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**When The State Stops Writing:
Emergence of Individual Histories in post-New Order Indonesia**

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Preface

“Tell me Sartono, what is worse: a military man who pretends to be an historian or an historian who pretends to be a military man?”¹

In 1999, Pramoedya Ananta Toer said to younger Indonesians in lament, “Since you were children you have been educated with the political lies of the New Order, painting the New Order as angels and depicting all those layers of society who refuse to defend it as devils.”² But a decade after the fall of the New Order, there is now a popular notion in Indonesia that the reporting of history is on the path to becoming unbiased. Several prominent newspapers, periodicals and web pages have proliferated with articles and essays by both historians and civilians re-envisioning Indonesian pasts and critiquing New Order historiography. While it is undeniable that academics in Indonesia and abroad have been at this business for many years by voicing their opinions despite rigid New Order censorship, today they can be far less guarded because with the easing of censorship laws and the rapid increase of various media pathways, much of their pent up anxieties have found expression. The Indonesian historian can finally exhale.

But it was only in the recent past that history was considered to be a state-backed enterprise. The introductory quote above alludes to the long-influential historian Nugroho Nutosanto, the head of the Armed Forces History Center in Bandung for two decades during the New Order. During this time he was an employee of the University of

¹ Katharine E. McGregor, *Legacy of a Historian in the Service of an Authoritarian Regime*, ed. Mary S. Zurbuchen (Singapore: University of Singapore Press, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2005), 225. Authors interview with Sartono Kartodirdjo, Yogyakarta, September 1997

Indonesia's Department of History as well. After the fall of the New Order, Nugroho (who passed away in 1985) was criticized heavily by numerous scholars of Indonesian history as having reworked events and facts for several years to suit the New Order's political agenda. These included an attempt to minimize the importance of civilian contributions to Indonesia's national development while applauding military efforts; a concerted effort at discrediting President Soekarno's role in developing a proto-democratic state in Indonesia; and perhaps most significantly, a widely disseminated, "official" master-narrative of the 1965 coup favoring the version of the PKI masterminded plot. As Education Minister from 1983-1985 Nugroho also introduced into the school curriculum a *History of the National Struggle* reader in six parts through which the necessity of the military-dominated authoritarian regime was argued for and validated. Over the course of the production of this multi-part opus, several Indonesian historians involved with the project including Abdurrachman Surjomihardjo, Thee Kian Wee, Taufik Abdullah and Sartono Kartodirdjo, resigned, and their reluctance to be associated with these books has been discussed by more recent scholars. In an essay entitled "History, Nationalism and Power," Asvi Warman Adam has laid out in a case-by-case manner a critique of numerous unsubstantiated, non-scholarly historical reports in the sixth and final volume of *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia*. This installment, covering the years 1942-1965 and almost exclusively authored by Nugroho, is described by Warman Adam as having "a lack of clarity in the logic—[and] sometimes, one might say ... no sense at all."³

² Max Lane, *Unfinished Nation*, (London, New York: Verso, 2008), 107. Pramoeuya formally joined the PRD (Partai Rakyat Demokratik) in 1999 and the above address is excerpted from his acceptance speech.

³ Asvi Warman Adam, *Social and Power in Indonesia*, ed. Vedi R. Hadiz and Daniel Dhakidae, (Singapore: ISEAS Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), 256-266

Perhaps the most remarkable expression of Nugroho's reworking of history can be seen in the dioramas on display in the exhibit hall of the national monument (MONAS) in Jakarta. In 48 scenes made of sculptures and painted backdrops of mediocre quality, Nugroho (the historical consultant for the project) summed up the nation's history. It would not be too far off the mark to say that Nugroho's version of events was Indonesia's official version of history—a manipulated canon of events and facts that made itself into every classroom in Indonesian schools, into television and film reenactments (of particular note the extremely popular *Gerakan 30 September*) and into hundreds of scholarly publications.

His grave flaws notwithstanding, Nugroho did acknowledge that the sort of history he was chronicling and circulating suffered from the limitations of "epic" history writing. He admitted:

I cannot use history to express my sympathy for the ordinary people. Yes, ordinary people have been knocked over by big events.... Large historical events produce different emotions, colossal emotions.... History cannot capture subtle emotions.⁴

Of course, Pramoedya Ananta Toer had already been writing prolifically about the effects of large historical events on individuals, but it is unlikely that he was much of a role model for Nugroho, who had little interest in any portrayal of Indonesia's history that did not champion the military. When in 1980 the group *Hasta Mitra* started publishing novels by Pramoedya that focused on individual efforts in the anti-colonial struggle rather than

⁴ Katharine E. McGregor, 226

the Indonesian military's contribution, they were quickly shut down and the books were banned. Katharine McGregor has observed that Nugroho did eventually turn to fiction writing to express himself differently.⁵ But she says that it has never been clear whether he used his short stories to express an alternate view of Indonesian history or whether he merely wished for a different mode of expression. Nonetheless, there is significance in this idea that the so-called small "h" of individual histories is important and it has finally found its place in contemporary Indonesia. As we shall see, this worry about "colossal emotions" hijacking our sense of Indonesia's history has come full circle. Today, faced with a dubious historiography inherited from the New Order, it is individual testaments that are widely expected to be at the forefront of salvaging Indonesian history.

Soon after Suharto resigned in 1998, one of the key plotters of the September 1965 coup, Lieutenant-Colonel Latief, gave an interview from prison to an Australian journalist where he vehemently claimed that he had warned Suharto three times about the impending plot to kill the generals and thus suggested that Suharto was involved in it.⁶ This was perhaps the first in a series of admissions that sparked a nationwide fascination with personal recantings of the past, especially those related to murky New Order histories. More people came forward (e.g. General Nasution declared that Suharto had actually never fired a bullet during the famous siege of Yogyakarta in 1949, an episode that had helped Suharto build his political and military credibility) and began finding their outlets in more immediate and accessible media such as television and radio shows, newspapers and magazines. In his aptly titled article "The Battle for History after

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Michael R. J. Vatikiotis, *Indonesian politics under Suharto: the rise and fall of the New Order* (Routledge 1998), p. 21. Interview with journalist Patrick Walters.

Suharto,” Gerry van Klinken tells us that in Indonesia today, “History is not the stuff of specialized academic journals.... Everyone can read them in school texts, in newspapers and books, or see them on television and films, and discuss them. In reality, there is no single Indonesian history, but numerous histories.”⁷ And it is not just ex-army stars who make the news; we shall see that a different demographic is getting ink, lights and microphones as well. Sometimes the narrators themselves bypass the historians by publishing their biographies that soon become bestsellers. This puts the Indonesian historian in a conundrum of sorts. Does he or she have the time to publish a well-researched and factually sound book or is it more important to disseminate these newer, less authenticated stories quickly?

It appears that in this new era, rapacious for reconciliation with the past, the large “H” of History is being reworked through a multitude of numerous smaller histories that find direct personal expression. The agreed-upon credentials of a “real historian” is becoming more complicated. Are lay people becoming the primary historians in Indonesia? This paper shall explore that phenomenon and question its implications through three case studies from Java in the summer of 2008.

⁷ Gerry van Klinken, *The Battle for History after Suharto*, ed. Mary S. Zurbuchen (Singapore: University of Singapore Press, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2005), 236

1. Supriyadi, *Pahlawan Nasional*

“Independence War Hero Appears From Hideout,” reported the Jakarta Post on August 12, 2008. The phrase ‘appears from hideout’ might conjure up the image of a bedraggled person hesitantly emerging from a cavernous place, perhaps holding their hands up before a group of law enforcers. But Andaryoko Wisnuprabu, 88, appeared from his self-designed captivity in a distinct, confident manner: he revealed himself through a book. *Mencari Supriyadi*⁸ substantiates his claim that he is none other than Supriyadi, a soldier who disappeared after leading an unsuccessful rebellion against the occupying Japanese in 1945 in West Java, Indonesia. Supriyadi was declared *Pahlawan Nasional* (National Hero) by Indonesian President Suharto in 1970. At the book launch, sporting an official-looking green jacket with a golden Garuda brooch, the frail yet confident Andaryoko appeared authentic. Women and small children kissed his hand while men awkwardly saluted him. Personnel from every segment of the media were jockeying for an interview, from large television crews to small youth magazine reporters who thrust cheap camcorders into his face with equal fervor.

Over the next few days, Andaryoko further established his claim by traveling from city to city, often in his distinctive green jacket, across Java with a small group of handlers appointed by his publishing agency Galang Press, giving interviews to newspapers, TV stations, local cable access networks and in public appearances. He gave out his home address and phone number and invited people to visit him personally if they had doubts about his claim. At his book launch at the Gramedia bookstore in Semarang, a

huge following from his hometown in Central Java showed up to lend a festive air to the event, which was covered by national reporters. A number of eminent historians promptly debunked him as an impostor but *Mencari Supriyadi* sold out in a week. Galang promptly reprinted the book, which came with a bonus CD-ROM video featuring an interview with Andaryoko, and copies continued to fly off the shelves. TV-One broadcast a three-part prime time program on the mystery surrounding Supriyadi in the days leading up to independence celebrations. During one interview at his residence, he deftly swung around a samurai sword which he claimed was taken from a Japanese officer he had slain. Imposter or war hero, Andaryoko had become a national celebrity.

In May of 2008, Andaryoko approached Baskara T. Wardaya, a priest and history professor at Sanata Dharma University in Yogyakarta, wishing to tell his life story to a 'real' historian in order to publicly reveal the truth about his identity. Romo Baskara was quickly convinced that it was a worthwhile project and a whirlwind collaboration ensued, producing *Mencari Supriyadi* in under three months. The slim volume is in essence the transcript of a series of interviews with Andaryoko. Andaryoko said that he used to be known by the name Supriyadi and had been a leader in the Indonesian volunteer army (PETA) established by the Japanese in 1943 to assist Japanese forces against a possible allied invasion. In February of 1945, Andaryoko claimed that his troops in the Blitar contingent revolted against the Japanese under his orders. This famous event, the "Blitar Uprising", has become known as the first military rebellion against the Japanese. 68 soldiers were court-martialed and several were executed. Supriyadi, who went missing and was presumably executed, was later honored with the title *Pahlawan Nasional*.

⁸ Baskara T. Wardaya, *Mencari Supriyadi* (Yogyakarta: Galang Press, 2008)

Upon release of the biography, the veracity of Andaryoko's incredible claim that he was the long dead revolutionary Supriyadi was immediately called into question by historian Djuliaty Suroyo of Diponegoro University in Semarang. Suroyo referenced exhaustive research presented (interestingly, by the now unpopular historian Nugroho Notosusanton) in a dissertation about Supriyadi. Wrote Djuliaty:

Nugroho summarized several points. First, Supriyadi was arrested and then beaten by the Kempeitai secret police and died. The Kempeitai was afraid to report the incident to its superiors because prisoners had to be tried.

Second, Supriyadi escaped, but this is rather impossible. If he had hidden in the woods, it would be highly unlikely he could elude the Japanese troops who had surrounded the jungle in Blitar.⁹

Romo Baskara, despite his close association with Andaryoko, has never insisted that Andaryoko's story is true. He positions himself as someone who is merely instrumental in opening up a dialogue. As if pre-empting Djuliaty's concerns, he stated in an interview with the Jakarta Post, "I carefully chose the title *In Search of Supriyadi* and not *This IS Supriyadi* because I know this is only the beginning. As a historian, I am only providing a space for discussion, debate and discourse. Any differences in fact should not be a source of confusion, but a starting point to revealing the truth."¹⁰

Indeed, Romo Baskara, a Fulbright grant recipient in 2004, has worked tirelessly to open up dialogue about Indonesia's past, publishing several books in recent years with the same publishing agency. Says Julius Felicianus, Director of Galang Press:

⁹ Suherdjoko, "Historian doubts Andaryoko's independence war hero claim." Jakarta Post, August 14, 2008

¹⁰ Suherdjoko, "Independence war hero appears from hideout." Jakarta Post, August 12, 2008

When we [began to] publish historical books, mainly the popular ones like those that were first started by Romo Baskara, ... that was the starting point when people started to read [a new] history. During 32 years of the New Order era, history was made by the ruling power—by Suharto and friends to legitimate his power.

When a new and interesting history book appears ... other writers will follow behind. At first we published *Soekarno Menggugat*, then *Menggugat Supersemar, Indonesia Melawan Amerika, Mencari Supriyadi* and so on.... This is important for scientific life in Indonesia since it gives people alternative reading. 'Oh there's a book telling history not as we were told when we were students, on the New Order era.'"¹¹

Romo Baskara could often be seen at press events, discussing the importance of opening up historical discourse in Indonesia. His professorial image—that of a bespectacled man in a pressed shirt and tie, often carrying a simple satchel for his books—lent a certain authenticity to efforts to make these books and histories popular. He was featured in most of the documentaries and news clips on Andaryoko and despite appearances, maintained his steadfast impartiality on the subject. Several attempts by journalists to elicit an opinion from Romo Baskara proved futile, as he maintained the epistemic position that as a historian, it was his challenge to open up dialogue, not pass judgments. The mechanism of history he seemed to suggest had changed; it was no longer in the domain of men of authority such as Nugroho or even himself. A few days before Andaryoko's book was launched Romo Baskara said the following in a personal interview:

Andaryoko masters a lot of information, data and analysis of Indonesian history post-1945. He mentions names and events that actually were there. Andaryoko isn't talking a lot about himself. He said that the main thing isn't about Supriyadi himself but about the past, the present and the future of this nation. One of the main reasons why I wrote this book is not because I want to tell readers that this is the long missing Supriyadi—that now we have him! No, what I am trying to say through this book is, 'So there is a claim by someone saying he is Supriyadi' and I want my readers to decide for themselves, to

¹¹ Interview with Julius Feliciunus, Yogyakarta, August 2008

compare and to think. And what I am hoping will come out of this is that people in Indonesia or elsewhere will become interested in discussing, studying, learning and debating about Indonesian history. For me that's more important than opinions about whether Supriyadi is still alive or not.¹²

Romo Baskara, with his faith in the critical capacities of at least some of his readers to make up their own minds about Andaryoko, might have been glad because a few days after the book was released and the self-proclaimed Supriyadi was seen on television, animated discussion around this fantastic tale ensued. In fact, there are so many comments on the Internet that it is not easy to make a selection; I have chosen two sites that seem to at least represent the diversity of comments. The creators of *Budayawan Muda*¹³ or "Youth Humanists" describe themselves in the following way: "Budayawan is a word that encompasses very wide fields starting from art and society all the way to technology. *Muda* is used since the writers are interested in drawing in people from a younger generation." Some comments on the site:

This is an amazing yet troublesome story. It seems that there are many parts of history that are lost, unwritten and untold. I think this is a huge loss for our nation.

- sahatmrt, August 18, 2008, 5:41PM

This is just sensationalism, don't worry. People are now seeking money in a shameful way.

- Ihm Hambuako, August 20, 2008, 9:02AM

History depends on the ruler.

- Masbadar, August 20, 2008, 9:23AM

The most obvious point is that he can't even speak Japanese. Plus, in many interviews he called the automatic gun a stand [*sic*] gun. My grandparent told me that stand guns were first brought by the British, long after Supriyadi went missing. Plus, my grandparent told me that the Indonesian fighters called the automatic gun *metraliur*, not a stand gun.

¹² Interview with Baskara T. Wardaya, Yogyakarta, August 2008

¹³ Budayawan Muda, "Misteri Andaryoko vs Supriyadi,"

<http://dendemang.wordpress.com/2008/08/17/misteri-andaryoko-vs-supriyadi/>, Accessed March 1, 2009

-Idiotz, August 28, 2008, 1:32PM

The popular website Youtube hosts a video of a public appearance by Andaryoko at a book opening in Semarang.¹⁴ The related comments are as follows:

This is bullshit. His testimonies do not match with the explanations of PETA veterans. This case has something to do with economic and political interest. How could he refuse to meet his own family in Blitar? Not to mention the he also refused a DNA test.

-VintageAllstar

Andaryoko is crazy about popularity. He is making problems instead of repenting in his old age.

-coconrs

Indonesian history is a mystery that's hard to solve since there has been so much propaganda and history turned over. For me, Andaryoko is THE REAL SUPRIYADI, I believe that he is Supriyadi. Look carefully at his testimony and his picture when he was young. Indonesian history is a brainwash program for the young generation by the New Order.

- lefttoplay

Clearly some Indonesians are discussing current history with a discerning approach, and as the comment by username Idiotz indicates, these discussions can be transgenerational. There is no doubt that those who decide Andaryoko is telling the truth about his past are delighted that his version of history is now being revealed. But *if* Supriyadi had indeed died in 1945 and Andaryoko is indeed an impostor, do we still have reason to appreciate the book *Mencari Supriyadi* and the ensuing media affair? If one assumes that Andaryoko is lying, it could be argued that the inspiring life of Supriyadi, reborn through the cunning of an imposter, has gained far more salience now than it would have had he been put to rest as a distant, long-deceased national hero. Supriyadi is

¹⁴ Youtube, "Andaryoko in Testimony "Supriyadi " PETA'S Hero"
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sM8FvnyqbZo>, Accessed March September 15, 2008

a hero all over again, with this second life given far more publicity than he could have ever imagined. In 2008, Andaryoko appeared in three prime time television programs: *Metro File* on MetroTV, *Tokoh dan Peristiwa* on TV One and *Redaksi Kontroversi* on Trans7. Julius of Galang notes:

Information and news brought by Supriyadi, *despite his real identity*, is important. That's the point. That's why when people read of his story that has never been written in any history books, they are eager to find out more. Today, half an hour before, I had a call saying that the book on Supriyadi is sold out in Jakarta. And now every bookstore wants 500 copies of [it], ... [when] previously [they] wanted only 50-100 copies of other books.

In the weeks surrounding Andaryoko's announcement, there were discussions of historical events on television frequently, often unrelated to the Supriyadi story. One would just have to scan through the stations to find panelists discussing the events of 1965; or black and white images from archival footage of the Japanese occupation; or another survivor of the purported PKI purge narrating their experience. How much of this was directly related to the new book and how much of it had to do with the *merdeka* month of August? Although the answer is beyond our grasp, suffice it to say that this entire movement, be it for the purpose of selling books or advertisements on air, was creating great debate about the past in Indonesia and Supriyadi was the prize story of 2008. A television reporter made the following comments when asked about why she thought it was important that Andaryoko's story reached a large national audience:

Question: You have interviewed [Andaryoko]. What did you think of him?

Yolinda: I think he knows many things because he was there when history happened. He knows about how emotions flowed, about our leader Soekarno ...

Question: When you say he knows many details, are you acknowledging he is Supriyadi or that even if he isn't, this person is still very knowledgeable about history?

Yolinda: Actually, it is too early to determine whether he really is Supriyadi. But if we hear his stories and compare his photographs from the past and what the government has released about Supriyadi ... I think it's close to the truth. I am not sure...

Question: So if this person is not Supriyadi who led the rebellion against PETA in 1945, you have no doubts that this person, Andaryoko, was at least with PETA?

Yolinda: I am trying to collect evidence to see if this is true. We are comparing with statements from other people; we are talking to historians. If you see him and compare him with the government release photographs from our history books, the hairstyle, his smile [are] very similar ...

Question: How important is it to you whether he is or isn't Supriyadi?

Yolinda: It is not so important whether he is Supriyadi or not. What's important is that Andaryoko provides us with other options for history. We have been taught a wrong history for 40 years.... Our ex-regime made up many things that hurt our people badly.¹⁵

Despite having an assured spot in the historical record, there is actually limited mention of Supriyadi in Indonesian history books. Perhaps the one existing lengthy account of the 1945 Blitar uprising is by the man who was instrumental in starting PETA, Raden Gatot Mangkupradja. He had been worried about Indonesian youth being conscripted into the Japanese army and thought that the PETA groups would be a good compromise to propose to the Japanese. His long article "The PETA and My Relations With the Japanese: A Correction of Soekarno's Autobiography"¹⁶ was a response to his disappointment in Soekarno's autobiography in which the president took full credit for setting up PETA. According to Mangkupradja, Soekarno had falsely claimed to have known about the Blitar rebellion ahead of time and that he had later condemned the revolt. Mangkupradja writes that Supriyadi was not killed right away and that he headed for a town called Kapandjen with his troops to contact the PETA group in Malang after

¹⁵ Interview with Yolinda Puspita Rini, Semarang, August 2008

¹⁶ Raden Gatot Mangkupradja, Harumi Wanasita, Ruth McVey, "The Peta and My Relations with the Japanese: A Correction of Soekarno's Autobiography," *Indonesia* Vol5, (April 1968), 105-134

the attempt at Blitar failed. Andaryoko has the following to say about Mangkupradja's account:

Question: Grandpa, Gatot Mangkupradja said that Bung Karno falsely claimed to have known PETA's plan to rebel in Blitar. Is that true?

Andaryoko: I was the leader and I kept everything a secret. I wanted to rebel, so of course I didn't involve my leader. But then I seriously decided against it and made sure that Bung Karno did not know about the plan.

Question: Then, according to Gatot too, on the Chuo Sangi meeting on June 18th Bung Karno condemned the Blitar PETA rebellion. Is that true?

Andaryoko: Not true. If he condemned it, Bung Karno would have been angry with me when I reported to him on May 28th. But no, he neither supported nor praised [me or the rebellion], but was silent. He then gave me a way out to avoid conviction.

Question: Was it possible that Bung Karno criticized the rebellion a bit in order to avoid angering the Japanese?

Andaryoko: No. [According to] what I heard from the leaders in Jakarta, Indonesian leaders say that they didn't know anything about it.

Question: It is said that you and your troops went to Kepanjen afterward to make contact with PETA in Malang. Is that true?

Andaryoko: No, not true.¹⁷

Andaryoko's version of events matches up little with Mankupradja's—a discord that casts an even deeper shadow of doubt over his indignant claims. And yet, again, the notion that there was some sort of afterlife to Supriyadi despite a widespread belief that he was dead actually finds itself in a peculiar turn of chronology after the Blitar incident. Even though he was considered by many to have been killed in 1945, Soekarno had actually asked him to be People's Security Minister in the country's first cabinet in 1945 *after* the Blitar uprising. Historian Djulianti addressed this oddity:

¹⁷ Interview with Andaryoko Wisnuprabu, Yogyakarta, August 2008

However, this was in absentia, meaning no one actually held the post. There are two possibilities as to why Soekarno did it. First, at a time of revolution, a role model is crucial, and Supriyadi fit the bill as a rebellious figure from Blitar for people's security minister. Second, the name was given in the hope that, who knows, Supriyadi, who was reported missing, would suddenly reappear.¹⁸

Supriyadi apparently never showed up to take his official position. Andaryoko, however, claimed that he (Supriyadi) had indeed been in Jakarta at the inauguration of Soekarno's first cabinet of ministers.

Question: Why is it mentioned in textbooks that Supriyadi did not come on his inauguration day?

Andaryoko: There were no journalists at that time. The public didn't know and neither did the ministers. The President and Vice-President did not have an office yet; they were still working from home. So they did not know if Supriyadi was there and whether he saw Bung Karno in Pegangsaan Timur. They didn't know me yet. They thought that nothing had happened—that I never came out in public.

Question: So you were actually there but people did not notice?

Andaryoko: Yes. Maybe there were journalists who thought that I didn't look like someone about to become a minister. I was wearing short pants (the Dutch called them *urang wardech*), which are far less respectable than minister clothes. Someone asked me if I was inaugurated as a minister. I tell you, none of the ministers of the first cabinet were inaugurated. Nobody. They were simply assigned. There was no office or any facilities. Presidential papers had not existed either. These are the facts.¹⁹

Andaryoko's account of those turbulent times—marked with various improvised, makeshift ways of conducting secretarial business—does not seem out of place with what we know from that period. According to him, he lived in the jungles of Java for a few months and underwent a spiritual process called *tirakat* that helped him survive starvation. He eventually came to meet Soekarno, who was initially skeptical about his

¹⁸ Suherdjoko, "Historian doubts Andaryoko's independence war hero claim." Jakarta Post, August 14, 2008

¹⁹ Interview with Andaryoko Wisnuprabu, Yogyakarta, August 2008

identity. Andaryoko told Soekarno that if he did not believe him he could inform the Japanese that a man claiming to be Supriyadi was in his palace. Knowing that he would be executed either way if he informed the Japanese, regardless of the authenticity of his claim, Soekarno was moved and decided to believe him. The president made arrangements for him to go to Semarang temporarily, where Supriyadi took the pseudonym "Andaryoko" and grew a mustache.

The question that everyone asks at this stage of Andaryoko's account is why did he not reveal his identity after the Japanese surrendered? As Andaryoko stated above, he actually did come and begin work in the ministerial position that Soekarno had appointed him to, except that nobody really noticed him. He continued with his work for a few months and early in January of 1946, when Soekarno could not get into the presidential palace because the Dutch had taken it over, Andaryoko escorted him to Yogya. After that he never returned to Jakarta.

After the interview translated above, Andaryoko continued to describe these accounts to a rapidly growing group of listeners in Semarang in August of 2008 in a newly opened Dunkin Donuts coffee shop. His audience was mostly young journalists in their twenties from the local newspapers and Internet sites who probably had little direct interaction with someone who had actually been part of the freedom struggle. Andaryoko went into an unusually detailed account of that train ride with Soekarno to Yogya: it left Manggarai and actually moved backwards to Bung Karno's house, he said, drawing a map with his fingers, where Soekarno's other ministers came aboard. The train then went back to Manggarai and then to Bekasi and then sped on toward Yogya. At this point, as if to explain the reason behind his detailed recanting, he stopped and said in a baiting tone,

“Do you think a non-witness can deliver this thorough a version of events like I just did?”

Andaryoko looked ghostlike, seated in that gleaming coffee shop in Semarang. I do not mean “ghostlike” as a conflation of nostalgia and the para-normal, but physically, in the way that he was a complete contrast to his surroundings. Despite the skepticism that eventually appeared in newspapers and websites, people in close proximity seemed to believe him when he spoke. It is not clear whether this was due to his performative abilities, charisma and mystical personae, or whether it was a derivative of a Javanese sense of respect—or perhaps some combination of all of these. But surrounded by the new glow of urban Indonesia in this clean, shining shop, one had the impression that his audience was enraptured. Given the paucity of characters like him—whether real heroes or likely imposters—he did not encounter much resistance in convincing a number of people that he might have a story worth listening to. The following month, 1,634 copies of *Mencari Supriyadi* were sold.²⁰

²⁰ Datum from Galang Press

II. Soekardjo Wilardjito, *Bodyguard to President Soekarno*

At around this same time, yet another octogenarian from Central Java, one Soekardjo Wilardjito, stepped into the spotlight. Unlike Andaryoko, the name “Wilardjito” was not an alias and there was little controversy around his identity; he indeed was who he claimed to be: a bodyguard to President Soekarno. A former prisoner and army veteran, Wilardjito had waited for Suharto’s brutal New Order to fall before claiming compensation from the government for his years of service to the country and for the indignities he suffered while imprisoned by the New Order for 14 years (1966-1980).

While this may not have seemed an unreasonable request to the fledgling *reformasi* transition rule, it was one particular story that the former guard told in interviews in 1998 which stirred up controversy: Wilardjito swore that he had been present at Bogor Palace on the night President Soekarno signed the document that came to be known as *Supersemar*, which effectively handed military authority over to General Suharto. Wilardjito insisted that he had seen Soekarno concede— *while threatened at gunpoint*. Despite the change in political order and the appearance that Indonesia was in a reformist era of its history, Wilardjito was held in contempt of court for ‘allegedly spreading lies.’ There were clearly still many in power that protected the interests of the New Order, and Wilardjito’s testimony was a direct threat to its credibility. The old man who had been hit by rifle butts numerous times while in captivity was undaunted, and assisted by lawyers from the Yogyakarta Legal Aid Institute, he took his case to the Supreme Court. In July of 2008, it was upheld that he had the legal right to tell his

version of history. And he did so in an autobiography entitled *Mereka Menodong Bung Karno*,²¹ which was yet another bestseller for Galang. “Former Prisoner Gets Legal Backing For Soekarno Story” was the sensational *Jakarta Post* headline that appeared just three days after Supriyadi’s report was published. Supriyadi and Wilardjito started appearing together at public events and the double billing brought in even more people, more press and more book sales.

While both introduced intriguing narratives to an ever-curious Indonesian public, Wilardjito was unlike Supriyadi in many ways. A humble, soft-spoken invalid, he was pushed around in a wheelchair, usually by his middle-aged daughter. He wasn’t claiming to be the leader of a rebellion like Supriyadi, and had little defiance or excitability about him. He came across as the man he described himself to be: a simple, loyal soldier who inadvertently became witness to an important and controversial moment in history. And yet like Supriyadi, he was able to draw people in with an encyclopedic memory of events from decades before. Names and dates in Indonesian history, big and small, rolled off the tongues of these old men effortlessly. Journalists could not scribble fast enough when they spoke. And to a generation born under the rule of a quasi-dictator and with limited exposure to the past, these names and events that they described had a tremendously seductive effect. It was as though a new historical map of their nation was being unfolded and they were keen on being present while it all happened. If Andaryoko told inspiring tales of rebellion and mystery surrounding the last years of the struggle for independence, Wilardjito occupied a coveted place in people’s minds because here, sitting in front of them, was a man who knew Soekarno intimately. He had woken him in the mornings,

²¹ Soekardjo Wilardjito, *Mereka Menodong Bung Karno* (Yogyakarta: Galang Press, 2008)

escorted him all over the country and had once pulled a gun for him. He had *touched* Soekarno.

Of the 48 dioramas designed by Nugroho, there is one commemorating the *Supersemar* document of March 11, 1966. It shows a sick, rather effete Soekarno lying in bed and signing the decree that would give Army commander Lt. General Suharto the authority to take whatever measures he ‘deemed necessary’ to restore order to a nation that was spinning out of control after the 1965 coup attempt. It has been widely debated that there were versions of this document but no one has doubted that it was indeed signed by Soekarno. But *how* he signed it makes a big difference to our understanding of the events of 1966. On the one hand, we have a model bordering on political caricature: the first president of the Indonesian Republic, that arrogant, charismatic man who led an untold number of political campaigns and revolutions to unify an archipelago of diverse islands and land masses under one flag; a dapper figure rarely ever seen without the most immaculate and dignified of attire—lying in his *pajamas*, willingly signing the document that literally amounted to handing the country over to Suharto.

On the other hand, we have Wilardjito’s brief, oft repeated and vastly different account. He claims the following occurred on March 11, 1966:

Soekarno said, ‘Wait! This diction is that of the military, not the sort in a presidential letter!’ On hearing the president say that, as if by reflex, I approached the president and stood not even three meters behind him.

‘We are running out of time. Just sign it *Paduka. Bismillah*,’ answered Basoeki Rachmat, and both he and M. Panggabean pulled pistols. I too withdrew my pistol promptly. I was aware that at that moment the security of the President was my responsibility

‘Stop! Stop!’ said Soekarno, and then he added, ‘If I must sign this mandate, I will—but when the people are peaceful and orderly, this mandate should be returned to me.’

‘Yes, *Paduka*,’ replied Yusuf respectfully

'You must be careful. I have to leave the *istana*,' said the President to me as he returned to his bedroom.²²

The following night, Wilardjito was arrested by the Army and taken to a military detention center in Setia Budi, South Jakarta. He was charged for being a member of the Indonesian Communist party. Wilardjito was held without trial until 1969, during which time he was beaten so badly that he became permanently paralyzed. In 1969 he was put on a truck to Luweng Ombo, where prisoners were usually executed, but due to a long queue the truck returned to Yogyakarta. He was eventually moved to Penjara Pohon Pulau in Ambon, Maluku province where he stayed until his release in 1980.

Wilardjito was remarkably lucid and calm in his recollections of the violence he experienced during an interview at his very modest home in Godean, a few miles outside of Yogyakarta. It is apparent that he had great belief in his religious faith:

Question: Pak, What is the proudest moment in your life?

Wilardjito: The proudest moment in my life ... was that I was reborn. I still survived after a lot of torture. The first was in the headquarters.

'You're no more than a lieutenant but are able to work at the palace. Who assigned you there? Aidit?' they asked.

'I am a soldier, not Aidit's man.'

'Then who assigned you?'

'My leader, Gatot Subroto.'

'Don't get involved with someone who is dead! Do you know that Gatot Subroto was a friend of Aidit? You bastard PKI!'

DUAKK! I was hit with the end of a gun, which was normally made of wood but in this case was metal, and two of my teeth were knocked out. I spit them out. I couldn't eat anything for ten days after the torture and I was amazed that I didn't die. But the one who

²² Wilardjito, 159

did die was the wife of the man who hit me; she was hit by a motorbike, and motorbikes were not very common in Jakarta back then. Some of the torturers came to me later to apologize, kissing my knee. God's love for me was my pride. The proudest thing for me is that God didn't allow me to die after so much torture.²³

Wilardjito's version of the March 1966 events caught popular attention and he was asked to narrate his eye-witness account several times. Two years later, on November 28, 2000, Wilardjito went on trial on charges of sparking a public furor over the validity of the 1966 presidential order. State prosecutor Anton Sutedjo said in his indictment to the Yogyakarta District court that "Soekardjo has given inaccurate testimony about *Supersemar* and this has given rise to public disquiet."²⁴ The former armed forces chief M. Yusuf rejected Wilardjito's story, essentially upholding Nugroho's diorama at MONAS. Wilardjito released a statement asserting that his trial was unfair since, "the person[s] who have lost and falsified [the *Supersemar*] were not brought to court."²⁵ And in an unusual move, Wilardjito's lawyers asked the panel of judges to consider the case as a 'social and historical' fact-checking effort, not a crime. A few months later, Kees Van Dijk, a historian from Leiden University, published a book on the tumultuous years from 1997-2000 immediately after the fall of the New Order. He regarded Wilardjito's testimonial as pivotal because for the first time, someone had publicly dared to support the notion that March 1966 may have been a coup d'etat. Wrote Van Dijk:

This would not be very significant had Sukardjo not alleged that in their efforts to compel Soekarno to sign the Order of 11 March, Basuki and Panggabean had drawn their pistols, a detail that had never before been mentioned. From his story it could also be construed

²³ Interview with Soekardjo Wilardjito, Godean, August 2008

²⁴ Jakarta Post, "Ex-Presidential guard on trial." November 29, 2000

²⁵ "Former prisoner gets legal backing for Soekarno story" Jakarta Post, 12 August, 2008, sec. Java Brew

that Soekarno may only have considered granting Suharto the special powers on a temporary basis.²⁶

The case dragged on for several years and it was finally in the summer of 2008 that the Supreme Court conclusively turned down the appeal lodged against him by the Yogyakarta prosecutor's office. This did not mean that Wilardjito's account of March 11, 1966 was accepted—simply that he had the right to tell his version of events. But his lawyer, Budi Hartono from the Yogyakarta Legal Aid Institute felt that “it was a legal validation of the authenticity of his story.” Wilardjito remarked that it was like having nine lives, and that he ought to have died in 1966.

As of April 2009, *Mereka Menodong Bung Karno* had been reprinted three times, making it a veritable bestseller. For a book in that genre, an unusually high number of copies—6,820²⁷—had been sold as of March 2009. What is interesting about Wilardjito's popular autobiography is that only a few pages of it are actually concerned with the *Supersemar* events. In other words, the fascination with Wilardjito's life story is not merely confined to his brush with the events revolving around *Supersemar*. To be sure, that “glamorous” aspect succeeded in drawing initial attention to his life story, but it is overwhelmingly the many quotidian stories of second lieutenant Wilardjito's life as a low-ranked serviceman in the pre-New Order government that are capturing readers' interest. Nugroho's lament of the small “h” of History being overlooked with discussions of epic people and events is clearly experiencing redemption through this wheelchair-bound old man without any official laurels. An entire nation is now interested in knowing

²⁶ Kees Van Dijk, *A Country in Despair: Indonesia between 1997 and 2000* (Leiden: Koninklijk

²⁷ Datum from Galang Press

of his ordeals, understanding the indignities he suffered under the New Order and contemplating his version of Indonesia's history.

III. Sarinah

There was a third figure that summer that also caught the imagination of many Indonesians. This story, however, is so incredible that even a tentative acceptance by a small number of people should give one pause. In the town of Sragen in Central Java, a woman began receiving guests who wished to see her in the flesh because it had been rumored that she was Sarinah, a maid in the household Soekarno grew up in. This old lady, seemingly in her eighth decade of life, chatted merrily about her years with Bung Karno. The Sarinah of Soekarno's many personal accounts, if she were indeed alive today, could be anywhere between 120 and 150 years old. But in that small house in rural Java, surrounded by villagers hunched on the floor as reporters asked her questions, her relative youth did not seem to matter in the least. She wept during her recollections, answered all questions directed to her in a brilliantly vague manner and kissed the hands of all her guests with tenderness when they arrived and when they left. "Sarinah" even attracted a crew from Jakarta channel Trans 7.

A young television producer who was among Sarinah's visitors commented very sincerely that she had come with an open mind but given the evidence of what she had seen, she had *doubts* about the authenticity of Sarinah's claim. Born in 1981 in Malang, east Java, Yolinda Puspita Rini began her university studies right around the time when *reformasi* was sweeping through Indonesia. She was determined to become a television journalist—no easy feat for a young woman with few elite connections in a nation with limited news channels. Unable to find an established course of study that suited her career ambitions, she majored in economic management but then secured a job as an

announcer at the local radio station after graduation. Soon after, Yolinda found her break: in the years following the fall of Suharto, mass media liberalized and several new television channels began to appear that required young “video journalists” or VJ’s to serve the dual role of interviewer as well as producer. Trans Corp., one of the largest media outlets in Indonesia, went on a hiring spree and announced roughly 100 open positions. Out of 120,000 applicants, Yolinda was picked after eight rounds of interviews and soon began traveling the country with a lone camera operator, reporting on a variety of news and events. She quickly specialized in interviewing personalities and became an on-site host for field reports. Upon returning to Jakarta, she would spend days in a small video editing room in the channel headquarters, working with an editor to produce short pieces on the people she interviewed. Andaryoko and Wilardjito were among those that featured in her reports as her subjects were often controversial, the sort who would rankle viewers a bit and raise questions. Like Baskara Wardaya, she too had an agenda: to make history popular and to raise questions that had been buried under the New Order.

In August of 2008, Yolinda received information about the alleged Sarinah and traveled all the way from Jakarta with her camera operator to meet this woman and request that she tell her story to Indonesian television audiences. She seemed oddly open to the idea that this could actually be the real Sarinah. I talked to her en route to Sragen:

Question: Can you tell me why you are following this story? Why is it important to you, to the station and to its viewers?

Yolinda: In Trans 7, we have a program called *Redaksi Kontroversi* that uncovers cloudy and mysterious stories. There have been so many untruths told to people about Indonesian history. We want to uncover the truth, or at least get closer to the truth.

Question: Why would it be so exciting to meet Sarinah, if this woman is indeed her?

Yolinda: Sarinah is from a much older generation. We can't imagine how a woman who led such a simple life could live to be about 136 years old. "Sarinah" is a very big name; we have a very big store called "Sarinah." Bung Karno had said that Sarinah was very important to his life. If we can uncover accounts from a key person in Indonesian history, a primary source, we will know so much more about what happened.

There was a small crowd when Yolinda and the Trans 7 camera operator entered the modest sized compound in front of Sarinah's house. Many neighbors had come to see the television people from Jakarta. Baskara Wardaya, the historian from Sanata Dharma University, accompanied Yolinda. Sarinah did not appear to be a day over 80. She was small and thin, yet energetic and very much the gracious hostess. She bent down to almost waist level and kissed everyone's hands before inviting them into her home. Her family had cooked a feast for the guests. While Yolinda and Baskara ate, the camera operator set up lights that cast hard shadows on the walls of the rather spacious living room. Soon everyone sat down to watch the interview. Sarinah seemed nervous yet excited by all the fanfare around her.

Sarinah: This is hard since I am stupid. I've never been among respected people. I admit that I am poor and ugly. I know the history of Pak Karno but not all of it. He was circumcised at the age of five. All of you—where do you think Soekarno was born?

Baskara: Some say in Blitar but Bung Karno himself said that he lived in Surabaya.

Sarinah: No, that's false. It's not in Surabaya. That is his memory growing weak. I know that he was born in the north part of Semarang.

Baskara: Really? What year?

Sarinah: I don't know; I don't remember the year. There are too many things to think of.

Baskara: Do you know when you were born?

Sarinah: My mother told me it was 1876. Fortunately I'm still alive up to now. I was in Irian Barat, Padang Sidempuan, Aceh, France, Malaysia, Swiss, Turkey, Europe—so many places.

Baskara: Why were you in all of these places?

Sarinah: *Babe*, or *Paduka*, took me there. I am just a stupid person who knows nothing. All I understand is, 'I have to share when the food is ready and keep the remainder for next time' that's all. All my hard efforts for the country....nobody pays me for my hard work.

Baskara: So, you personally know the *Paduka*, Bung Karno, since he was a baby?

Sarinah: Yes, since he was born. I even saw when he was born in Pulowatu.

Baskara: Then how did he move to Blitar?

Sarinah: You know that his mother came from Blitar.

Baskara: When he moved to Blitar, did you come along or ...

Sarinah: No I didn't. I took care of Mega for four years. You know that she was born in 1947. Then Guntur was born a day after World War II. [*sic*]

Baskara: I see. Both of them were in Jakarta, right?

Sarinah: They were in Jakarta. I am sorry...

Baskara: It's okay.

Sarinah: My feelings are deeply hurt. I have grown up eating the root of the banana tree, of the papaya tree, but why are Indonesians still poor? I'm deeply hurt.

Baskara: Is it the suffering during Japanese occupancy ...?

Sarinah: Yes. You'll never imagine. I really thank God that I can still meet with you now.

Baskara: You're right. We're also thankful that we can meet with you.

Sarinah: (Sobbing) I am sorry.

Baskara: It's okay, this is the history of our nation. How was Bung Karno when he was a child?

Sarinah: What do you mean how?

Baskara: Was it obvious that he would be a leader in the future or did he seem like any other kid?

Sarinah: I don't remember anymore; there are too many things to remember.

Yolinda: How long were you with Bung Karno? Since he was a child, right?

Sarinah: I was with him until the moment the picture was taken with Bu Inggit and other respected people, though I don't know the year. I have the picture of Bu Inggit and *Babe*.

Baskara: Oh, you have it. Can we see it to keep in our records?

Sarinah: But you'll give it back, right?

Baskara: Sure, sure. We'll just take a picture of it here.

[She leaves to get the picture. People talk outside.]

Audience member: I was deeply moved, man. I even had tears in my eyes.

Sarinah: This one holding *suwis*, that's me. This one is Bu Inggit. This one was before the funeral in Blitar. This is the original picture.

Baskara: And this one?

Sarinah: There were many respected people at the time, right? I didn't know if they played a trick on me because I am not an intellectual. And I won't show this picture to anybody other than you.

Baskara: Oh, thank you. Thank you very much.

Sarinah: And this one is *Babe's* picture. You can read this one first.

Yolinda: This is Ibu Soekarno, right?

Baskara: That's her.

Yolinda: So this is the original photograph—but I know that the quality is ...

Baskara: Of course, it's an old picture.... Where was this picture taken, if you remember?

Sarinah: Ah! I don't remember. That was a very long time ago.

Crowd member: So, how old are you now, Bu Sarinah?

Sarinah: 134 in the next six months.

Yolinda: What did you do daily with Bung Karno?

Sarinah: I did what I wanted to do. People say I am Soekarno's teacher, but you know, I don't even have any formal education. I don't know why people say that.

Yolinda: How old were you when Bung Karno was born?

Sarinah: I ... Bung Karno ... I don't remember when he was born, but I know when Ibu Kartini was born: when I was 16 years old ... You want my picture? Oh my God, you are taking pictures of this ugly person?²⁸

²⁸ Interview with Sarinah, Sragen, August 2008

There are very few pictures in existence of the Sarinah that Soekarno idolized. The "pictures" Sarinah produced were actually Xeroxed copies of old history book photographs. They were inauthentic without a shade of doubt. And yet they were handled like props in a play everyone was complicit in and reviewed and discussed in earnest. While one might attribute this group behavior to a Javanese sense of respect and etiquette, there appeared to be a genuine fascination with this woman's ability to present herself as Sarinah. This Sarinah loved being photographed. She insisted on posing several times with various groups of people. She bid us a tearful goodbye and one could not help feeling moved by this emaciated old woman. Her anger regarding the persistence of poverty among Indonesians despite being free of foreign control was genuine. But one could not fathom how or why she maintained her outlandish tale. And yet, it was clear that Yolinda, Romo Baskara and all of us present at that meeting were part of her story and played a role in maintaining it. Like many before us, we had talked to her gently, respected her fable and not once challenged her on any grounds. She had thus managed to create a form of historical folk theater in that living room in Sragen, with the cameras rolling.

I imagined that later, when by ourselves, Yolinda and Romo Baskara would let down their polite reserves and perhaps laugh over the morning's proceedings. I was mistaken. During the drive they were both quiet. Later, Romo Baskara offered this social analysis:

For me there is some value to what we were just doing. She reflects some kind of uneasiness or disappointment among people at the grassroots level, among common folk. They are not happy, they are not satisfied, with what is going on now in terms of politics and economy. That's why they need a hero or heroine who can be regarded as some kind of a messiah ... to help us get out of this kind of situation. So a person like that who

claims to be Sarinah is also a product of Indonesian society itself.

Question: Do you think that there are people who really believe her?

Baskara: I am sure that there are.²⁹

Romo Baskara reminds us that history can indeed be performative, and that in times of political and spiritual emptiness, such as in this post-*reformasi* era, some people are simply willing to go along with a convincing story. However, Yolinda stated that she would not air this episode—that Sarinah, for all her charms and efforts, was to remain inside those videocassette tapes. Sarinah continued her solo performances but the big city lights and cameras did not bother her again. Meanwhile, Wilardjito and Andaryoko received large-scale media attention and their stories continued to be debated widely in the press for several months.

²⁹ Interview with Baskara Wardaya, Sragen, August 2008

Challenges of an Evolving Archive: Collecting Diverse “h”s

With the advent of television documentaries, talk shows and extensive print journalism, long interviews and conversations with subjects could perhaps fall into a category akin to the autobiography. Autobiographies are of course not new in Indonesia, and distinctions within the genre have emerged. Kartini’s diaries, Sotemomo’s *Kenang-Kenangan*, Tan Malaka’s *Dari Penjara ke Penjara*, Saifuddin Zuhri’s *Guruku Orang-orang dari Pesantren*, Pramoedya’s semi-biographical novels ‘heavy with history,’³⁰ and recently, Wilardjito’s *Mereka Menodong Bung Karno* and Supriyadi’s *Mencari Supriyadi*, have clearly been written in different contexts, often in different eras. Dr. Soetomo’s introspections on his inheritance of a Javanist way of life, written from a position of elite privilege, are very different from the relatively impoverished, devout Catholic Wilardjito’s recollections as a bodyguard to Soekarno several decades later. One could further make a distinction between pre- and post-1998 autobiographies, with the former typically written by intellectuals with formal education and literary ambitions. Wilardjito and Andaryoko do not quite fall into that category. And yet C.W. Watson, in his career-long analysis of the Indonesian autobiography, suggests that there may be a commonality to *all* autobiographical accounts:

In the creation of modern nations, individuals who are the new citizens of those nations invest more of themselves in this new institution, which displaces other points of reference as the locus of their identity.... [W]riters know that they are not simply reacting to a preexisting cultural and historical tradition taken over or brought in from outside but are actively contributing to the making of something new and unique.³¹

³⁰ Term used by Max Lane in describing Pramoedya’s books published by Hasta Mitra in 1980

Thus according to Watson, the very awareness that his book could shape the future of Indonesia binds Wilardjito with someone as removed and distinct as Kartini. However, there is one fundamental assumption being made here: that six decades after independence, Indonesia is *still* a new nation. Is there salience to this notion?

The idea that the entire New Order period could be considered an interregnum is an attractive one, despite the limited success of the *reformasi* and post-*reformasi* eras in dramatically turning the country around. There is a widespread desire to connect with some sort of pre-1965 ethos, to find a lost sense of purpose that apparently flowed through the nation's veins during that period. Indonesian historian Max Lane has reported that there is low confidence in the current political parties and there is now a scramble to find a guiding ideology. In that pursuit, he says, biographies on Fidel Castro, Che Gueverra and even Saddam Hussein have become top-sellers; translations of previously banned Marxist works abound; and the general mood is that the intellectual achievements of the nation from the time of Kartini right up until 1965 have come undone and that the task at hand is to pick up again from the point when the New Order intervened. "Mister," people complained to Lane, "Indonesia is terrible now and you must look at the past."³² This suggests a kind of headiness and introspection that is arguably comparable to the early years of independence. The post-1998 years do indeed have something in common with the 1950s: after a much yearned for change in the political system (end of colonialism/end of the New Order) there is initial euphoria followed by an emerging feeling of despair. Even the staunchest supporters of Soekarno would perhaps agree that

³¹ C.W. Watson, *Of Self and Nation: Autobiography and the Representation of Modern Indonesia*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 2000), 15

³² Max Lane, lecture, "Mass Action, History, Parties and the 2009 Elections in Indonesia: The Politics of an Unfinished Nation," University of Michigan, Center of Southeast Asian Studies, October 24, 2008

by the early 1960s, Indonesia was on an abysmal course. Thus, this romantic view that the “real” Indonesia was in abeyance from the end of Soekarno’s first decade in authority until the deposal of Suharto is understandably a strong motivator for many involved in the enterprise of making a new version of Indonesian history popular. A new generation claiming to be at the forefront of defining the nation is looking back and a cultivated nostalgia appears to be blossoming.

This preoccupation with the nation’s rearview mirror is not limited to authors and journalists but finds strong expression in consumerism as well. A scratchy recording of President Soekarno reading the Declaration of Independence is not just audible to those visiting the MONAS monument in Jakarta, but to anyone watching a Sampoerna cigarette ad on television—laid under a montage of fast-cutting, almost dizzying MTV-style edits of old images is Soekarno’s passionate and hopeful voice. Bentoel and Djarum cigarettes too have similar advertisements with evocative pre-New Order imagery. These old images and sounds, layered into slick, contemporary television packaging, are perhaps analogous to the state of mind of many Indonesians today: a resignation to the reality that while their rapid modernity has roots in the New Order, an emotional hankering for heroes from the past remains. Thus, Sarinah’s humble demeanor, Soekarno’s excitable voice, Andaryoko’s leathery face and Wilardjito’s wheelchair-bound tales haunt the minds of many, despite their physical and temporal contrast to the landscape of modern Indonesia. These remnants and reminders of a pre-Suharto, pre-hijacked era of national promise easily impress themselves in the minds of a groping nation. While coffee table books, television programs and museum documents surrounding dead heroes are

ubiquitous in the world, in Indonesia today there is always that added edge: one could yet judge the veracity of what is before them and this might affect the future. Are there then deeper implications of these emerging (auto)biographies?

For people like Pak Julius of Galang Press, Yolinda of Trans 7 and professor Romo Baskara, the task of historical discovery should ideally be a collective effort—Indonesians jaded by the annual screening of *Gerakan September 30* and *Janur Kuning* in their schools and on television deserve the chance to feel that they too belong to the current effort to correct their historical records. There is a far greater expectation of historical transparency than ever before, along with a deep skepticism about any form of truth inherited from the New Order. And as we have seen, this can be accompanied by a weakness for wishful alteration. Historian Asvi Warman Adam sees this as a sign of a healthy democracy: “By having more than one understanding of history, people can debate and discuss which version makes more sense. This helps in forming a critical and democratic society.”³³ Gerry Van Klinken has interviewed school teachers who admit to being harassed by students who accuse them of teaching a false New Order version of the history of the Communist Party and the events surrounding *Supersemar*.³⁴ The format of television programs pursuing historical cases is rather telling of this ethos: a host, often an attractive woman with average education and common diction, pursues a historical mystery. She stops several times during the show and asks herself questions out loud, just as the viewers might themselves. This lay, open-minded video journalist, representing thousands of citizens with the same queries, follows a story and takes her audience along with her. She rarely seems to have any special insight or knowledge about the case and

³³ Siahaan, Armando, “Setting History Straight.” *Jakarta Globe*, April 29, 2009

relies on university professors to fill the audience (and herself) in on the historical facts. By the conclusion of the program large doubts are raised about what has been taught as historical fact. The message is simple: history is no longer trapped in the control of the privileged; we, as a people, shall ask questions until truths are revealed. Civilians can and *ought* to be historians now.

Yet despite this era of heightened critical evaluation and democratic involvement, some basic themes surrounding the stories narrated in this paper are often not discussed in the public discourse surrounding them. Were these stories popular in the summer of 2008 because of a vacuum caused by the emotional desperation of some Indonesians who, as Dr. Wardaya stated, needed a ‘messiah?’ Was Sarinah’s story an isolated case of deceit in a rural setting? Was the observer who claimed to be “moved to tears” by the woman claiming to be Sarinah merely a gullible soul, a representative of the millions of “common folk” unable to critically assess historical timelines? If Andaryoko is a flat out liar, is there value to his version of history? There are no clear answers to these questions and it may be futile to attempt any. But one can immediately glean one simple fact: *all* of these stories are linked to Soekarno and by extension the pre-New Order days. It would then behoove one to question whether there is a responsibility to publicize histories that are not just necessarily anti-New Order and pro-Soekarno. Certainly a de-Nugrohoization of Indonesia’s history is important but might not there be a wider lens through which to look at that huge nation’s rich, under-narrated past? And is there an accompanying responsibility to be critical of the pre-New Order master narratives along with the Suharto era distortions? Despite a deep criticism of the “untruths” in the New Order’s

³⁴ Klinken, 233

manipulations of history and a commitment to find out the “real truth,” there might remain an uncritical aspect in which Soekarno era events are remembered and discussed. Max Lane tells us that Soekarno’s name still carries strong emotional salience even though an awareness of the nature of his politics has faded: “The memory of Bung Karno as an enormously popular leader among ordinary people has proved impossible to eradicate completely.... The real content of Soekarno’s political thinking and political history has been separated from his memory which is now vague and ill defined.”³⁵ A young television reporter summed up the *reformasi* mood when he said:

Even our journalists and historians make mistakes. During the New Order, everything Soekarno did was wrong. During *reformasi* everything Suharto did was wrong. It has been hard to have a real discourse here. Indonesian people have not had time to accept their pasts. That process just started in 1998. A lot of people felt that they came out of jail in 1998 and there was a lot of bitterness that influenced searching for the truth.³⁶

It is indeed important that Indonesians further uncover and understand the events of 1965 and 1966 (such as the coup and the *Supersemar*) that led to a change in the nation’s leadership. The violent origins of the New Order era are like a wound in the nation’s history that has been wrapped in several layers of bandages but is now being unraveled, exposing a deep, unhealed scar. But while it is important to know how the transition of power occurred, it is also important to acknowledge that Indonesia was already in a disastrous place before the New Order started its authoritarian rule. Certainly one cannot condone the way in which Suharto came to power, but it is important to discuss and comprehend the failings of Soekarno as well. How did the man Wilardjito guarded so closely go so wrong in his latter years? As the search for those answers

³⁵ Max Lane, 114

³⁶ Interview with Julius Sumant, Producer Trans 7, Jakarta, August 2008

continue, one should be vigilant of the fact that a moral polarizing of the New Order and the Old Order is not helpful.

Sarinah's story, although probably far more innocuous, also falls under that attractive master-narrative of the glory of Soekarno's early years. But there has been an uncomfortable and nagging notion that Sarinah was actually fictitious. Historian Rudolf Mrázek has commented that long conversations with Soekarno's sister have failed to conclusively reveal the existence of anyone by her name as a hired help for their family.³⁷

Willard Hanna has also written:

Nobody except Bung Karno himself seems ever actually to have made the acquaintance of [Sarinah].... [S]he was a humble servant girl from whom Bung Karno learned about feminine charm, charity, chastity, [and] also, it seems, something about national soul, will and service. Sarinah has starred in many a Soekarno speech; she has served as a heroine in a book of Soekarno homilies.³⁸

Have Indonesian historians ever really debated the veracity of Sarinah's existence with any real inquiry? It was perhaps not a major worry that someone of Soekarno's stature might have repeatedly fabricated that aspect of his childhood. Soekarno would have seen the power of situating the small "h" of history within a larger context—in creating a folk hero out of the story of an individual. Surely no one can underestimate the power of Soekarno's much repeated character, regardless of whether or not she actually existed. And if it served the purpose of unifying Indonesia, then is it pardonable? Is there a significant difference between the tale of a woman who was mythologized into a quietly suffering, noble, peasant class hero, the epitome of *gotong royong*, and a modern day

³⁷ Conversation with Rudolf Mrázek, Ann Arbor, October 2008

³⁸ Willard A. Hanna, *Eight Nation Makers*, (New York: St. Martins Press, 1964), 16

imagination of that existence by a people, ‘common’ or not? Sarinah from Sragen in 2008 really had the casting correct—a formally illiterate woman who despite her brush with fame, her incidental involvement with one of the greatest characters in modern Asian history and all her possible travels with him, remained unchanged in her humble core values. She remained *good*, a morally upright Javanese peasant-class woman. In a sense, this reincarnated Sarinah has served Soekarno’s purpose decades after her real or imagined passing; her ethos and place in Javanese lives still matter. Ironically, she is still what she possibly never was. Yolinda, the television producer, knew that it would be embarrassing if she aired that particular segment since this woman was clearly not who she claimed to be. Perhaps she felt that she had a duty to protect Soekarno’s story.

Asvi Warman Adam has reminded us recently of the “heroes industry” in Indonesian politics.³⁹ He infers easily that the system has always been set up to reward military personnel who tend to be from Java. Michael Wood takes note of the fact that the shift toward recognizing individuals who were in the military over civilians happened during the New Order.⁴⁰ While it is undeniable that Supriyadi had demonstrated some degree of bravery and guile in the Blitar uprising, the exact details were never quite known and we thus cannot ascertain the degree of Supriyadi’s heroism. However, Supriyadi did fulfill two important criteria: he was among those who sacrificed their lives to bring independence to Indonesia and, most significantly, he was a military man—an all-important consideration for the New Order. While I am not suggesting that anyone ought to contest Supriyadi’s title of *Pahlawan Nasional*, it might be acceptable to say that

³⁹ Warman Adam, 266

⁴⁰ Michael Woods, *Official History in Modern Indonesia: New Order Perspectives and Counterinterviews*, (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2005)

there were other Indonesians who might have deserved that recognition as well. What follows then is a call to explore such possibilities before an entire generation of non-military people who participated in the struggles of the freedom movement from diverse parts of Indonesia are buried unsung.

Several historians have written about the headiness of the months immediately after the fall of the New Order. Karen Strassler has commented that although President Habibî's act of relaxing press controls exposed Indonesians to a "flood of *reformasi* images ... [as] book publishing boomed and hundreds of new tabloids competed for attention",⁴¹ those innumerable images of students photographed in the act of demonstrations were in danger of being appropriated and subsumed within a larger historical narrative of ineffective "youth movements" that have spanned nearly a century. It did not help, she added, that, "many students seemed to be more interested in luxuriating in nostalgia for the heroic history of their own struggle than participating in efforts to reform." Unfortunately, those photographs also remind us "of how impossible it is to sustain a romantic notion of popular memory as an oppositional reservoir of alternative historical truths untainted by the ideological effects of official history." Strassler observed that there was a historical *expectation* of a backlash of sorts, but after a proliferation of photographs and eyewitness accounts, there was immediately a pre-existing banner under which to file them away.

One could draw a parallel to Strassler's analysis of photographs with emerging personal histories that are jockeying to find expression. Like photographs and popular memory, alternate (auto)biographies like the ones explored here run the risk of being

⁴¹ Karen Strassler, *Photographs and the Making of Reformasi Memory*, ed. Mary S. Zurbuchen (Singapore: University of Singapore Press, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2005), 279

shunted aside as marginal expressions unless they are channeled into some form of legislative agency. To put it simply, it is one thing for Wilardjito to claim that Soekarno signed the *Supersemar* document at gunpoint and to even be allowed by the highest court to tell that story freely, but it is another to actually have the diorama of Soekarno signing the document dismantled or at least modified. News gatherers, journalists and television stations would do well to avoid being perceived as temporary patriots as Strassler indicates some students were. As there are an unusually high number of stories about Indonesia's past now being narrated, one ought to be careful that the historical importance of such "breaking" stories not be confined by a short-sighted desire to be identified as part of a new liberated media that gets credit for "fixing" Indonesia's history. The emergence of these personal stories and differing accounts of history must be encouraged, to be sure, but they must also be situated in a reworking of history that is at once accurate, diverse and credible as a true alternative.

Soekarno had a simple schema for segmenting Indonesian history in his inspirational speeches: the glorious past, the dark present and the bright future. That basic framework has persisted ever since—the emphasis has only shifted ahead in time. During the New Order, the glorious past moved from the Majapahit era to the more recent glory of battles won during the struggle for independence. The dark present was a result of Soekarno era or Old Order mistakes and the future was where the New Order would lead the country. During *reformasi*, it moved further down the continuum of time: the glorious past became those years of the independence era led by Soekarno; the darkness was caused by the New Order; and of course the search for the glorious future was ongoing.

The problem with this sort of compartmentalizing is that it makes all emerging Indonesian histories subject to that Old Order-New Order-*reformasi* axis, creating preconceived notions on what a reclaimed account of Indonesian history should discuss. If the three case studies in Java from the summer of 2008 are indicative of a trend, then historians and those agencies concerned with the dissemination of new narratives might consider brighter searchlights aimed at different segments of this very large and historically diverse Republic. While all conscientious expositions of the past must be applauded, a much more extensive and submerged collection of histories that lie outside the discourse of power politics in Java must be revealed and publicized.

Yet, these criticisms notwithstanding, the study of history in Indonesia is at a seminal juncture for one main reason: the expectation of the mechanics of how history is understood and transmitted has now changed. No longer does it originate from the state or from the transcription of colonial-era records disseminated via official textbooks; rather, historical consciousness is being cultivated by a diversity of sources and individuals. One can only hope that this scattering of origins will gradually leave the more Java-centric locus and fall across different points in the archipelago. This current process of gathering individual stories, though at times less than perfect because of concomitant fabrications, is the inevitable rite of passage if we are to eventually arrive at a repository substantial enough for critical study. Thus one cannot help but encourage and applaud all those who have recently taken up the time-consuming business of collecting and archiving those smaller “h”s that have long been knocking at the door of the proverbial waiting room of Indonesia’s history. The idea that some of these smaller

stories will ultimately become indelible fragments of a larger constellation of historical understanding is one whose time has come in Indonesia.

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