travelling back and forth, especially when it concerns ordinary kampong folk.' Of course, these 'ordinary kampung folk' could be anyone, including workers, traders, students, activists, and adventurers. Thus, the idea of an 'isolated' West coast was meaningful only from the perspective of regional integration, with Banda Aceh as the province's political centre, and the North and East coasts as its economic 'heart'.

Religious practice in a place in flux

Vernacular signs of modernity in colonial Indonesia are often read as supporting the macro-narratives related to the forces of nationalism and the Revolution. In a recent article, Henk Schulte Nordholt has suggested that, in sharp contrast to the assumptions underlying such totalising narratives, 'the majority of the indigenous native middle classes were not primarily interested in joining the nationalist movement'. He hypothesised that the major aim of the people belonging to these middle classes was not so much a 'nation', but rather a 'lifestyle', which 'could be obtained by joining the framework of the colonial

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51 According to Kern, the 'indigenous [Malay] press was 'not much read' in Aceh in 1920 (Ibid.). However, according to Zentgraaff, who wrote in 1928, this was changing fast. In his view, the Dutch were too obsessed with chasing the Hikayat Prang Sabit Panglima Polem, the chief of the Sagi of the 22 Mukims, told him: "If there is something which excites more than the 'Hikajat Perang', it is... the soerat chabar [newspapers]!" Zentgraaff concluded: 'Is it not a little bit foolish that one still hunts down the ancient hikajats, while every individual Acehnese can subscribe to one or the other Malay medium in which day after day the Authority is denigrated, the government is derided and insulted?' Nonetheless, Zentgraaff stated that, while this is certainly the case in the North and East coast, it may not be true with regard to the 'isolated' West coast (Zentgraaff 1928:281-82).
52 'Governor Hens to the Governor-General', 20 April 1923, NL-HaNa, Politieke Verslagen Buitengewesten, 2.10.52.01 inv. nr. 6, microfische 90.
system’ (Schulte Nordholt 2011a:437-38). Schulte Nordholt’s view – which is based for an important part on the analysis of visual materials – resonates closely with an article by Jean Taylor (2011) on the way in which colonial era photographs produce ‘alternative’ Acehnese histories, that is, histories that are not primarily based on war and resistance. Instead, Taylor focused on images that convey (changes in) the design of houses, clothing, ethnic variety, infrastructure, architecture, technology, artistic performances, and images suggesting changing gender norms. These images produce a multifaceted picture of Aceh that offers ‘clues for writing social histories to complement the political histories that already exist’ (Ibid.:234).

Both these interventions function as a point of departure for this section, in which I will place the theme of religious practice – including particular expressions of ‘piety’ – more squarely in the context of changing social, economic, and political circumstances of the late colonial period. I do not intend to present a detailed discussion, let alone a systematic ‘overview’ of religious practices in Aceh in this particular time frame. To some extent, this section may be seen as a bridging section, connecting the previous discussion of the imagination of Aceh as a meaningful socio-cultural entity to the contestations about public space that would emerge in the 1930s. My central aim, however, is to give an impression of the changes that were affecting society, and which, for the most part, did not necessarily translate into political or associational activity.

According to the accounts of Dutch observers, most people in Aceh took their faith seriously, in the sense that they seemed to be diligent in performing their daily prayers, while adhering, generally, to the other pillars of the Islamic faith, including the fast (puasa) and the payment of religious tithes (zakat), and showing an aversion to ‘impurities’, such as pork, or objects touched by dogs. Snouck Hurgronje wrote that the frequency at which ordinary villagers devoted themselves to the daily prayers varied from village to village, and that piety was to a large extent dependent on the diligence and vigilance of village leaders, or the ‘fear for or shame in front of one or another religious man’ (Snouck Hurgronje 1893-95:I.65). Yet, thirty years later Dr. Thijssen, an Dutch itinerant philanthropic eye doctor, recalled that, when travelling along the West coast in 1923, the young men he encountered on the road, ‘would spread out [their] headscarf on the road, regardless where [they] might find themselves exactly, to perform their prayers, whenever the time for prayer drew near (Graadt van Roggen 1934:12). In the fasting month, he stated, ordinary life came to such a standstill, that is was impossible for him to work. Similarly, in the early 1930s Van der Velde wrote that, on his tax collecting visits to the villages of Seulimeum (Aceh Besar), he became used to the sight of male villagers flocking to the meunasah to perform the daily evening prayer, in congregation, under leadership of the village imam (Van der Velde 1982:53).

In 1931-1932, Dutch political reports noted a rather sudden ‘revival’ (D: opleving) of religiosity in Pidie, as communal evening prayers (maghrib sembahyang) in village meunasah were marked by an increase in attendance. According to Dutch observers, this was a result of the rapid expansion of religious schools and public sermons associated with the reformist movement (I will return to this development in more detail in the next section). However, as suddenly as this upsurge of public piety emerged, it seemed to subside again in 1933, perhaps – as one of these reports suggests – because the 1930s economic depression (temporarily) delayed associational activities.53 In any case, it would produce a distorted picture if we focus solely, or even primarily, on the ‘frequency’, or

53 ‘Politiek-politioneel verslag 1932’, 4 March 1933, NL-HaNa, Politieke Verslagen Buitengewesten, 2.10.52.01 inv. nr. 7, microfiche 103.
public visibility, of pious acts. Instead, it is important to take into account the rapid social transformations of this period.

According to some observers, the thirst for education in Aceh seemed to become near-unquenchable in the 1920s and 1930s. Basic education for ordinary villagers, and advanced education for the children of the nobility, was always part of the pacification strategy. Yet, decades of warfare had made people wary of the indoctrination of their children by 'kafir schools' (sekolah kafir). In reaction, the government pressured local chiefs to 'convince' their subjects to send their children to modern, Dutch-style primary schools (D: volksschool, lit. 'people's school'), usually without much success. This changed during the course of the 1920s, and in the mid-1930s there were 328 such schools, staffed with 600 teachers, with more than 36,000 students enrolled (Jongejans 1939:254). Initially, teachers came from outside the province (most were of Minangkabau, Batak, or Mandailing descent), but gradually more Acehnese teachers were trained. In addition, in the mid-1930s 201 of these 328 common schools taught in Acehnese, besides the common Malay medium (which means that there were 127 schools teaching in Malay language only).

In a simultaneous development, mixed religious/secular schools established by reformist ulama increasingly provided a serious alternative. In the 1920s these schools popped up 'like mushrooms from the ground', especially in Aceh Besar and the North coast (including Pidie). The most significant change, initiated simultaneously by Dutch schools and reformist 'madrasah' (as they are often categorised in the literature), was education for girls. Indeed, changing patterns of gender were a crucial element in what 'modernity' was thought to offer.

One of the most interesting descriptions of colonial society in Aceh comes from the hand of Henri Zentgraaff. Before embarking on his career as a writer and a journalist Zentgraaff served in the Dutch military and fought in the Aceh War. In 1929 he was appointed editor in chief of one of the largest newspapers in the Netherlands East Indies, the Soerabaiasch Handelsblad. Three years later he switched to the conservative Java-Bode. In 1938 Zentgraaff published Atjeh!, a kind of coffee table book, or a 'glossy' avant la lettre: populist in tone and with lots of pictures. An homage to General Van Heutsz and the Dutch military, Aceh! was both a popular and a controversial work. More interesting than Atjeh!, however, is Zentgraaff's account of a journey through Sumatra, published more than ten years earlier in a series of articles in the Soerabaiasch Handelsblad. In this series, Zentgraaff showed himself to be a particularly acute observer, well equipped to notice the changes lost on the eyes and pens of most of his contemporaries. According to Zentgraaff, Aceh in the 1920s was catching up with modernity fast. He noted, for example, conspicuous changes in styles of clothing:

Not so long ago, everywhere you would see the larger part of the population in typical Acehnese clothes, the men with headscarf or the familiar uleebalang-topi, the women in trousers and badjoe.

Well, on the East coast these have become exceptions. In short, it is astonishing how significant the change is; almost everywhere I see people wearing that meaningless and insipid

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54 Van Aken, 'Memorie van Overgave', p. 144.
55 Much of the controversy about Zentgraaff was derived from the fierce reaction incited by his book on the part of the 'ethical' writer E. du Perron, who thought Zentgraaff was 'the embodiment of everything he had come to detest in "the Indies"'. See P.J. Drooglever, 'Zentgraaff, Henri Carol (1874-1940)' in Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland. www.inghist.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/BWN/Lemmata/bwn4/zentgraaff (Accessed 13-03-2008). Zentgraaff regarded Atjeh! as his masterpiece.
garb, which appears to become the one and only common ideal of the 'Indonesians', with the familiar dark little cap. Women appear almost everywhere in sarong and badjoe. As for the younger men, they seem to obtain their clothing (...) from the 'horror-chamber of Western dress', as they go around in jackets with Schiller-collars, sometimes with startling, thick knitted caps, that well-known breeding place of bugs (Zentgraaff 1928:221-22).

European, or European-style clothing was, in itself, not new in Aceh. In 1876 Kruyt (1877:21-22) described Acehnese nobles in Idi as wearing a combination of European-style garments and 'local' clothing. However, in the 1920s a growing number of people seemed to be discarding 'traditional' clothing altogether. A typical example was the attempt by a local administrator in Lam Meulo (Pidie) to have thirty uleebalang appear in typical adat clothing for a visit of the Governor General. This turned out to be impossible, Zentgraaff reported: '[The Controleur] had to settle for a different kind of headwear; [for] the [traditional scarf] had become a curiosity.'

Personally Zentgraaff was ambivalent about these changes. On the one hand, he lamented the loss of 'local identity'. On the other hand, he saw the development as a sign of the Acehnese people turning away from 'resistance' as a dominant attitude. What he was documenting, then, was the emergence in Aceh of a new, and rather content, group of young people, who 'go to the cinema (...), bring comfort in their lives and feel that they can no longer do without some degree of leisure and enjoyments. When I see those lanky youngsters, wearing a modern flannel costume with a collar at one of those small stations of the Atjeh-tram, I am certain that these are not the men for long stays in the jungle, for months-long wanderings in the 'mud', or fanatical klewang-attacks' (Ibid:215).

Another conspicuous change, not limited to the needs and aspirations of the emerging urban middle class, was the attitude of Acehnese villagers toward western medicine. In the early decades of colonial rule, Dutch medical techniques were approached with suspicion. As Van der Velde, who travelled from village to village in 1933 to collect taxes, reported:

In the past [Acehnese villagers] were afraid of injections. An old man told me, with a large smile on his face, that for a long time after the war, the Acehnese were so mistrustful, that they called the injections 'ie kaphé', water of the unbelievers, the aim of which was to bring the Acehnese from their true faith, Islam (Van der Velde 1982:53-54).

Ordinary villagers regularly asked Van der Velde for quinine against malaria, and injections against framboesia (a tropical skin disease). Similar experiences were related by Dr. J. Thijssen, an eye doctor and philanthropist, who, for a period of over sixteen years from the early 1920s onwards, frequented Acehnese villages, alone or in the company of a Javanese assistant, to help cure blindness and other eye disorders. Thijssen performed

56 Zentgraaff continued: 'I cannot say this [development] is to be hoorayed. We are glad see a dangerous enemy like the Acehnese to lose his sharp nails. Yet, the decay of national characteristics is never a cheerful sight. And one should not underestimate the meaning of this clothing phenomenon; it is an expression of the same national slackening which had manifested itself, gradually, in language and adat.'

57 As part of its modernisation policy, the government set up medical posts in many small and medium sized towns, but according to Thijssen Acehnese villagers would never come to these hospitals spontaneously. '[The Acehnese] is different from us', he told a journalist, whom he met by chance aboard a ship on its way to the Netherlands (Graadt van Roggen 1934:4). 'To live another half year, we are willing to lie in the hospital for two. But the Acehnese dies in a good way only if he dies in the kampung among his own people. He fears isolation in a hospital more than the intimacy with death'. What was lacking, in his view, was more idealism among medical doctors, who should actively visit villagers instead of waiting in vain in town hospitals.
operations in the most remote corners of Aceh, often successfully. Reflecting on a 1932
trip to Bakongan, a region on the West coast notorious for an outburst of anti-Dutch
violence in 1925-26, he recalled:

Everything speaks of struggle, resistance, hatred. Everything – except for the people. In this
region no [military] officer will ever enter the kampong without a soldier with a loaded
carbine following directly behind him. And yet – while I lived, unarmed, among these people
for weeks in a row, no one touched a hear on my head, and when you ask me why here, exactly
here, the situation was always so turbulent, I am forced to answer: I don’t know, and I have
never understood. (Graadt van Roggen 1934:11)

It is important, then, to emphasise that ‘modernity’, as expressed in clothing,
entertainment, medicine or technology, was restricted neither to an ideological
attachment to ‘westernisation’ or to Islamic modernism. In fact, the hopes and promises
associated with progress and modernity seem have been to a large extent quite un-
ideological.

Another way to illustrate this is by giving an example from popular literature. Djeumpa Atjéh
(‘Flower of Aceh’), a ‘modern Acehnese novel’ published in 1928 by the
Acehnese author H.M. Zainoe’ddin, is a story about Siti Saniah, a young, well-educated girl
from an affluent family in Banda Aceh. Going home on the tram after visiting family in Sigli,
Siti Saniah meets Nja’ Amat, a young man who could well have been one of Zentgraaff’s
‘lanky youngsters’:

There is a young man there, wearing a white shirt, flannel trousers and a black velvet kopiah.
On a string around his neck dangles a golden brooch, in the form of an Acehnese rencong
[dagger]. He is good at talking high Malay and eloquent. Sometimes his language is mixed with
Acehnese or Dutch, just for the sake of adding charm to his talk. (Zainoe’ddin 1928:6)

Siti Saniah is a student of home economics. Nja’ Amat works for the Dutch civil service, and
is active for the National Indies Party (Nationaal Indische Partij). They fall in love, and
become engaged. From here onwards, everything goes horribly wrong. The novel develops
into a tragic story of clashing values, horrible miscommunications, and burning pangs of
love and sadness. In the end Siti dies. The girl leaves behind a letter to her parents which
reads: ‘My disease, father and mother, was not caused by magic, like you and the rest of
the kampoeng believed. It was something else, something very malicious and dangerous...
this disease is called ‘love’ (Ibid:143) In this story, Islam has a limited presence. There are
prayer and other rituals, but these are hardly a topic of discussion. Adat stands for the
conservative way in which parents decide over their daughter’s future, but rather than
pitted against (modernist) Islam, local customs are presented as running counter to the
‘time of progress’ more generally. The book, in brief, is a story about ambition and self-
determination, the achievements of modernity, and the limits of emancipation. To tell this
story, the character Siti Saniah needs to be neither ‘European’ in style nor a particularly
‘pious’ person.58

58 There is only one passage in which Siti’s relationship with God becomes tangible. This is when she
tries to commit suicide. Shortly after the death of her grandmother, who was the only one sympathetic to
her fate, Siti becomes so distressed, that she decides there is no more reason to live. When she writes her
farewell letter, just before she plans to hang herself from a tree in the backyard, she is disturbed by her
aunt, who requests that Siti joins the women who are praying for her grandmother. Siti joins the prayer.
When the prayer reaches the passage about hell, ‘the place for all the kafirs’, Siti ‘became fearful of Allah
James Siegel (1997:143) has argued that *Djeumpa Atjeh*, like most other texts belonging to this particular genre and publishing house, contained a sense of the impending revolution, albeit, in his understanding, a revolution that ‘failed’. According to his reading, the novel was a symbol of the ‘domestication of the foreign’ and the ‘fetish of modernity’ (in the sense that Marx spoke of a ‘fetish of commodities’). Anthony Reid (1979:24-25) also wrote that social changes in colonial Aceh, such as Western style dress, modern schools, organisational life, technology, business and the printing press were precursors of the struggle for independence from the Dutch, and the internal conflicts that would affect Acehnese society after the ending of colonialism (I will turn to this episode in much more detail in the next chapter). However, in his reading of this ‘modernity’, it constituted the definitive anti-colonial force – which had yet to rise to full maturity. The epitome of this force was PUSA, whose leader Daud Beureueh was called ‘father of the awareness of the Acehnese people’.59 I agree with the importance attached to the ‘sense’ of change. I am critical, however, of the way in which both Siegel and Reid put the interest in ‘modernity’ in the service of explaining the Revolution. In the late colonial period, people in Aceh – including the thousands of people involved, directly or indirectly, in the blossoming of associational life – may not have had a very clear idea of what the future would bring, and what kind of polity it should produce. In the next section I move to a discussion of the dynamics of associational life, in an attempt to create a more nuanced picture, moving beyond the dominant dichotomy between colonialism and Islamic modernism.

**Islamic activism and state responses**

Associational life in Aceh was extremely diverse. Organisations listed in a 1920 inventory range from branches of major political organisations – such as the Sarekat Islam and the nationalistic Boedi Oetomo – to specific interest organisations such as the ‘Association of Railway and Tram Personnel’, local welfare organisations and small reading clubs. Officially, the Dutch approach toward these associations was ‘neutral’. This stance was expressed, for example, in the government’s refusal to intervene in worker strikes, which happened quite often.60 With regard to religious organisations, however, ‘neutrality’ does not seem to be the most appropriate of terms.

**Associations**

The first major Islamic organisation active in Aceh was Sarekat Islam (SI), which started out originally as the Sarekat Dagang Islam (‘Association of Islamic Traders’), founded, perhaps as early as 1911 or 1912, in the Javanese city of Solo. Although the root of this movement lay in the rising social and political tensions between Javanese traders on one side and Chinese traders and the Javanese and European elite on the other, the SI quickly evolved in a mass movement, growing fast under the leadership of Tirtoadisoerjo and, especially, the charismatic chairman Tjokroaminoto. The goal of the SI was to unite Muslims, stimulate loyalty among them, and increase their standard of living. As the first mass movement to claim a social basis in Islam, it was able to spread beyond Java, and again. “Ah,” she thought, “if so, there is no need for me to die misguided, to die a kafir, instead let me die because of my love” (Ibid.:116).

59 Njo Meunan, in *Sertuan Kita* 2, No. 29 (9 February 1940), pp. 634-5, cited in Reid 1969:35, n.64. The full phrase is *Bapak kesadaran rakyat Aceh*.

60 *Van Sluys, ‘Nota’,* p. 17. For the list, see ibid., Bijlage No. IV.
attract people from a range of backgrounds. It was particularly popular, however, among educated youth and the middle class. In Aceh these were mostly found among the *uleebalang*.

An Acehnese branch of the SI was founded in Tapaktuan in 1916. Although Dutch officials initially predicted that the movement would never flourish here, it grew quickly in membership, and in 1920 Governor Van Sluys believed that the organisation might become the pre-eminent popular movement in Aceh. Its activities were closely watched. In 1921 three SI propagandists and two **zelfbestuurders** were exiled for creating an 'anti-Dutch atmosphere'. What worried the Dutch mostly about the activities of SI in Aceh was not so much its ideology, or even its engagement in political activism, but its secretive character. Suspicion was raised by the alleged practice by SI members of taking a 'holy oath', which included a promise of loyalty to the leadership of the organisation. In 1922 the Governor General in Batavia explained to the chairman of the Volksraad (People's Council) that it should be considered a serious matter if the oath sworn by SI members was perceived to be 'stronger' than the oath of loyalty sworn by *uleebalang* to the colonial government. At the same time, the practice of swearing a 'holy oath' reminded the Dutch of the oaths sworn by fighters in the Holy War. The success of the SI did not persist. One of the reasons for this was the persecution of SI leaders by the Dutch, which made joining the SI no longer a very attractive option. Another reason was the increasing polarisation between the *kaum muda* and *kaum tua*. Particularly strong among the multi-ethnic populations of large and middle-sized towns, this ideological struggle worked to the disadvantage of the class-based and business oriented networks that underlay the success of the SI.

Other associations were making their presence felt as well. An important influence from the side of West Sumatra was the modernist Sumatra Thawalib, which opened its first branch in Tapaktuan in 1919, and in 1930 changed its name into Persatuan Moeslimin Indonesia (PMI). Muhammadiyah established its first branch in Banda Aceh in 1927. Dutch reports were consistent in stating that Muhammadiyah and Sumatra Thawalib membership in Aceh were predominantly comprised of ethnic 'outsiders' (particularly Javanese, Minangkabau, and Malay). It seems to me, however, that 'Acehnese'...
membership was structurally understated. Muhammadiyah was primarily active in urban settings, and in the late colonial period these contexts were indeed markedly multi-ethnic. When, also in 1927, the first Muhammadiyah (secondary) school opened in Banda Aceh, 27 per cent of the 99 students were ethnically Acehnese: a minority, but not an insignificant one. Various uleebalang were present at the opening, as well as 'other important Acehnese people'. The leader of the Acehnese branch, Teuku Gloempang Pajoeng, was unmistakably 'Acehnese'.

Sumatra Thawalib and Muhammadiyah presented themselves as educational organisations, thus raising less suspicion than the Sarekat Islam. However, in West Sumatra Sumatra Thawalib members were occasionally suspected of having radical left-wing sympathies. This was certainly not the case with Muhammadiyah. In fact, Dutch officials were quite sympathetic to the Muhammadiyah, which was seen as a 'modernising' factor because of its focus on education and development, and as moderate, tolerant, and generally favourably disposed toward the authority of the colonial government. A 1928 political report wrote very favourably about the secretary of the Acehnese Muhammadiyah, who was said to have published 'a very tolerant little tract in which, amongst other things, a stand was made against the "prang sabil" doctrine'. Still, the presence of the Muhammadiyah in Aceh was seen as a mixed blessing. While the Sumatra Thawalib was labelled as dangerous predominantly because of its potentially radical ideological nature, Muhammadiyah was seen as a risk factor because it may be too modern for Aceh. The Acehnese, the argument went, were so self-conscious about their religion, so inherently conservative, and so easily brought off balance, that the presence of any activist Islamic movement coming from 'outside' might cause a disturbance. Again, the geographical aspect is interesting. Tensions between kaum muda and kaum tua sympathisers existed across Aceh. In Banda Aceh, Sigli, and Lhokseumawe, Muhammadiyah branches were regarded as a positive influence, because they might absorb kaum muda factions and keep them from radicalising. In West Aceh and Tapaktuan, however, the population was considered to be too 'orthodox' to absorb modernist influences in a peaceful way. Therefore, the presence of these movements was

65 'Verslag betreffende den politieken toestand in het gouvernement Atjeh en Onderhoorigheden over het jaar 1927', 9 February 1928, NL-HaNa, Politieke Verslagen Buitengewesten, 2.10.52.0, inv. nr. 7, microfiche 99.
66 'De politieke toestand gedurende het jaar 1926'.
67 'Verslag betreffende den politieken toestand in het gouvernement Atjeh en Onderhoorigheden over het jaar 1928', NL-HaNa, Politieke Verslagen Buitengewesten, 2.10.52.01 inv. nr. 7, microfiche 99-100. There were some minor irritations in the 1930s on the side of the government about the growing confidence expressed by leaders of the movement, as expressed not only in speeches and sermons, but also in a growing reluctance to inform the authorities about prospective meetings. Yet, the impact of these irritations seems to have been modest.
68 In some places, 'counter-movements' were set up by local groups or by the uleebalang. In 1928 and 1929 Muhammadiyah failed to set up branches in Bireuen, Idi and Langsa because of this reason. 'Verslag politieken toestand 1928'; 'Verslag politieken toestand in het Gouvernement Atjeh en Onderhoorigheden gedurende het jaar 1929, 24 January 1930, NL-HaNa, Politieke Verslagen Buitengewesten, 2.10.52.01, inv. nr. 7, microfiche100-101.
thought of *a priori* as undesirable. In Tapaktuan Muhammadiyah propaganda was first discouraged, and later (in 1936) even forbidden.

From the early 1920s onwards locally-based Arab and Acehnese (*dayah* educated) *ulama* inspired by the transnational modernist movement started establishing schools and educational organisations throughout Aceh, often under the patronage of sympathetic local chiefs. One of these teachers was Teungku Daud Beureueh, from Mutiara, just south of Sigli (Pidie). After travelling and teaching for a number of years in different places in Aceh, Daud Beureueh established his own school in a village near Sigli in 1930. Together with Teungku Abdullah Ujong Rimba, he was involved in the establishment of an organisation, Jamiatul Diniyah (on 6 March 1930), which set as its goal the creation of a network of schools based on identical curricula. As activist reformers, Daud Beureueh and like-minded did not limit themselves to teaching, but also travelled around to spread their ideas through *tabligh*, or public meetings. These were held in towns as well as small villages, and usually featured various speakers.

It is important to emphasize that, for most of the 1930s, there was no such thing as an ‘Aceh-wide’ association of *ulama*. Instead, an array of initiatives, single issue events, local associations, shifting alliances and long lasting as well as short-lived collaborations between a variety of organizations emerged, which, one way or another, belonged to or felt sympathy for the *kaum muda* current. These groups often cooperated. This was true also of the Muhammadiyah and the teachers who, in 1939, would be involved in the founding of the PUSA. The reformist movement was neither homogeneous, nor ‘progressively’ moving toward a common goal. In the ‘revival’ of religious awareness, as the Dutch called it in their reports, there was considerable fluctuation. ‘Peak years’ were

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69 Sumatra Thawalib established its first Acehnese branches in Tapaktuan (early 1919) and Takengon (1926). Muhammadiyah established its first branch in Banda Aceh in 1927. While ‘modernist’ activities thus existed earlier in South Aceh than in North Aceh, Muhammadiyah leaders were formally requested not to expand their activities beyond Aceh Besar and the North coast. ‘De politieke toestand gedurende het jaar 1926’; Cf. Isa Sulaiman 1988.

70 There was an immediate cause for this. The government was unpleasantly surprised by the establishment of a branch in Tapaktuan, believing there was an agreement to keep the expansion on hold. When, on top of this, a public *tabligh* was organised without requesting government permission in advance, this was seen as the straw that broke the camel’s back. Communication between the government and the Muhammadijah took place through mediation by the Advisor for Indigenous Affairs, generally on request of the Governor of Aceh. ‘Politiek-politioneel verslag betreffende het gewest Atjeh en Onderhoorigheden gedurende het jaar 1936’, NL-HaNa, Politieke Verslagen Buitengewesten, 2.10.52.01 inv. nr. 7, microfische 106.

71 About the ‘Arabic’ element, see Isa Sulaiman (1988:493-94), who wrote about ‘Arabic traders’ establishing reformist schools in Aceh. There has been some debate about which institution deserves to be called the first, ‘truly’ reformist madrasah in Aceh. Most authors regard the Madrasah Al Khairiyah, founded by Tuanku Raja Keumala in the Great Mosque complex in Banda Aceh (possibly as early as 1916) as the first of its kind. One of the questions is how ‘modern’ this school really was. While it had replaced the ‘traditional’ style of learning with modern elements such desks, chairs and a blackboard, it did not include ‘secular’ elements in its curriculum. See, e.g., Hasbi Amiruddin 2003-2004:I.93-98; Isa Sulaiman 1988:494-95; Tgk. Nur El-Ibrahimy 1984.

72 Hasbi Amiruddin 2003-2004:L67-70; Morris 1983:80; Reid 1979:23. According to Morris and Reid, Daud Beureueh enjoyed all of his education in traditional *dayah* in Pidie. However, according to Hasbi Amiruddin, he also studied for a short period at the Dutch Inlandsche School in Seulimeum.

73 ‘Atje bergerak!’, *Soeara Atjeh*, 15 March 1930; see also ‘Politiek-politioneel verslag 1932’.

74 For example, in February 1932 a public meeting was held in Banda Aceh, which attracted a crowd of 2000 people, including many women. This event was organised by an ad hoc committee of three *uleebalang* (which called itself *Peurajaän Id’ilfitri*) and featured speakers of different Islamic associations, including Jamiatul Diniyah and Muhammadiyah. Ibid.
1931 and 1932, when an explosion took place of meetings, sermons (tabligh umum), and communal prayers, particularly in Pidie and North Aceh. The years following on the economic depression were rather quiet, for the momentum to pick up again in the second half of the decade.

A small booklet summarising the content of a meeting in Banda Aceh and a ‘Great Tabligh’ (Tablegh Akbar!) in a village in Aceh Besar in 1936 gives us an impression of the reformist agenda. According to the program, representatives of 92 ‘organisations or schools’ (djamijjah atau sekolah) attended the meeting. Of these, 40 were located in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar, 26 on the North and East coasts (including Pidie), 24 on the West and South coasts, and 2 in Takengon (Gayo district). Before discussing the events, the booklet praises the 'renaissance' of Muslim consciousness, emphasising the importance of bringing 'clarity' into the 'true goal and meaning of the religion of Islam', and of countering the false teachings, 'propaganda' and attacks against the (modernist thinker) Shaykh Muhammad Abduh by Yusuf Nabahani (a Sufi and poet from Palestine, who campaigned against the agendas of reformist thinkers such as Muhammad Abduh and Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani) and his followers. The Banda Aceh meeting brought together a select group of ulama, sympathetic chiefs, and other dignitaries (orang patut-patut) at the house of Teuku Nyak’ Arif. The meeting was convened to discuss three specific questions: whether sciences such as geography, chemistry and 'all other sciences that are at the heart of progress' may be studied by Muslims, whether these subjects may be included in religious schools, and whether women may teach men ‘in places that are considered safe or protected’. After everyone present had been given the opportunity to state an opinion, the assembly decided that neither Islam nor Shari’a prohibited the study of ‘worldly sciences’, that the study of these subjects should even be considered obligatory (wajib), that including these was ‘indeed the intention of those schools’, and that there was no objection against women teaching men.

The subsequent tabligh featured a number of reform-minded ulama, and reportedly attracted an audience of ‘more than 10,000 Muslims and Muslimah’s’. Also present were Teuku Mohammad Hasan, the zelfbestuurder of Glumpang Payong (and former leader of the Muhammadiyah Aceh chapter) as well as other zelfbestuurders from Pidie and Aceh Besar. After a short opening address, a speech was given by Teuku Nja’ Arif in which he warned the audience that ‘Islam does not permit fragmentation and division (berpetjah belah) and does not propagate foul talk (tjatji mentjatji). He asked listeners to consider carefully all the advice that would follow, and then passed the chairmanship (pimpinan) to Teungku Daud Beureueh. The main part of the meeting consisted of speeches given by different ulama, including Teungku Abdullah Lam U, Teungku Hasballah Indrapuri, and Teungku Abdullah Udjong Rimba, who discussed issues such as the history of Islam, from the Prophet Muhammad to the ‘services to the ummah’ offered by Shaykh Muhammad Abduh, the ‘obligation of men to teach women’, the crucial importance for the ummah of modern education (including sciences such as geography, and books with

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75 ‘Politiek-politioneel verslag 1932’.
77 After the Japanese occupation Teuku Nya’ Arif would become the first independence era Resident of Aceh.
78 ‘Verslag Tablegh Akbar!’
pictures), and the discrepancy between Islam and the (Malay and Acehnese) practice of holding *kenduri* for the deceased.\(^79\)

In May 1939 a conference was held in the village Matang Glumpang Dua (Bireuen, on the North coast), which featured many of the same speakers. This meeting, a joint initiative between Teungku Abdul Rahman, head of the Al-Islam school movement in Peusangan, and Teukoe Hadji Tjhi’ Mohamed Djohan Alamsjah, the influential *uleebalang* of that district, resulted in the establishment of the Persatuan Ulama-Ulama Seluruh Aceh, or PUSA. Unfortunately, we have little information about the content of the conference. According to one Dutch report, participants agreed that modern Islamic education in Aceh was scattered, and too much dependent on the Muhammadiyah. Therefore, it was decided that reform-minded *ulama* in Aceh should work together and create a standardised network of religious schools and teacher training colleges that was not only adapted to the modern era, but also ‘in accordance with the specific qualities of the land and its people’.\(^80\)

Daud Beureueh was chosen as chairman, probably because of his talent as an orator and youthful charisma. Despite the name, the PUSA was open both to lay Muslims and *ulama*. Its headquarters was Sigli, which was also the base of Daud Beureueh.

One of Daud Beureueh’s first initiatives was to go on a promotional tour to the West coast, together with Ismail Yakub, in November 1939.\(^81\) This seems to have been a mixed success. In Calang a crowd of 100 people assembled to hear Daud Beureueh speak, in Susoh 500 (respectable numbers, but much smaller than the audiences Daud Beureueh was able to draw on the North coast). Around these *tabligh*, propaganda was made for PUSA, and funds were raised for a school in Bireuen. After this, the tour led to Tapaktuan, and back via Kota Buluh and Blangpidie. In all of these places, Daud Beureueh met with local *uleebalang* some of whom made a real effort. For example, the *zelfbestuurder* of Blangpidie organised a *tabligh* which was attended by 1000 people.\(^82\)

In April 1940 PUSA held its second conference in Sigli. Apart from attracting thousands of people, this meeting was significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, the idea of an Acehnese ‘re-awakening’ had become very prominent, both in the speeches held and in the pamphlets distributed.\(^83\) Secondly, PUSA-affiliated *ulama* presented themselves much more as leaders of a mass-based popular movement, founding chapters such as the PUSA youth (under the leadership of Teungku Amir Husin al-Mujahid) and the women’s section Muslimat PUSA (led by Daud Beureueh’s wife Nya’ Asma). Existing organisations, such as the Islamic scouting movement (Kashfatul Islam, based in Bireuen), affiliated

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\(^79\) Ibid.

\(^80\) Politiek-politioneel verslag 1e halfjaar 1939’.

\(^81\) The teacher and writer Ismail Yakub seems to have been one of the driving forces behind the PUSA. Influenced by his experiences as a student in West Sumatra, he founded a school in Lhoksukon, North Aceh. According to his own saying, he was the one who proposed the idea of uniting Acehnese *ulama* into a single organization, after an earlier (somewhat less ambitious) initiative called PERGUISI (Persatuan Guru-guru Islam di Aceh; Association of Islamic Teachers in Aceh) had failed to materialise. In 1938 a *tabligh* was held in Lhoksukon, which was attended, among others, by the famous modernist scholar Hamka (Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah; d. 1981) and a number of *uleebalang* At this meeting, Yakub claims, he provided the opening address, in which ‘I suggested how good it would be if, here in Aceh, we would form an association of *ulama*, with as goal, among other things, to unify opinions within Islamic law as well as the curricula at the religious schools, which, in general, are led by *ulama*’ (Ismail Yakub 1980:351-53) This suggestion was received so well, he stated, that they were spontaneously invited to Glumpangdua by Teuku Abdurrahman Peusangan, who then promised them that he would help carrying out this idea. Of course, it is not impossible that Ismail Yakub overstated his own role.

\(^82\) Politiek-politioneel verslag betreffende het gewest Atjeh en Onderhoorigheden gedurende de maand december 1939’, NL-HaNa, Politieke Verslagen Buitengewesten, 2.10.52.01 inv. nr. 7, microfische 107.

\(^83\) *Sinar* 3, No. 7-8, 15 April 1940.
themselves formally with the PUSA. Thirdly, PUSA began to advocate its reformist ideology more widely. A special council – the Majlis Tanfidziyah Shar’iyyah, under the chairmanship of Teungku Hasballah Indrapuri – was established to issue fatwa’s on legal issues, and a periodical, Penjoeloeh, was established as a platform for reformist views on different matters ranging from correct Islamic practice to international politics. Finally, PUSA leaders affiliated their organisation formally with the Indonesia-wide network of Islamic associations called Majlis Islam Ala Indonesia (MIAI).84

The emergence of the PUSA has often been presented as a ‘native’ alternative to the (‘alien’) Muhammadiyah. Yet, it is important to emphasize that the cooperation between different reformist associations did not suddenly stop in 1939. When the Sigli branch of the Muhammadiyah organized a meeting in September 1939 to commemorate isra mikraj (the night journey of the Prophet Muhammad), it featured Daud Beureueh as one of the main speakers. Some people held double positions. For example, PUSA leader Teungku Abdul Wahab was appointed secretary of a new Muhammadiyah branch in Seulimeum. And when Daud Beureueh’s organisation Jamiatul Diniyah held a reception in Lam Paseh, again in September 1939, it invited the Consul of Muhammadiyah Aceh, Teuku Tjoet Hasan, to give a speech. With regard to more practical issues, such as the beginning of the Holy fasting month Ramadan, both organizations tried to follow the same line.85 As we shall see, rather than creating mutual divisions, scripturalist reformists sharpened their profile by emphasising their difference from the seemingly harmless, but evidently ‘foreign’ Ahmadiyah sect.

Rallying against the Ahmadiyah: PUSA as a colonial phenomenon

On the eve of the Japanese invasion a revolt broke out in Aceh Besar, in which the PUSA played a central organisational role. I will discuss this episode in more detail in the next chapter. It is interesting, however, to briefly look ahead by quoting some reflections on this period by A. J. Piekaar, the former government secretary in Aceh, and author of a particularly important book about the Japanese period. In Atjeh en de oorlog met Japan (1949:23-24), Piekaar asked how it was possible that the colonial government did not recognise the ‘potentially dangerous’ character of the PUSA. He mentioned a few factors. Firstly, the Dutch had been too dependent on the uleebalang for information, lacking means of keeping the ulama under surveillance. The uleebalang were the heads of religion in their district, but (...) in the light of the gradually increasing antithesis between the uleebalang and ulama factions, the uleebalang in fact had little control over the ulama.' Particularly important was the lack, after the death of Tuanku Raja Keumala in 1930, of a religious adviser. After the discontinuation of the Raad Oelama, Piekaar stated, ‘we no longer had the opportunity of staying informed about the developments within the potentially most dangerous and most irreconcilable faction of Acehnese.’ ‘It would be wrong to assume that the potentially dangerous character of the Poesa had to lead, necessarily, to an outburst.’ With a ‘normal’ course of events (that is, if the Pacific War had not broken out), the inherent conflict between uleebalang and ulama might have been

85 Politiek-politioneel verslag betreffende het gewest Atjeh en Onderhoorigheden gedurende de maand september 1939; Politiek-politioneel verslag betreffende het gewest Atjeh en Onderhoorigheden gedurende de maand oktober 1939', NL-HaNa, Politieke Verslagen Buitengewesten, 2.10.52.01 inv. nr. 7, microfische 106-107.
reconciled on an ‘evolutionary’ path. In that case, Piekaar imagined, PUSA would have functioned as a catalyst for reform rather than a warring party.

At first sight, these arguments seem reasonable. It is true that the Dutch relied heavily on the judgment of the *uleebalang* and thus had a very limited view on what was going on among the larger sections of the population. Unconditional trust in the *uleebalang* at least explains the Dutch approach to PUSA in ‘security’ terms. A good example of this is the establishment of the Sekolah Normaal al-Islam institute in Peusangan, which was seen as one of the most prestigious projects of PUSA in the early phase. Except for religious subjects, this school was intended to offer secular education in Dutch and English. At the opening, Teuku Moehamad Djohan Alamsjah, the *zelfbestuurder* of Peusangan, thanked the PUSA for ‘accepting his advice to build the school outside the city [kotta], where the lessons would not be disrupted by all kinds of entertainment’, and where abundant land was available for agricultural education. These conditions made it possible to produce religious teachers, who, in the case of a shortage of vacancies, would still be able to support themselves through farming.’ As director of this institute, the PUSA board intended to install vice-chairman Teungku Muhamad Noer el-Ibrahimy. This was a sensitive matter, for Teungku Noer had been barred from teaching two year earlier, because his lessons were considered ‘political and undermining of authority’. When the school was opened amid great public interest in December 1939, high-profile deliberation was needed between the PUSA leadership, Teuku Moehamad Djohan Alamsjah, and Dutch authorities. Teungku Noer’s appointment was eventually passed, on the probation of a year, after Daud Beureueh, Teungku Abdoel Rachman, and the *zelfbestuurder* personally promised to vouch for him.

Yet, Piekaar’s arguments also seem to miss the main point. In my view, the most interesting question is not whether, or to what extent, the PUSA projected longstanding anti-Dutch sentiments on the position of the *uleebalang* (even though this is clearly what happened after 1945). This question automatically excludes analysis of the extent to which the organisation itself was a product of the colonial encounter. Generally, the Dutch were quite sympathetic to ‘modern’ expressions of Islam, as opposed to the more dangerous forms of ‘heretical mysticism’. Contrary to the activities of the Muhammadiyah, however, the reformist initiatives by the PUSA were seen by the provincial government as ‘home-grown’, and therefore much less likely to cause disturbance. Although the colonial government and the reformists did not share similar goals, they did share a ‘wavelength’ on which they could communicate about the meaning of ‘Aceh’ as a meaningful and demarcated ethnic, religious, and geographic entity. This becomes clear, for example, in their dealings with the Ahmadiyah.

Ahmadiyah is a messianic, revivalist religious movement founded in 1889 by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in Qadian, India. For many ‘mainstream’ Sunnis, Ahmadis – who commonly regard themselves as Muslims – comprise a deviant sect, because Mirza Ghulam Ahmad claimed to be a ‘prophet’, and thereby ignored one of the most important Islamic teachings, namely that Muhammad is the last Prophet. As a result of this controversy, by the turn of the twentieth century the movement split in two factions: the Qadiani (who were known as the more ‘radical’ faction), and the Lahori, who stressed Mirza Ghulam

86 ‘Politiek-politioneel oktober 1939’.
87 Ibid. Teungku M. Noer el-Ibrahimy was a son in law of Teungku Daud Beureueh. Before teaching in Aceh, he had spent five years of study at Al Azhar, the bulwark of Islamic modernism in Cairo, Egypt.
88 ‘Politiek-politioneel verslag december 1939’.
89 In fact, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad claimed to be ‘the Mahdi of Muslims, the Messiah of Christians, and the avatar of Krishna for Hindus’ (Esposito 2003:95).
Ahmad’s claim that he was a ‘renewer’ (mujaddid) rather than a ‘prophet’ (See Lavan 1974). We have little information about the beginning of the Ahmadiyah movement in Indonesia. According to Herman Beck (2005:220), ‘[t]he story told in Muhammadiyah circles holds that the first two Ahmadiyya missionaries arriving in Yogyakarta [perhaps in 1924] had actually set out for Hong Kong, China, or Manila’. These missionaries to Java belonged to the Lahori faction. Initially, Muhammadiyah members were sympathetic to the Ahmadiyya proselytisers, and it was even anticipated in the press and by some Dutch administrators that the Muhammadiyah and Ahmadiyah would soon merge.90 However, in 1929 it came to a sharp rupture when the Central Board of the Muhammadiyah issued a declaration, sent to all its branches, stating that ‘from now on, it was forbidden to teach any knowledge or view of the Ahmadiyya in circles of the Muhammadiyah’ (Ibid.:236).91

In 1926 Dutch intelligence reports mentioned the arrival in Tapaktuan of Rachmat Ali, an ‘Ahmadiyah propagandist’ and religious teacher belonging to the Qadiani faction.92 Reportedly, in 1922 three former Sumatra Thawalib students from South Aceh and West Sumatra had gone to Qadian to study. Encouraged perhaps by people at home, they requested that an Ahmadiyah mubaligh was sent to Sumatra. Rachmat Ali was accompanied by them to Tapaktuan, where they acted as his translators.93 It is unclear how successful they were. One contemporary source reports that Rachmat Ali had about a hundred followers.94 While this figure seems overstated, the development was regarded important enough by Governor Goedhart to ask religious advisor Tuanku Raja Keumala (of the Raad Oelama) to start providing ‘counter-propaganda’ immediately.95 In response, Raja Keumala sent Shaykh Saman, ‘a greatly respected ulama’ from Banda Aceh, to warn people in Tapaktuan about the incorrectness of Ahmadiyah teachings. These events led to a (short-lived) alliance, directed against the Ahmadiyah, between local Sumatra Thawalib and kaum tua activists.96 In response, the local zelfbestuurder decided that he would ‘allow no more religious teachers from outside the province’. In the meantime, Rachmat Ali moved on to Padang and Bukittinggi (and later, in 1930, to Batavia). His replacement in Tapaktuan was Zaini Dahlan, one of the three students who had accompanied him from

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90 Beck (2005:220-25) mentions various reason for this. Although the doctrinal differences between both groups were recognized, it seems that Muhammadiyah members were attracted by the anti-Christian disposition of the first Ahmadiyah Lahore missionaries in Java, as well as the fact that both movements stressed the compatibility of Islam and modernity and discarded mystical and saint-worshiping practices, and the zeal with which the Ahmadis proclaimed the need for renewal.

91 Nonetheless, the Ahmadiyah grew out to become a significant religious minority in Indonesia. Ahmadiyah followers have lived peacefully in Indonesia for some 90 years. However, since 2008 they have become a target of prosecution, as they are increasingly depicted as a ‘deviant’ sect threatening Islam. This has led to various deadly attacks. In 2008 the Indonesian government issued a special law on the Ahmadiyah. While not outrightly banning the sect, it has prohibited its members from proselytizing (International Crisis Group 2008).


94 Draft article by ‘Merac’ (a pseudonym for G.L. Tichelman) for the series ‘Brieven uit Atjeh’ (Letters from Aceh) published in the Java Bode in the early 1930s. Archief KITLV, Collectie G.L. Tichelman, H 814, inv. nr. 177.

95 Ibid.

India (and who came originally from Fort de Kock). However, he also yielded to the pressure and returned to Qadian.97

In subsequent years Ahmadiyah propagandists occasionally popped up at various places in Aceh, without causing much disturbance. This changed in the early 1930s. In September 1930 one Hadji Machmoed arrived in Takengon, on the invitation of a Takengon local and Ahmadiyah adherent, Abdul Gapoer, 'to propagate the doctrine'.98 According to government reports, Hadji Machmoed had studied at the Inlandsche School in Padang, after which he travelled extensively, first to Mecca (1914-1915), then back to West Sumatra (Payakumbuh en Fort de Kock and his village of birth Gunung, 1917-1922), Tapaktuan (1923-1925), and Qadian, where he studied with the Ahmadiyah teacher Syaikh Abdurrahman, returning to Padang in 1927. By 1931 he had acquired some followers, namely '2 Padangers, 3 Javanes, and 11 Indians',99 Apparently, his stay in Takengon led to some tensions with the kaum kuno. But since he did 'nothing to endanger order and peace', he was allowed to stay in Takengon. In November 1931 Hadji Machmoed returned to Padang, after which he was 'replaced', in January 1932, by an 'Indian from Padang' called Muhamad Sadiq, who had first called at Banda Aceh in 1930, and put up briefly at the Java hotel.100

Muhamad Sadiq stayed in Takengon for a while, after which he moved back to Banda Aceh. He was given permission to stay in the city, 'on the condition that he would inform [the authorities] whenever he wished to discuss religious matters in public'.101 In June 1932 the 'reading-club Mohammadijah' held a closed meeting, which was attended by 25 people from 'native' and Indian background, and chaired by Teuku Tjoet Hasan Meura'sa. At this meeting, Muhamad Sadiq gave an explanation of Ahmadiyah teachings. The report states:

[Muhamad Sadiq's] explanations were fiercely contested by those present. Mocking and scornful, [the other participants] reproached him for leading the Muhammadan community astray, under the pretext of explaining the ancient religion based on the Quran, tradition and communis opinio. He was advised to leave Banda Aceh as soon as possible, to prevent trouble, for the Acehnese people do not value his teachings.

In subsequent months the debate was continued at a more public level, with Muhamad Sadiq receiving attacks and veiled threats in the Banda Aceh journal Pergaoelan. One article pointed out that, although it was not formally the task of the government, it would be advisable to bar such propagandists from Aceh for their own safety. After writing a defensive piece in the journal's next issue, Sadiq was advised by the Dutch Controleur of Banda Aceh to leave the city 'in his own interest'. He then left for Sigli at the end of June.102

On 27 July Sadiq returned again, this time in the company of Abu Bakar Gelar Bagindo

98 'Verslag betreffende den politieken toestand in het gouvernement Atjeh en Onderhoorigheden gedurende het eerste halfjaar 1930', 18 August 1930, p. 13-14, NL-HaNa, Politieke Verslagen Buitengewesten, 2.10.52.01, inv. nr. 7, microfische 102-103.
99 'Verslag betreffende den politieken toestand in het gouvernement Atjeh en Onderhoorigheden gedurende het eerste halfjaar 1931', 8 August 1931, p. 15, NL-HaNa, Politieke Verslagen Buitengewesten, 2.10.52.01, inv. nr. 7, microfische 103.
100 'Verslag betreffende den politieken toestand in het gouvernement Atjeh en Onderhoorigheden gedurende het eerste halfjaar 1932', 29 August 1932, p. 12, NL-HaNa, Politieke Verslagen Buitengewesten, 2.10.52.01, inv. nr. 7, microfische 103-104; See also 'Beroering in Islamitische wereld door Ahmadijah propagandisten?', De Sumatra Post, 9 August 1932.
101 'Verslag politieken toestand eerste halfjaar 1932'.
102 Ibid., p. 13.
Marajo, designated in Dutch political reports as the ‘president’ of the Ahmadiyah in Padang. This time the situation turned more serious. Coincidentally, another Ahmadiyah follower – not a proselytiser it seems – arrived in Banda Aceh a few weeks later to live with his uncle in Kampung Keudah. Soetan Ismail was a Minangkabau who had worked as a mantri in a plantation near Takengon. He came to Banda Aceh after losing his job. On 15 August, having performed the evening prayer (salat maghrib) in the praying hall (langgar) of Keudah, Soetan Ismail was intimidated by the imam, who told him that he was not considered as a fellow Muslim by the community. In reaction, Soetan Ismail issued a complaint with the authorities for being insulted. The case was set (‘amicably’, according to the report) by intervention of no one less than the Assistant-Resident. The imam had to withdraw his words. Soetan Ismail, however, had to promise that he would no longer enter the langgar.\textsuperscript{103}

While this hostility seems to emerge rather suddenly, it did not come from nowhere. In reaction to the return of Sadiq, on 7 August (which is two days before the arrival of Soetan Ismail) a group of ulama from Aceh Besar announced the formation of an ‘anti-Ahmadiyah committee’, to be chaired by a well-known ulama from Aceh Besar, Teungku Hasballah Indrapuri. On 21 August a public meeting was held on the ground next to the Great Mosque, reportedly attracting some 2000 people (the Deli Courant even mentioned the figure of 5000), mostly from villages outside Banda Aceh.\textsuperscript{104} Sadiq, who wanted to participate in the debate, was refused. A government report describes the meeting as follows:

Tgk. Sjech Ibrahim explained about the goals of the meeting, that by means of collecting-boxes funds would be raised for the benefit of needy haji’s in the Hejaz, the mosque in Seulimeum and the anti-Ahmadiyah committee in Koetaradja. The students of the Djadam-Montasie performed religious songs, stirring [the people] to unite against the danger of disintegration, which was threatening Islam through the activities of the Ahmadiyah. Tgk. Hasballah of Indrapoeri speaks in Acehnese about the meaning of the Quran. Sajid Hoesin, religious teacher in Sigli, explained that where there is ‘true’ there can be ‘false’ and where there is ‘authentic’ there can be ‘fake’. It is a certainty that Muhamad is the last prophet, and if Mirza Ghulam Ahmad claims to be a prophet and, like the prophets, to have had ‘wahyu’ [inspiration, or words of revelation], that is conversations with God, then this is clearly just lies and conceit; watchfulness is now our duty, thus the speaker ended his lively speech.

Tgk. Moehd. Daoed (Bireuen North coast) spoke in Acehnese about the return of the prophet Isa [Jesus] on earth at the end of times. This will only be possible when Islam has become the universal religion.

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad calls himself Isa Masiah (Jesus the Messiah). This is completely opposed, according to the speaker, to Gods own words, as laid down in the Quran.

The speaker urged the Ulama’s to dedicate themselves with all their power to the preaching of the pure Islam and the Uleebalangs to take care that the people are able to receive good religious education and that the Baitulmal is being managed according to the rules put forward by God Himself.

T. Djohan Meura’sa explained the strategy used by the Ahmadiyah, and discussed some brochures, published by the Ahmadiyah, in which there is much which deviates from the true faith.

\textsuperscript{103} ‘Politiek-politioneel verslag 1932’; The incident was also covered in the Deli Courant 22-08-1932.

\textsuperscript{104} It is unclear whether the term ‘anti-Ahmadiyah committee’ was used by the protesters, or in Dutch-language reports and newspapers. ‘Politiek-politioneel verslag 1932’, p. 15-17; ‘Godsdienstkwesties in Atjeh. Een comité anti-Ahmadijah opgericht’, Deli Courant 09-08-1932; ‘Godsdienstkwesties in Atjeh. Massa-vergadering tegen de Achmadijah’, Deli Courant 22-08-1932.
Tgk. Lam Oe (Seulimeum) spoke in Acehnese and explained the theories of the 74 sects in Islam. 72 of these are devious. Only one, which follows the Quran and the Sunnah, is correct.

The last speaker was Teungku Lam Birah, who pronounced a 'fatwa', in which it was said that the followers of the Ahmadi were not muslim but kafir and that the congregation of the faithful were urged not to be misled by false doctrine.\textsuperscript{105}

In subsequent weeks nothing much happened. It seems that Muhammad Sadiq kept aloof, at least for the time being. Soetan Ismail decided about a month later to go to Lhokseumawe.\textsuperscript{106}

These reports indicate that the presence of the Ahmadiyah was regarded by reformist teachers as a serious threat. While the large attendance of the meeting suggests that anti-Ahmadiyah propaganda was an effective way of drawing crowds. At the same time, it is important to evaluate critically Dutch reporting – both in the government report and in newspapers – about these events. Activist reformists and Dutch administrators shared an interest in 'containing' those figures who, in Dutch sources, were invariably called 'foreign propagandists' (\textit{vreemde propagandisten}). In reformist discourse, groups like the Ahmadiyah caused sectarian splits in the community of the faithful. The Dutch, who emphasised that the Ahmadiyah was seen as 'liberal' and 'heretical' by the 'conservative' and 'orthodox' Acehnese, were concerned about religious strife. Governor Philips, when interviewed about the incidents mentioned above, argued that the Ahmadiyah was simply 'unwanted' in Aceh, and that representatives of the movement would be wise 'not to risk their lives' by travelling to the Acehnese interior. He explained the hostile sentiment as follows:

The aim of the Ahmadiyah movement is to disseminate and propagate liberal Islamic teachings, such as put forward in the publications of the well-known founder of the Ahmadiyah movement, Mirza Gulam Ahmad (...). It is because these teachings are liberal in nature, that the Ahmadiyah invites resistance of orthodox Muslims, who constitute the large majority of the people in these regions. In Aceh, especially, the centre of orthodoxy as far as Islam is concerned. This is why Ahmadiyah will never get much attention from the local population, something to which the ulama of course have their share to contribute.\textsuperscript{107}

There was no necessity for the government to intervene, he added. The people have made a stand for themselves, and the preacher in question (...) will not be granted much success.

Stereotyping also played an important role. Ahmadiyah proselytisers were said to have at their disposal infinite funds from obscure sources.\textsuperscript{108} They were regarded as arrogant, supposedly insisting on speaking exclusively in English or in Urdu. They were simply seen as a red cloth in front of a bull by the Dutch. In 1933, another Ahmadiyah follower was advised by a meeting of prominent ulama to disappear from Aceh in order to 'prevent a beating'. Governor Van Aken personally warned him that, 'however tolerant and

\textsuperscript{105} 'Politiek-politioneel verslag 1932', p. 15-17.
\textsuperscript{106} One year later, in 1933, Muhammad Sadiq called again for a public debate with the Acehnese ulama, this time in a written reaction to an attack on the movement published in Padang. In the same year, this newspaper reported an incident in Bayu, where the presence of an Ahmadiyah activist disturbed a debate between local ulama, as organized weekly by the Zelfbestuurder. 'Politiek-politioneel verslag 1932', Verslag politieken toestand eerste halfjaar 1933'.
\textsuperscript{107} Quoted in Deli Courant, 03-10-32. N.B.: It is not entirely clear to me why Dutch administrators like Van Aken used the term 'liberal' to typify the teachings of the Ahmadiyah. One possibility is that, in this context, 'modernism' and 'western' education was associated with 'liberalism'.
\textsuperscript{108} For example, there was suspicion about the fact that Abu Bakar rented a house for Sadiq in Banda Aceh. 'Politiek-politioneel verslag 1932'.

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beautiful’ his teachings may be, he would be wise not to choose Aceh as a ground for propaganda, for he would only harvest hatred and conflict.’ Mohammad Zain left, eventually, ‘without drum or trumpet’, for Padang. In 1936 Van Aken wrote in his final report that the Acehnese ‘strongly rejected’ the Ahmadiyah, and that it would find its supporters only among ‘strangers and unsatisfied Acehnese elements’. The aversion was so great, he continued, that the police ‘had to protect its propagandists’. In practice, this ‘protection’ meant persuading these people to ‘leave Aceh alone’.

Conclusion

In Aceh, the contours of a colonial society arrived as abruptly as they disappeared. It was not until the late 1910s that the violence of the Aceh War subsided, and that administrators were able to introduce a system of civil rule. Two decades later, in 1942, the Dutch were expelled, never to return. In between, Aceh had become a social, cultural and political pressure cooker.

While it is tempting to reduce the Dutch stance toward violent resistance to colonial narrow-mindedness, I have argued that it is important to consider how ‘Aceh’, as an ethnic, religious, and geographical entity, was constructed in the first place. Thus, I have focused in this chapter on the relationship between religious practice, evolving ideas about Acehnese indigeneity, and the kind of associational life connected to the project that is sometimes defined as ‘colonial modernity’. Just like elsewhere in Indonesia, the Dutch ‘pacification’ of Aceh consisted of a combination of indirect rule, economic development by large scale commercial enterprises, mass education, and the use of modern technologies in transportation, communication, and medicine. More than elsewhere, however, this process was informed by a set of stringent discursive dichotomies that separated the traditional from the modern, the ‘wild’ territories of the West coast from the developing North coast, and the ‘mystical’ nature of Acehnese warfare from the ‘reasonable’, civilised and mundane strand of Islamic modernism developing across the Indonesian archipelago. In the late colonial period, these concerns became increasingly judicial in nature. At the same time, the distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ expressions of Islamic religiosity remained closely connected to eruptions of violence, especially on the West coast.

The relationship between Dutch colonialism and the vernacular current of Islamic reformism which led, in 1939, to the establishment of the Acehnese reformist organisation PUSA (All-Acehnese Association of Ulama) is particularly interesting. While the literature about Aceh has presented PUSA as an ‘anti-colonial’ phenomenon, in this chapter I have argued that, in fact, there were conspicuous analogies between the ideologies of Islamic reformers and colonial administrators. These included a strong propensity to declare expressions of Islamic mysticism as ‘deviant’ and dangerous, and the connection of a true, orthodox Islam to the dichotomous discourses just mentioned. What we are seeing, then, is the construction of a narrative, tying a shared idea about the history of ‘Aceh’ to an (at least partly) shared vision of the future. This was a narrative with a particular direction, even if it was not cast in the same terms. While colonial administrators spoke of ‘opening’ up, bit by bit, the ‘isolated’ parts of Aceh to enable adequate rule and ‘development’, PUSA leaders were guiding the people on the straight path of Islam, from ‘darkness to light’ (Siegel 1969:130). On the one hand, one might say that Dutch administrators and reformist Islamic teachers inhabited totally different universes. Dutch engagement with

109 ‘Governor Van Aken of Atjeh en Onderhoorigheden to the Governor-General in Batavia’, 25 February 1934. NL-HaNa, Politieke Verslagen Buitengewesten, 2.10.52.01, inv. nr. 7, microfische 105.
110 Van Aken, ‘Memorie van Overgave van het Gouvernement Atjeh’.
the activities of Acehnese 'native' reformers was often restricted to the practice of collecting (political) intelligence. Islamic activists, for their part, made sure to maintain good relations with the local chiefs who had been turned into colonial officials, but for the rest acted independently. On the other hand, Dutch colonial administrators and Islamic activists shared a wavelength, which was tuned to a future-oriented paradigm of progress and modernity, and connected to a recognisable (and highly ideologically charged) combination of moral uplifting and economic development.

The professionalisation of organised Islam and the development of the modern state were closely intertwined processes. In the post-independence period, this development continued. The next chapter looks at the reformist legacy in the period between the 1930s and the 1970s. In line with my approach centring on state, authority and individual space, I will zoom in further on the local level, and ask how this impacted the dynamics of village life in one particular district, that of Indrapuri in Aceh Besar.