

INDONESIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY*

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Introduction

With regard to the relation between the discipline and the society, being historians in Indonesia has been a kind of adventure. How is it possible? History proves to be a risky business. To be responsive to popular demand is doing good to their own society, but neglecting their own field of study. To be independent is also a wrong position, for it means doing bad to their own society and living in ivory tower. This paper is then firstly an attempt to reconcile the dilemma. Secondly, it is an attempt to solve the problem of how a historian can serve the time, without being a "betrayal of the intellectual".

Towards National Identity

The First Venture: Decolonization. The popular demand after Independence for a national history was well responded by Indonesian historians. The search began in 1957 when a handful historians got together in Yogyakarta for a seminar on the philosophy of history. The question of decolonization of historical knowledge was the dominating theme in the seminar. It concerned with actors in history, in short a Neerlandocentrism versus an Indonesiacentrism question, a nationalistic historiography. As is known, textbooks written by Dutch scholars always pictured Indonesian as extension of the Dutch (Coolhas, 1980) and the seminar tried to debunk it (*Seminar Sejarah*, 1957; Notosusanto, 1965; Reid in Reid and Marr,

1979). The seminar itself was later called Seminar Sejarah Nasional I.

There had been already an ideological historiography in the decade of 1950s, before the Seminar Sejarah Nasional I. For instances, Muhammad Yamin (re)published *Sedjarah Peperangan Dipanegara: Pahlawan Kemerdekaan Indonesia* ([1945], 1950), *Gajah Mada: Pahlawan Persatuan Nusantara* ([1945], 1953), and *6.000 Tahun Sang Merah-Putih* (1951), M. Dimjati *Sedjarah Perjuangan Indonesia* (1951), A.H. Nasution *TNI I* (1956), and Yusuf Abdullah Puar *Peristiwa Republik Maluku Selatan* (1956). In short, books with the spirit of heroism and nationalism.

In 1962 John Smail seemed to have moderated the quest of a nationalistic historiography when he wrote, "On the Possibility of an Autonomous History of Modern Southeast Asia", in *Journal of Southeast Asian History*. He offered the concept of an autonomous history by stressing the importance of indigenous dynamics, while foreign forces were only appendices (Smail, 1960). The autonomous history thesis is, however, only partly true. For instances, it is true in cases of the ethnic war between Makassar and Gowa, the Javanese dynastic wars, the Padri War (1821-1838) in which the *tuanku* (religious leaders) and the *penghulu* (clan leaders) were in conflict, the conflict between Aceh and Siak, and the *uleebalang* and the *ulama* rivalry in Aceh. But, it is certainly a gross reductionism in other cases. The coming of the Spanish, the Portuguese, and the Dutch could not be

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reduced into internal dynamics. Neither is it true for the Cultivation System, the liberal policy, and the Ethical Policy.

The stress on actors was certainly there because at that time historiography was understood to be political history and military history, the only histories in fashion. The right solution must be to extend historiography beyond political history. Academically speaking, the risk of ideologization in history at the time was the narrowing scope of history as a discipline.

In addition to the demand of decolonization, the search for national identity was possibly because of the fact that the intellectuals felt the menace of the leftist movement, the Indonesian revolution interpretation of the PKI (Communist Party of Indonesia). As is known in the fifth congress of the PKI (1954), the theoretical statement of the communist role in Indonesia was set up. In 1957 D.N. Aidit published *Indonesian Society and Indonesian Revolution* which delineated the interpretation of the PKI on Indonesian revolution (McVey in Reid and Marr, 1979). The same feeling was certainly shared by the cultural intellectuals. PKI established LEKRA (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, People Cultural Council) in 1950. With the "Konsep Kebudayaan Rakyat" (People Cultural Concept), "Seni untuk Rakyat" (Art for the People), and "Politik sebagai Panglima" (Politics as the Highest Command) it mobilized the masses (Moeljanto in Moeljanto and Ismail, 1995: 32). Intellectual activities in general (including historiography) of the crucial decade (1950s), however, remains to be revealed.

The Second Venture: Social Science.

The Seminar Sejarah Nasional II was held in Yogyakarta in 1970. In addition to descriptive histories (military history and political history), it showed already promising topics, the use of social science in historical study. Apparently, the intellectual leadership of Sartono Kartodirdjo influenced many papers of the seminar. He then masterminded the publication of a standard book called *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia*, comprised of six volumes. The first edition of the books appeared in 1975. The standard book was an exemplification of the use of social

science in history, with the diachronic and synchronic approaches.

An example will clarify the issue. The main contents of *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia III* ("The Period of the Rise and Development of Islamic States") are: Chapter I "The Rise and Development of Islamic States"; Chapter II "The Response of Islamic States to the Western Penetration"; Chapter III "Sailing and Commerce"; Chapter IV "The Development of Islamic Religion and Culture"; Chapter V "The Rise and Development of Cities"; Chapter VI "The Structure of Bureaucracy" (Poesponegoro and Notosusanto, 1981/1982). The Chapter I and II are concerned with the diachronic history, while the rests are synchronic.

The social science approach to history were prevalent in the Seminar Sejarah Nasional III (Jakarta, 1981), the Seminar Sejarah Lokal I (Bali, 1982), and the Seminar Sejarah Lokal II (Medan, 1984) (Reports, various years). All were seminars? True, the social science approach was known only by academicians. The works by academic historians, papers of seminars, students' *skripsi*, masters' *tesis*, and doctoral dissertations used to be kept in the library only. Thus in order to know the extent of the influence of social science approach one should go to the library. As is known in Indonesia publication of historical works lagged behind popular readings. The most popular historiography in the market for the last two decades have been military history (most important has been the voluminous works of A.H. Nasution), and biographies of military, business, or political leaders.

The social science approach to history was the timely endeavor. The question of actors in history was answered in a non-ideological terminology, in a more scientific way, by formulating "history viewed from within" (The introductory remark, Poesponegoro and Notosusanto, 1984). The social science approach had two advantages. Academically, it succeeded in the advancing historiography. Politically, it was a neutral position, for it had nothing to do with the existing power holder; otherwise, historians who dissatisfied the regime would be considered renegades. History did not threaten

the regime, because history was far of being a social critic.

The social science approach, unlike the New Left History in America in the 1960s, was amenable to whomever in power. It is then becoming a kind of disengagement of academicians. In effect, history contributed nothing and contradicted nobody, history was safe for everybody very much like those living in an ivory tower. There was not a single sign of the martyrdom of academicians, like the one in pre-1965 when many academicians were willing to suffer on behalf of freedom. The fact that later the movement against the existing power came from the side of the students proves that history (and social sciences in general) has been a lame science in the near past. We must stop the situation in which history is alienated from its society.

The Coming Venture: Ethics. I hardly dare to use the word "ethics", because I can imagine that many will not agree with moralization of history. What I mean by ethics is simply a commitment beyond one's discipline to replace the ivory tower attitude of the social science approach, a sense of purpose beyond the field of study (Tillinghast, 1972).

The ideology of decolonization of the Seminar Sejarah Nasional I (1957) meant that historians yielded to popular demand without any reserve. The non-ideology of the Seminar Sejarah Nasional III and thereafter was the alienation of science from the rest of society. To think dialectically, there must be a higher state of consciousness among the historians, a state which I call ethics. The non-ideological attitude of alienation made history not responsive to the need of society, especially when it was in need of social critic. The absence of persistent social critic proved to have been detrimental for the society. The New Order developmental ideology with vertical political nationalism (which in effect was just another "Politik sebagai Panglima" [Politics as the Highest Command] policy as did the PKI did not tolerate differences. With alienating itself from society, history was able to evade the influence of that day to day politics, but it was unable to contribute something to society. This kind of attitude was unhealthy

for historians themselves and for the state as well as the society in general.

The new era called Reformation Order deserves to have its own historiography. It is usual that every age has its own trend in historical scholarship. We want to make history functional to, but not influenced by its society, very much like fish in the sea which never become salty. Historians have to be responsive to the climate of opinion of the society (Skotheim, 1969). Academicians whose stipend paid for by their society must not live in an ivory tower; they have no choice other than to be together with their own society. However, they must do it in their own way. For instance, when the society was in danger of the intrusion by the state as in the New Order period, historians had to defend the society by revealing the danger of such an affair. Historians must have no hesitation to criticise the society. When society tends to have an hegemonic politics, the historians have to write on the value of pluralism.

In short, in the Reformation Order history should prepare itself for the most important job, to be a social critic.

Elements of the New Historiography

The new historiography comprises three elements: history as system, history as transformation, and history as social critic.

History as System. The New Order paid much attention on the nation as a political and military entity. Historical consciousness of the officials and the military men had been only political and military history. This fact resulted in the repressive policies in Aceh, Irian Jaya, and Timor Timur. Should the nation consider itself as a great system—or systems with webs of interrelationship—it would certainly contribute to an understanding of a more comprehensive nationhood.

In the prehistory, classical, and modern periods examples of such webs were abundant. The navigation, the commerce, the religion, and the culture composed networks of relationship. Even in the seemingly out of the webs, like Irian Jaya and Timor Timur, local systems with the nearby neighboring states and societies had to be prevailing in

the past, which, in turn, related to the great system. The last statement, however, still needs to be supported by research.

The existence of navigation as a system has always been depicted in many Indonesian historical textbooks, including *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia III*, Chapter III. It was Sartono Kartodirdjo who proposed in the mid-1980s to his colleagues that the Braudelian Model of structure-conjuncture-events be used in writing of Indonesian history (Braudel, 1980: Part 2). He himself uses the approach in his introductory book to Indonesian history (Kartodirdjo, 1987).

Due to weather cycles in Asia, Indonesia had two wind cycles, western and eastern, and two seasons, rainy and dry. The fact offered a structural condition for navigation system to arise. Commercial activities then flourished along the navigation's route. Silk road which passed Indonesia during the Sriwijaya and Majapahit periods and religious journeys were all made possible by the navigation system. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it was Malaka which became the center of the great system, including all Indonesian archipelagoes. In addition to the great system there were regional systems of commerce in Sumatera, Jawa, Sulawesi, Maluku, and other islands. In the past regional systems and the great system were connected to the greater system, the Silk Road.

Islamisation process was also made easier through commerce. Centers of commerce also became the centers of the spread of the new religion. As Islam is missionary religion without special preachers, no doubts that there were formerly muslim foreign traders *qum* preachers in the harbors. They introduced the new religion while awaiting for the right seasons to sail. Consequently there were local communities around the harbors which through intermarriages and conversion embraced Islam. The first Islamic state dated back to the thirteenth century was found in Samudera, a harbor state in North Sumatra. It took three to four centuries for Islam to be able to serve as base of the new system of religion in the whole Indonesia. The new Islamic states then emerged not only in the coastal areas but in the hinterlands, too.

Due to the religion of Islam the greater part of Indonesia had slowly become a unified culture. Many socio-cultural traits related to religion, such as education (*pesantren*), leisure time activities (music, dance, literature, magic), community organization (sufi brotherhood *tarekat*, mosque), and bureaucracy (*sultan*, *kadi/pengulu*) showed that a common system did emerge. However, Malay was still the lingua franca only for commerce and the rest of the populations still spoke their own languages.

Other systems existed in the rest of Indonesia. In Bali Hinduism became a system of its own. Due to the activities of the missionary works of either Catholicism or Protestantism many ethnical groups in Eastern Indonesia and Batak lands were Christianized. They certainly formed systems of life of their own.

History as Transformation. "History is above all the science of change," said Marc Bloch (Bloch, 1976: xxv). For Indonesian historiography the changes can be seen in any textbook. Though certainly there is no even development in the whole Indonesia, the usual chronology of transformations will be (1) from prehistory to Hinduism-Buddhism, (2) from Hinduism-Buddhism to Islam, (3) from Islam to colonialism, and (4) from colonial to national authority. This paper is discussing also the transformation during the period of national authority.

Prehistory to Hinduism-Buddhism: Traditional Society to Statehood. Western Indonesia was exposed to Hinduism-Buddhism in an earlier period than was Eastern Indonesia. The fourth-fifth century is considered to be a transformational era in Western Indonesia and certainly later for Eastern Indonesia. In some parts of the hinterlands of Irian Jaya even until recently the process of change was still going on. In Irian Jaya the transformation was directly from prehistory to modern period, due to the influence of Christianity or the Dutch administration. In many places of East Timor it was Portuguese Catholic mission and administration which introduced modern culture and modern statehood to the tribal societies.

Hinduism-Buddhism to Islam: The Concept of Dewa-Raja to Khalifah. The thirteenth century is considered to be the ear-

last existence of Islamic kingdom, though evidences may show that Islamic communities did exist before the thirteenth century. The most significant change was the transformation of the concept of kingship, from the concept of *dewa-raja* (God-king) to the concept of *khalifah* (vicegerency). In Java, the concept changed but the practise remained the same. Outside Java, the Islamic concept of kingship introduced new terminology, i.e. the word *adil* (just) for power holder.

In addition, Islamisation divided Indonesia into two kinds of Islam. The orthodox (*santri*) and syncretism (*abangan*). Outside Java orthodox Islam was more popular, while Java—beside the enclaves—was syncretics. The two Islamic trends influenced politics, culture, and bureaucracy. The trends have always been manifested in political life, even until nowadays.

Islam to Colonialism: Aristocracy to Meritocracy. The Islamic bureaucracy rested on the traditional elite, an upper layer of the society with genealogical privileges.

The king had the last word for all appointments for high offices through favoritism. As a rule, however, the appointment for bureaucratic posts always gave privileges to members of the ruling class, the *sentana*. Colonial authority continued to use the genealogical consideration, but with additional criterion, the expertise. Due to enlargement of colonial bureaucracy the meritocratic appointment was completely applied for new offices, in education, health service, and many newly opened ones (such as opium seller and pawn shop keeper). Those served in the colonial bureaucracy were collectively called the *priyayi*, regardless of the position.

Colonial to National Authority: Social Mobility. The change was manifested in the social mobility of the native. The highest bureaucratic posts formerly reserved only for the Dutch was then opened for the native. The public education was becoming the means to social mobility. Though the Japanese colonial interregnum favored the traditional *santri*, this sector of the population did not enjoy social mobility due to qualification. In general social mobility enjoyed by the native with *abangan* leaning,

especially in the years following the Independence.

Researchers paid no attention on the problem of social stratification as the cause of compromises, resistances, and rebellions of the *santri*. The usual approach in explaining Indonesian political history of post-Independence is by the endemic tension between the *santri* and the *abangan* culture.

National Authority: Social and Political Transformation. At the bottom of the Indonesian society, the problem of social mobility is still the haunting question, some times the social mobility influences politics sometimes does not. The case of the rise of ICMI (Association of All-Indonesia Muslim Intellectuals) could be seen as a phenomenon of the upward mobility of the *santri* middle class (Hefner, 1995).

Meanwhile, at the highest level the problem is always politics, i.e. the question of democracy. The transitions from parliamentary democracy to the Guided Democracy, the Guided Democracy to the New Order, and the New Order to the post-New Order (the so-called Reformation Order) are all the problems of democracy. Nevertheless, the last transition must be caused by the dissatisfaction of the middle-class to the existing state of democracy. The problem here is both social as well as political.

History as Social Critic. The task of "history as system" and "history as transformation" is the reconstruction of the past for understanding the past. "History as social critic" has somewhat different task, it is the reconstruction of the past for understanding the present and projecting the future. Biography and memoir are the most usual tools for exposing the past events in order to memorise, to criticise, and to correct history, especially the contemporary history. Many books have been recently published in order to criticise, for instance, the New Order. The New Order government had accordingly reacted by legally prohibiting the circulation of many books considered to be dangerous to the regime. The use and abuse of historiography for political purpose was much realised by the PKI in the past. Likewise, the government published book about the PKI's rebellion in 1965 (Sekretariat Negara, 1994).

"History as social critic" is far from political pamphlet. It must show the highest standard of historiography in the use of historical sources, criticism of the sources, sound analysis, and academically acceptable writing. In short it is history, no less and no more. We will discuss the themes of democracy, religiosity, and societal nationalism.

The history of democracy could be traced backwardly to the establishment of Volksraad, the rise of the voluntary associations, and the growth of political parties. In the societal level it could be explicated through oral tradition and oral history of tribal societies outside Java or villages in Java, in the tradition of *lessing* (lecture) of the Budi Utomo, and in the close relationship of the nationalist leaders (Budi Utomo and SI in Solo, Budi Utomo and Muhammadiyah in Yogyakarta). Reversely, the anti-democratic tendencies of both Sukarno and Soeharto could become the history of authoritarianism which is always becoming a threat to Indonesian politics. Book like *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia* by Herbert Feith is an example of how to write about democracy critically. We are waiting for a book on "the decline of democracy" during the last thirty two years.

Prehistory, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam showed that Indonesian were people of religions. The coming of Islam, the resistances to colonialism, the nationalist movements, the rise of voluntary organizations, and the growth of political parties showed enough examples on the role of religion in society and history. Not only Islam, historians could also write something about Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The history of religious life, religious culture, and religious politics are among the many possibilities which will likely convince readers of the religiosity of Indonesian.

The threat of religiosity comes from secularism and marginalization of religion. Secularism has two sources, the indigenous attitude of anti-instituted religion of the present day mysticism and the tendency towards a materialistic world influenced by Western values. Marginalization of political Islam by the state during the New Order

(1970-1990) was against the principle of pluralism. The task of history as social critic is then to warn the state and society of potential social disintegration both of secularism and marginalization.

So far nationalism means only political and cultural nationalism. Political and cultural nationalism has already deep root in the national consciousness. Political nationalism is horizontal unity, transcending territorial and ethnic units. Cultural nationalism is symbolic unity, transcending linguistic, literary, and cultural entities. In the age of industrialization and social division of labor, Indonesia lacks—what we call—societal nationalism. Labor and peasant movements are often suspected to be a danger for society, because we have traumatic memory of labor and peasant movements of the PKI in the past. The societal nationalism then is a world view which see the whole society as one unit, transcending the division of labor in society.

Conclusion

After having ideological historiography of decolonization and non-ideological historiography of social scientific approach, Indonesia needs a new historiographical identity in order to serve the society without losing history as an academic discipline. The result of the search is ethical historiography, meaning to pose history as social critic. For this purpose we have discussed democracy, religiosity, and societal nationalism. Democracy is an important subject, since in the last thirty two years Indonesia has lost its democracy. Religiosity is a necessary subject due to the possibility of the social disintegration. Societal nationalism will become more necessary in the world so divided by social classes.

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