De-colonising Indonesian Historiography

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Abstract

This paper presents a preliminary analysis of Indonesian historiography in connection with the post-colonial nature of the Indonesian nation-state. It argues that in terms of perspectives, the use of concepts and the selection of topics a fundamental 'decolonization' is required in order to create a broader basis for a new national historiography.

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De-colonising Indonesian historiography.[1]

Ideas about national ethnic or religious identities are often rooted in the past, from where key narratives are unfolded which explain one's destiny. It is not enough to look at these narratives in terms of representations only. We also need to uncover the genealogies which have constructed and (re)produced these texts. It is, in the words of Bernard Cohn (1987), the combination of how history is mediated by culture and how culture is mediated by history, which produces the perspectives people use when they conceptualize the past, as well as the categories by which they classify the world. 'Indonesia' was the result of these complex processes.

National histories were born in the 19th century when the formation of the nation-state required persuasive narratives, which transformed subjects of the state into new citizens, incorporated them into the new nation, and convinced them that they shared a common future.

In *Seeing Like a State* James Scott (1998) has shown how state institutions have attempted to reduce complex realities into simplified ideas and clearly arranged categories in order to control society. Such state simplifications cause a great deal of local knowledge to be lost. Although he does not explicitly refer to it, national historiography is pre-eminently an activity that streamlines the complex and multidimensional narratives about the past. It erases competing histories and lots of (semi) autonomous local narratives in favour of a new centralised meta-narrative of the nation-state. Based on data produced by its own state archives, the new biography of the nation was told in every classroom in terms of birth, growth and glory, mixed with crises which were always overcome.

A history without people

Colonial history formed in this regard an overseas appendix to the national epic and the Dutch version of it was no exception. The Dutch overseas adventure started in the 17th century with pioneers who established Batavia -- a name that referred to the 'ethnic ancestors' of the Dutch -- and was completed in the early 20th century with the formation of a strong colonial

[1] This paper is a first -- and very preliminary -- effort to address one of the themes of the KITLV research programme, 'Renegotiating Boundaries: Agency, Access and Identity on Post-Suharto Indonesia' (2002-2006). This theme is in particular concerned with continuities and changes in Indonesian historiography in connection with efforts to reformulate national and/or regional identities, and to give voice to alternative historiographies.

state, which received the illusory name 'Tropical Holland'. The culmination of Dutch colonial historiography was Stapel's *Geschiedenis van Nederlandsch-Indië* (5 vols, 1938-1940). The first two volumes told the story of the old Java based Hindu and Muslim kingdoms, but this perspective changed abruptly when the Dutch arrived. From volume 3 onwards they became the main actors while the indigenous peoples were marginalized. Despite minor differences of opinion regarding the moral quality of colonial rule and the role of the state -- liberals advocating less state interference and criticising state led exploitation versus conservatives who defended the interventionist role of the state -- the Dutch remained the main actors, representing enlightenment, progress and the ability to protect the interests of the 'natives' who were represented as being incapable of running their own affairs.[2]

It was the Weberian sociologist Van Leur who challenged in the 1930s the monolithic picture of Dutch dominance. He argued that throughout the VOC period Dutch influence had been marginal because the Indonesian archipelago had been able to maintain its autonomy till the end of the 18th century (Van Leur 1940). Van Leur did neither explain whether this autonomy had primarily to do with political power or cultural hegemony, nor did he elaborate to what extent and how the Dutch eliminated this autonomy. Like Weber, Van Leur had problems to conceptualise the structures of change. Despite their sympathy for the indigenous perspective both Van Leur and his fellow sociologist Schrieke -- who maintained that there was no fundamental difference between Java in the year 1700 and 700 AD (Schrieke 1957)-- presented a static picture of an Indonesian archipelago.

During the late 1930s few people took notice of Van Leur. It was Wim Wertheim who propagated Van Leurs work in the 1950s while he also developed a more historical approach that offered more space for a dynamic articulation of different sociological formations.[3]

Meanwhile Indonesia had become and independent nation-state and needed historians who were able to write a new national history. In contrast to India, there were however very few professional Indonesian historians, as a result of which not only a national historiography but also a group of national historians had to be established. The majority of the new generation of historians were writers and poets. Their interest in history was driven by

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[2] Consequently, the central role of mestizos or Indo Europeans was by and large silenced in the white colonial historiography, cf. Bosma and Raben 2003.

[3] Wertheim 1950; Van Leur 1955. See also Wertheim 1978 on the so-called Lebak affair in which Douwes Dekker who represented a modern bureaucracy confronted the *bupati* of Lebak, who embodied a patrimonial order, while both systems were part of the same colonial system.

ideological issues, and less informed by sociological concepts or economic themes.

Van Leur's model was not popular among the new generation of Indonesian historians because his sociological categories were not the best breeding ground for a new eventful and heroic history that could mobilize and inspire the new nation. Moreover, due to Van Leur's emphasis on the autonomy of the Indonesian world, the period of actual colonial rule had been relatively brief. A similar view was also advocated by the legal historian Han Resink(1968). This approach shortened the period of colonial exploitation and consequently downplayed the total amount of suffering by the Indonesian people, as a result of which the victorious revolution and national liberation were less impressive (Klooster 1985:24-25).

Indonesia's new historians designed on their own terms a suitable past on which the history of the nation could be based. Despite the national slogan which propagated unity but respected diversity, and despite the egalitarian mood of the revolution (*bung* Karno, *bung* Hatta) the origins of Indonesia were firmly framed in a Java centred Majapahit imperialism that celebrated Gadjah Mada and other expansionist strong men. Actually Gadjah Mada represented dynastic hierarchies but was re-defined into the role model of the national hero.[4] It is in this respect interesting that the main architect of this Java centric hierarchical image of Indonesia's past was not a Javanese but Mohamad Yamin from West Sumatra. He argued that the map of Indonesia was already drawn in the glorious days of Majapahit whose exemplary military leader fitted the fighting spirit of the revolution. Not everyone agreed with this image. Intellectuals like Mohamad Hatta and Takdir Alisjahbana resisted this Java centred imperialism, while Mohamad Ali and Tan Malakka criticised the feudal heritage of the old empires and the colonial period.[5] However, the 'greatness' of Majapahit had more appeal than a more egalitarian narrative in which common people were allowed to participate.

Nation building was one of the main themes of the 1950s and the making of national histories was an integral part of it. In December 1957 the Ministry of Education convened the first National History Congress in Yogyakarta in order to design an official national history. The main controversy was between Mohamad Yamin and Soedjatmoko.

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[4] A colonial textbook by Fruin-Mees (1919-'20) served in this respect as a source of inspiration (Reid 1979).

[5] Klooster 1985: Ch 4. Hamka tried to write a history of Islam in Indonesia. Armijn Pane made an interesting attempt to contextualise Indonesia's past through its trade networks within the larger world of Southeast Asia.

Based on the theory of the Arab historian Ibn Chaldun (1332-1406 CE) Mohamad Yamin argued that scientific research should lead to a nationalist interpretation and serve the strengthening of a nationalist consciousness. Soedjatmoko, on the other hand, criticised the notion of an 'utopian past' with its collective values. Instead, he advocated individual responsibility and argued that nationalism excluded a real scientific approach.

Soedjatmoko lost his case, because he favoured a kind of abstract universalism that was not rooted in nationalism. His approach did not suit the atmosphere of the 1950s, when people all over the archipelago were urged to become Indonesians. At the same time people saw the nation as a vehicle of modernity, justice and equality and wanted to become part of all this, although they resisted in a number of regions the 'new Majapahit imperialism'.

When towards the end of the 1950s efforts to establish democratic institutions and regional autonomy were frustrated by Sukarno's authoritarian nationalism, Indonesia was still a nation without history, because the intention of the congress of 1957 to write a new national history had not been realised. School textbooks were still based on a preliminary text published by Sanusi Pane during the Japanese occupation. (Van Klinken 2001b).

Meanwhile John Smail (1961) re-opened the debate initiated by Van Leur concerning the autonomy of Indonesian history. He tried to overcome the old dichotomy between Euro-centrism and Asia-centrism by using a single regional perspective. Smail's article was paradigmatic in the sense that a new generation of Western historians started to conduct research focussed on particular regions in Indonesia. This approach was facilitated by the fact that Dutch colonial archives were organised according to regions. It was for instance much easier to find information on Bali or Ambon than on issues like labour migration. The new wave of regional studies also implied that historians were less interested in national history. The regional approach brought them closer to the 'real' people and stimulated also a dialogue with anthropologists. The regional and cultural approach also implied that matters concerning the role and nature of the (post)colonial state remained far behind the horizon.

At the same time, history in Indonesia became an ideological tool for the mobilisation of the masses during the closing years of Sukarno's rule. A focus on the region, or conducting archival research was in this context rather

irrelevant. Instead, Muhamad Yamin published a book of 350 pages on the history of the national flag in which he demonstrated that the red and white banner had its origins in pre-historic times, and Roeslan Abdulgani advocated a Marxist inspired history demonstrating how the antithesis between the forces of lightness and darkness had ultimately brought freedom to the masses, while Mohamad Ali emphasised that a true Indonesian historiography is about the realisation of the 'Pancasila man' (Klooster 1985: Ch 5). All this came to an end in 1965.

Under Suharto's New Order (1966-1998) a developmental authoritarianism has been established in order to achieve rapid economic growth in combination with political stability. The centre of the state was seen as the only legitimate operator of a controlled process that would lead Indonesia to a new era of progress and prosperity. This centralist approach was paralleled by an equally centralist and eschatological historiography that was inspired by Sukarno and applied by Sanusi Pane: the 'lightness' of the pre-colonial golden era -- which already contained the 'essence' of the national identity -- was followed by the 'darkness' of colonial rule and exploitation; heroic resistance culminating in national 'awakening' and revolutionary struggle brought eventually freedom and independence. To this familiar sequence a closing chapter was added during the New Order, telling how the nation fell prey to internal discord and how it was saved by Suharto who then led the country to lasting development and. permanent stability. The dream of Suharto's New Order was to arrive at the 'end of history', by establishing an order, which was characterised by the absence of disturbing events (cf. Pemberton 1994).

The national history, which had to embody this message, was finally published in 1975.[6] Its six volumes covered (1) the pre-history (before the CE), (2) the period of the old Hindu kingdoms (0-1600 CE), (3) the Islamic kingdoms (1600-1800 CE), (4) colonial rule in the 19th century, (5) nationalism and the end of colonial rule (1900-1942), (6) the Japanese occupation (1942-1945), revolution (1945-1950), liberal democracy (1950-1959) and guided democracy till the events of G30S/PKI (1965) -- the communist assault on six generals which brought Suharto to power -- and the issuing of Supersemar (1966) -- the founding text of the New Order that legitimised Suharto's rule.

This periodisation reflected to some extent conventional colonial historiography -- like volume 2 on Hindu kingdoms, while volume 3 resembled the work of Pigeaud and De Graaf (1976) on Muslim kingdoms -

[6] Sartono Kartodirdjo et al 1975.

-, while Van Leur's ideas on the loss of autonomy of the Indonesian world around 1800 CE can be recognised in the shift in focus from volume 3 to volume 4.

In volume 6, which is the key volume of this series because it explains the rise of the Orde Baru, an interesting attempt is made to add themes like 'social change and social mobility', 'the structure of government and political life', and 'education and social communication' to the narrative of political events between 1942 and 1966. The attempt to pay attention to socio-institutional dimensions of the national history -- chapters on economic history were remarkably absent -- was concluded with a paragraph which legitimised the dual role (*dwifungsi*) of the armed forces, i.e. protecting national sovereignty and guarding national development.

In 1984 a revised edition of the national history was published, this time without Sartono Kartodirdjo as editor.[7] Apart from some minor changes in the volumes 1-5, volume 6 was reorganised and enlarged. The separate chapters on political and socio-institutional developments were merged, existing chapters on the period 1952-1966 were further elaborated and new chapters on the New Order were added. The New Order was presented in terms of the realisation of political and economic stability and planned development, the establishment of a new foreign policy in which the ASEAN played a central role plus the 'necessary integration' of East Timor, *dwifungsi* and the making of a New Order society, which was legitimised by the results of the elections of 1971 and 1977.

In the 1990s another revised edition was published. A new editorial committee was formed and an extra volume 7 was planned to describe the New Order period from 1965 onwards.[8] By and large there seem to be no fundamental differences with the previous editions. According to Indonesian historian Asvi Warman Adam (personal communication) volume 7 had only a very limited circulation and looked like the GBHN -- the broad outline of state policy that was presented by the president to the Peoples Congress -- or blatant New Order propaganda.

It had been Sartono Kartodirdjo's ideal to use various disciplines and perspectives in order to describe a slow process of cultural integration, which formed the backbone of national integration. Trained by Wertheim and influenced by Harry Benda, Sartono argued that nation building was a cultural process, which preceded the colonial state. In order to understand

[7] Marwati Djoened Poesponegoro and Nugroho Notosusanto 1984.
[8] Anhar Gonggong 1993.

this the interaction between local history and processes at the national level was of central importance. However, Sartono's programme was never elaborated because the national history project became a military operation led by military historian Nugroho Notosusanto.[9] Not only through publications but also by way of museums, monuments, films and commemorations Nugroho managed to create an almost hegemonic historical discourse in which the military played the key roles.

Four features -- which are not necessarily unique for Indonesia -- characterise Nugroho's national history. It is in the first place a state-centred narrative in which representatives of the state are the sole legitimate actors. In a way the post-colonial history of Indonesia can be read as a series of crises which threatened national unity but which were timely overcome thanks to military intervention. Military actions and national interests were synonymous. Only when tight control was established guided development could succeed.

As a result of this approach regional histories were marginalised. If mention was made of local histories, they had to fit into the larger pattern of the nation's biography. Reproducing a colonial idea, regional cultures were seen as static entities which needed to be protected and improved by agents from the centre. This reinforced the idea that regional histories had no dynamics of their own and were subordinated to the interests of the centre, which wanted to make its policy of national development a success (*sukseskan pembangunan nasional*).

National historiography also emphasised the authority of the (colonial) state archives as repositories of 'reliable facts' in contrast to local historiographies that were categorised under folklore. When for instance Balinese historians from Universitas Udayana in Denpasar conducted in the 1980s a government sponsored research project on the colonial conquest of South Bali at the beginning of the 20th century, they relied primarily on Dutch archival material because they considered local sources to bee too unreliable. This perspective implied also that they tended to ignore Balinese perspectives and local historical dynamics, which were not seen or understood by the Dutch. This led to an almost violent confrontation between the Western trained, state sponsored historians and representatives of local interest groups who did not recognise themselves in the official version.

In the second place such an approach leaves very little room for ordinary people as meaningful historical actors. Instead, since 1959 Indonesia saw the

[9] See McGregor 2001, 2002.

birth of more than 100 national heroes, predominantly male, Java born and belonging to the elite.[10]

The exclusion of commoners from their own history implied a neglect of labour history, aspects of gender, everyday forms of resistance, the role of local intellectuals in translating nationalist ideas, to name only a few examples. As long as the role and importance of historical agency outside the state is denied, alternative perspectives on Indonesia's cannot be developed.

In the third place, there is the ironic paradox of a history without violence, which is dominated by military. Not only the (late) colonial state, but also its post-colonial heirs actively managed to erase state generated violence from official memory.[11] The best example of this phenomenon is the total erasure of the killings of 1965-'66 from official textbooks. They only mention the murder of 6 generals plus 4 lower officers in the night of September 30-October 1 1965. And then the story ends because the thousands of people killed by the new regime were also efficiently silenced in history. Because of this silence, the credibility of Indonesian historiography has been seriously damaged and can only be repaired when the victims of the New Order are brought back into the national history.

Censorship was in this respect not only an Indonesian phenomenon but occurred outside Indonesia as well. In order to obtain a research permit or to participate in profitable projects, it was better not to touch upon this sensitive matter. And when the killings were accidentally mentioned by Indonesian authorities they were located in the tumultuous period predating the New Order and without any causal connection with the rise of this authoritarian regime.

Moreover, in the final days of structural functionalism, in which society was conceptualised in terms of an integrated system and violence as a means to restore the equilibrium, the social sciences were hardly able to account for such large-scale violence. Only after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when genocides in Africa, and ethnic, religious or 'communal' violence spread like wildfire in the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, parts of Africa and India, social scientists were forced to face this phenomenon.

Finally, another feature of Indonesian as well as Dutch colonial historiography is the near absence of a comprehensive analysis of the late-colonial state as a set of repressive institutions and its postcolonial legacies. Dutch colonial historians have by and large refrained from looking at the violent nature of colonial rule and the way Indonesians were persuaded to

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[10] See Schreiner 1997.
[11] See Schulte Nordholt 2002.

participate in a repressive regime, while Indonesian historians were not in a position to make meaningful comparisons between the late colonial state and the New Order. An exception in this respect is the work of Pramoedya Ananta Toer (esp *Rumah Kaca* from 1988) in which he evokes a penetrating picture of the repressive nature of late colonial state.

Although attention was paid to protest movements and rebellions against colonial rule, the nature of the object of rebellion, the oppressive state, remained by and large unexplored. This omission has a lot to do with the fact that most historians operate from within the state by consuming its archives and looking through its glasses, while they are usually paid and sponsored by the state. Like fish that do not speak about the water in which they swim, many historians still seem to ignore the dominant structuring role of the state.

'Postcolonial' is in this respect not a term exclusively reserved for diaspora intellectuals from former colonies who find themselves imprisoned in colonial discourses of the former imperial metropoles and reflect on their post colonial condition in post-modern terms.[12] The word also refers to the political structures and institutions that were inherited by independent nation states and appropriated by the new power holders. Post-colonial states are structured in a particular way and have inherited more from their predecessors that their nationalist rhetoric would suggest. They retain an intense distrust towards their own subjects, as well as a strong concentration of power in the centre because of fear that the delegation of power could lead to disloyalty and separatism. Therefore the armed forces have the task of protecting the interests of the state within its own national borders. Economically there is the inclination to export the country's riches instead of putting them to productive use, a practice that has led to extreme cases of self-exploitation. In connection with this, business minorities are made politically dependent on power holders by delivering them surplus in exchange for economic privileges. Because of the weak and underdeveloped legal system the formation of a strong civil society is frustrated. But at the same time the state has problems legitimising itself, a condition which is only temporarily addressed by the launching of expensive prestigious projects to enhance a national identity, while the political aspirations of rising middle classes are bought off with increasing material prosperity.

A historiography, which is conditioned by these constraints, is not equipped to focus on popular participation in national history. As Jim Siegel (1998) observed, the people, or *rakyat*, who became a nation the moment

[12] Cf Eaton 2000.

they were addressed as such by president Sukarno, were classified as a potentially dangerous *massa* under the New Order. Excluded from political participation they were not allowed to figure in the official history. Instead, technological development was celebrated, which is well illustrated by the history textbook for the SMU from 1994.[13] Following the model of volume 6 of the national history (edition 1993) the textbook first sketches in part I the rise of the New Order out of the chaos of the1950s and early 1960s. Then it emphasises the importance of development, explains the integration of East Timor and summarises the main national values (national unity, self sacrifice, humanitarianism, mutual consultation and consensus, co-operation, mutual respect, love for the motherland). After part II, in which international developments are sketched -- the Cold War, bodies of international co-operation in which Indonesia participated, and various conflicts including the fall of the Soviet Union, German unification, the conflict in the Middle East, and the war in former Yugoslavia, plus lessons to be learned from history in order to reinforce national unity (*kesatuan dan persatuan*) --, part III is fully devoted to technological developments under the New Order. These innovations include the Green Revolution, developments in the field of communication, transport, industry and technology, while this part is concluded by a paragraph that emphasises the care for a healthy and clean environment.

The main line of argument -- reflecting the leading obsession of the New Order -- is that 'guided unity' leads to prosperity whereas disunity results in chaos and decay. This is presented through a series of 'true historical facts', which carry a moral meaning. Because these 'facts' and their moral implications are closely related to the fate of the state, they are far removed from the historical experience of ordinary people. To them the term 'sejarah' became another word for 'not us'.

Apart from participating in state-sponsored projects, professional historians in Indonesia were engaged in non-sensitive research topics. They went so to speak in exile by writing about regional and/or a-political socio-economic histories, preferably located in the colonial period. There was also 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'.[14] Like in the colonial period, New Order historiography produced histories without people.

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[13] See Badrika 1997b; see for a teacher's guidebook Widyasusanto 1997.
[14] Bambang Purwanto 2002: 144.

A people without history

After Suharto's fall in May 1998, his version of the history was no longer credible -- the economic miracle had collapsed, order was replaced by disorder -- but an alternative national history has not yet emerged. In this sense Indonesians became a 'people without history'.

Asked in September 2000 for an agenda of a new Indonesian historiography, students from the departments of history at the Universitas Indonesia in Jakarta and Universitas Andalas in Padang mentioned as priorities both the autonomy of regional histories as well as the autonomy of historiography itself. They advocated a decentralisation as well as a demilitarisation of Indonesian historiography, and emphasised the importance of regional variation. Most of all, they wanted "the truth" back into the historical narrative. While celebrating the centrality of the region there was, however, not much enthusiasm for exploring the parameters of a new national history. One may even wonder whether there is still anything left of the nation after no many years of state domination. To put it differently it is important to know whether a *negara persatuan* is still imaginable after such a long period in which Indonesia has been a *negara kesatuan*. The *Jakarta Post* illustrated in this respect the indifference of many young Indonesians with regard to the nation:

"I'm Indonesian because I was born in Indonesia…I just have to live with that." "It's just a statistical status, I mean …you are Indonesian because your ID and your passport say so…."[15]

For them being an Indonesian is a geographical fact (or fate) without further emotional attachments.

Meanwhile a controversy emerged concerning some historical issues, which received wide media coverage. These include (1) the question whether Suharto really played a central role during the so-called *Serangan Umum* of March 1 1949, when revolutionary troops managed to occupy Yogyakarta for a few hours; (2) the events leading to the coup of 30 September 1965 and, again, the precise role played by Suharto during the fall of the Old Order; (3) the content of the so-called *Supersemar*, the sacred letter of 11 March 1966 in which Sukarno authorised the transfer of power to Suharto, and, again, the role Suharto played in persuading Sukarno to sign this document; (4) the role of the military in the national history, especially with regard to regional rebellions during the 1950s.[16]

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[15] *Jakarta Post* 16 August 2002.
[16] See Syamdani 2001; Purwanto 2001.

The fact that these issues were debated in public was unprecedented and formed an attack on the credibility of New Order history and in particular the centrality of Suharto in that narrative. Throughout Indonesia school teachers were uncertain about what to teach when pupils raised critical questions, and in the media voice was given to the urge to *meluruskan sejarah* (to straighten out history).

Therefore Minister of education Yuwono Sudarsono (1998-1999) ordered an investigation into these issues in order to improve the content of the official school textbooks, a new edition of which was published in 2000. The results were, however, mixed. Concerning the *Serangan Umum* (issue 1) the role of Suharto was downplayed while more credit was given to Sultan Hamengku Buwono of Yogyakarta as initiator, and the reliability of *Supersemar* (issue 3) was questioned as well .[17]

But two other issues -- the *coup d'etat* of 1965 and the role of the army -- were not revised, while the victims of 1965-66 were still silenced.

Meanwhile various groups in Indonesia are active in digging up episodes of the mass killings while in September 1999 the Society of Indonesian Historians organised a seminar where an appeal was made for critical research on this period. But it is an ominous sign that the results of this seminar have not yet been published while the political climate facilitating these activities seems to deteriorate. There is on the other hand an enormous amount of publications on 1965 by NGO's and individual authors.[18] The killings of 1965-'66 should, however, also remain on the agenda of professional Indonesian historians. And in order to avoid misleading cultural explanations of mass killings -- Balinese culture was out of balance, the killing were an eruption of collective *amuk* in Java -- it would be interesting to make comparisons with the killings in Cambodia under Pol Pot and the historiography of mass violence in India/Pakistan during Partition.[19]

The textbook revision did have a deep impact on the representation of the New Order period. Whereas the 1994 edition explained the rise, the achievements and the values of the New Order including an account of the 'integration' of East Timor, in the revised edition the New Order was almost completely erased![20] The story about the integration and the loss of East Timor --admitting the Indonesian embarrassment about the result of the referendum, criticising the unfair role played by the UN and silencing the

[17] Compare Badrika 1997a: 304 and Rubiyatno 2001a: 253-255.
[18] See Van Klinken 2001b.
[19] See Fein 1993 and Pandey 2001. See for a critical assessment also Asvi Warman Adam 2004.
[20] Compare Badrika 1997b: 41-54 and Rubiyanto 2000b: 43-49; 59-62.

violence of September 1999 – was moved to an earlier chapter where it was located after the liberation of Irian Barat in 1963, while the actual history of the New Order was reduced to three things:1) a list of old ministers who were replaced by a new cabinet in 1966; 2) a picture of the *Supersemar* plus the information that there are various interpretations of the authenticity of this document; 3) although the opening line mentions the developmental success of the Orde Baru, in the next sentence we are reminded that Suharto's regime eventually shipwrecked on KKN (corruption, collusion and nepotism) after which we witness the economic crisis of 1997. It seemed as if the years between 1966 and 1997 had been event-less -- an old ideal of the New Order. But the emptiness of that era implied also the evaporation of the New Order in history.

In contrast to the disappearance of the Suharto regime, 25 pages were devoted to an optimistic narrative of *reformasi*, starting with the crisis of 1997 and ending with the Wahid-Soekarnoputri government of October 1999.[21] Apart from these changes, part 3 of the textbook, on economic development and technological innovation remained more or less the same, but is was no longer rooted in the New Order.[22] As a result this part operates almost outside Indonesia's history since it is virtually disconnected from actors, political space and time.

Outside the domain of the official textbooks, many books were published, which addressed themes and periods in Indonesian history that had been 'no-go-areas' under the New Order. Leftist books by Tan Malaka and Mas Marco, a revival of literature on Sukarno, ethnic oriented regional histories and individual biographies flooded the market (Van Klinken 2001b).

It is, however, easier to erase the New Order from textbooks than from public discourse. There is a strong tendency to write about current politics or history in terms of issues, or *isu*. Under the title *kasus*, *tragedi* or *peristiwa*, a detailed account is given of a controversial or violent event, which belongs to a larger genre of similar *isu*. Looking at the impressive number of publications on such *isu*, one gets the impression that political developments in Indonesia are represented as an archipelago of seemingly unconnected *isu*. Hardly any efforts are done to make meaningful comparisons and analytical connections between these *isu*.[23]

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[21] Rubiyanto 2000b: 63-88

[22] Rubiyanto 2000b: 182-220.

[23] See for an effort in this direction Sihbudi and Nurhasim 2001. Their comparative analysis of local conflicts in Kupang, Mataram and Sambas fails to make meaningful connections with the violent nature of the larger political system which facilitated local conflicts.

In contrast to this tendency towards the fragmentation or *isu*-ization of political discourse, there is a large body of more general normative reflections on current problems. The arena for these discussions is formed by the countless one-day-seminars held in expensive hotels in Jakarta and other big cities. The empirical part of the papers presented at these occasions is often based on newspaper clippings while the content closely follows the fashion of the day. A topic like 'civil society' or 'decentralisation' is almost exclusively discussed in normative terms -- how it should be implemented -- and not in terms of its actual development and historical context. As a consequence the critical analytical middle ground between atomised empirical *isu* and conceptual contemplation is by and large absent, and this is part of the heritage of the New Order.

It is necessary to develop on this middle ground a new set of historically informed analytical concepts and tools, which should be liberated from a long period of intellectual imprisonment under the New Order. 'Ethnicity' is for instance not a static thing but a process, 'civil society' should not be defined in normative terms, but should be seen as a contested space, a 'region' is not a simple geographical term but a dynamic phenomenon which should be understood in the context of the making of Indonesia, while 'crisis' is not a neutral world but an ideologically informed construction. These words are part of complex processes of mediation and just like the society they try to describe they are also constantly in transition.[24] Historical research plays a key role in reformulating a dynamic analytical discourse.

In August 2002 a meeting of the Society of Indonesian Historians (MSI) took place in Cisarua to discuss the new edition of the national history.[25] Those who had hoped for fundamental changes were disappointed. There was no opportunity for theoretical innovation, not much interest to incorporate new subjects, while the fact that most historians who had worked under the New Order were now supposed to write some sort of post-New Order history was not a point of discussion. Apart from some concessions made in order to create more space for regional history there was actually hardly any discussion at all. It will take more time before the post-colonial nature of official historiography will critically be examined. And that involves more than to straighten out some historical controversies.

In order to de-colonise Indonesian historiography, it should be liberated from the interests, perspectives and conceptual frameworks that are part of an

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[24] I refer here to the Indonesian-Dutch research programme 'Indonesia in Transition' which is sponsored by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences.
[25] See *Sinar Harapan* 19-10-2002.

authoritarian state. The theme of de-colonisation is not new. In recent collections of essays both Sartono Kartodirdjo and Taufik Abdullah address the same topic.[26] They tend to reproduce the old debate on perspectives (Van Leur, Smail) and although they mention various new approaches, they do not reflect on the nature of the post-colony and its impact on historiography itself.

Towards a de-colonisation of Indonesian historiography

Against the idea of the centrality of the state as the sole source of legitimate historical documentation, the search for a plurality of voices and perspectives should be encouraged. Instead of a single Indonesian history -- with a single time regime -- the complex interactions between a variety of Indonesian histories -- including different time systems -- could be a helpful approach in order to incorporate different groups of people who are excluded from the official narrative. Jean Gelman Taylor's book in which she traces the historical trajectories of different groups and ideas which eventually met and recognised each other as Indonesians is a promising attempt in this direction.[27] Approaches like these argue against the homogenising categories applied by agencies of the state and encourage the rediscovery of meaningful alternatives.

It is in this context interesting to study the role of local intellectuals -- both in the colonial era as well as during the post-colonial period. They should not be seen as local 'adat heroes', but as mediators between new and external influences and local discourses. We know for instance quite a lot about the official history of nationalism, but very little about the way ideas about the nation were localised and how new futures were imagined within particular regional settings.[28] More broadly formulated, the phenomenon of colonial modernity and its post-colonial trajectories need further study.

Despite this plea for the fragment the context of a strong state should not be ignored because it moulded and informed to a large extent the lives and languages of its subjects. It is therefore imperative to elaborate research questions that cover both the late colonial as well as the postcolonial period. Violence is in this respect one of the subject that should be addressed.[29] Another question concerns the role of regional elites. Reinforced and often

[26] Sartono Kartodirdjo 2001: 29-46; Taufik Abdullah 2001: 221-227.
[27] Gelman Taylor 2004, cf Van Schendel & Schulte Nordholt 2001.
[28] See Schulte Nordholt 2000.
[29] Schulte Nordholt 2002.

(re-)created in the late colonial period as agents of indirect colonial rule, these (semi-)aristocracies went in many places over to the PNI during the Sukarno years, after which they dressed themselves in yellow jackets as Golkar bureaucrats during the New Order. After the fall of Suharto the power structure in which they were used to operate collapsed, and decentralisation and regional autonomy became the new buzzwords. In this changing context some of them manifested themselves as legitimate traditional leaders in search of new regional constituencies. In alliance with local strongmen of the military and/or the police they mobilised regional support by referring to religious or ethnic sentiments in order to control regional resources and, if necessary, to organise ethnic cleansings. Although the timing of most of the violence that has occurred in many regions should be seen against the backdrop of power struggles in Jakarta, and trans-national models of political behaviour play an important role as well, the intensity and precise nature of it can only be understood within particular regional and historical settings.[30]

The list of topics to be studied is of course unlimited. Histories of work, workers, gender divisions, labour migration and labour organisations should figure more prominently on the research agenda.[31] And because class is a serious topic of historical research, the role of middle classes should not be ignored either. By and large neglected in the colonial period and still poorly studied today, the middle classes form in fact the backbone of Indonesian culture. This is a wide field, ranging from lower middle classes, who were perhaps the main victims of the recent economic crisis, to upper middle classes who belong to the new rich. These middle classes share one feature: they are people without history, because they suddenly appear in the late 1980s in the literature when they grow in size and old colonial categories (aristocracy, officials, peasants, labourers) can no longer be applied. We do not know where the various groups that inhabit the new air-conditioned urban spaces come from. And we can only speculate to what extent their habitus and worldviews are framed by older colonial conceptions.[32]

A final note concerns methodology. It is a paradox of the bureaucratic New Order that it has left few accessible archives. Therefore oral histories are of crucial importance for Indonesian historiography because they constitute an

[30] See Van Klinken 2001a, 2002.
[31] See amongst others the activities of the IIAS/CLARA project, which is based at the IISG in Amsterdam and co-ordinated by dr. Ratna Saptari.
[32] See Van Niel 1960; Price 1997; Van Leeuwen 2002.

alternative and open archive.[33] Based on oral narratives it is possible to trace histories of the New Order and to highlight individual experiences outside the disciplined grid of state institutions.

There are a variety of activities in this field. Apart from the Arsip Nasional, which collected interviews on the national revolution, various NGO's try to uncover the histories of the mass killings of 1965. Among these is the Jaringan Kerja Baru, which operates outside academia.[34] Outside Indonesia Hersri Setiawan conducted interviews with representatives of the Indonesian leftist diaspora, which are kept by the IISG in Amsterdam, where the CLARA project initiated oral history research on subalterns groups in Indonesia.[35] Recently the Dutch SMGI project created a large oral history archive on European experiences of the late colonial state, which is kept at the KITLV in Leiden. At the moment the KITLV is initiating an ambitious plan for an audiovisual archive of Indonesian places in the 21st century, which is based on two considerations. First, other media than written sources should be used in order to record the past, and secondly, apart from preserving existing sources, historians must also actively create new source material. There is, in other words, no shortage of enthusiasm and initiatives. What should be encouraged is an effective co-operation between foreign and Indonesian scholars in order to stimulate discussions about the nature of oral history research and the making of oral and visual history archives. Although most efforts to collect and create new sources occur in regional contexts they should not be primarily intended to serve the creation of new ethnic or regional identities. Instead, they can help to inform Indonesians who live elsewhere in the archipelago about the experiences of their fellow countrymen. In order to write a new national history, new sources and subjects should be explored with the intention to bring Indonesians back into their own history.

[33] See also Bambang Purwanto 2002: 154-158.
[34] See Hilmar Farid 2001 and John Roosa, Ayu Ratih and Hilmar Farid 2004.
[35] See for instance Setiawan 2002.

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