

# **A NATIONAL MENTAL REVOLUTION THROUGH THE RESTORATION OF CITIES OF COLONIAL LEGACY: TOWARDS BUILDING A STRONG NATION'S CHARACTER**

## **An Urban Cultural Historical and Bio Psychosocial Overview**

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*"We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us" --- (Sir Winston Churchill).*

*"The young generation does not realize how hard and difficult it was when Indonesia struggled for our independence throughout three hundred years of colonization. They have to learn thoroughly from our history and to use the experiences and leadership of the older generations, as guidance and role models. They have to understand about our national identity. When they do not know their national's identity, where would they go?"*

*(Ali Sadikin's statement as interviewed by Express Magazine, June 1, 1973, and several times discussions with Martono Yuwono)*

### **"Majapahit", a strong maritime nation in the 14<sup>th</sup> century**

The history of Indonesia as a maritime nation dates back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century when this South East Asian region was subjected under the reign of the great "Majapahit" Empire. The Empire ruled a region which is geographically located between two great continents namely Asia and Australia, and at the same time between two great oceans namely the Pacific and the Indian oceans. This region consisted of mainly the archipelagic group of islands (which is now referred to as Indonesia), and some portion of the coastal region at the south eastern tip of the Asian continent. "Majapahit" was already the largest [archipelagic state](#) in the world at that time, in control of the strategic cross roads (sea lanes) between those two great continents and two great oceans. The influence of "Majapahit" reached out as far as to the Middle East and East Africa. All of these signify that "Majapahit" was then already a leading maritime nation. As the main body of the Empire, Indonesia which is an archipelago is consequently an archipelagic state. Nearly two third of this archipelago is made up of sea and the rest are numerous islands. The archipelagic country was also called "Nusantara", a term taken from an oath by [Gajah Mada](#) in 1336, the prime minister of Majapahit, a strong Javanese maritime kingdom, who then vowed to unite Nusantara. The term Nusantara was **written in** the old [Javanese](#) manuscripts called [Pararaton](#) and [Negerakertagama](#). The synonym to Nusantara in Sanskrit means "island" to describe the Southeast Asian Archipelago. Hence, "Nusantara" is a synonym of "Indonesia".

### **The Colonial era : Conversion of a Maritime Nation into a Non-Maritime One**

Before the Dutch colonization from the 16<sup>th</sup> century through the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, with the merits of "Majapahit" remained at large, Nusantara was still a great maritime nation, as shown by our ancestor's ships which were sculpted in Borobudur reliefs. There were many great maritime empires, such as the kingdoms of Srivijaya, Majapahit, Samodra Pasai, Darussalam, Banten, Mataram, Jayakarta, Cirebon, Tuban, Gresik, Madura, Gowa, Bone, Wajo, Makassar, East Kalimantan, South Kalimantan, Ternate, Tidore, etc. Each kingdom had its own trade ports or shipyards, intertwined in interregional maritime shipping and trade since the days of kingdom. There were testaments on the triumph of Nusantara's

history of its territory or influence to the Malay Peninsula, Champa, Philippines, Thailand, India and China. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century Srivijaya ships already dissected the ocean to Madagascar and South Africa.

However, after more than 350 years of colonization, this nation then seems to turn away from their maritime legacy inherited from their ancestors of the great maritime kingdoms of Sriwijaya, Majapahit, and many others that rooted back seven centuries, before the colonial time. Surprisingly, many continental nations with no root of maritime culture have developed their character to that of a maritime country, such as Russia, America, Thailand, China, Korea, etc.

What did really happen? How come such a many great maritime kingdoms had to transform themselves and denied their maritime history and the geographical character, and turned away their nation character into a totally different new nation character. It was the three and a half dark colonial time that was responsible for creating the “black box” of the national problems. History is the only information we can get to indicate the exact moment of the declining glorious maritime nation of the past. The dark time of the colonial time was where it began. In search of the root of the problems, Raphael Lemkin (1988) in his book Introduction to the Study of Genocide stated: "... colonialism can not be left without blame".

Since the introduction of the concept of cultural genocide as the destruction of the non-physical aspect of a group by Raphael Lemkin during the Second World War, the term cultural genocide was sadly dropped during the Genocide convention in 1948 following a serious debate by the countries fearing the legal claims of ethnocide (such as Australia, the United States States, Swiss and Canada).

It is exactly latent problems, as the black box of the lost history the Indonesian are facing after the dark time of colonialism.

It was started in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the Dutch VOC headed by Speelman, planned to take by force the spice trade monopoly from Hasanuddin, the Sultan of Gowa-Talo. After a fierce heroic naval war, known as the war of Makassar, Hasanuddin surrendered and signed the Bongaya Treaty on November 18, 1667 with the Dutch VOC. As a result, there were major restrictions on Gowa's ability to trade, even to sail their ships freely to the sea. The treaty declared that all Gowa traders required licenses to do business in regions controlled by the Dutch East India Company.

Following the Bongaya Treaty, the Dutch VOC built Fort of Rotterdam as the head quarter of spice trade trading post in east of Nusantara. It was built by destroying the main fort of Makassar, Somba Opu, and 17 other forts. Fort of Rotterdam had the Dutch city character, transplanted by force on top of the center point of Makassar maritime city. Consequently, people of Makassar had to adapt as their survival mechanism, by changing their profession into the field of agriculture cultivation in the inland region.

The Dutch VOC went further into the inland regions and extended their territories. They signed another treaty with Mataram Kingdom in Central Java in 1743. This treaty imposed the VOC monopoly to the legalization of all ship buildings along the north coast of Java. Only small boats were allowed to be built by local people, but should not be longer than 20 meters with a carrying capacity of not more than 30 tons.

A similar phenomenon also occurred in Jakarta. Jayakarta, which was the root of the Jakarta city, experienced a dramatic transformation. The city was destroyed and on its ruins a new city was built as a

fortified city, called Batavia. Makassar and Jakarta indeed shared a dramatic history of the past. As a matter of fact, Indonesia had also a number of patriotic histories of heroic wars against colonization throughout the country, such as Diponegoro or the Java war, Imam Bonjol or the Padri War, Teuku Umar or the Aceh war, and many others. Cultural genocide is the evil responsible for transforming our cities into non-maritime cities which resulted in transforming our character from outward-looking into inward-looking or the so called “inlander” character.

We are proud of these patriotic struggles through physical revolution, which were then continued with several diplomacies, started with the National Awakening movement (1908), the Youth Pledge (1928), until the declaration of the Indonesian Independence in 1945. The Indonesian revolution was not yet finished. We had to struggle for our existence as a maritime nation and territory, culminating in a declaration known as the Djuanda Declaration in 1957, which was acknowledged by the UNCLOS of the United Nation in 1982.

Sadly, it has been almost seven decades since the Indonesian independence, and now we are still trapped as a non-maritime nation. How could we revive our maritime nation character and become a strong maritime nation again? Working in a preservation and restoration program of the Old Jakarta as a colonial city for almost four decades, from the era of Ali Sadikin until now, has led the author to search for an answer and discussions with the (late) 4<sup>th</sup> President of Indonesia, KH Abdurrahman Wahid, historians, architects and many other prominent people from various backgrounds and disciplines. *We have come into a conclusion that there is a national mental block, caused by the long duration of Dutch colonization, as a black box or a mystery box. We should find the black box and identify our problems.*

## **The Nation’s Mental Block and Life Space Concept**

A city has the soul of the location (the local genius) as the local wisdom character. Local wisdom is a creative adaptation to geographical, political, historical, and situational, in the form of attitude, outlook, and the ability of people to manage their social-cultural, mental-spiritual and physical environment. The lack of attention and research in this subject, raises questions such as how much are we aware about the importance of the impact of local wisdom of the predecessor’s heritage on our cities?

The erosion of local wisdom character and cultural transformation in cities due to colonization has been taken for granted by most people to avoid conflicts with authorities. We submit to authorities as a survival mechanism to adjust to our illusory life (or false life) in a climate of so-called the "comfort zone". This “comfort zone” avoids us to challenge life, in order to remain comfortable, causing a character characterized by reluctance to change as well as resisting changes. Indeed, studies by prominent anthropologists, cultural authors, historians have demonstrated the character changes of the people after the Dutch colonization as compared to before the arrival of the Dutch VOC in Java.

This is the mental shackle or mental block of the nation, which has taken place subconsciously and has become latent for centuries. This mental shackle causing repressions of our creativity and progress, and

the nation's tendency to import goods, adoption of a corruption life style as a national culture to maintain the status quo, prevent bureaucratic reforms and development breakthroughs.

Kurt Lewin (1940) proposed a concept of "life space" as human living space that evolved from life experiences and interactions with the environment. This life space contains the experiences and needs of each person. It is called the "field theory", a theory of social psychology that studies the patterns of interaction between the individual and the whole field or the environment. The theory states that behavior must be derived from the totality of the facts of life together. These coexisting facts create a dynamic field, which means that the state of every part of the field depends on each other. Thus, behavior depends on the current field and not on the past or future.

According to the life space theory (Super, 1990), each person has a different life space depending on personal factors (needs, values, interests, talents) and environmental factors (family, community, the state, the policy economic, gender and race, and others. These factors interact on each person and shape the life roles and self-concept.

Lewin's field theory and Super's theory can explain the observation, that there is a reciprocal relationship between the building structure and behavior of human beings who live in it, as stated by Sir Winston Churchill: "We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us".

Quantum physics views that electromagnetic waves can behave as particles and it only requires a very small energy to change large systems. It has been demonstrated that electromagnetic brain waves are generated by thoughts and emotions. These electromagnetic waves enter the brains of other humans and trigger new behavior patterns. The brain has a protective regulatory environment called the craniosacral system which has its own pulsation (the cranial rhythmic pulse). This system has physical, chemical, electrical and bio-energy potencies and is powered by the divine Breath of Life energy and serves as the highest governing body of the body physiology, health and life. The system is sensitive to physical, chemical, mental, spiritual and bio-energy forces. It has been demonstrated that acupuncture points possess pulsations originated from the craniosacral system.

Presumably, cruelty, violence, colonialism and slavery discharge negative energy patterns recorded in the building structures, living space and the environment. This negative energy field affects the brain, the craniosacral system and acupuncture meridian system negatively and destructively. This negative energy field in the building structures and space with "colonial orientation" induces changes in the holistic health and behavior of the people, from outward looking maritime values into an inward looking destructive behavioral pattern (the so called "inlander" character).

By changing the pattern of the spatial structure of the building and the city, there will be new life space as a result of new interaction patterns between humans and the environment according to Lewin's field theory and Super's life space theory. Changing the architectural designs can transform the negative energy field imbedded in the physical structure and space caused by colonialism into a positive one consistent with the original outward looking character of the nation. Building architectural designs and living space possessing an "outward-looking character" is expected to create maritime character minded

people. In accordance with the "morphogenic field theory" (Sheldrake), the new character will spread throughout the islands across the ocean without the necessary social learning activities.

## **Indonesia must now regain its status as a nation with maritime vision It should begin with Preservation of Historical Landmarks**

The authors propose a drastic transformation of the colonial character of the buildings and sites in Indonesian cities to change the nation's people character to enable generating a "mental revolution" holistically. In this case, a therapeutic preservation strategy should be applied by restructuring the colonial heritage and transforming it into patriotic or nationalism character, according to its local wisdom character.

Historic city centers as inherited from the colonial Dutch must be revitalized or restored ("diruwat", a term used by Martono), if not, negative and destructive energy will influence and encourage the establishment of grand colonial scenarios of the cities to become the imaginary cultural prisons of the inward looking people ("inlanders").

Preservation of historical heritage of the past is perceived as national pride and is considered to be universal. It is done by all countries in the world. Many old cities in various countries who have preserved the historic values and their nationality, are now cities of prestige and proud.

However, when we talk about the old town (read: historical city) in Indonesia, the question is how much do we have the local wisdom of our ancestors, in part or whole, remaining in the town character, since the destruction of the local wisdom character or the coating to the building of a colonial city on it have taken place? The local wisdom of our ancestor's city heritage is a continuous cultural journey from the initial root until now. We have been separated away from the cultural roots of our ancestors as sailors for centuries, and cut off by the dark history of colonization that has isolated us from the sea.

The historic city centers of the colonial era are highly sensitive targets for constructions. Urban renewal characterized by rejuvenation approaches in development which are "free of values" without paying any attention for the "local genius", needs to be reconsidered seriously. Sooner or later, this trend will turn the historic centers liberally into city areas possessing a new form of colonialism such as superblock city areas and malls that are exploding all over the city without a hitch. It is feared that this trend will increase a consumerism life style which is a seed for the development of a hedonistic lifestyle, which is unhealthy and damaging to our future generations.

We need a therapeutic strategy to overcome the nation's shackles to come out from our "comfort zone". Restoring the legacy of our ancestor's local wisdom is the nation's foundation to build our future and deal with future challenges. We have to build the spirit of a strong maritime nation. Otherwise, we would just once again become an object of exploitation by other stronger countries or nations.

In the restoration of the Old Jakarta, Ali Sadikin, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Governor of Jakarta (1966-1977) transformed the character of the inherited colonial city into the patriotic spirit of Fatahillah, who founded Jayakarta (meaning the “City of Victory”). He changed the name of Old Batavia to become Fatahillah Square. He also changed the name and character of many other historic buildings, such as the STOVIA building to become the National Awakening Museum, the VOC warehouse into the Maritime Museum, etc. Ali Sadikin’s vision should be used as guidance in restoration of historic buildings and sites by the new generations in this field as a cultural strategy in city development.

Restoring the soul and the spirit of place is the basic strategy to be applied to any heritage preservation projects, especially to cities dominated by the colonial concept. Ali Sadikin, who introduced a patriotic spirit in restoring the Old Batavia to become Fatahillah Square, had entrusted a heroic message for all of us. He believed that the solution of Jakarta resembled that in Warsaw city, Poland and the historic cities in the US. Ali Sadikin’s efforts in restoring the Old Jakarta were in line with Soekarno’s vision, who wished to build a strong national character to become a strong nation and state.

Jakarta could become a restoration program model for the revitalization of a hundred of old harbors all over the archipelago, which in fact were originally colonial cities, as a wake-up call for the nation in reclaiming its genuine strong maritime character of the people of Indonesia and to restore the honorable nation maritime state.

Our dreams seem to come true, as indicated by Joko Widodo’s speech after he and Jusuf Kalla won the President and Vice President’s Election on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2014 on the Bugis Pinisi traditional schooner in Sunda Kelapa Old Harbor. This moment shows us how serious he is in planning to build the Indonesian future as a strong maritime nation by empowering the Indonesian position in the world maritime axis. In this context Jakarta Heritage Trail could function as a golden bridge to put the plan into realization.

In summary, changes in health, administrative and bureaucratic system of government and the nation character and direction of our future can only take place if there is a mental revolution, which can occur by the renovation and restoration of historic buildings and sites of colonial towns, especially the old city harbors. According to the field theory, it will not take long time to change people’s life space and their life styles and their behavior and the nation character. Field theory focuses on the present, not on the past or future.

We should understand the strong message of Ali Sadikin in restoring the old Jakarta. *Pursuing a future strong nation, state or cities can only be achieved with a patriotic vision inherited for centuries by the heroic Nusantara people against foreign powers to colonize Nusantara.* It is our responsibility to continue the patriotic spirit of our founding fathers in order to build a strong nation and cities with a patriotic spirit in the past, to face the fierce challenge of the global competition.\*\*\*

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