

# Bahder Djohan's Struggle: The Doctor's Contribution to National Independence, Language, Emancipation, Social Affairs, and Education

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**Abstract:** Within the domain of postcolonial nation-building and educational reform in countries of the Global South, the role of local intellectuals is frequently marginalised in international discourse. This article examines the figure of Bahder Djohan (1902–1981), an important yet relatively obscure figure in the context of modern Indonesian history. During his tenure as Minister of Education and Culture in the early days of independence, Djohan proposed a vision of education that integrated Minangkabau traditions, Islamic values, and the legacy of colonial education. The approach adopted by the aforementioned individual was such that education was regarded as a means of fostering moral character and facilitating social mobility, without the concomitant abandonment of local cultural roots. Utilising a qualitative approach, this article employs character study and historiography methods to provide a reconstruction of Djohan's biography. Furthermore, it conducts an analysis of his contributions to youth activism, women's emancipation, and post-independence institutional reform. Djohan eschewed imported ideological frameworks, instead developing his thinking through practical involvement in health development, gender equality, and national education. Djohan demonstrated equality of values with global figures such as Gandhi, Freire, and Tagore, especially in his struggle against colonial discrimination and his advocacy for social justice and cultural preservation. Nevertheless, his legacy remains conspicuously absent from both national curricula and international studies. The present article situates Djohan within the global discourse on postcolonial reform, thereby emphasising the importance of recognising local actors as key agents of change and agents of universal values in the history of global ideas.

**Abstrak:** Dalam konteks pembangunan bangsa pasca kolonial dan reformasi pendidikan di negara-negara Global Selatan, peran intelektual lokal kerap terpinggirkan dalam wacana internasional. Artikel ini mengangkat sosok Bahder Djohan (1902–1981), tokoh penting namun kurang dikenal dalam sejarah Indonesia modern. Sebagai Menteri Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan pada masa awal kemerdekaan, Djohan menawarkan visi pendidikan yang menyatukan tradisi Minangkabau, nilai-nilai Islam, dan warisan pendidikan kolonial. Pendekatannya menjadikan pendidikan sebagai sarana pembentukan karakter moral dan mobilitas sosial, tanpa melepaskan akar budaya lokal. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi karakter dan historiografi, artikel ini merekonstruksi biografi Djohan serta menganalisis kontribusinya dalam aktivisme pemuda, emansipasi perempuan, dan reformasi kelembagaan pascakemerdekaan. Djohan menolak kerangka ideologis impor, dan justru membangun pemikirannya melalui keterlibatan praktis dalam pengembangan kesehatan, kesetaraan gender, dan pendidikan nasional. Djohan menunjukkan kesetaraan nilai dengan tokoh global seperti Gandhi, Freire, dan Tagore, terutama dalam perjuangannya melawan diskriminasi kolonial dan advokasinya terhadap keadilan sosial serta pelestarian budaya. Namun, warisannya masih absen dalam kurikulum nasional dan kajian internasional. Dengan menempatkan Djohan dalam diskursus global tentang reformasi pascakolonial, artikel ini menegaskan pentingnya merekognisi aktor lokal sebagai pelaku utama perubahan dan agen nilai universal dalam sejarah ide-ide global.



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## INTRODUCTION

In the broader context of postcolonial nation-building, educational reform, and social emancipation, the role of local intellectuals and political actors from the Global South is increasingly recognised as central to the shaping of modern states. Yet, many of these figures remain marginal in international scholarship, particularly those from Southeast Asia. This article brings to light the life and legacy of Bahder Djohan (1902–1981), a key but underrecognized Indonesian statesman, intellectual, and reformer whose contributions as Minister of Education and Culture during the early years of independence offer significant insights into the indigenous reform agenda in a postcolonial state.

While many global narratives tend to focus on figures like Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, Rabindranath Tagore in India, or Paulo Freire in Latin America, who each proposed education as a tool for liberation and cultural reawakening, Bahder Djohan's approach reflects a distinctive synthesis of Minangkabau cultural traditions, Islamic values, and Western colonial education. His vision of national development emphasised the transformation of education into a vehicle for both moral character-building and social mobility, while remaining deeply rooted in local wisdom and community-oriented values.

Djohan's unique trajectory, as a Minangkabau-born doctor, youth movement activist, minister, and university chancellor, mirrors the hybrid struggles of a society emerging from colonial rule and grappling with the challenges of modernity. Unlike many of his contemporaries who relied on imported ideological frameworks, Djohan developed his thought through practical engagement: promoting gender emancipation within local *adat* (customary law) constraints, contributing to grassroots health infrastructure, and reforming Indonesia's national education system without abandoning its cultural anchors.

This article positions Djohan as a comparative figure in global discourses on postcolonial leadership and reform, while addressing the notable absence of his legacy in both national curricula and international historiography. Although hailed as a national hero, Djohan's contributions are rarely taught in Indonesian classrooms. This gap reflects a broader trend in the selective remembrance of history shaped by state educational policies (Pramono et al., 2024). As Fatimah and Lionar (2022) suggest, West Sumatra has long been regarded as the intellectual granary of Indonesia, home to thinkers and revolutionaries like Mohammad Hatta and Tan Malaka, but Bahder Djohan's intellectual contributions remain largely overshadowed. Studying historical figures can help understand

their educational value and character for future generations (Lionar & Fithriah, 2023).

This study not only reconstructs Bahder Djohan's biography but also critically analyses his ideological positioning within the broader movements of youth activism, women's rights advocacy, and post-independence institutional reform. Through this exploration, the article seeks to expand the international scholarly conversation on indigenous reformers, arguing that Djohan's integrative approach provides a contextually grounded, morally driven alternative to dominant Western-centric paradigms of postcolonial development. In doing so, it reclaims a space for Southeast Asian agency in the global history of ideas.

## METHOD

The present research employs a qualitative approach, combining a descriptive-analytical method with a character study approach. The present approach was selected because of its capacity to effectively explore and elucidate the intricacies inherent in Bahder Djohan's role in the annals of education and Indonesia's national endeavour. This is achieved by emphasising his personal integrity, leadership attributes, societal contributions, and the socio-historical milieu that moulded and influenced him (Harahap, 2006, pp. 9-10; Caine, 2009, p. 4).

The rationale for adopting a character study approach is rooted in its capacity to analyse historical figures as a holistic entity, encompassing their role as individuals and as social actors within the context of their era. This approach emphasises four main aspects that are relevant in writing character histories: The following factors must be considered when analysing a character in a literary work: 1) the personality and character of the individual, 2) the social forces that support or influence, 3) the historical context in which the character plays a role, and 4) the success and development of the character over a period of time (McAdams, 1988; Kuntowijoyo, 2003, p. 178).

The character studies approach has been extensively utilised in global historiography to comprehend the role of prominent figures such as Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, and others. This method is employed to demonstrate that history is not merely the record of events, but also a means of examining the values embodied by the figures involved and how these values are transmitted or influence society across generations. In an international context, this approach enriches historiography with narratives rooted in human values, moral exemplars and transformative leadership.

The present study focuses on the biography of Bahder Djohan, a freedom fighter from West Sumatra

who later became Minister of Education and Culture. The present study employs a character study approach to assess the integrity and contributions of the subject in question. The assessment is based on the following dimensions: knowledge, leadership strategies, morality, and the relevance of his thoughts in the Indonesian context and global discourse.

The present research employs the historical research method formulated by Gottschalk (1986, p. 35), which consists of four stages: 1) The heuristics (i.e. the source collection) were conducted through a literature study. The primary sources were obtained from newspapers from the Dutch East Indies colonial period and the early Indonesian independence period, which are available at KITLV Leiden. In addition, the sources were complemented by literature pertaining to Bahder Djohan, Jong Sumatranen Bond, and the Youth Pledge; 2) The authenticity and relevance of the sources were subjected to scrutiny in order to ascertain their ability to provide a comprehensive explanation of Bahder Djohan's struggles and reflection; 3) Interpretation was conducted throughout the research process, with a focus on analysing Djohan's leadership qualities, struggle strategies, achievements, contributions, and challenges; 4) Historiography is defined as the presentation of results in the form of in-depth and contextualised historical scientific writing. It is anticipated that this approach will not only contribute to the study of national history but also enhance international historiography discourse through the introduction of Indonesian figures whose values are comparable to other global figures.

## THE PERIOD OF THE INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLE

### **Bahder Djohan in the Context of the Global Anti-Colonial Movement and Social Emancipation**

Bahder Djohan demonstrated his combative spirit at the earliest stage of his career, during his time at MULO, where, in collaboration with Mohammad Hatta and his colleagues, he was resolute in his determination to instruct religious studies to school children in Padang. Sarekat Usaha endorsed this initiative through its secretary, Taher Marah Sutan, who persistently advocated to local officials that religious studies were not detrimental to the government, irrespective of the religious affiliation of the students. Following eight years of struggle, in mid-1918, the government finally granted permission for MULO students in Padang to receive religious instruction for one hour per week, according to their respective religions and outside the school's responsibility. Muslim students were taught by Haji Abdullah Ahmad, while Christian and Catholic students were taught by teachers from their



**Figure 1.** Prof. Dr. Bahder Djohan

respective churches (Safwan, 1973; 1985, p. 10). This experience fostered an active role for Bahder and his colleagues within Sarekat Usaha, shaping him as an idealist with a concern for societal issues and an entrepreneurial spirit.

### **Bahder Djohan Struggle for Indonesia (Anti-Colonial Movement and Social Emancipation)**

During his youth, Bahder Djohan was involved in the Jong Sumatranen Bond (JSB) organisation, serving as Secretary and then Treasurer of the Great Guide (*Overzicht van de Inlandsche en Maleisisch-Chineesche pers*, 1921, p. 404). He encountered difficulties in allocating sufficient time to both his academic studies and his involvement with the organisation. At JSB, Bahder and his colleagues engaged in discourse on social and cultural issues, with a particular focus on the disparities between Western and Eastern cultures, and the status of the Malay language in Asia and the Dutch East Indies. In collaboration with Mohammad Hatta, he endeavoured to amalgamate various youth organisations, including Jong Java, Jong Ambon and Jong Minahasa, into a unified entity known as Jong Indie. However, this endeavour proved unsuccessful due to the prevailing strong tribal affiliations (Safwan, 1985, p. 42).

Bahder Djohan was a proponent of linguistic unity, particularly in the context of creating the Indo-

nesian national language. He acknowledged the historical role of the Malay language in uniting ethnic groups across the archipelago through trade. In this regard, he and Hatta established a Malay-language magazine entitled *Malaya*, which addressed a range of subjects, including the discord between the older and younger Minangkabau generations (Safwan, 1985, pp. 42-43).

One of the issues criticised was the Koto Gadang customary ban on women marrying men from outside the region, even fellow Minangkabau. Bahder expressed significant opposition to the regulation, notably when he observed that educated young people were in favour of it. He and JSB provided a defence for a Koto Gadang girl who had married a Javanese man, despite facing pressure from the community and the educated people of Koto Gadang. Bahder's position is that Adat must evolve in accordance with the prevailing circumstances. This conflict temporarily disrupted the JSB community but subsided once the issue was resolved (Hatta, 1978, p. 90). Bahder and Hatta also championed the emancipation of Minangkabau women, opposing conservative views expressed in media such as *Oetosan Melajoe* and *Soenting Melajoe*. These publications accused the younger generation of forgetting adat and being influenced by Western culture (Overzicht van de Inlandsche en Maleisisch-Chineesche pers, 1918).

In 1919, Bahder Djohan accepted an offer to continue his education at STOVIA and relocated to Java. Despite having relinquished his position within the core management of Jong Sumatranen Bond (JSB), he maintained his involvement as a member (Safwan, 1985, pp. 12-13). At STOVIA, he rapidly established social connections and advocated for youth participation in organisations such as Jong Java and JSB (Hadisutjipto, 1973, p. 27). Despite maintaining a strong focus on his medical studies, he did not relinquish his involvement in organisational endeavours, notably assuming a leadership role at JSB in Jakarta.

In June 1919, Djohan participated in the First Congress of the JSB, where he was elected to the position of secretary. He served alongside Amir, who was chairman, and Mohammad Hatta, who was treasurer (Hatta, 1978, p. 78; Safwan, 1985, p. 14). He proactively presented materials at the congress, including 'Tambo Orang Minangkabau' and 'Intercourse Poestaka Melajoe' in December 1921. Djohan and his colleagues advocated incorporating Malay into every youth congregation to foster unity (Overzicht van de Inlandsche en Maleisisch-Chineesche pers, 1921, p. 442).

His relationship with Mohammad Hatta

strengthened, and they engaged in frequent discussions on topics such as the nation, youth organisations, and the advancement of JSB. Djohan, who had studied medicine, developed an interest in cultural issues, while Hatta, who had studied economics, concentrated more on politics, including after he went to the Netherlands in 1921 (Safwan, 1985, pp. 15-16).

Bahder Djohan played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Youth Congress. In early 1925, he and other youth leaders, including those from the Jong Sumatranen Bond (JSB) that he led, encouraged national unity. The Jakarta-based JSB gradually relinquished its regional identity, instead promoting a sense of national unity. Notable figures such as Mohammad Hatta subsequently assumed leadership roles within the Indonesian Association (PI) in the Netherlands, while Mohammad Yamin became involved in the organisation of the Indonesian Student Association (PPPI) (Kutoyo & Kartadarmadja, 1970, p. 25).

On 15 November 1925, Bahder attended a meeting known as the forerunner of the First Youth Congress, which took place from 29 April to 2 May 1926 in Jakarta. He served as Deputy Chairman of the Committee, collaborating with Tabrani (Chairman), Soemarto (Secretary), and other youth leaders. The congress was attended by various youth organisations, including Jong Java, Jong Sumatranen Bond, Jong Ambon, Sekar Rukun, Jong Islamieten Bond, Stedeerende Minahasaers, Jong Bataks Bond, and Theosophical Youth (Pemuda Kaum Theosofi), with the aim of discussing the formation of a joint national organisation, "Indonesia Moeda" (Overzicht van de Inlandsche en Maleisisch-Chineesche pers, 1926, p. 132; Safwan, 1973, p. 23).

Bahder presented a speech at the congress entitled *De Positie Van De Vrouw in De Indonesische Samenleving* (The Position of Women in Indonesian Society) (Djohan, 1975, p. 23), the purpose of which was to highlight the issue of gender equality. His prior experience as the head of JSB Padang since 1918 served to reinforce his commitment to the advancement of women's rights. This commitment is evidenced by his support for the marriage of a Minang girl to a Javanese man, despite her family's opposition, and his advocacy for the government to provide women with access to scientific education (Djohan, 1974, p. 172).

The views expressed by Bahder Djohan on the subject of polygamy attracted significant attention from the Dutch East Indies government and Minangkabau society, comprising both the older and younger generations. Drawing upon his extensive field observations, Djohan contended that polygamy frequently resulted in injustices, including the ease with

which men could divorce their spouses and the subsequent abandonment of children without adequate support. He proposed that Muslim communities and the government consider abolishing the practice of polygamy (Java-post; weekblad van Nederlandsch-IndiëJava-post; jrg 22, 1924, p. 520). Siti Zairi, his wife, participated in the struggle for women's rights by joining the Batavia branch of the Vereeniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht, an organisation dedicated to the empowerment and rights of women in the Dutch East Indies (Maandblad van de Vereeniging voor vrouwenrechten in Nederlandsch-Indië; jrg 6, 1932).

Bahder and the youth's endeavours reached a crescendo with the Second Youth Congress, which resulted in the formulation of the Youth Pledge. This pledge served as a solemn declaration of their commitment to the principles of national unity. Bahder, along with Hatta and Dr Nazhier, established the Padang branch of Indonesia Moeda on 20 May 1930. This action signified the organisation's commitment to non-political status and the promotion of nationalistic sentiment, independent of any political affiliations (Overzicht van de Inlandsche en Maleisisch-Chineesche pers, 1930, p. 365).

### **Bahder Djohan Struggle for Indonesia (as a Doctor)**

Dr Bahder Djohan studied at STOVIA for about eight years and graduated as a doctor on 12 November 1927 with an Indish Arts degree (later became Indonesische Arts after the 1928 Youth Pledge). After becoming a doctor, he devoted himself to the health sector until the end of the Japanese occupation (Safwan, 1985, p. 3). He was a Dutch East Indies medical professional and health researcher with various important positions.

In addition to his medical work, Bahder Djohan was an active proponent of national equality and independence. He and other indigenous doctors rejected salary discrimination between indigenous and Dutch doctors and encouraged the use of Indonesian as a scientific language. It was in 1939 that the fruits of his labour were first evident, with the commencement of the utilisation of Indonesian in national medical meetings (Safwan, 1985, pp. 17-19).

However, pursuing his doctoral aspirations was hindered by the expulsion of the Dutch by the Japanese. The Japanese occupation had a detrimental effect on the quality of education. However, in 1943, the medical school reopened, and Bahder Djohan assumed the roles of lecturer and assistant professor of hot soil disease. Nevertheless, he was detained by the Japanese authorities on suspicion of collaborating with indigenous medical practitioners (Safwan, 1985, pp. 20-21).

During the period of Dutch occupation, the use of the Indonesian language underwent accelerated development, a phenomenon that can be attributed, at least in part, to the prohibition of Dutch language use. In response to the challenges posed by the need to preserve and promote the integrity of the Indonesian language, the Indonesian Language Development Commission was established in 1943. In the medical sector, the Indonesian Medical Language Development Committee was established, with Dr Bahder Djohan assuming the position of vice chairman. He is recognised for his significant contribution to the Indonesian language, having donated more than 3,000 medical terms to the lexicon (Ibrahim, 1975, p. 72).

The Japanese occupation also brought great tragedy. In 1944, approximately 1,000 romusha perished as a result of vaccines that had been contaminated with tetanus toxin. Consequently, Achmad Muchtar was compelled to confess and was subsequently sentenced to death, while several other medical professionals perished as a consequence of torture. Bahder Djohan was assigned to investigate the case and asserted that the blame lay with the Japanese doctors' erroneous experiments. However, the Japanese attributed the blame to the indigenous doctors instead (Hanafiah, 1976, pp. 11-12). He expressed regret at Sukarno's adoption of a posture influenced by Japanese propaganda, which resulted in the approval of Muchtar's death sentence (Safwan, 1985, pp. 24-26). Dr Bahder Djohan is remembered as a medical figure who persistently fought for justice, independence, and the development of the Indonesian language in the scientific realm, as well as a witness to the atrocities of the Japanese occupation.

### **Bahder Djohan in the Context of the Global Anti-Colonial Movement and Social Emancipation**

Bahder Djohan's engagement with issues of educational access, medical inequality, and women's rights should not be seen in isolation. His activism must be understood within the broader context of global anti-colonial resistance and emergent feminist movements of the early 20th century.

During his early years at MULO and later STOVIA, Djohan was already showing awareness of the structural inequalities embedded in the colonial education and health systems, particularly in how indigenous students and professionals were treated. The effort to secure religious education for students of all faiths, eventually granted in 1918 after eight years of advocacy, mirrored broader anticolonial demands for cultural autonomy. This is comparable to educational campaigns led by Indian nationalists such as Mahatma Gandhi and Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who chal-

lenged British control over the educational content and language of instruction in India. Similarly, Egyptian intellectuals like Taha Hussein emphasized the right to modern, inclusive education that honored local traditions and resisted colonial imposition.

Djohan's advocacy for using the Malay language in publications and organizational discourse was deeply intertwined with the global anticolonial linguistic decolonisation. His editorial involvement with *Malaya* magazine, and support for using Malay (later Indonesian) as a unifying language for diverse ethnic groups, reflected a broader rejection of the Dutch language as a marker of elite, colonial knowledge. This linguistic activism parallels the rise of Swadeshi movements in India and negritude in Francophone Africa, where native languages and cultural expressions were reclaimed as resistance tools.

His later work as a doctor highlighted the racialized hierarchies of the colonial medical system. Djohan's protest against wage inequality between Dutch and indigenous doctors aligned with broader struggles by colonized professionals elsewhere. For instance, in British West Africa, Dr. J.E. Casely Hayford advocated for African control over health and education institutions, while in India, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy not only served as a physician but also fought for medical education reform and equality for native doctors under the British Raj.

Djohan's belief in the use of the Indonesian language in medical discourse, culminating in his leadership in developing Indonesian medical terminology, echoes parallel linguistic nationalist projects in other colonized societies. For example, in Vietnam, Phan Bội Châu and Phan Châu Trinh supported the transformation of education through the modernization and vernacularization of knowledge.

Regarding gender equality, Djohan's stance on women's rights, particularly his public critique of polygamy and advocacy for girls' education, places him within the global currents of early feminist reform movements in colonized nations. His actions resonate with figures such as Huda Sha'arawi in Egypt, who founded the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923, or Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain in Bengal, who established schools for Muslim girls and wrote against oppressive gender norms. Like these reformers, Djohan challenged both colonial structures and conservative elements within his own society, positioning women as central to national progress.

The conflict with Minangkabau elders over cross-ethnic marriage restrictions and the active support Djohan gave to young women's autonomy highlighted his progressive stance on interpersonal freedoms and gender emancipation, a position that was

not merely local but shared by a generation of reformers across colonized Asia and Africa.

When Djohan spoke at the First Youth Congress in 1926 on "*The Position of Women in Indonesian Society*", he was contributing to a regional awakening that questioned the intersection of patriarchy and colonialism. These mirrored discourses happening concurrently in India with Sarojini Naidu and in the Philippines with Pura Villanueva-Kalaw, who campaigned for women's voting rights and education access as part of broader nationalist demands.

Through this comparative lens, Bahder Djohan's activism is not merely a reflection of local dissent but a node in the global matrix of anti-colonial and feminist resistance. His life and work exemplify how indigenous elites in colonized nations attempted to reclaim professional, cultural, and political agency while simultaneously redefining modernity on their own terms. In this way, Djohan should be read not only as an Indonesian nationalist, but also as part of a larger global struggle against imperial hierarchies and social injustice.

## POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

### Educational Reforms and Global Educational Trends in the 1950s

After Indonesia's independence, Dr. Bahder Djohan was appointed as Chairman of the Association for the Advancement of Science and Culture in Jakarta (October 1949) (Indonesische documentatie dienst van ANP-Aneta, 1950, p. 287), and later served as Minister of Education and Culture in the Natsir (1950–1951) and Wilopo (1952–1953) Cabinets. His tenure marked a pivotal effort in rebuilding and reorienting Indonesia's education system after colonial rule. Djohan's reform agenda not only reflected the urgent needs of a newly independent nation but also resonated with prevailing global educational trends of the 1950s—such as the promotion of literacy, the cultural affirmation of national identity, and the strategic use of education as a tool to counter ideological threats like atheism and communism.

### Literacy and Scouting as Character-Building Tools

Until 1947, there was a low level of public awareness, interest, and appreciation for the teaching profession. In that year, only 600 new teachers were appointed, and they were preparing for final exams at various training schools. The younger generation's lack of interest in becoming teachers is partly due to their preference for continuing their education at university to obtain a master's or doctoral degree. A new perspective suggests selecting teachers based on the principle of 'placing the right person in the right place' rather

than questioning their titles. To this end, a committee on reading materials for the public was formed by several scholars, including Prof. Barwono, Dr. Bahder Djohan, M. Kocsrin, Sookardi, and Sadarijoon, under the leadership of the Department of National Education. The aim is to enhance people's interest in and reading ability. Bahder Djohan, who had previous scouting experience during his youth (*Overzicht van de Inlandsche en Maleisisch-Chineesche pers*, 1929, p. 413), proposed along with other academics to include Scouting under the Ministry of Education (*Indische documentatie dienst van ANP-Aneta*, 1947, p. 118). In September 1951, thirteen Scout organizations formed a federated body, Ipindo, to meet national and international needs. The Indonesian Pandu Association (Ipindo) has elected Mr. Soemardjo as its main commissioner, with Dr. Djohan, an experienced Scout, serving as honorary President (Wilson, 1959, p. 254).

In response to low literacy rates and a lack of public interest in the teaching profession, Djohan initiated programs to cultivate a reading culture. He supported the establishment of a reading materials committee composed of academics and educators, aiming to make reading more accessible and attractive to the general population. This initiative aligned with UNESCO's global literacy campaigns in the early 1950s, emphasising education as a foundation for national development and global peace.

Djohan also proposed the inclusion of Scouting under the Ministry of Education, recognizing its potential in character development and national integration. This move mirrored international trends where Scouting was promoted as a moral and civic education tool in newly decolonized countries, reflecting both Western and local values. In 1951, the unification of thirteen Scout organizations into "Ipindo" underlined Indonesia's commitment to fostering youth leadership and civic responsibility.

### State-Private Sector Collaboration

Bahder Djohan suggests that the government collaborate with the private sector to improve the quality of education, as the education sector is still lagging behind in post-independence development. Bahder Djohan suggests that the government collaborate with the private sector to improve the quality of education, as the education sector is still lagging behind in post-independence development. Bahder Djohan suggests that the government collaborate with the private sector to improve the quality of education, as the education sector is still lagging behind in post-independence development. This recommendation is based on the private sector's contribution to economic development. Bahder Djohan emphasised the im-

portance of training teachers in Indonesia as soon as possible. There is a shortage of skilled Indonesian workers capable of occupying higher positions in the fields of trade and industry. Bahder Djohan expressed gratitude towards private business organizations for their initiative in training. He stated that the government will always welcome and support private initiatives (*Indonesische documentatie dienst van ANP-Aneta*, 1951, p. 32).

Djohan advocated for government cooperation with private sectors to accelerate educational development. This approach was influenced by both Indonesia's economic limitations and the global movement of public-private partnerships in post-war reconstruction. He recognized the vital role of private initiatives in vocational training and teacher preparation, critical areas where the state lacked capacity. His openness to non-state actors echoed broader international practices, particularly in newly independent states seeking to diversify education funding and expertise.

### Religion and the Fight Against Atheism

During his tenure as Minister, Bahder Djohan faced a significant problem in the education sector - atheism. In the 1950s, Indonesia experienced a decline in religious awareness compared to other countries. According to Wachid Hasjim, the Minister of Religion at the time, 80% of elementary schools in the Netherlands made religious education a mandatory subject. In contrast, Indonesia lagged far behind in this regard. The Minister highlighted the perceived threat of atheism, which is reportedly gaining ground in Indonesia. As a result, the Ministry of Religion is urging Indonesian intellectuals to embrace religion, as belief in God is considered a crucial prerequisite for the country's and society's progress.

Dr. Bahder Djohan, the Minister of Education, explained the fundamental principles of education law and emphasised that the Indonesian education system places significant emphasis on religion. The Ministries of Education and Religion are responsible for collaborating to regulate religious education in public schools. Indonesian education must be based on Indonesia as the only country and adapted to the principle of *Ketuhanan yang Maha Esa* or 'Belief in One Almighty God' (*Indonesische documentatie dienst van ANP-Aneta*, 1951, p. 48).

Even after he was no longer Minister of Education and Culture in 1953, he was replaced by Mohammad Yamin. Dr. Bahder Djohan, on behalf of the National Academy, also supported the establishment of the Indonesian Christian University on October 15, 1953. This opening was a significant event in the history of Christianity in Indonesia and a step to counter

the growing influence of atheism in the country (Richters, 1953, p. 187).

One of the most urgent issues Djohan addressed was the perceived rise of atheism among youth, echoing global Cold War anxieties over communism and secularism. In partnership with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Djohan reinforced religious education as a core element of national schooling. He argued that belief in God was essential for national progress, a stance that paralleled U.S.-led educational strategies of the 1950s aimed at countering Soviet atheism by promoting religious and moral education, especially in countries within the "non-aligned" or "Third World" spheres.

Djohan's support for religious institutions also extended to higher education. In 1953, he endorsed the establishment of the Indonesian Christian University, underscoring the government's stance on pluralism and its rejection of ideological extremism. His actions were consistent with the international trend of using education to instill moral values and religious ethics as bulwarks against political radicalization.

### **Cultural Identity in Education**

Bahder Djohan places great importance on the issue of nationalization and culture in education within the Indonesian education sector. To promote a culture-based education, cultural preservation should be adopted in associative student activities, such as the Taman Siswa program. In March 1951, Dr. Bahder Djohan, the Minister of Education and Culture, issued a decree to establish an institution to study education and teaching. This decision was because the current contents, systems, programs, and methods of education and teaching were not based on the cultural and national ideals. Mr. Wongsonegoro, who succeeded Dr. Bahder Djohan, continued and realized his vision and mission (Oriëntatie; cultureel maandblad, 1951, p. 380).

Mr. Wongsonegoro then held the Indonesian Cultural Congress on October 8, 1951 in Bandung. Bahder Djohan, who was no longer a minister at the time, opened the congress as the President of the Indonesian Cultural Institute (Indonesische documentatie dienst van ANP-Aneta, 1951, p. 430). The Indonesian Cultural Congress is significant as it brings together cultural representatives across Indonesia. The Ministry of Education and Culture recognises the potential for this second congress to make a valuable contribution towards shaping the direction of Indonesian cultural life. In contrast to past struggles, the Indonesian people were able to achieve independence by preserving their cultural heritage (Indonesische documentatie dienst van ANP-Aneta, 1951, p. 431).

Upon his reappointment as Minister of Education and Culture in 1952-1953, Bahder Djohan called upon all educational staff and society to collaborate in building a national cultural identity that is rooted in regional culture. Application in the field of education can be achieved by teaching regional languages in schools, developing regional literature lessons, and implementing other programs. Emphasising regional languages as compulsory subjects is an effort to create a generation that understands not only the language of books but also the language of its people (Indonesische documentatie dienst van ANP-Aneta, 1952, p. 215).

A key legacy of Bahder Djohan was his promotion of culture-based education as a means of national identity formation. Recognizing that postcolonial education systems often inherited Eurocentric models, Djohan advocated for curricula grounded in local values and languages. His vision was realized through establishing an education research institute and promoting regional languages and literatures in schools.

This emphasis on cultural identity echoed UNESCO's 1952 "Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property," which called on member states to integrate cultural heritage into education systems. Djohan's initiatives placed Indonesia within this broader discourse, asserting national sovereignty not just politically but also culturally through education. In 1951, although no longer minister, Djohan opened the Indonesian Cultural Congress as President of the Indonesian Cultural Institute. His return to the ministry in 1952 further advanced his agenda to root national education in regional and indigenous cultures, efforts that anticipated later decolonial education movements across Asia and Africa.

### **ENTERING RETIREMENT**

#### **A Critique for the National Council, PRRI, and Minangkabau Culturalists**

In 1957, Indonesia faced economic crises, political competition, and regional upheavals criticising the government. Uneven development caused obvious regional divisions, and dissatisfaction with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) was prevalent among figures and people close to the Soekarno government. President Soekarno hoped that the formation of the National Council would improve the stability of the country's economy and other sectors. However, the formation of the National Council received mixed responses and rejections from various individuals whom Soekarno had directly appointed. One of them was Bahder Djohan, who declined his recruitment into the National Council. Soekarno had appointed Bahder Djohan as an Intellectual of the National

Council (ANP Indonesische Documentatie Dienst, 1957, p. 358). Djohan rejected the membership because he was not consulted about his appointment and only found out about it after the member list was published (ANP Indonesische Documentatie Dienst, 1957, p. 372).

Following the outbreak of upheaval in Central Sumatra, specifically the incident of the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (PRRI), chaos ensued. The Djuanda Cabinet, which was in power at the time, was required to promptly restore normalcy to central and regional relations. However, their performance was considered unsuccessful in achieving this goal, as well as in implementing the decisions of national deliberations between the central government and external regions. In a final effort to save the situation, Prime Minister Djuanda was asked by hundreds of students who surrounded his house to avoid bloodshed in resolving the Central Sumatra problem. They requested to wait for President Soekarno to return from Tokyo to discuss the ultimatum further (ANP Indonesische Documentatie Dienst, 1958, p. 177).

The conflict arose from the resolution of the PRRI upheaval, when the government failed to handle the first air attack on Painan City (now in Pesisir Selatan, West Sumatra). This caused deep disappointment in Prof. Dr. Bahder Djohan, leading to his resignation from his position as Chancellor of the University of Indonesia (ANP Indonesische Documentatie Dienst, 1958, p. 455). The attack took place on Friday 21 February 1958. Djohan and Hatta expressed their concern about the involvement of communists closely associated with Soekarno. They believed that communism and atheism posed a threat to the Indonesian nation. The duo also criticised Soekarno's handling of regional issues. However, the Indonesian National Party (PNI), led by Suwirjo, considered the PRRI a rebellion that undermined the 1945 proclamation and threatened the unity and integrity of the country (ANP Indonesische Documentatie Dienst, 1958, hal. 214; Majalah Tempo, 1981).

Despite retiring from his position as Chancellor of the University of Indonesia, Bahder Djohan remains active in the field of education, particularly in his homeland of Minangkabau. In 1970, he served as a Steering Committee member for the 'Seminar on Minangkabau History and Culture' in Batusangkar. Upon returning to Jakarta, he founded the Minangkabau Cultural Foundation as a continuation of the seminar in Batusangkar. In early 1974, the foundation published the Minangkabau Culture magazine, led by Prof. Dr. Bahder Djohan, who had previously established the foundation in 1972. After retir-

ing from his position as a lecturer at Ibn Khaldun University, Bahder Djohan dedicated his time to the magazine. To conclude this discussion, it is important to convey a message to the younger generation about the significance of fighting for and defending their nation. As well as being a young man who is 'content' but still 'down to earth': *"Indonesia was built by young people, you must also remember your duty as guardians of Indonesia. Then your difficulties will disappear. Throw away all feelings of inferiority. Act as a ruler but remember that you are Orientals. Take rice as an example, the fuller it is, the more it bends towards the earth"* - Prof. dr. Bahder Djohan (De Nederlandsche werkgever; orgaan van het Verbond van Nederlandsche Werkgevers, jrg 5, 1950, p. 526)

## CONCLUSION

Bahder Djohan's legacy transcends national boundaries; his advocacy reflects a broader global movement toward anti-colonial emancipation, educational equality, and cultural sovereignty. From his early critiques of colonial discrimination in education and healthcare, Djohan aligned with global figures like Gandhi, Taha Hussein, and Casely Hayford who challenged imperial structures through inclusive reform. His commitment to religious education for all, linguistic decolonization through the promotion of Malay, and insistence on equal treatment for indigenous professionals situate him firmly within worldwide efforts to reclaim cultural and intellectual agency from colonial powers. Djohan's outspoken support for women's rights, including his critique of polygamy and defense of girls' education, echoes the pioneering feminism of contemporaries like Huda Sha'arawi and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. His vision of gender equality as integral to national progress placed him in step with reformers across colonized Asia and Africa.

After independence, Djohan's leadership as Minister of Education and Culture reflected global post-war trends, particularly in literacy, national identity, and moral education as tools against ideological extremism. His promotion of culture-based curricula and regional languages paralleled UNESCO's push for cultural heritage protection in education. Djohan's integration of civic, spiritual, and cultural dimensions into education not only addressed Indonesia's needs but also engaged universal values central to 20th-century global reform movements. His life exemplifies how local actors contributed meaningfully to international conversations on justice, equity, and decolonization, making him not only a national figure but also a global symbol of postcolonial transformation.

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