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## Biography as a Source and a Methodology in Humanities Research

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I Nyoman Wijaya

Department of History, Faculty of Arts,

Universitas Udayana, Indonesia

Email: [iwijayastsp@yahoo.co.id](mailto:iwijayastsp@yahoo.co.id)

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### ABSTRACT

This study discusses whether biography can function as a source and a methodology in humanities research. By taking biography as a source, humanities researchers can use a collection of biographical facts as research material or writing resource. Meanwhile, by taking biography as a methodology, they can apply a scientific approach to biography through their research. This is not a simple issue; thoughts on biography that emerged during the 1980s have been unable to adapt themselves to the emergence of post-structuralist approaches, while the scientific biography approach that emerged in the 1990s has similarly proven unable to adapt. Therefore, it is necessary to hold a congress to develop a contemporary biographical approach that can accommodate the influence of post-modernism [beyond modernism] and post-structuralism [beyond structuralism] in humanities research. To further this goal, this article attempts to provoke some preliminary thoughts by revealing the weaknesses of previous biography methodologies before offering alternative ideas that borrow from relevant post-structuralist theories.

**Keywords:** *biography, source, methodology, post-modernism, post-structuralism*

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### INTRODUCTION

This study examines the function of biography as a source and a methodology in the researches of humanities, including language, art, literature, history, culture, philosophy, and literature. Each field has its own methods, theories, and research methodology. However, all still require biography as a tool for obtaining sources [material] and enriching their research methodologies. Biography, thus, has a special position. A search for the keywords “Ilmu-Ilmu Humaniora dan Biografi” in Google Scholar (March 8, 2019) returned 1,370 results in 0.09 seconds; none, however, specifically included that topic.

Nonetheless, the idea of reconciling biography and the humanities in a single ‘unit’ needs further exploration; as both take humans as their objects of study, they may intersect. Such meeting points are particularly evident, for example, when the topic of the biography is a scholar of the humanities.

Take, for example, the intellectual biography of I Gusti Ngurah Bagus (2012), an anthropology professor who explored not only language, art, literature, history, culture, and philosophy, but also religion and politics. This biography included many of his research results, and as such humanities scholars seeking research sources or materials will find this book very useful. By integrating the methodology of intellectual history with the methodology of biography (Kuntowijoyo, 2003: 203–217), this book is not only able to present how its subject became a professor, but also his thoughts and his findings (both before and after his professorship). Furthermore, the ‘entry point’ approach used in the writing of this book managed to place its subject within the context of larger historical events and social, cultural, and economic conditions. As such, one can gain insight into the subject’s research methods, either through the interviews or the bibliography. Despite a number of editing weaknesses,

the book not only provides a resource for humanities scholars, but offers them inspiration.

This article, however, has no pretension of discussing the facts and the methodologies of the book. It is not a book review. Rather, this article attempts to answer the bigger question of whether biography is capable of functioning as both a source and a methodology in humanities research. This issue is particularly important given the significant changes that have occurred in the humanities since the emergence of post-modernism (Neuman, 2017: 132–137) and post-structuralism (Aur, 2006: 145–162). Seeking to address the weaknesses of modernism and structuralism, scholars such as Michael Foucault, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida sought to radicalize and transform structuralism into post-structuralism. They problematized the position of humanity in structuralism, which marginalized the subject and replaced it with structures. Post-structuralism accepts that there is no reality in humanity except language (meaning) while radicalizing the concept of structure. Structures exist, but they are never constant and arbitrarily change the course of history (Adiwijaya, 2011: 810).

Among these thinkers, Barthes stands out with his idea of the “death of the author”. It holds that there is no authentic meaning; everything is a matter of interpretation of interpretation of interpretation (ad infinitum). Meaning flows without boundaries, and everyone is an author (interpreter). If everyone is an author (interpreter), this is equivalent to the death of the author. One important point through which phenomenology criticizes structuralism in linguistics is language itself; phenomenological research into language has shown that human meaning cannot always be expressed through language (Adiwijaya, 2011: 810).

Within the context of history as a science, the rise of post-structuralism since the 1980s has created political biography’s single largest crisis. Biography has seemingly been unable to describe and explain the lives of its research subjects, as its delineations of its research subjects’ lives with specific origins, logics, purposes, and outcomes to create singular objective identities that can be described chronologically now appear to be imaginary creations by writers relying on a form that began in the 19th century. Such biographies, some have argued, are more fiction than history (Ferres, 303–305; Bourdieu, 1986: 69–70; Shaffer in Riall, 2010: 375–397).

Historians should understand this criticism so that they are aware of the importance of replacing the classical method, which tended to apply modernist approaches that were tacitly supported by structuralism. Such approaches and theories are no longer relevant to

the needs of the humanities, which has fundamentally transformed through the growing influence of post-modernism and post-structuralism. Historians should start borrowing from these approaches and theories. In this article, we focus on the works of Bourdieu, hoping to lay guidelines for biographical works that can better explain the life dynamics of their subjects without separating the objective and subjective structures that shaped their lives.

In doing so, this article seeks to answer the following research questions: (i) Why are the approaches and theories of the old model of biography no longer relevant, and why should they be supplemented by a post-modernism and post-structuralism (particularly Bourdieu’s model?); (ii) How can Bourdieu’s model of post-structuralism be implemented as a useful source and methodology for writing biographies as part of humanities research?

Supporting the research questions is the argument that a biography cannot come into being before readers until someone writes it. The approach and theory used by this writer determines the biography’s manifestation. Of course, there is no guarantee that a Bourdieuan model of post-modernism and post-structuralism can provide a new framework for reconstructing the past experiences of research subjects, even when nothing remains but memories (Budiawan, 2010; Darian-Smith and Hamilton, 1994). Biography writers who are capable of using Bourdieu’s model to reconstruct the past experiences of their subjects can, however, confirm the model’s potential to more comprehensively explore subjects’ experiences than possible under the old model.

Departing from this argument, this article seeks to produce stronger guidelines for biography writing. Doing so will not only enable biography to play a bigger role in humanities research, but also transform the paradigms of authors and journalists and create new possibilities for historians.

## DISCUSSION

### Methodology of History and the Old Model of Biographical Thinking

In principle, the methodology of historical research always changes. Carr (1961), in his book *What is History*, wrote “the more historical sociology becomes and the more sociological history becomes, the better”. This statement shocked historians around the world. It is from this point that social history, a methodology favored by American historians, began, as shown by the body of research that emerged between 1958 and 1978. The trajectory of social

history was influenced by Marxism and the *Annales* School, as explored below (based on Hunt, 1989: 1–9).

French historians of the third *Annales* generation (including Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Pierre Goubert) were prime drivers of social history and economic history. These models soon replaced biography and the history of religion in the very conventional journal *Revue historique*. Between 1965–1984, the number of writings applying of social history or economic history approach in *French Historical Studies*, a famed American journal, almost doubled (increasing from 24% to 46%).

In the 1980s, social history began to face stiff competition. At the time, the Marxist and *Annales* Schools began to take an interest in Cultural History. This can be seen in Thompson's "The Making of the English Working Class", in which he rejects the metaphor of Marx's basis–superstructure, which decisively connects socio-economic conditions with the superstructure, and focuses more on cultural and moral mediations.

Soon, cultural history was a significant challenge to the old model of history used by *Annales*. Although economic, social, and demographic histories still dominated the journal (being used in more than half of articles published between 1965 and 1984), intellectual and cultural history came second (35% of articles); for comparison, only 10–14% of articles applied a political history model.

The fourth generation of *Annales* historians, such as Roger Chertier and Jacques Revel, rejected mental attitude as part of historical experience. They saw the image of the social world as a component of social reality. As Foucault explained in his work on discourse, social and economic relations do not precede or determine cultural relation; they are fields of activities and cultural works that cannot be explained by referring to dimensions of experience outside culture. Foucault was not interested in determining the underlying causes of discourse formation. Instead, he is more interested in how the effects of truth are produced by discourse.

In looking at cultural tradition, *Annales* historians such as Chertier and Revel were very much influenced by Foucault's criticism of the assumption of social history. Foucault wrote that there are no natural intellectual objects. As explained by Chertier, "madness, medicine, and state are not categories which can be universally conceptualized and whose objectives are elaborated in every stage", since they have previously been considered *discursive objects* [unrelated objects], they have dynamic effects, and they cannot provide a universal basis for history.

A number of historians were furious with Foucault's

sharp criticism, which they viewed as anti-method as he did not accept methods as models for his work, did not offer causal analysis, and rejected the correlation of discursive formations and social political contexts—for example, between changes in the perception of madness and the socio-political changes in 17th- and 18th-century France.

Foucault urged research into origins, and his genealogy demanded nothing of economy, society, or politics. Although some historians were influenced by Foucault, generally speaking historians still had other options for cultural history, particularly given the strong influence of the anthropological model. The most renowned anthropologist to integrate history into his work was Clifford Geertz, whose collection *The Interpretation of Culture* has been cited by historians from various backgrounds.

This discussion has shown that biography, despite its initial popularity, was ultimately replaced by social history. This shift cannot be separated from approaches and theories of modernism and structuralism. Therefore, it is only by renewing the approaches and theories that biography can play a more significant role in humanities research.

### **Why We Need to Be Critical of the Old Model of Biography**

The model of biography that developed in the 1980s needs to be criticized as its approach is increasingly out of date. It shows the strong influence of social history, with proponents including Abdurrahman Surjomihardjo, Suwadjji Syafei, and Sagimun MD.

According to Surjomihardjo, biography is the description of the experiences and personality of a subject. A biography is expected to describe the life of its subject by clarifying background events—personal, local, national, or even international events. In his exposition, Surjomihardjo argued against using chronological description. A good biography should expose the subject's hobbies, sayings, opinions, and views, as well as their ambitions for their families, societies, etc. (Surjomihardjo, 1982/1983: 54–56).

Quoting Allan Nevins, Sagimun MD (1982/1983: 65–66 and 70) described biography as a tool to facilitate the study of history. Initially, biography was a tool for teaching ethics and moral living. As the historical method was developed, biography took the form of "life and times". *Life* is the part of biography that explores the character, personality, pleasures, and hobbies of its subject, while *times* deals with the historical events

that are closely connected to the subject. The subject of biography, thus, should be put within the historical context within which he or she lived and struggled. Reaching beyond history, such biography also conveys educational and imperative values that are needed for national development.

According to Syafei (1982/1983: 80–81), biography writers need to highlight the heroic, strong, or unique points of the subjects they study. Through a biography's ability to create admiration and show good examples, it will be able to educate readers. However, biography writers should not ignore the objectivity of historic works. As such, they require a knowledge of history, philosophy, and sociology. This knowledge is necessary since their subject is a person with unique strengths or characteristics, and as such the subject should be understood from various perspectives.

From a psychological perspective, every human action has its own history, which means that in many ways human beings are the same in that they eat, have sex, enjoy social activities, go on adventures, and need security. However, they are different in their aspirations, a situation caused by historical traditions, environmental conditions, and individual experiences. This is why it is important to know the subject's environment and other external factors, and as such the subject should be placed within the correct social, economic, political, and cultural context (Syafei, 1982/1983: 80–81).

Equally important, biography writers should avoid the trap of egocentrism. Often, biography writers see the era of their subject through the eyes of said subject, thus making the subject the center of activities. To avoid this trap, writers should be aware that the eras in which their subject live also determines their subjects' actions. It should also be noted that the lives of biography subjects are entwined with the lives of the people around them. Human beings are not alone in society. Therefore, biography writers should not see history as being made solely by individuals, but also by its era; as a matter of fact, it is the era that creates an extraordinary figure. That is why universal human factors should generally be taken into consideration (Syafei, 1982/1983: 82)

Syafei also urged biography writers to position their individual subjects within the larger framework of history, including political history, social history, military history, economic history, etc. Biography writers should investigate more than their individual subjects; in other words, writers should not simply accept a history that is centered around individual figures. Biography writers should not be tempted to produce commemorative biographies, i.e. biographies whose goal is to glorify

their subjects by only discussing their good deeds (Syafei, 1982/1983: 85–86).

Biographies must frame their subjects within the context of socio-political forces to avoid being called romance stories or novels. This is only possible using a critical history method. Using this method, subjects can be viewed as individuals representing the natural force of the era. Such a critical attitude will help avoid the creation of myths surrounding the figure. In other words, a critical history approach will demythologize the biography subject's realm of thought (Syafei, 1982/1983: 87–88)

Again according to Syafei, biography writers should also avoid worshiping and idolizing their subjects. It is sufficient to show that the writer has not forgotten the services of the subject, while still remaining scientific and exact. They should be aware that their main objective is to provide factual information about the subject. Persons known for doing good can provide models or examples that other people can imitate or follow, while evildoers can be used as examples so that people will know what actions must be avoided (Syafei, 1982/1983: 88–89).

Meanwhile, Anhar Gonggong asked biography writers to try to understand their subjects' social and educational environments. To understand these environments, which shape individuals' psychologies and personal/social development, a general description of the subject's society and family is needed. Description of the subject's family environment should provide a better understanding of how he or she became a nationally recognized leader. We should be able to see how the father/mother/other relatives shaped the personality of the biography subject (Gonggong, 1982/1983: 95).

Oral history methods should be carefully used to obtain both factual information as well as the "mood". Writers should be able to find people who know or knew their subject well, such as family members, colleagues, comrades, students, and employees. Psychology is also needed to ascertain the development and behavior of the subject, as well as the subject's ideas, character, and social significance. This should be done in a reasonably human manner; idolization is to be avoided (Gonggong, 1982/1983: 97).

Such an approach to biography, which seeks to determine the objectivity, truth, and totality of the subject, can no longer defend itself from post-modernism and post-structuralism's critiques. The modernist and structuralist model must be supported, complemented, or even replaced by a new model of biography. This, however, can only happen with a simultaneous expansion of the methodology of history research.

## Opportunities for a New Model of Biography

In the 1990s, the previous model of biography was challenged by the scientific model proposed by Kuntowijoyo (2003: 209), which included critical social science theories. Nevertheless, this model retained some of the problems of the old model, as it continued to require four elements: personality of the subject, supporting social forces, historical description of the era, and chance/luck. In explaining the subject's personality, Kuntowijoyo wrote, a biography should pay attention to the subject's family background, education, socio-cultural environment, and self-development. It should also consider the turning points and important changes that determined the subject's life journey.

Scientific biography is different from portrait biography. Portrait biography is attempting to *understand* the figure, while scientific biography is attempting to *explain* the figure on the basis of scientific analysis. Explaining is “analyzing from outside”, using scientific language to understand the figure outside his own consciousness. If the tools used are the concepts and theories of *psychoanalysis*, this tends to produce a *psychohistorical* biography (Kuntowijoyo, 2003: 209).

Psychohistory is “a fusion of psychoanalysis and history”, not just the application of psychoanalysis to history. It is through such analysis that the subject's personality—including the subject's roles, ambivalences, and denials—can be investigated. A subject's psychohistory can be understood through religion, location, culture, family background, psychological growth, culture, political career, etc. (Kuntowijoyo, 2003: 209). A subject's psychohistory can also be traced through the subject's crises and their resolutions, including identity crises, toddler crises (relationship with mother), childhood crises (giving birth to determination and strength), initiative crises (obedience vs. rebelliousness), and crises marked by systematically studying and collaborating with others. It can also be traced by determining the subject experienced intimacy, creative, or integrity crises.

However, no Indonesian biography writers have used this approach. What has been done is a kind of *ethnopsychology*, similar to that used by Anhar Gonggong to understand the concept of *sirik* of South Sulawesi. If *ethnopsychology* is accepted as analysis of the psyche, then Indonesian historians can do many things when writing biography. When ethnopsychology is used to

produce explanations, there is no chance for subjects to interpret their own actions (which would ultimately produce ordinary biography rather than psychohistorical biography). A psychohistorical biography should examine the “sub-consciousness”, an “explanation from outside” (i.e. from a historian). In other words, if *sirik* is a common value and norm in South Sulawesi, biography writers must be aware of how figures are motivated by it.

Kuntowijoyo's model still applies the typology of structural history, which distinguishes between structure and agency. Such an approach has been abandoned by followers of Bourdieu, who have sought to transcend the dichotomy of agency versus structure in order to more comprehensively explain the dynamics of social life. They distinguish between objective structures and subjective structures. Objective structures are those manifested in social spaces, while subjective structures are the dispositions of individuals. The concept of objective structure can be traced back to Marxism, while the concept of subjective structure is rooted in phenomenology. Bourdieu rejects a distinction based on a structure vs. agency dichotomy, holding that it is not adequate to explain social reality. Agency and structure (the subject and the external world) cannot be easily separated. Both are interconnected, and both influence each other in a complicated process to produce social practice (Harker et al., 2009: xvii–xviii).

Bourdieu rejected modern Marxism, holding that this school of thought overemphasized economic factors as structures shaping human beings and ignored humans' subjectivity as agents. Likewise, Bourdieu rejected phenomenology, disagreeing with the propositions that make the truth of primary experience explicit and belittle various questions about external conditions. According to Bourdieu, phenomenology tends to place humans as determining subjects with independent consciousnesses while underestimating the influence of social reality (which presents itself as objective structure). In place of these theories, Bourdieu offers the concept of habitus and field to explain the non-linear relationship between agency and structure (Harker et al., 2009: xvii–xviii).

Habitus is a system of dispositions (desires, tendencies) that are dynamic and long-lasting, and that function as a generative basis for objectively structured and integrated practices. It is a cognitive structure (including intellectual capability) that mediates individuals and their social reality; in other words, when dealing with social reality, individuals use their habitus as the medium. Meanwhile, the field is a network of interpositions within a social order that exists separately from the consciousness and will of individuals. As Bourdieu's

main conceptual tools, habitus and field are supported by concepts such as symbolic power, strategy, struggle (for symbolic and material power), and various types of capital (economic, cultural, and symbolic capital).

Bourdieu's concepts have been adopted by prosopography writers, who have abandoned Lawrence Stone's classical approach of elites and masses (cited in Gilbert and Graubard, 1972: 107) for the Bourdieuan model introduced by Keats-Rohan (2007: 21). Keats-Rohan proposed the following understanding of prosopography: (i) prosopography is a study about individuals with a common field; (ii) That common field is based on the comprehensive collection (with perhaps hundreds of variables) of data on individuals, including their social origins, educational backgrounds, trajectories, positions in social space and field, perspectives (particularly their position-taking in important fields), and their resources, especially their specific symbolic capital; (iii) groups of similar data must be collected for each individual; and (iv) the main focus of prosopography is not the individuals themselves but the history and field structure.

Prosopography must be distinguished from biography. Biography deals with the life of one person; if it takes more than one subject, it is called collective biography. Although the term 'collective biography' is often confused with prosopography, these concepts are unrelated. Biography, autobiography, and collective biography focus on individuals and the details of their lives, while prosopography only processes data files related to biography. In biography, the writer has a direct personal interest in the subject, while prosopography writers are only interested in individuals so long as they have one or more characteristics in common (Keats-Rohan, 2007: 15–16).

Within the context of biography, Burke (2011: 1–9) described the inevitable role of social theories as supplements to Bourdieu's concepts, considering them to temporarily stop the use of 'common sense'. Burke also showed the danger of replacing a theory of reason with learned irrational prejudices, as well as procedures that can help avoid this problem. For this purpose, Burke used education as his object of study, discussing the empirical application of habitus in terminating the theory of reason without ignoring social theories. In doing so, he not only commented on the need to apply theory in educational research, but also showed how the interview method can support the Bourdieu's argument that habitus can be implemented in both educational research and in academia in general.

## **Biography as a Source in Humanities Research**

Of the humanities, history—whatever the method—has the most freedom to make use of biography as a source. This freedom has come along as the influence of critical history has decreased, an important event in the development of history as a science. It signals the end of the Voltairean Era, during which historians unquestioningly obeyed Voltaire's demand to avoid highlighting facts without referring to accurate and reliable witnesses (Thomson, 2012: 35).

During the heyday of Voltairean history, historians agreed that a source can only be used if it met three requirements: they witnessed it themselves, they heard it themselves, and they experienced it themselves. Meanwhile, sources written by non-witnesses or non-doers of events—even contemporary ones—can still be regarded as primary sources. However, these sources were of limited authority, being far weaker than sources that met the three criteria above. As such, they could not be used immediately; the historian would first have to verify the accuracy with which the writer described the event and delivered the truth. Such source needed to be supported by other, independent sources (Garraghan: 1946).

Under the criticism of radical postmodernists, historians began resisting critical history as a method. For example, Robert Samuel urged for history to be understood not as a record of fact, but rather as a historian's fiction or fabrication (Evans, 1977: 7). In Indonesia, such resistance was exhibited by Moeftich Hasbullah in his online criticism of Nina Herlina Lubis' article "Analisis Historis tentang Sunan Gunung Jati: Perspektif Metode Sejarah Kritis" (A Historic Analysis of Sunan Gunung Jati: A Critical History Perspective). Hasbullah argued that critical history failed to provide a tool suited to recent scientific developments. Historians have entered the postmodern era; critical history, meanwhile, is a product of modernism. Although it may appear strong, it produces nothing but insults and nihilism.

In writing biography, critical history can no longer offer an appropriate method. Writers cannot always ask "Is there proof? Does the document exist? Who is the witness? Can we find the witness? Can the witness be contacted?". They usually let the biographical figures tell about their experiences with events, or what they witnessed or heard from other people. Much more experience is kept in memory than in written documents; as such, it is essential that this experience be explored through intensive circular interviews.

The quality of figures' memories regarding historical events depends on the images these events evoke, as well as the year they were born and how involved they were in the social practice. Indonesians born in the late 1920s and early 1930s had a broad range of experiences, covering the end of the colonial period, the Japanese occupation, the Netherlands-Indies Civil Administration (NICA) government, the physical revolution, the early years of Indonesian independence (i.e. the Liberal Democracy era), the Guided Democracy era (culminating in the massacre of suspected communists in 1965/1966), the New Order period, and the early years of political reform. Even when these figures did not know each another and had experiences that were separated in space and time, the combination of their experiences will produce a historical narrative of a certain topic, supplementing existing texts.

Similarly, the Balinese born in the early 1930s lived in a different area, and experienced a number of events that occurred in the last years of Dutch colonial rule. They experienced the Dutch education system, how teachers taught, and what students did after school (Wijaya, 2003, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2018). They may have witnessed air battles between American and Japanese forces in the South Bali Sea (Wijaya, 2014). They may have seen Japanese troops landing on Sanur Beach, climbing the cliffs, and asking the local residents for help. They may have felt how people fled the region in fear (Wijaya, 2014), as well as how the Japanese troops confiscated all available motor vehicles (Nyoman Wijaya 2013).

Such Balinese could also discuss how they experienced Japanese power through the economy, trade, mass media, industry, agriculture, sports, and art. For example, the colonial grand narrative rarely mentions that the Japanese paid a lot of attention to arts, especially the fine arts. They held a competition to find the best painters in Denpasar, and two of the artists involved—who had studied under a Taiwanese artist—produced three-dimensional paintings in what became known as the Denpasar Style (Wijaya, 2012).

Similarly, in an investigation of the physical revolution period, the combination of individual testimonies from this period could reveal a number of trivial matters (unimportant daily events) not recorded in the grand narrative; this has been attempted by undergraduate theses (Rama, 1981), dissertations (Wirawan, 2009), and books (Pendit, 2008). Although these individuals did not discuss the revolution, as exposed in the work of Pindha (2012), they nonetheless had interesting experiences to share. Most of them were between the ages of 13 and 15,

and they were sitting in junior high school. They usually took on roles as liaisons or messengers for the guerrilla fighters hiding in the jungles of Bali. They brought not only letters about the war, but also about love and other personal matters.

Such individuals may reveal the situations and conditions of their areas. One informant from Sanur, a village six kilometers east of Denpasar, said that “real war” did not take place in his village; war-like situations were only seen before the general attack on the Japanese military barracks on December 13, 1945. Afterwards, life went on as usual (Wijaya, 2014). Although this village did not have a war-like atmosphere, because it housed a number of guerrillas, the colonial police—working with pro-NICA local people—regularly conducted sweeps and often intimidated residents. They often conducted inspections, during which all adult males had to gather in front of a house or the village meeting hall. During these inspections, the colonial police checked them. Men with long hair or pale faces were taken and interrogated as suspected guerrillas. On one occasion, a child mocked the colonial police by launching a blazing paper rocket into the sky; there were also numerous heirlooms stolen by NICA troops (Nyoman Wijaya, 2014).

This description of everyday activities in Sanur differs significantly from those in Peguyangan, a village seven kilometers north of Denpasar, as told by a villager. Republican guerrillas escaped to this village after a failed attack on the NICA barracks in Denpasar on April 10, 1946. Much violence was committed by the colonial police as they attempted to identify and arrest the young guerrilla fighters (Wijaya, 2012).

Various biographical figures have their own stories about the Indonesian revolution. One told of the condition of Denpasar after the defeat of the Ciungwanara Troops under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel I Gusti Ngurah Rai in Klaci, Margarana, on November 20, 1946. The day after the incident, the colonial police travelled around Denpasar and announced its failure. As such, most of the residents of Bali knew about the Republicans' defeat (Wijaya, 2003: 98).

Many of the events from the early years of Indonesia's independence can be told using biography as a source, including the founding of private schools as well as students' intra and extra school activities. These include the experiences of Balinese university students outside their hometowns, especially in Yogyakarta, and offer an understanding of the teaching system of Universitas Gadjah Mada, the social life of the Balinese outside their hometowns, and the interfaith love stories and marriages of university students (Wijaya, 2012, 2014). Balinese

senior high school students living in Malang similarly offer an understanding of their lifestyles, favorite films, love stories, and tastes in food, as well as their encounters with theosophy and conversion to Buddhism and Christianity (Wijaya, 2003, 2014).

Entering the 1960s, one widely discussed event is the killings of (suspected) communists in late 1965/early 1966. A grand narrative of this event can be produced by highlighting smaller narratives (i.e. the experiences or testimonies of biographical subjects). Such testimonies do not depend on subject age, but rather where they lived and their position in society. Small children, teenagers, and adults; generally, nobody directly observed the massacre.

Those persons who were still very young when the massacres took place only heard of these events from the stories circulating in society. If they happened to live near areas where massacres occurred, they were usually able to point to the location by saying ‘over there’, although they never directly participated. Those who were already adults often saw people being beaten by others and bodies lying on the street; stories about houses—especially the houses owned by the ethnic Chinese—being razed were also common (Wijaya, 2014).

Wijaya (2018), for example, discussed the experiences of a doctor who was visited by a group of *tameng* (executioner) who sought to detain a patient being treated at the hospital where he worked. This subject described the appearances of the executioners, their clothing, and their accents. The information conveyed by the figure implied that not all executioners arrested and killed their targets immediately. The executioners seem to have obeyed the doctor, who had said “Once they have recovered and are no longer at the hospital, I am not responsible for them. So, I have to ask you to leave the hospital now, and please do your job somewhere else.”

Such trivial everyday events are rarely documented in the grand narrative of the 1965/1966 massacres, which of course require the attention of humanities researchers as well as historians. Why? Because memories of the event affect, to some degree, daily activities, and rise to the surface when it intersects with incidental interests. As another example, take the story of a figure whose house was burnt by the masses during a massacre of suspected communists in Bali in 1965/1966 (Wijaya, 2001). When this incident happened, the figure was not in Bali. These events were reconstructed based on the experiences of family members whom the figure happened to meet outside Bali. Upon arriving at his house in Bali, the figure saw the ruins of his house and he identified the dominant people in the event. Several years later, when the figure had become a successful businessperson, the children

of the people involved in the incident came seeking employment, he rejected them without expressing his reasons (Wijaya, 2001).

Regarding the next period, i.e. the New Order government, biography can teach us much about how the Balinese people responded to Soeharto, the differences between Soeharto and Soekarno, the development of infrastructure (airports, sea ports), tourism, education, health, meditation, healing, and even philosophy (Wijaya, 2014, 2016). Biography can also expose the arts missions and state celebrations of the era (Wijaya, 2016).

The above discussion presents only some of what biography can offer as a source of research, which of course benefits not only history, but also the humanities in general. Critical history is still relevant, as no matter how good the work of a writer, biography remains a tertiary source that is far removed from the events and incidents. Nevertheless, biography is still history, a primary source (especially for subjects who are still living when the research and writing take place) regarding an event in the past.

## Biography as a Methodology in Humanities Research

My approach to writing biography and the methodology I used can be read in a 2011 paper that distinguishes between writing biography, prosopography, and biographical novels. Said paper exposes the biography of John Ketut Pantja (JKP) using the biographical methodology of the 1980s (as previously discussed). Reading the paper, it is clear how the thoughts of Surjomihardjo, Syafei, and Gonggong provided its scientific basis.

For the interests of humanities researchers today, the methodology used in writing the JKP biography is still functional (Wijaya, 2001). Of course, the elements of modernism and structuralism embedded in the methodology should be cleared first to ensure that one is not trapped by the principle of pursuing the objectivity, truth, and totality of the figure. If there is no interest in promoting post-modernist and post-structuralist theories, the methodology used by the book can still be used, as it has proven capable of producing a short yet comprehensive biography that can use the details of personal events to understand a bigger history.

Details could be accessed in this research because the biographical methodology of the 1980s integrally relies on circular interview techniques. As such, many hidden facts about JKP, including the environment in which he was raised can be revealed; this includes, for example, the historical involvement of his family with



a Pasek Badak altar at the Pura Taman Ayun Mengwi Complex. The story of this figure is revealed in folk stories, oral traditions, and chronicles (Vansina, 2014), all of which offer scholars from various backgrounds the opportunity to make the figure an object of research.

This book also exposes the activities of JKP's father as *kelian banjar* and the everyday routines of JKP's mother, from driving away birds in the paddy fields, weeding the swamp cabbages, to supplying pig feed. The book also refers to JKP's traumatic, dramatic experience when he was a child, particularly his inability to buy roasted pork and fruit drinks when he watched cockfighting at the village and outside the temple (in the *jaba pura*). There are also stories of his school days, including his social circles both in and out of school. JKP's after-school activities, including herding ducks, cutting the grass, looking for potable water, playing with his peers, and watching the magical performances of *leak* are explored, as are stories of his evening and nighttime activities (which are no longer seen today). The book also tells about JKP's first journey to Denpasar, the starting point of his encounter with urban culture. Having his photo taken in the mock cockpit of an airplane at a night fair was one of JKP's first experience dealing with symbols of modernity. His encounters with urban culture boosted his confidence and eroded his inferiority complex.

There are also descriptions of JKP's experiences as a student at Mengwi Junior High School, where his friends were more progressive and smarter than his friends in elementary school. He built a friendship with a woman whose older brother was a pilot, and this inspired JKP to become a pilot and join the Indonesian Air Force. There is also a story about his ability to organize others, which later proved useful when he entered the world of business.

The next part of the book discusses when JKP returned to his hometown after gaining knowledge and experience. It discusses JKP's studies in Denpasar, where he learned to become a pilot. Because of his family's limited financial resources, he had to work as a newspaper boy and live with an in-law. Although he failed his final examination and broke up with his girlfriend, he rose from his failure, working first as a malaria prevention officer before enrolling as an Indonesian Air Force cadet.

The next section discusses JKP's journey as an Air Force student in Solo and in India, where he learned about Hinduism by comparing the religion in Bali and in India. The story of JKP's relationship with a Christian girl in India and his Air India flight from India to Jakarta by is also mentioned. After returning from India, JKP became involved with a woman from Solo, but their relationship

was put on pause when JKP traveled to Makassar with the air force. It is also told that JKP ultimately had to return to Surakarta to marry his girlfriend, who was pregnant when he left for Makassar. After their wedding and divorce, JKP returned to Makassar; having completed his senior high school studies during his previous trip to the city, he enrolled at the Faculty of Law, Universitas Hasanuddin. The book also includes the story of JKP's friendship and love with a female student, as well as his later relationship with Elisabeth Lallo, whom he later took as his wife and for whom he converted.

The above exposition is only a small part of JKP's biography; the remainder requires no further discussion, as this summary has been intended solely to demonstrate the end results of the implementation of the 1980s-era methodology. This shows that, despite its details, this approach to biography can only understand the subject from within himself; it cannot explain the subject from outside using scientific principles. Does such a methodology offer benefits to humanities researchers? It all depends on the purposes and objectives of the research and the ability to conduct circular interviews (in which the figure is not led directly to the objective the researcher wants to achieve, but elicited to talk about something else first so that he does not realize that he has expressed all of the experience he can remember; this eases the achievement of the research achieved).

To play a bigger role in humanities research, it is high time that biography borrowed from Bourdieu in order to elaborate its subjects from outside based on the principles of post-structuralism. Bourdieu's theory, known as generative structuralism, holds that (Habitus x Capital) + Field = Practice. In other words, a person's practices and everyday social life are influenced by the intersection of that person's habitus and capital within the field.

Basically, everyone has four types of capital whose accumulation varies. These are: (i) economic capital (in the form of moving and stationary objects); (ii) social capital (a network of relations that provides a resource for gaining social position); (iii) cultural capital (including certificates, knowledge, and speaking styles); and (iv) symbolic capital (producing symbolic power; this includes high status and a well-known family name). A person's accumulation of capital is influenced significantly by that person's habitus, including the values absorbed from that person's everyday family, social, and school environments as well as the values developed through individual and collective history. Habitus produces practices, either individual or collective, that reflect the history that generates it. Habitus guarantees

that past experience is actively present in each organism through its perceptions, thoughts, and actions. Formal rules and written norms are used to guarantee compliance (Haryatmoko, 2016: 40).

If a person has preferred reading, writing, and discussion since childhood, that person will accumulate more cultural capital than a person who has focused on trade and investment. The latter, meanwhile, would enjoy more economic capital. Given this capital inequality, to be able to compete with others in the field, a person needs to convert capital. One can convert economic capital, for example, into social capital (social networks, relations) by donating money to a political party, then later becoming a party official and finally gaining an elected position. Similarly, this individual can convert symbolic capital into cultural capital by attending lectures in an official capacity and receiving a doctoral degree. Indeed, of the four types of capital, economic capital is the easiest to convert. All of these efforts are undertaken as part of the effort to gain an advantage in social life (Haryatmoko, 2016: 49).

Gaining an advantage in the field is also possible when one makes distinctions (silently compete), uses symbolic power, and uses symbolic violence (to coerce the controlled party into giving a kind of consent). Such activities cannot be avoided, as human beings live and grow through social interactions, which are used as mechanisms for reproducing power relations between individuals and groups. Do the subjects of biography do those three things? How do they do them?

These questions can be answered in various ways, as determined by the habitus of the subject. Regarding distinction, answers can be found in the works of Baudrillard, particularly his concept of mimesis (imitation) within the context of desire. Bourdieu and Baudrillard shared an understanding of the question of desire. According to Baudrillard, one's desire for things stems from one's imitations of others' desires (mimesis). As the desire grows, the other party who initially helped cultivate the desire becomes an obstacle (Haryatmoko, 2016: 63).

All of these reflect humanity's narcissistic side, the desire for oneself to be loved. While Bourdieu argues that humanity's narcissism is intended to gain social recognition, Baudrillard calls this sign manipulation. Both, however, have the same end; in principle, sign manipulation is undertaken in search of social recognition, as behind the sign there is desire for social integration or distinction (Haryatmoko, 2016: 63). Is it for the sake of prestige or social integration that one does not want to buy the cheapest goods? Such questions are essential when

identifying the social status or achievements (income, prestige, culture) of a biography subject.

### **Bourdieuian Biography as a Methodology and a Source**

This section answers the question of how Bourdieu's model of post-structuralism can be applied in biography writing as both a methodology and a source. Biography, the process of telling someone's life story through research, is regarded as an effort to connect structure and agency. To more accurately understand a life story, a researcher must place it within its structural context: 'biography, history, society – three coordinate points for the appropriate study of human beings' (Mills 1959: 143 in Burke 2011: 5). Through structure and agency, researchers understand the influence of structures, individual strategies, and experiences upon agency. With a depth and richness of data, researchers can see the silent and often hidden processes of agency within the context of the structure and how they may work against or outside the structure.

Many researchers choose a biographical approach when trying to understand major historical events. According to Elliott (2005: 305 in Burke 2011: 5), biography can be used to understand everyday life, while Segert and Zierke (2000: 241 in Burke 2011: 5) argued that, when studying the metamorphosis of habitus among the people of East Germany, it is obvious that individuals collect and compose experiences as long as they live. These experiences may not automatically produce new actions, but they can play new or renewed roles. Miller et al. (2005: 113 in Burke 2011: 5) emphasized that the purpose of sociological research is to raise awareness about what is not usually seen, i.e. the everyday behaviors that are taken for granted and "hiding before our very eyes."

The need to appreciate structure and agency, as mentioned above, refers to the relationship between habitus and biography. As habitus can be understood as dynamic, researchers have to be able to see everyday events that deterministically change life. Experience may have a cumulative effect on practice, and as such empirical strategies are needed to track records through life stories. Therefore, according to Bourdieu, (1987: 6 in Burke 2011: 5), although biography has more emphasis on agency, researchers must consider structural influences when recording and analyzing a subject's life history. Failing to do so is akin to entering a subway without taking into account the network structure, i.e. the objective relationship matrix between the different stations.

On the other hand, Grenfell and James (1998: 10

in Burke 2011: 5) explained that Bourdieu's theory of practice has become important because it attempts to apply an objective approach to understanding the role of structure in social phenomena while simultaneously respecting the subjective actions of the individuals. This is why, in biography, researchers are asked to examine individual life to understand it not only as an autonomous phenomenon separated from society, but also as existing within the structure and history.

Wijaya (2018), for example, showed how A.A. Made Djelantik's subjective structure was connected with other individuals within a network of objective structures. As such, Djelantik's life journey was always connected to the life journeys of other individuals, both within the context of his extended family in Puri Karangasem, one of Bali's pre-colonial kingdoms, and elsewhere. Subjective structure and objective structures, including history, are obviously seen in Djelantik's biography. This biography is different from most, where objective structures are determining factors that shape individual experiences. In this biography, as in Wijaya's other works, Bourdieu's analysis—although not explicitly referenced—it implicitly used, as the life of the individual is not positioned as an autonomous phenomenon separated from society, objective structures, and history.

If Bourdieu's biographical analysis is used as a methodology, humanities scholars can refer to the works of Ward and Jenkins (1999 in Burke 2011: 6–7), who have written about the implementation of biography in education. They say that much money and time was invested in the 1990s to assess higher education in Great Britain, but only a few knew the experiences of individual students. Ward and Jenkins wrote that previous research had an important role, and admitted its use, but argued that it failed to show the long-term impact (if any) of academic titles on the lives of individual alumni. They thus referred to the method of oral history (as will be discussed later) as a means of applying Bourdieu's methodology.

If using Bourdieu's biographical analysis as a source, humanities scholars can refer to the works of Foster et al. (1996: 3 in Burke 2011: 7), who explained that—during Thatcher's administration—research into education within the context of the social gaps (Hargreaves 1967 in Burke 2011) and social frictions felt by the working class (Jackson and Marsden 1966 in Burke 2011: 7) were replaced by a preoccupation with academic standards and examination results. They wanted to address falling academic standards without heeding the inequality of the education system; in other words, they were assuming that failure of education was being caused

by the individuals involved, not the system.

Humanities researchers, especially Indonesian scholars in the field of socio-cultural anthropology, are generally interested in the everyday lives of contemporary society. Referring to the above research, these scholars could see the issues of contemporary education in Indonesia as being similar to those in Thatcher-era England. Teachers are more preoccupied with administrative activities than academic ones, and educational failure is blamed on individuals rather than the system. This issue requires further study. Although the object of the research is contemporary society, the contemporary is always related to the past. Therefore, humanities researchers in Indonesia can borrow Burke's biographical methodology, which not only criticizes Bourdieu, but also concludes that all techniques of objectification must be implemented to temporarily stop the use of the theory of common sense (1991: 13 in Burke 2011: 7).

Humanities researchers—historians, anthropologists, literature scholars, and archeologists—who are not interested in Burke's model of methodology, which only relies upon Bourdieu's concept of habitus, can refer instead to the methodology offered by Ferme (2001: 187–194). Ferme borrowed more extensively from Bourdieu's concepts, applying them to the domain of gender by examining the interests of an international non-governmental organization and its political partners through their emphasis of women's participation in state and civil society. Through her article, Ferme sought to build an understanding of the domination/subordination model, which exists outside Bourdieu's theory. Departing from Bourdieu's classical argument on the reproduction of unequal systems, including gender inequality in everyday life, Ferme also relied on such Bourdieuan concepts as habitus, disposition, doxa, and symbolic violence within the context of the reproduction of inequality. Based on studies of the gender implications of the practice of law, education, politics, and economics in Cameroon, she concluded that urban and rural women generally have more options than they did before the state and feminist organizations fought for egalitarian agendas, but progress was often written using patriarchal orders.

Humanities researchers can also refer to the work of Singh (2012: 479–504), who borrowed Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital to explain how Indira Gandhi gained political legitimacy in India. Despite being a member of Nehru's family, Gandhi was regularly insulted by the post-Nehru leadership. The political ruling elites degraded her family's symbolic capital, i.e. mass popularity-based capital. Nonetheless, Gandhi had an

advantage, namely the strong patron-client relationships between the landed and the landless. It is because of this situation that the ruling elites' attempts to destroy Gandhi's symbolic capital in India failed. Gandhi made the most of access to symbolic power at state offices to prove that landless groups could electorally defeat the ruling elites. At the same time, however, Gandhi was unable to escape the insults she received.

In his article, Singh was thus able to apply Bourdieu's concept of field to offer important findings about leadership and legitimization. Singh showed how family background could facilitate female leaders as they sought high political positions. Singh also showed that, even when female politicians hold a high position, they do not always have high levels of political legitimacy. For a female politician to gain legitimacy (in the form of respect from colleagues and subordinates), the political space imposed on her should be symbolically favorable.

Furthermore, if political policy is categorized as political practice, the success of Gandhi's political policies—whatever the form—may be seen as having been shaped by the level of symbolic authority she gained through her fight against the ruling elites. Singh used Bourdieu's concept of field to explain that rivalry between social actors is a fundamental part of everyday social realities. The concept of field is necessary for researchers to illustrate various perspectives systematically while investigating the social phenomena in certain areas.

Whatever model chosen, be it Burke's (2011), Ferme's (2001), or Singh's (2012), humanities researchers applying Bourdieu's biographical analysis must—as mentioned by Ward and Jenkins—master biographical narrative interview methods so that they can understand respondents' life stories. Rosenthal's "traditional" model of biographical interviews (2003 in Burke 2011: 5–6), consisting of three sub-sessions, can be used as learning material. The first sub-session is intended to obtain an initial narrative, what may be called the main narrative. In this sub-session, the respondent is asked to tell his or her life story. During this phase of the interview, the researcher is supposed to make as little verbal and physical input as possible to limit level of reflectivity. The second sub-session is generally conducted in the same position. The interviewer can seek more clarification or information about topics or areas discussed by the respondent, but should only ask questions about the topics or areas mentioned by the respondent. The Questions should follow the narrative's order and be expressed in the language or terms used by the respondent. Finally, in the third sub-session the interviewer makes an initial analysis of the previous two sub-sessions and reflects

on their results. The interviewer's job is only to provide an initial analysis of previous sub-sessions, although the interviewer has the discretion to interrogate the respondent's narrative and inquire about topics or subjects that the respondent did not discuss. The third sub-session, thus, is a little reactionary, as the composition of the interview is left to the interviewer's discretion.

The biographical narrative interview model, meanwhile, is an application of the theory being used by the researcher. It gives the researcher the opportunity to understand social phenomena, as it allows them to ask about social relations. The theory does not only discuss problems, but can also be used to build a research design, including research examples, initial narrative questions, and further questions. The interviewer, therefore, must conduct two interview sub-sessions beforehand, while simultaneously limiting the possibility of influencing the respondent. Therefore, during the first session, the respondent can talk about anything without interruption, as the respondent is talking about his or her life story. During the second sub-session, the researcher can only ask questions about topics that had been discussed by the respondent in the first session. At this stage, the theory learnt can be put into practice, thereby giving the researcher the opportunity to discuss other narratives or topics.

## **CONCLUSION**

Can biography function both as a source and a methodology in humanities research? Through this article, I have answered this question by demonstrating that biography can function as a source and a methodology in humanities research. As a source, biography can facilitate the collection of biographical facts for research materials or for writing. However, using the model popularized in the 1980s would produce limited results, as that model has not accommodated the critiques of post-structuralism. Similarly, the model developed in the 1990s would be poorly suited, as it continues to separate structure and agency—a tendency abandoned by post-structuralism.

The weaknesses of these models can be addressed by borrowing from post-structuralist theories, especially Bourdieu's, as done by a number of researchers since 2001. Humanities researchers, historians and non-historians alike, can use such biographic works as both sources and methodologies. Researchers can refer to Burke's argument that structure and agency must be appreciated to show the relationship between habitus and biography. In this regard, researchers must be able to see everyday events, because Bourdieu states that such

events deterministically change life. Experience has a cumulative effect on practice, and as such empirical strategies are needed to track someone's life story.

Humanities researchers can also refer to Ferme (2001), who borrowed Bourdieu's concepts more extensively. Referring to this model, they can examine the interests of international non-governmental organizations and their political partners through their emphasis of women's participation in contemporary Indonesian state and civil society. Using such a model, researchers need not be trapped by the domination/subordination model; instead, they can examine the reproduction of inequality in everyday life using Bourdieu's concepts.

Researchers can also refer to Singh (2012), who used Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital to explain how Indira Gandhi gained political legitimacy in India. Where Singh had researched Gandhi, Indonesian scholars can investigate Soekarno and Soeharto's sons and daughters, asking why only one of Soekarno's descendants has become the President of Indonesia. Why have Soeharto's sons and daughters not been able to hold such a position?

Like Gandhi, Megawati—as a daughter of Soekarno—faced numerous insults during the New Order era. Her family's symbolic value was degraded, but she sought capital through mass popularity. Megawati gained an advantage through the strong support of the lower classes, known as *kelompok sandal jepit* (people wearing cheap flip flops), as well as the political and economic turbulence that preceded the fall of the New Order. She and her party gained considerable support, and in elections they defeated the Golkar Party that had won every general election under the New Order. Referring to Singh, researchers can use Bourdieu's concept of field to further study leadership and the process of gaining legitimacy, with emphasis on the family's historical background. Does the historical background of Soeharto's family not provide them with enough symbolic capital to gain the presidency?

Although a number of biographies have used Bourdieu's analytical model, my experience shows that the works of Burke (2011), Ferme (2001), and Singh (2012) still show many weaknesses. They seem unable to distinguish between concepts and theories. Habitus, capital, field, doxa, and symbolic violence are not theory, but rather concepts in Bourdieu's greater theory. While Bourdieu once described his thought as theory of practice, given the intersection between habitus and capital in the field it is more appropriate to term this theory generative structuralism (Harker et al., 2009).

Given that the concepts of Bourdieu's theory

should be interrelated, whether they are in the form of preposition or causality (Neuman, 2017: 79–99), it should be understood how habitus shapes capital, how the subject's capital quality and ability to convert capital will influence success in a field, how through distinction and symbolic violence the subject can maintain legitimacy, and so on. The subject's success or failure depends on the generative output of habitus and capital, as adjusted to the field through capital conversion. In short, Bourdieu's theory, if used for research, cannot be simply divided as done by these three researchers. As mentioned by Ward and Jenkins, oral history provides a means of initiating a Bourdieuan analysis.

In summary, biography can function both as a source and a methodology in humanities research, provided that scholars are train themselves to use the post-structuralist theories that have dominated the discipline. Academics need not rely only on Bourdieuan analysis, but may also look to such great thinkers as Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, and Gilles Deleuze. Therefore, it is necessary to hold a congress to develop a contemporary biographical approach that can accommodate the influence of post-modernism [beyond modernism] and post-structuralism [beyond structuralism] in humanities research. To further this goal, this article attempts to provoke some preliminary thoughts by revealing the weaknesses of previous biography methodologies before offering alternative ideas that borrow from relevant post-structuralist theories.

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