Chapter 28

Indonesian Historical Writing after Independence

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CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

At the time Indonesia became independent, knowledge of academic history-writing was virtually non-existent. In 1930, the date of the last census of the Netherlands Indies, the colony had an estimated overall literacy rate of 6.4 per cent—extremely low even by comparison with other colonized nations. Very few indeed of the 6.4 per cent would have had any secondary education; and the Netherlands East Indies government provided no tertiary education other than three schools (later Faculties) of Engineering, Law, and Medicine, established throughout the 1920s. In the Netherlands itself, study of Indonesia was undertaken primarily through philology and ethnography, as well as a strategic interest in Islam, with history playing a minor role. Such an approach often displayed the ‘orientalist’ bias later criticized by Edward Said.

European universities developed out of religious foundations, established either by orders such as the Benedicites, or under royal patronage, as in England where the ‘new learning’ took a more humanistic direction, for example, in the patronage of Margaret Beaufort which led to the establishment of St John’s College Cambridge in 1511. These universities developed a national role. Geographical, social, and ideological reasons precluded such a development taking place in Indonesia, where the religious foundations remained local and relatively short-lived. Indigenous history-writing was therefore produced at the various courts, and concentrated on the exploits of kings and other thaumaturgical characters. A major innovation took place in the early nineteenth century with the work of Yasadipura II, a scholar at the court of Surakarta who was impelled to analyze an unprecedented disaster—Dutch domination—through

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painful self-examination. This produced an analytical historiography that looked beyond the ruler and his courtiers to deal with the Javanese people as a whole and the organization of society.

The effect of the colonial predicament in stimulating an analytical historical consciousness continued to operate in the twentieth century, and this consciousness was central in the formation of an Indonesian identity. We can see it in the ironical article written in 1913 by R. M. Soewardi Soerjaningrat, a founder of the Indische Partij (Indies Party). In ‘Als ik een Nederlander was’ (‘If I were a Dutchman’), its author writes that if he were Dutch he would not allow the natives to join in the celebrations of the Netherlands’ independence as they currently did. He asks whether the Dutch actually believed that they had killed all human feelings in their colonial subjects, when in fact ‘even the most primitive peoples curse all forms of imperialism’—‘imperialism’ being a European concept quite foreign to traditional chronicles. In response to the implication that colonial rule was accursed, the colonial government exiled Soewardi and two other Indische Partij leaders to the Netherlands. In 1930, when an independence movement had developed, the nationalist leader Sukarno, on trial in Bandung, made a stirring appeal to history in his famous defence speech, Indonesië Klaagt aan [Indonesia Accuses]. He and his party, the National Party, were determined to raise awareness of the glory of the many earlier Indonesian kingdoms, most of them Javanese. Admitting that this was a feudal past, and disclaiming any desire to revive feudalism, Sukarno nevertheless saw it as a healthy feudalism containing the seeds of progress, whereas the present colonial era was sick and empty. He writes: ‘Although they are now almost as lifeless as a corpse, the Indonesian people who flourished and were so exceedingly great in the past must have sufficient strength and ability to rebuild this greatness in the future, must be able to rise again to the heights they achieved before, and indeed to surpass them.’ Sukarno saw knowledge of past great kingdoms as essential to raising Indonesia from its present state as a ‘nation of coolies and a coolie among nations’. However, another member of the political intelligentsia, the Sumatran Tan Malaka, argued that the village republics of the past, with their allegedly communal institutions, provided a better example for the future than did feudal kingdoms. Sukarno would later eliminate Tan Malaka from the political scene, which meant that it was Sukarno’s tripartite schema of Indonesian history—a glorious pre-colonial era of great kingdoms followed by the dark colonial age, in turn to be succeeded by a brightly beckoning future—that was most influential after Indonesia became independent.

Although history was not a major interest of the Indological departments, there was some Dutch colonial historiography that sought to legitimize and

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strengthen Dutch rule. This transcended the regional focus of the old court chronicles and provided a view of the whole Indies. But as the Indonesian nationalist Hatta commented in his 1928 defence speech answering charges of encouraging armed resistance, the history of the Indies was essentially written as Dutch colonial history, requiring Indonesian youth to ‘parrot its masters and call its own heroes, like Dipo Negoro, Toan Koe Imam, Tengkoe Oemar and many others, rebels, insurrectionists, terrorists and so on’, whereas Hatta considered them to be national heroes comparable to ‘William of Orange, William Tell, Mazzini, and Garibaldi’. After Independence, Western historians such as P. B. R. Carey would make a more sympathetic reappraisal of these ‘rebels’.

So Dutch colonial historiography was abhorrent for its attitude towards Indonesians; yet, paradoxically, it was also exemplary, even well after Indonesia became independent, with citation of Dutch sources required to establish something as ‘factual’. The culmination of Dutch colonial historiography was F. W. Stapel’s *Geschiedenis van Nederlandsch-Indië* [History of the Dutch Indies], whose five weighty tomes appeared in 1938–40. By this time, however, the young Dutch scholar J. C. van Leur had mounted an incisive and perceptive critique of the approach exemplified by Stapel, which he characterized as the view from the deck of Dutch ships, producing a grey and undifferentiated picture. He also drastically reduced the period of time in which the Dutch could be said to have actually ruled the Indies. Generally speaking, however, Indonesian historians have continued to speak of ‘300 years of colonial rule’.

After independence, a strongly anti-aristocratic tide stripped rulers of their power, and a new style of history focused on the new nation had to be invented. This was in a context where different groups of Indonesians were making different claims to inherit power. The established Nationalist leaders felt that they, who had endured long years of imprisonment and exile by the Dutch for their principles, were the rightful leaders of the new nation, while leaders from the Left, equally persecuted by the colonial government, felt that the Nationalists were preventing them from carrying out the social revolution catering to the people’s needs that was the proper culmination of the winning of independence. The third vocal group, the military, claimed that the whole civilian leadership had been cowardly in allowing themselves to be captured by the Dutch and that only the military had

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stood firm—and they certainly did not wish to see the mobilization against the Dutch extended into a social revolution. Rather, they proclaimed military heroism as justification for a political regime that would provide them with wider powers than did Western democracies. These different points of view, which Western studies of the period chronicle, would lead in later decades to history wars.

NATIONALIST HISTORY-WRITING AND ITS CRITICS

Just after the Dutch withdrew, Muhammad Yamin published a book on the history of the Indonesian flag, *6000 Tahun Sang Merah Putih* [6,000 Years of the Red and White], pushing its origins back to prehistoric times, thus initiating a markedly nationalist approach to history-writing. In December 1957, as parliamentary democracy was replaced by Sukarno’s Guided Democracy regime (1957–65), the Ministry of Education convened the first national history congress in Yogyakarta to plan an official national history. At this conference, Yamin’s nationalist approach was criticized by Soedjatmoko, one of Indonesia’s most eminent public intellectuals, who argued that it was incompatible with a scientific approach to history. He also rejected the idea of a utopian past with collective values, and instead advocated individual responsibility. While awaiting the production of the national history, schools used a text published by the writer Sanusi Pane during the Japanese Occupation.

Sukarno himself had been influenced by Marxist history-writing, for example, in his 1932 analysis of the difference between British and Dutch forms of imperialism, and in his Guided Democracy regime there was room for Marxist approaches to history, as there was room for Marxists in politics. One of the foremost exponents of a Marxist-style history was Roeslan Abdulgani.

A number of Western historians began to carry out research on Indonesia from the time it became independent, and there was a shift from Indological studies to history. These Western historians, though generally sympathizing with Indonesian aspirations, were less fully absorbed by the project of providing historical depth to the fragile nation than were their Indonesian colleagues, and some proposed alternative ways of approaching Indonesian history, such as John R. W. Smail’s ‘autonomous history’ concept. This emphasized regional history, which fitted well with the organizing principle of Dutch archives, but less so

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12 Schulte Nordholt, ‘De-Colonising Indonesian Historiography’, *3.*
with the strong feeling in Indonesia that regional culture and identity were potentially dangerous to national unity and should not be encouraged.

HISTORIANS IN THE SHADOW OF MILITARY POWER

In the momentous year of 1965, Soedjatmoko edited a volume that undertook a stocktaking of history-writing in Indonesia as a first step towards raising standards in the profession. It was written in a climate that in hindsight appears as the apogee of Western satisfaction with its uniquely 'sound' and 'scientific' historiography—a claim accepted by the cosmopolitan Soedjatmoko. There were eight Indonesian contributors, thirteen Western, and one Japanese. A number of Western contributors were concerned with evaluating the performance of indigenous history-writing in different parts of Indonesia. For example, a contribution by J. Noorduyn on the Buginese and Makassarese chronicles notes their sceptical attitude to myths and legends, matter-of-factness, dry prose style, and valuable data on technology and law—all seen as commendable qualities, though regretfully they lacked dates.15

Rereading this volume today, there is something poignant about the expressed aspirations of the Indonesian contributors to a 'sound' and 'scientific' historiography under Western tutelage, which were about to be seriously undermined on two fronts. First, the overthrow of Sukarno's Guided Democracy and installation of a military-dominated regime would bring back a highly statist history-writing, much like that produced by the Dutch colonial government, and this state control would last until the end of the century. Second, the imminent rise of new critical theory would increasingly call into question the scientific impartiality of Western scholarship from within Western academia itself. However, the impact of new critical theory has been comparatively slow and weak in influencing both Indonesian historians and Western historians writing about Indonesia.

It seems faire to say that the Western contributor to this volume whose work attracted most attention was C. C. Berg, one of a number of Western scholars of the period to make sweeping ex-cathedra characterizations of Indonesians. Berg claimed that the ancient Javanese believed in 'verbal magic'. To him this implied that the fact that three different texts describe Erlangga as the legitimate king of Java is to be regarded, not as corroboration of this claim, but rather as proof that Erlangga was actually a usurper. Not content to discredit what was present in the written sources, Berg actually reconstructed what was not in them, for example, a putative regicide producing a putative change of dynasty, neither recorded in any

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source, thus arriving at a position where the only things we can say are historically true are those for which there is no evidence. This was going too far for some other Western contributors: for example, the Jesuit scholar P. J. Zoetmulder politely pointed out the logical difficulties of Berg's approach, and his inadequate understanding of Indonesian languages. Another contributor, H. J. de Graaf, maintained that the Javanese chronicles (babad) actually exhibited a better sense of history than Berg attributes to them, despite their 'sacral' character and use as political weapons. Neither Berg nor de Graaf, leading experts on Java, had noted the rise of analytical historiography in Yasadipura II, whose work, like so much else available only in manuscript form, was little known. Another contributor, J. C. Bottoms, was rather in advance of his time in pointing out that the tendency of authors to please their patrons is not peculiar to Indonesian and Malay writings but is inherent in all historical writing.16

Even before assuming power in 1965, the military had been writing history. General A. H. Nasution had already established the Armed Forces History Centre in 1964 for the purpose of countering a communist history of the 1945–9 revolution: the history wars were beginning to heat up. After the coup attempt of 1965 and the ensuing military takeover, this History Centre assumed a far more assertive and prominent role in the representation of Indonesian history. The military-dominated regime, called the New Order, appropriated Sukarno's three-age historical schema. But it added a further stage: one of internal discord that developed under Sukarno's 'Guided Democracy', from which the country was 'saved' by General Suharto, who eased Sukarno out and took over as president. The fact that Nugroho Notosusanto, as head of the Centre, took over the planning of Sukarno's half-completed National Monument History Museum project in 1969 provides evidence of the extent to which representing national history became military business in the early New Order period. The military used history to legitimize the overthrow of the Sukarno regime, to justify the killing of perhaps 500,000 alleged communists, to strengthen military unity, and to legitimize the military's political role and the suppression of dissent.17

And so, despite the aspirations of Soedjatmoko and others, it turned out that Indonesian historians would have far greater restrictions on their pursuit of 'scientific' history than Western ones, and be required to slavishly follow state directions. Through the 1950s to the 1980s, and even beyond, the majority of academically licensed works on Indonesian history were written by Westerners.

17 Kate Macgregor, History in Uniform: Military Ideology and the Construction of Indonesia's Past (Singapore, 2007).
They were free, and resourced, to explore topics closed to Indonesians. Some Western historians like de Graaf and Ricklefs continued to write about kings, while others turned to new topics such as the modern ideologies that transformed the Indies, particularly nationalism and communism, and a number of histories of Indonesia appeared. Islam was generally described in terms of who-brought-it-and-from-where (like another much-discussed influence from the west, Indianization, which was generally portrayed as a more civilizing influence than Islam). However, Christine Dobbin produced a sophisticated analysis of the intertwining of religious and economic imperatives in the Padri War, and Ann Kumar used Javanese sources to describe the world of the Islamic pesantren as seen from the inside. Other Westerners turned their attention to groups not much covered in pre-colonial and colonial histories, such as women in colonial cities, labour, and youth.

SARTONO AND THE NATIONAL HISTORY

The second national seminar on history-writing was held in 1970, and the next three decades saw the rise of the multi-dimensional social science approach pioneered by Sartono Kartodirdjo. Sartono was trained by the moderately leftist Dutch sociologist W. F. Wertheim, and influenced by the American historian H. J. Benda, the author of a monograph on Islam under the Japanese Occupation. His approach aimed to be national and Indonesia-centric, and was informed by the realization that historical events are the outcome of a complicated interplay among social, economic, cultural, political, and religious factors, on which the explanatory capacities of different disciplines must be brought to bear, in contrast to the basically non-theoretical and descriptive approach of earlier historians. He also aimed to observe standard, 'scientific' historical methodologies, and to be


19 For example, George McTurnan Kahin, Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia (Ithaca, 1953); and Ruth T. McVey, The Rise of Indonesian Communism (Ithaca, 1965).


politically 'neutral'. Rommel Curaming argues that the influence of the Sartono school is overstated in standard accounts of Indonesian historiography, and that it actually found little expression in academic works, textbooks, or popular media. The history department of Gajah Mada University was dominated by Sartono and his protégés, while the Universitas Indonesia history department was more influenced by Nugroho Notosusanto (though there were also Sartono adherents such as Adri Lapian there), and has been accused of collusion with the New Order government to install a state-sponsored historiography. This approach tended towards a descriptive, non-theoretical narrative of political history like the nationalist historiography of Yamin, with military leaders given prominence.24

Sartono's work was highly innovative (not just among Indonesian historians but also with respect to Western ones) in that it included peasants as well as the élite.25 This conflicted with the notorious New Order proclamation, rakyat masih bodoh, 'the people are still stupid', which was constantly repeated as justification for the wholesale depoliticization of the populace who, instead of mobilizing to promote their interests, were exhorted to devote themselves to 'productive' work and play a subordinate role in developing the country under the guidance of a 'stabilizing' and 'dynamizing' military.

Sartono's national history was finally published in 1975. The six volumes covered: prehistory (before the Christian era); the Hindu kingdoms, to AD 1600; the Islamic kingdoms, to AD 1800; colonial rule in the nineteenth century; nationalism and the end of colonial rule; the Japanese Occupation; the Revolution (1945–50); and Liberal Democracy and Guided Democracy up to the events of the 1965 coup that brought in the New Order. Volume 6 added developments such as social change and social mobility, the structure of government and political life, and education and social communication to the narrative of political events. It provided a justification for dwifungsi, or dual function, the politically dominant doctrine that the military should have a sociopolitical as well as a military function.

In 1984 a revised version of the national history was published, this time without Sartono as editor. Changes included the addition of new chapters on the New Order, emphasizing the attainment of stability and development, the establishment of a new ASEAN-centred foreign policy and the necessary integration of East Timor, as well as the making of a New Order society and the legitimization provided by the elections of 1971 and 1977 (so-called festivals of democracy held in such restricted and manipulated circumstances as to guarantee the return of the government party). In the 1990s another revised version was

24 Rommel Curaming, 'Towards Re-Inventing Indonesian Nationalist Historiography', Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia, 3 (March 2003), http://kyotoreview.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp.
published, including a seventh volume which seems to have had a very limited circulation and followed the format of the five-year development plan.

PROPAGANDA AND DEMONIZATION

Sartono's method had been to use various disciplines and perspectives in order to describe a slow process of cultural integration—a process that he saw as predating the colonial state, and which formed the backbone of national integration. Interaction between local history and processes at the national level was of central importance. This approach was abandoned when the military historian Nugroho Notosusanto took over. Nugroho's account of the most contested historical event of all, the 1965 coup, is not a simplistic assertion that this was a communist bid for power foiled by the heroic army, and in fact falls well within the range of analyses of the coup by Western academics. However, a less nuanced message was presented in the historical discourse he presided over, which was centred on the military, and utilized not just written accounts, but also museums, monuments, films, and commemorations. This was a state-centred narrative describing threats to national unity overcome by the military, the promoters of development. Regional cultures were seen as static entities, as in the colonial period, without any dynamism of their own. Local histories were considered less reliable than the colonial archives, there was very little room for the agency of ordinary people, and the list of national heroes drawn up foregrounded royalty, in contrast to Maoist China's 'people's heroes'.

In this discourse there was a total erasure of the 1965–6 killings of hundreds of thousands accused of complicity in the coup attempt. Only the murder of six generals was covered in intentionally horrifying—and as it transpired, fictional—detail. Saskia Wieringa has shown that contrary to official accounts and the dioramas at key sites such as Lubang Buaya and the National Monument, the generals were not in fact subjected to genital mutilation. In stark contrast, members of the leftist women's organization accused of doing this really had been horribly tortured after they were imprisoned.

The high school (Sekolah Menengah Umum) history textbook published in 1994 downplayed social and political issues in favour of a heavy emphasis on material developments such as the Green Revolution, and developments in communication, transport, industry, and technology, with a concluding paragraph on caring for a healthy and clean environment (ironically, since the New

28 Schulte Nordholt, 'De-Colonising Indonesian Historiography', 7.
29 Saskia Wieringa, Sexual Politics in Indonesia (Basingstoke, 2002), 298--309.
Order gave its crony businessmen virtually unlimited licence to destroy it. Professional historians were generally engaged in non-sensitive research projects, such as apolitical socioeconomic histories. Henk Schulte Nordholt comments that a tendency to use models derived from the social sciences in order to describe the past in terms of structures without processes and without 'empirical imagination' produced histories without people, as in the colonial period.

He also points out that there has been hardly any analysis of the late colonial state as a set of repressive institutions with significant influence on the New Order state, particularly in the use of illegal violence, which still today limits the effectiveness of parliamentary decision-making. He is correct in pointing out the dearth of historical analysis connecting the colonial legacy with the Indonesian present, but the conditions of the infant profession were such as to militate strongly against this. Indonesian historians had no tradition on which to call for such analysis, nor had they the opportunity to learn from historians elsewhere. Salaries were so low that most had two jobs to achieve subsistence, and there was no money to buy books or to travel. Finally, severe reprisals were visited upon any who criticized the government, even politely. An instructive example is the government reaction to the Petition of 50, drawn up in 1980, which pointed out that the Pancasila, or five principles of the nation, had originally been designed as a uniting ideology, and not, as it now was under the New Order government, to persecute and isolate political opponents. Its eminent authors were not imprisoned or killed as less distinguished Indonesians would have been, but were subjected to the subtler penalty of ruinous financial reprisals.

One historian who did develop a new way of seeing the past was Onghokham, notably in his study of one particular region of Java, which provided an ironical picture of the personal interaction between high-ranking Dutch and Javanese officials, and also in his attention to the quotidian, such as food. He was willing to express unpopular, even dangerous political sentiments, and in his journalism (he was a columnist with Tempo) he implied that the New Order was just a modern form of the jago-ism (banditry) of the past. Though he headed the Lembaga Studi Sejarah Indonesia, Ong had a somewhat marginal role in the Indonesian establishment, partly due to his Chinese ancestry. And few other historians deviated much from the official line, let alone challenged it. Those who did challenge it were generally in the arts—painters, novelists, playwrights, film-makers, and even troupes of strolling players until these were taken over by the military. In this group none presented a more courageous and a more

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30 See, for example, Masjuki and Surisno Kuroyo (eds.), Sejarah Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta (Jakarta, 1982).
historically grounded challenge than the extraordinarily gifted novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer, whose incarceration in an extra-legal prison camp and subsequent persecution demonstrates just how severely those who challenged the official discourse were treated. His remarkable bravery in never recanting under duress enabled many other dissenting Indonesians to find courage.

Pramoedya is the writer who most meets Schulte Nordholt’s desideratum of an analysis of the late colonial state as a repressive regime whose practices the New Order government largely followed. His work evokes a penetrating picture of the cruel nature of this state, using his power as a storyteller to make turn-of-the-century Netherlands Indies the historical scene for a reading of the present. His portrayal of Tirto Adi Soerjo, the model for Minke, his main character, restored to historical memory one of the most important forerunners of Indonesian journalism. In his interview with GoGwilt, Pramoedya explained that he invented the character of the heroine Nyai Ontosoroh as a model of resistance, so that his fellow political prisoners would not be demoralized by the killings and cruelties of the prison camps.

Pramoedya’s work is throughout informed by a strong historical consciousness, evident in his interview with GoGwilt, in which he claimed that Sukarno had given birth to the nation without spilling a drop of blood, unlike the New Order, and that the further Indonesia travels from the moment of independence in 1945, the further Indonesia is from real independence. He also saw the Indonesian and Vietnamese independence movements as initiating a global struggle for freedom that spread across Asia and Africa, freeing the world from colonial rule. So considerable is Pramoedya’s stature as the provider of an alternative Indonesian history that Adrian Vickers’s recent history of Indonesia is constructed as a dialogue with him.

Pramoedya’s Buru quartet was banned for allegedly spreading communism, Marxism, and Leninism. This illustrates the state’s determination to control not just history-writing, but also more popular representations of history, such as historical fiction and films (for example, the film Max Havelaar, based on the nineteenth-century novel of the same name, which depicted the Javanese aristocracy colluding with the Dutch to oppress the peasantry) and the theatre.

However, not all history-writing was under state control, if only because the state did not have sufficient capacity to control all aspects of Indonesian society. Beneath the radar of the state, humble local histories appeared like wild flowers at many Indonesian localities, and were often handed out to visitors at historic sites. These histories represent the movement of oral traditions into the written

37 GoGwilt, ‘Pramoedya’s Fiction and History’, 148.
register, thanks to the massive advance in literacy in independent Indonesia. Unlike Pramoedya's work, they did not contest the official version of national history, which was outside their field of vision. Though artless and far from the 'scientific' history desired by Soedjatmoko, they provided a perspective on the way in which the past was present in different Indonesian milieus, and the parts of its legacy that different writers thought it important to preserve, which is not to be found in more academic works.

**REFORMATION AND FREEDOM OF SPEECH**

Once the New Order was dethroned in 1998 following the Asian economic crisis and the Indonesian Reformation movement, there was a strong desire for the restoration of historical truth, often based on a relatively simplistic idea of realloving praise and blame. So there was a re-examination of the 'Serangan Umum', the major attack launched against the Dutch in Yogyakarta; of the events leading up to the 30 September 1965 coup; of the content of the document called *Supersemar*, in which Sukarno had allegedly signed over power to Suharto; and of the role of the military, especially in regional rebellions. Minister of Education Yuduno Sudarsono ordered an investigation of these issues to improve the content of school texts, a new edition of which was published in 2000. Suharto was given less credit for the Serangan Umum, and the Sultan of Yogyakarta more, and the reliability of Supersemar was also questioned. However, the role of the army in 1965 was not re-examined, and the victims of 1965–6 were still silenced, though in 1999 the Society of Indonesian Historians (Masyarakat Sejarawan Indonesia) made an appeal for investigation of this period. In the revised text the New Order was almost completely erased, except for statements about its developmental success and its eventual downfall due to KKN ('Corruption, Collusion, and Nepotism)—the main targets of the Reformation movement. Part three of the textbook, on economic and technological development, remained more or less the same, though it was no longer attributed to the New Order. By contrast, twenty-five pages were devoted to an optimistic narrative of Reformation. Schulte Nordholt comments that the overall effect is of an eventless history disconnected from actors, political space, and time.\(^{38}\)

In the wider society the lifting of censorship rapidly led to the republication of leftist books by legendary figures such as Tan Malaka and the radical Javanese journalist and writer Mas Marco Kartodikromo, a revival of literature on Sukarno, ethnic-oriented regional histories (some reacting to representations of the Javanese as the heroic winners of independence by portraying them as in fact the new

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38 Schulte Nordholt, 'De-Colonising Indonesian Historiography', *14*, 11–12.
colonizers), and individual biographies. Books appeared on subjects hitherto taboo: for example, the mass slaughters of 1965–6.

The Society of Indonesian Historians made a formal and categorical declaration of independence from state control at the Seventh National History Conference held in Jakarta in October 2001. This meeting, and the next one held in August 2002 in Cisarua, saw the emergence of a younger generation of historians referred to as the Third Generation, Post-Sartono, or Reformation generation. Mestika Zed presented a paper, 'Menggugat Tirani Sejarah Nasional' ('Criticizing the Tyranny of National History'), in which he represented the idea of a national history as tyrannical and oppressive. Bambang Purwanto criticized Indonesian historians for their over-emphasis on the colonial, to the neglect of internal and local dynamics, and for anachronism and disproportionate attention to 'big men'. His solution was strict adherence to scientific historical methodology. Purwanto also accused Sartono of regarding things done by the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Kompagnie [VOC]) as exploitation, while considering the demands of local elites as merely requiring the sacrifice one member of the family makes for another. This constitutes an implicit criticism of the central New Order ideal of the familial state, characterized by a natural and desirable obedience to the head of the family. He also argued that the VOC’s exploitation simply continued a venerable Indonesian tradition, and criticized the Sartono school for having an anachronistic framework in which pirates and bandits were portrayed not as criminals, but as anti-colonial fighters. Purwanto also rejected the popular demand to replace Suharto with the Sultan in the role of hero as simply the equivalent of the de-Sukarnoizing of history when Suharto took power, and was wary of the pelurusan sejarah ('rectification of history') project begun in 1998. He feared that this would just replace old historical orthodoxies with new ones, giving rise to yet another version of history satisfying the hunger for revenge and power, rather than one satisfying scientific norms for truth verification.

On the other hand, Asvi Warman Adam, who was actually involved in the pelurusan sejarah project, claimed that it intended to be inclusive, and not to install another monolithic interpretation of history—rather, it wanted to democratize history by allowing space for competing interpretations. Adam reported some successes, such as the stipulation in the 2004 curriculum that students should be presented with different interpretations of the 1965 coup. However, his report of success in curriculum reform proved to be premature. In early 2007 the Attorney General took legal action to withdraw the new school textbooks and overturn the 2004 history curriculum, which had embodied the efforts of teachers, university lecturers, and curriculum designers to introduce some sort of balanced coverage of the Madiun affair of 1948, with its ferocious clashes

39 Ibid., 13.
40 Curaming, ‘Towards Re-Inventing Indonesian Nationalist Historiography’.
between hard-line Muslims and leftists, and of the 1965 coup. Rather than introducing counter-propaganda, they were merely attempting to show students that there are a number of different interpretations. This more open viewpoint is now undermined by a resurgence of fanatical anti-communism, according to some because of the continuing political influence of the military and Suharto supporters. Many prominent historians, such as Sartono and Onghokham, signed a petition against the bannings. Nevertheless, in May 2007 the Attorney General’s Office confiscated textbooks on the grounds that they covered the teachings of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao, which were supposedly in violation of the principles of Pancasila, particularly its affirmation of belief in God. Anti-communist historians continued to propagate the New Order’s official version of the 1965 coup and of the violence arising out of the land reform law that led up to it. For example, Aminuddin Kasdi published a book on land reform in East Java called Kaum-Merah Menjarah [The Reds Plunder].

In mid-2007 a workshop on alternative history was held in Yogyakarta, bringing together younger intellectuals, including practitioners from outside the academy such as activists such as Hilmar Farid, who criticized Indonesian historians for retaining the categories and frameworks of the New Order, and journalists such as Maria Hartiningsih. Purwanto presented a paper on land ownership prior to 1965, showing how local religious leaders had reclassified land to increase their holdings, in contrast to the picture given by Kasdi of illegal communist seizure of land. By this time various NGOs, not all from academic circles, were trying to uncover the histories of the mass killings of 1965.

In a recent publication, Schulte Nordholt argues that as long as the history of Indonesia does not include the 1965 killings, it is not a true history with which people can identify: it is a pitiful history which remembers only official heroes and is silent about the thousands of victims, while centralizing the primacy of the state. He is of the opinion that Indonesians are momentarily ‘a people without history’, and the question that must now be asked is whether a new Indonesian historiography will succeed in liberating itself from the interests, perspective, and conceptual framework of the state. This criticism of Indonesian history-writing is a valid one. However, we must also take into account the fact that both the Indonesian state and the Indonesian people have greatly changed since colonial times, and this has major implications for the relationship between them, and also for history-writing in Indonesia. The state is no longer the monolithic colonial bureaucracy, nor the tightly controlled New Order state, but a state that has fractured into many competing groups—some legal, others not. The populace too is very different: the literacy rate is no longer 6.4 per cent but has been raised to 90 per cent, one of the highest in the Muslim world—above richer

42 Ibid.
states such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and neighbouring Malaysia, and also above South American states such as Peru and Brazil. There are now around forty-four state universities and a couple of dozen private ones. Certainly, these are not Oxford or Harvard, but neither was the Bandung Engineering College that Sukarno attended, and if he could mount a critique of imperialism in its impoverished intellectual climate we can expect some critical thinking today. In addition, increasing numbers of Indonesians complete Ph.D.s in history at overseas universities, satellite dishes with access to world news have long been a feature of the landscape, and now YouTube provides vastly more information to the well-connected. Indeed, travelling in Indonesia reveals that even rural villages are surprisingly aware of what is happening in other countries. Unlike the Dutch, the New Order government actually used its increased resource revenues to pump large amounts of money into education. So, even if the present government would like to reimpose a statist historiography, it can no longer rely on the existence of an uneducated and credulous populace, as both the pre-colonial kings and the colonial government could. The written word has lost most of its intrinsic magic, rather like the batik patterns once reserved for royalty, because it can now be used by nearly everyone.

Indonesia is now enjoying, after nearly half a century of authoritarian government, the sort of freedom it enjoyed briefly in the 1950s. This has led to a rapid shift to a much more diverse landscape, both in the political sphere, with its dozens of parties, and in the diverse viewpoints now espoused by historians. The outpouring of different accounts of Indonesian history with the lifting of censorship testifies to the extent of interest in this subject, and it is hard to see how Indonesians are a people without history. Vickers's database contains about 1,600 books on history published since the fall of Suharto. Nationalism is still by far the largest topic with seven hundred books. Islam comes in second with over three hundred books, many of them on 'dissenting' or indigenous forms of Islam. This is an opportune juncture to pay tribute to the pioneering work of Azymardi Azra in tracing Islamic networks that, despite their powerful historical agency, are extraordinarily difficult for later historians to recapture. This work is certainly history with personal actors and within a clear political context. Nearly as numerous as works on Islam are those on social history, while the substantial output of regional histories is what one would expect in the wake of political decentralization.

Meanwhile, the Western historical profession has also changed enormously since the 1965 criticism of Indonesian history-writing as insufficiently scientific. Van Leur's critique of Dutch colonial historiography has been extended, for

45 Azymardi Azra, The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries (Crows Nest NSW/Honolulu, 2004).
example in Schulte Nordholt’s deconstruction of the representation of the *pax neerlandica*, one of its central claims. Schulte Nordholt uses an unsolicited report, submitted to the colonial government by the tobacco planter C. Amand in 1872, that caused considerable unrest among colonial officials. Amand’s report overturned the prevailing colonial picture of the Javanese peasant community as a ‘palladium of peace’ by depicting a world in which cattle theft, extortion, opium smuggling, violence, and especially intimidation, were daily phenomena.

The entire colonial government on Java was based, in fact, on an extensive network of rural crime, largely due to governmental inability to control all of Java. It was forced to recruit the services of local strongmen, called *jagos*, in exchange for which they were free to carry out their own criminal activities. The *jago* were no noble bandits who stole from the rich and gave to the poor, and neither did they form a remnant of an old and decaying culture. Rather, they were the product of a new colonial relationship. The colonial government tried in vain to discredit Amand’s report, but was more successful in keeping from the public the shocking revelation that on Java, crime and the state were largely formed, and reinforced, by each other. Schulte Nordholt’s work reveals that the authoritatively written and expensively produced volumes of Dutch colonial history (so much more impressive than the cheap paperbacks in which local histories appeared) have their own form of ‘verbal magic’. 46

Western historians in general are also now more inclined to recognize the validity of local and indigenous historical traditions and memories, even if these do not stand up to the sort of scholarly scrutiny that would once have been considered essential. This is true of Western attitudes to Indonesian history-writing. While this may be less arrogant and unreflective than earlier attitudes, it is not without its problems. A significant proportion of the local or regional or ideologically in-group historical accounts are not simply picturesque and colourful parts of a rich tapestry, but are highly polemical. To validate one view of the past is to invalidate or deny the truth of another—and Indonesian history is highly contested indeed. Deep divisions are found in the interpretation of bloody events of the past, and heroes of the past are often mobilized for the battles of the present. Conflicting interpretations are held with particular heat when they pertain to a history of violence springing from major fault lines in Indonesian society: ethnic conflicts, either between different *pribumi* (‘indigenous’) groups or between indigenous Indonesians and Chinese Indonesians, who are not included in the *pribumi* category; conflicts between different religious groups; and conflicts between hard-line Muslims and secularists or socialists. It is hoped that the Society of Indonesian Historians will be able to play a role in reducing the production, and inflammatory effects, of aggressively one-sided histories.

If there is to be another national history, it cannot be as ‘tyrannical’ as it was in earlier periods because it cannot have the same monopoly (unless there is a return to authoritarian rule, and even then it will be difficult to reverse the developments that have taken place in Indonesian society and internationally). And it will have to deal with the legacy of past political manipulation of history, particularly with respect to those previously treated as outside the pale. Historians will need to develop, as Adam stated, an inclusive history. The New Order state operated by designating certain groups as pariahs, from whose alleged nefarious activities it ‘protected’ the conforming population. The most obvious of these groups comprised those accused of left-wing activity, and now perhaps no single issue is a greater problem for reconciliation between antagonistic parties than the regime change of 1965—an issue that seems unlikely to go away if it is not addressed. President Abdurrahman Wahid broke the taboo on discussion of these events when he made a public appeal for investigations of the murders of 1965–6, and also offered an apology for the role that the militias of his own organization, the Nahdatul Ulama, had played in them. The issue is, however, far from resolved.

Indonesians of Chinese descent are another stigmatized group. They did not live in the extreme wretchedness of those accused of being communists, but they were pariahs in the sense of carrying the guilt for any economic hardship suffered by the populace, and have been widely regarded as thieving usurers without loyalty to Indonesia. Though the New Order generals themselves became rich by working with the Chinese, they did not hesitate to use them as scapegoats. After the economic crisis and during the regime change, there were attacks on Chinese and mass rapes of Chinese women allegedly instigated by a prominent general. In the aftermath of the New Order’s long-running strategy of caricaturing and stigmatizing many Indonesians (such as leftists or alleged leftists, Islamic extremists, and Chinese), it is to be hoped that both academic histories and textbooks will now move beyond this divisive and prejudicial way of writing history.

TIMELINE/KEY DATES

1942 (March) Japanese conquest of Indonesia
1945 (17 August) Declaration of Independence
1945–9 ‘Revolution’ ending with failure of Dutch attempt to re-establish colonial rule
1948 (September) Madiun Affair
1949-62 Darul Islam rebellion
1949-57 Parliamentary Democracy
1955 First elections
1958 (February) PRRI rebellion
1957-65 Sukarno’s Guided Democracy
1961 Dutch forced to cede West Irian to Indonesia
1963-5 Confrontation (with Malaysia)
1965 (30 September) Gestapu (coup attempt ended by military takeover)
1965–8 Establishment of ‘New Order’ with General Suharto as President
1975 Annexation of Timor
1976 Aceh insurgency begins
1998 Asian Financial Crisis; ‘Reformation’ and resignation of Suharto
1999 Restoration of free elections and increase in parliament’s authority
2002 Timor becomes independent

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