

# Desperation in the Indonesian diaspora

The global success of Satudarah, an outlaw motorcycle gang with roots in the Netherlands' Indonesian community, speaks to the ongoing socioeconomic marginalisation of Indonesian and other diaspora communities in the west.

MICHAEL BUEHLER - 17 APR, 2018

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In 2012, Dino Patti Djalal, then the Indonesian ambassador to the United States, launched the first Congress of Indonesian Diasporas. The congress was held in Los Angeles with the aim of increasing the visibility of Indonesians living abroad. The Indonesian government's publicity campaign culminated in a keynote speech by former US-president Barack Obama at the 4<sup>th</sup> Congress of Indonesian Diasporas, held at the exclusive Kota Kasablanka shopping and hotel complex in Jakarta in July 2017.

The audience at the 2017 congress consisted mainly of business tycoons, military figures, politicians, and starlets from the entertainment industry. For instance, speakers at the panel "Opportunities and Risks for Indonesia" included Sri Mulyani Indrawati, Indonesia's Finance Minister; Bambang Susantono, Vice-President for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development of the Asian Development Bank; as well as Helman Sitohang, CEO of Credit Suisse Asia Pacific.

Meanwhile, Anies Baswedan, who won Jakarta's gubernatorial election in April 2017 after delivering racially tinged speeches and cosyng up to Islamist vigilante groups, was speaking at the panel "The Role of the Diaspora in Promoting Diversity and Tolerance Around the World", while on-screen talent such as Tania Gunadi (*Scooby-Doo! Shaggy's Showdown*, 2017; *The Jetsons & WWE: Robo-WrestleMania!*, 2017), Tasia and Grasia Seger (Winners of *My Kitchen Rules*, 2017) as well as Yoshi Sudarso (*Power Rangers HyperForce*, 2018) were headlining the panel "Living and Working Abroad: If You Can Make It Here You Can Make It Anywhere".<sup>[1]</sup>



BARACK OBAMA AT THE 2017 CONGRESS OF INDONESIAN DIASPORAS, JAKARTA (PHOTO: SRI MULYANI INDRAWATI ON FACEBOOK)

Yet the situation in which most overseas Indonesians find themselves is very different from the possibilities the glitzy venue and illustrious attendance list of the 2017 diaspora congress implied. Many Indonesians who live abroad are exploited and poorly integrated into society. The story of Satudarah, an outlaw motorcycle club with roots in the Indonesian diaspora, shows the harsh reality many overseas Indonesians are confronted with.

In 1990, children of émigrés from the Maluku islands in Indonesia established a motorbike club in Moordrecht, a small town in the southeast of the Netherlands. They called it Satudarah. Within a few years, Satudarah gained a reputation as “one-percenter” motorcycle club due to the involvement of club members in assaults, drug sales, extortion, forced prostitution, murder and racketeering.<sup>[2]</sup>

One-percenter motorcycle clubs derive their name from a press release the American Motorcycle Association (AMA) felt compelled to publish after 4000 bikers descended upon the small town of Hollister in California in July 1947 for a few days of boozing and racing. In response to what became known as the Hollister Riots—later turned into a movie *The Wild One* with Marlon Brando—the



AMA stated that “99% of motorcycle riders are law-abiding citizens.”<sup>[3]</sup> Ever since, outlaw motorcycle clubs have used the one-percenter label as a badge of honour.

Satudarah’s one-percenter status and notoriety have not prevented the club from expanding. On the contrary, since the club was established 28 years ago, it has opened 44 chapters in the Netherlands alone. By 2011, Satudarah had become the second largest outlaw motorcycle club in the country.<sup>[4]</sup> Over the last decade, Satudarah has also seen an explosive expansion across Europe and now boasts chapters in Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. Recently, the club has set foot on Australian soil and established a presence in Asia, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.

To understand Satudarah’s global appeal, one needs to look at the close relationship between the milieu from which the club emerged and Indonesia’s colonial past.

### **Postcolonial immigration and exclusion**

The arrival of a Dutch ship in the Moluccas in 1599 marked the beginning of 350 years of colonial rule over a string of islands that eventually became the Dutch East Indies. Attracted by an abundance of highly priced commodities such as pepper and nutmeg, the “Spice Islands” were first exploited by the Dutch United East Indies Company (VOC—*Verenigde Oost Indische Compagnie*), and, after it went bankrupt in 1789, directly by the Dutch colonial government.

The Japanese occupation of the Dutch East Indies in 1942 in the context of the Second World War paved the way for an independence movement. The Republic of Indonesia proclaimed independence in 1945. The Dutch government subsequently tried to re-colonise the archipelago for several years. These efforts were met with fierce resistance by the Indonesian Republican Army. After four years of attrition warfare, the Netherlands entered a compromise with the Indonesian independence movement in 1949. The Dutch suggested the creation of the United States of Indonesia, based on a federal government structure.

The Moluccas, part of the “Great East,” accepted this proposal. However, the Government of the Republic of Indonesia, which at the time controlled the most

populous islands of Java and Sumatra, preferred a unitary state. The aspirations of the republican government raised concerns in many parts of the archipelago, but especially so in the South Moluccan islands. There, people were concerned about being integrated into a unitary Indonesian state for various reasons. Not only were South Moluccans predominantly Christian—and therefore wary about joining a Muslim-majority state—but the Dutch colonial government had also recruited many South Moluccans into the colonial army, and then deployed these troops to “pacify” local rebellions in other parts of the archipelago.

Concerned about their position in a unitary state, people from the southern Moluccas established the Republic of South Maluku in 1950, a political entity that was immediately crushed by the Indonesian Republican Army. The ensuing demobilisation of Moluccan soldiers triggered an exodus of more than 12,000 Moluccans to the Netherlands in 1951:

Both the Dutch government and the immigrants themselves expected a return to the Moluccas as soon as the political situation in that region had stabilized, and their stay was thought to be only a short one. As a result, no measures were taken to integrate the Moluccans into Dutch society. They were housed in camps, often former concentration camps from WWII, and were not issued with work permits. However, the political situation in the Moluccas did not stabilize and for years, the Moluccan communities remained isolated and largely unemployed within the Netherlands, and feelings of frustration and deprivation mounted.<sup>[5]</sup>

After languishing in former Nazi *Durchgangslager* (transit camps) and temporary shelters for over 25 years, unable to work and depending on financial support from the Dutch government, the isolation and exclusion of the Moluccan diaspora in the Netherlands became even more pronounced after some of its members carried out a series of high-profile hijackings with the aim of drawing attention to the situation of the Moluccan community.



MOLUCCANS AT A 'RECEPTION CAMP' PROTESTING THEIR TREATMENT BY DUTCH AUTHORITIES, 1956 (PHOTO: GUIDO T'SAS ON FLICKR, CREATIVE COMMONS)

In December 1975, a group calling itself the Free South Moluccan Youth hijacked a train near the village of Wijster, taking over 50 people hostage. Two days later, a second group of South Moluccans seized control of the Indonesian consulate, taking another 41 hostages. The groups demanded negotiations between the Dutch government and president Suharto about the establishment of a Republic of South Maluku, which, in fact, the Netherlands had promised to the Moluccans in 1951. During the ensuing 12-day standoff with the police, three hostages were killed in the train near Wijster. Eventually, all hostage takers surrendered.

Two years later, in May 1977, another train was hijacked near the village of de Punt. This time, a group of nine South Moluccans took 50 hostages. The same day, four hostage takers took control of a primary school in the nearby village of Bovensmilde. As before, the group asked for the establishment of a Republic of South Maluku, and for diplomatic relations between the Netherlands and Indonesia to be severed. Six hostage takers and two hostages were killed before the police gained control over the train 20 days later.

While both hijackings generated worldwide attention, they neither led to the creation of a Republic of South Maluku nor did they improve the standing of the Moluccan diaspora in the Netherlands.<sup>[6]</sup> While the Moluccan diaspora has become more assimilated since the 1970s, the community continues to have a “much lower socio-economic position than the native Dutch” and continues to face various disadvantages in the labour market.<sup>[7]</sup>



HIJACKER WITH RMS FLAG, DE PUNT, 1977 (PHOTO: NATIONAAL ARCHIEF)

## Bigots on bikes

Poorly integrated into Dutch society and struggling to find work in the formal economy, disgruntled youths from the Moluccan diaspora also find it difficult to access the informal economy due to a combination of outlaw motorcycle clubs’

dominating large swathes of the country's criminal underworld and the racism permeating the culture of many traditional outlaw motorcycle clubs. The Hell's Angels, for instance, provide an important hub for the drug trade in the Netherlands.<sup>[8]</sup> At the same time, despite the blue-collar backgrounds of most Hell's Angels, membership has always been defined in terms of race, not class.

As gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson wrote in his seminal account of the rise of the Hell's Angels in American counterculture:

Anybody who has ever seen the Angels on a run will agree that rural Californians are likely to reject the spectacle as not right for their way of living. It is a human zoo on wheels. An outlaw whose normal, day-to-day appearance is enough to disrupt traffic will appear on a run with his beard dyed green or bright red, his eyes hidden behind orange goggles, and a brass ring in his nose. Others wear capes and Apache headbands, or oversize sunglasses and peaked Prussian helmets. Earrings, *Wehrmacht* headgear and German Iron Crosses are virtually part of the uniform—like the grease-caked Levis, the sleeveless vests and all those fine tattoos: 'Mother', 'Dolly', 'Hitler', 'Jack the Ripper', swastikas, daggers, skulls, 'LSD', 'Love', 'Rape' and the inevitable Hell's Angel's insignia.<sup>[9]</sup>

Sonny (aka Ralph Hubert Barger), a founding member of the Hell's Angels, explained to Thompson that all this should be seen as "a kind of joke—you know, like a giant masquerade",<sup>[10]</sup> while on another occasion Sonny informed Thompson that "This stuff [the Nazi insignia and headgear]—that's just to shock people."<sup>[11]</sup>

However, from their inception, the Hell's Angels have dabbled in racism and adhered to the same kind of "retrograde patriotism that motivates the John Birch Society, the Ku Klux Klan, and the American Nazi Party."<sup>[12]</sup>

While a Californian police inspector noted in 1966: "No, I wouldn't call them 'racists'. Not really. Maybe deep down they are. There ain't no Negro Angels, you notice. But the Angels ain't *for* anybody, and that makes them anti-Negro and just about anything else,"<sup>[13]</sup> in fact, the official bylaws of the Hell's Angels in the USA state: "No Niggers in the club." The bylaws of the Canadian Hell's Angels, slightly

less offensive (they are *Canadian* Hell's Angels after all) read: "No members of African descent."<sup>[14]</sup>

The other traditional outlaw motorcycle clubs, namely the Bandidos, the Outlaws, the Pagans and the Sons of Silence, have similar membership restrictions in place.<sup>[15]</sup>

Many of the local chapters of these "Big Five" outlaw motorcycle clubs have also close links to white supremacist groups. For instance, the US Department of Justice reported in 1991 that the Pagans had "provided the Covenant, Sword, and Arm of the Lord [CSA] with training in booby-trap devices and survival techniques in return for weapons and ammunition."<sup>[16]</sup> The CSA was a far-right terror organisation of fundamentalist Christians and "preppers" that was mainly active in the Southern United States in the 1970s and 1980s but continues to inspire supremacist groups until present.

The same report showed that "[t]he Hells Angels [sic] in New York have sponsored rallies for their local Skinheads and neo Nazis," while one-percenter clubs in North Carolina were collaborating with the Southern White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in trafficking weapons. Outlaw motorcycle clubs also provided security for the New Dixie Rights of the KKK in Florida.<sup>[17]</sup> Finally, the Sons of Silence, the dominant outlaw motorcycle club in the Midwest of the United States—which derives much of its income from running shake-n-bake methamphetamine production sites and the sales of "Nazi dope"<sup>[18]</sup>—has recently been labelled an "Aryan Nation organization."<sup>[19]</sup>

## **The colours of the colourblind**

Immigrant communities, including Moluccan youth, are acutely aware of the racism permeating the culture of traditional outlaw motorcycle clubs. Mima, one of the founding members of Satudarah, for instance, said: "In the past, motorcycle clubs already existed. But they were all White people with long beards and long hair. We saw that too and at a certain point we thought: We also want to found a motorcycle club but a Moluccan club. That's how we started off."<sup>[20]</sup>

Satudarah, meaning "One Blood" in Indonesian, is decisively colourblind. The club's logo shows two American Indian faces, one in black, the other in white,

symbolising Satudarah's multicultural outlook. The bottom rocker usually says "Maluku," while one of the club's patches is blue, white, green and red, the colours of the Republic of South Maluku that never was.

Arguably, it is precisely this multicultural image that has allowed Satudarah to expand rapidly across the Netherlands, Europe and, more recently, Asia and Australia. The thread running through all of Satudarah's recruitment efforts is a focus on young men from immigrant communities who are not only poorly integrated into society but who are also excluded from established outlaw motorcycle clubs due to their race. For instance, in the Netherlands, Satudarah has not only been popular among Moluccan youth but also among the Traveller community's criminal underbelly, from which the club recruited "fully fledged members almost without a trial period."<sup>[21]</sup> A 2016 report noted that in the Netherlands "some 20% of [Satudarah] members do not even have a licence to drive a motorcycle."<sup>[22]</sup>



While most Satudarah members in the Netherlands are either Moluccan or Travellers, Turks constitute the majority of Satudarah members in Germany after the biker club Brotherhood Clown Town, under the leadership of Yildiray Kaymaz aka Ali Osman and his deputy Baris Tepe aka Vice Balyoz (meaning "sledgehammer" in Turkish), joined Satudarah in 2012.<sup>[23]</sup> Likewise, in Denmark, Satudarah teamed up with the Værebros Hårde Kerne (VKH),<sup>[24]</sup> a street gang that formed in Værebroparken, a suburb of the Danish capital with an above-average percentage of immigrants. Many youths from Værebroparken have little economic prospects or possibilities for upward social mobility due to their poor integration into broader society. In Australia too, Satudarah tried to recruit members by pointing out that it was the country's "first truley [sic] multicultural motorcycle club."<sup>[25]</sup> Australian authorities reportedly considered "Pacific Islander and Aboriginal communities between Brisbane and the Gold Coast [to be] most at risk of recruitment by new "multicultural gangs."<sup>[26]</sup> Satudarah is reportedly also popular among New Zealander's of Maori descent living in Australia, as well as Russian and Eastern European immigrants.<sup>[27]</sup>

The story of Satudarah's rapid global expansion comes full circle in Indonesia, where I came across the group for the first time in 2012. Satudarah seems to recruit many of its members from the Moluccan community in Jakarta, particularly from the Kei clan. At the time of writing, Marsyel Ririhena, known to many Indonesians as a Merpati Putih *pencak silat* teacher and a mixed martial arts champion,<sup>[28]</sup> had established himself as the group's leader.

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When I spent a day with Satudarah members in South Jakarta in September 2017, they insisted that they were a simple motorbike club whose members would only get agitated if they saw a non-member wearing a Satudarah T-shirt. "If we catch someone, we will make him take off the T-shirt right there on the street," Marsyel Ririhena's cousin, an Ambonese man going by the name of Roger, told me.

Riding motorbikes and showing colours may not be the club's only *raison d'être*, however. Ambonese have often struggled to find employment in Indonesia's formal economy and have therefore "carved out a niche in the world of debt collection."<sup>[29]</sup> Satudarah also seems to have connections to the Indonesian security apparatus. After cruising around South Jakarta with Roger and his friends (in a Toyota Kijang, to my disappointment), I suddenly found myself in the mansion of the late general

Banurasman, who headed the Indonesian national police force between 1993 and 1996. There, I was presented with the opportunity to buy antiques Banurasman had amassed throughout his career, and which spread over four floors, "for only US\$400,000!"

### **Expensive expansion**

The rapid growth of Satudarah across the globe has seen setbacks and created new challenges. Clashes with traditional outlaw motorcycle clubs, government bans and infiltration by law enforcement personnel are the most prominent. Fights, shoot-outs, arson attacks and bombings between members of Satudarah and traditional clubs such as the Hell's Angels have created headlines from France to Sweden. The media attention has been followed by dozens of arrests. In the Netherlands, the police have placed several Satudarah leaders on the country's

most wanted list. In Germany, leading members of the group have been arrested and been given substantive prison sentences.

In addition, in 2017, the Dutch government has mulled over whether or not to ban the club,<sup>[30]</sup> while German authorities banned Satudarah throughout the country and closed down the clubhouses of affiliated organisations such as MC Tigatanah and MC Nusa Ina in 2015. Likewise, Australian police personnel shut down a Satudarah chapter in Sydney in 2016.



SATUDARAH MEMBERS IN THE NETHERLANDS, 2014 PHOTO: JACOB HAHURY ON FLICKR, CREATIVE COMMONS)

Yet turf wars with rival motorcycle gangs are simply an indication that the expansion of Satudarah has upset established power equilibria in local drug- and sex-industries. These public clashes are therefore likely to subside in the future. Likewise, government bans seem to have done little to dispel the organisation. In Australia, for instance, Satudarah made a comeback in Sydney in late 2017, only a year after law enforcement had closed down the local chapter.<sup>[31]</sup>

The main problem for Satudarah it seems then is the breakdown of internal cohesion, brought about by the club's rapid expansion in past years. Satudarah initially relied on family and ethnic networks to recruit members. This provided the

group with an effective means to prevent law enforcement personnel from infiltrating the organisation while also reducing the risk of defection.

These safeguards have crumbled as a result of the club's expansion across the globe. Ali Osman, the aforementioned leader of the Brotherhood Clown Town motorcycle club that formed the first Satudarah chapter in Germany in 2012, entered a plea deal with German authorities in 2014. In return for a reduced sentence and a place in the witness protection program, he informed on other Satudarah members, including several leaders of the motorcycle club in the Netherlands. Olla, a Moluccan Satudarah leader who received a jail sentence for arms trafficking based on Ali Osman's testimony had this to say:

That bloody Ali, the fucking Moroccan, the son of a bitch. He said whatever he could to get a reduced sentence. In Germany, it's Article 31. If you snitch, you get a reduced sentence. Ali would have gotten 20 years. As he is in the witness programme, he got 6.5 years. And he is attending a drugs programme so it got halved to 3.5 years. Next year he is free again. That's the problem abroad, you don't know them. If you don't know someone here [in the Netherlands] you ask a neighbour or a friend...If you want to join, someone must vouch for you. But not in Germany.<sup>[32]</sup>

To add insult to injury, it became clear during the Osman trial that a leading Satudarah member, Christian Jahn, had been an undercover policeman.

Despite these challenges, however, Satudarah is likely to continue its global expansion. After all, the club's appeal is an indication of the failed integration policies in many affluent countries around the world. As long as the structural and economic conditions that facilitated the rise of Satudarah continue to exist, the club will be able to recruit new members from desperate diasporas.

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- [13] *Ibid.*, 290
- [14] Thomas Barker. 2014. *Biker Gangs and Transnational Organized Crime* (Waltham: Anderson Publishing), 126.
- [15] *Ibid.*, 127.
- [16] US Department of Justice. 1991. *Outlaw Motorcycle Groups: Overview* (Arlington: Virginia), 11.
- [17] *Ibid.*, 11.
- [18] Methamphetamine is known as "Nazi dope" in the United States not because much of it is produced by white supremacist groups but rather because Adolf Hitler encouraged the production of methamphetamine and its distribution to soldiers of the Wehrmacht. It was usually distributed in pill form under the name of "Pervitin" but known at the frontline as "Pilot's Salt" or "Tank Chocolate." Heinrich Böll, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1972, was a Pervitin addict when fighting at the frontlines during the Second World War.
- For an overview of the close relationship between drugs and warfare, see Mike Jay's account "Don't fight sober," in the *London Review of Books* (Vol. 39, No. 1, January 2017) The article is available at <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v39/n01/mike-jay/dont-fight-sober>
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