

## Epilogue

Every now and then it is said in the Philippines that national hero Jose Rizal influenced the course of the revolution in neighbouring Indonesia. A statement by former vice president Salvador Laurel, chairman of the Philippine Centennial Commission in the 1990s, may be taken as emblematic. Speaking at the Jakarta International Conference on the Centenary of the Philippine Revolution and the First Asian Republic in 1997, Laurel said: “Historians recount that Rizal’s death and immortal poem, ‘Mi Ultimo Adios,’ translated into Bahasa Indonesia, inspired the Indonesian revolution.”

It is a problematic statement, because certain terms demand an explanation. Which historians does Laurel mean? How does he define inspiration? It can be, strictly speaking, misleading. The Indonesian revolution, which began in 1945, did not depend on an acquaintance with Rizal or his poem. And yet it is truthful too. Journalist and occasional historian Rosihan Anwar argued the case as far back as 1961: Rizal’s example and his exemplary poem were an inspiration for many in the revolutionary generation. The repeated experience of revolutionary pemuda claiming the translation as their own, in 1944 in Jakarta, in 1945 in Surabaya, in 1946 in Mojokerto, shows that, at least in Java, Indonesian nationalists at a moment of real peril had taken inspiration from a stirring poem that promised a useful, even glorious martyrdom.

It is in this last, nuanced sense that we can say that Rizal’s influence in Southeast Asia outside the Philippines was real. It was both a part of the general background (in the exact same sense that Philippine “people power” was very much in the air in the late 1980s, seeping

even through the cracks in the Iron Curtain), and specific to both time and place.

Rizal's impact was strongest in the Indonesian nationalist awakening. By the second decade of the twentieth century, a pioneer nationalist, the Eurasian E. F. E. Douwes Dekker, had embraced Rizal's work and example. It is a matter of debate whether Douwes Dekker's writings reached a broad public, but there is no doubt that, during a crisis in the emergence of Indonesian nationalism, he found Rizal congenial to his cause. He would eventually outgrow the notion of an independence movement led by mestizos like him, but it was Rizal who informed that transitional phase. The true leader of the Indonesian nationalist struggle assumed his role in the late 1920s; but there is no evidence (only mere assertion) that Sukarno already put Rizal to use in his speeches at the time. Sukarno would learn to appropriate the historical reputation of Rizal for his own nation-building purposes only from the beginning of the Japanese occupation. But Rosihan, in 1961 politically estranged from Sukarno, identified the Indonesian leader as a populariser of the Rizal name in Indonesia, and the evidence from Sukarno's speeches bear this out.

The impact on Malay nationalism is more vexing. A scholar like Ramlah Adam can assert (Ordoñez 1998) that "The influence of the Philippine revolution, Jose Rizal, and Philippine independence on Malay nationalism was very significant." But the available evidence seems scanty. True, there is a reference to Rizal as early as 1938, in a newspaper editorial written by Ibrahim Haji Yaacob; it is possibly the first mention of Rizal in a Malay-language publication. But perhaps it is only in the sense that Rizal was an inspiration for Indonesian nationalism, which in turn shaped Malay nationalist aspirations, that an argument for his influence can be claimed, and then only tangentially. Anwar Ibrahim's enthusiastic but belated discovery of Rizal has had a salutary effect on regional discourse, but it is difficult to escape the conclusion that his appropriation is not driven by nationalist objectives but by political concerns. It is in Rizal's impact

on Malaysian intellectuals, however, where the true measure of his legacy was first plumbed in Southeast Asia. The work of Syed Hussein Alatas and the intellectual tradition he started, passing through Chandra Muzaffar and Shaharuddin bin Maaruf, now in the deft hands of Farish A. Noor and Syed Farid Alatas, among others, is a rich resource for both post-colonial studies and for regional polity-building.

The communist Tan Malaka had warm words for Rizal; his judgment of Rizal's lack of revolutionary sense was severe, but it was not harsh. The practised organiser, a sometime resident in American-era Manila, responded to the genuine admiration in which the politicising Philippine labour sector in the 1920s held the martyr of Bagumbayan. He did not attempt to appropriate Rizal for his own purposes, an act of generosity which allows the modern-day reader to compare their approaches to armed revolution, and to realize that Rizal was, in fact, animated by a genuine revolutionary spirit. He just thought the true revolution was the moral kind.

Unlike Tan Malaka, the great Indonesian novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer did use the name of Rizal for his own purposes. In the second volume of the *Buru Quartet*, Rizal becomes the means through which the reader understands the depth of the colonial mindset that ruled the Dutch East Indies, and by which history's protagonist, Minke, politically comes of age. It is a richly satisfying device — that is to say, it works very well in the economy of the novels — but it has often been neglected or ignored outright in the scholarly or critical commentary. Pramoedya's use of Rizal is very specific to time and place, and yet, like the character of Rizal's influence on the Indonesian revolution, like the nature of inspiration itself, it is also and only as real as air.

