

REALITY AND MYTH IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIAN HISTORY

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1. Background

History has emerged as an increasingly prominent field of study in Indonesia at least since 1980's, after being neglected for several decades. New theoretical, philosophical, and empirical analyses of Indonesian history were taught widely at university and appear in professional journals and books. At the same time, a new generation of students and young scholars in a variety of fields was being made aware of the interrelationship between their fields with history. Above all however, there are growing doubts about the truth of Indonesian history at any level of society following current political changes after the resignation of Soeharto in May 1998. Indonesian history is considered primarily as a product of social and political engineering of the New Order rather than an appropriate scholarly apparatus. Consequently, Indonesian historiography is no longer appreciated and people are simply asking for a new history, a deconstructed history.

The most vocal and trenchant criticism of existing historiography, however, has come not from within historian community. This is an irony. The need to deconstruct contemporary Indonesian history is not an important issue in academic or professional historian community. The polemic took place mostly in daily newspapers, popular weekly magazines, or tabloids rather than in highly recognised historian forum. Most prominent historians at the university obviously had chosen a different path from the one which was being led by recent popular viewpoint. Instead, politicians, journalists,

and other social-humanities scholars took over the place of historians in discussing the truth of the past.

There is no disguising the fact that much effort has been done to reconstruct Indonesian history since the first national history conference in 1957. However, too much of what has been presented as historical reconstruction by Indonesian historians is highly criticised at the present days, particularly for the history covering period from 1945. People tend to argue that Indonesian history has been divorced or isolated in the analysis or methodology, if not in the reality, from its real past. Such separation has led to, and has been reinforced by irresponsible scholars, bureaucrats, and political elites.

Academically, one reason for this divorce is to be found in the philosophical heritage of modern Indonesian historiography. The heritage that has shaped much of the modern Indonesian historiography is nationalistic ideology. This such ideology rejected the concept of universal objectivity of reconstructive past. Moreover a great deal of the recent work on the contemporary Indonesian history concerns political history. Excepting very few studies, it is fair to say that much attention of contemporary Indonesian political history has been devoted only to the past events around patriotism, Soekarno, Soeharto, communist party, Islam, and military in accordance to certain political interests. From reading those works, it can be assumed that history is simply the ideologies of intolerance and the raw material for legitimacy. Therefore, it is hard to deny that some current practices of Indonesian historiography do make an

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easy target for new viewpoints knock-down the existing argument.

The purpose of this paper is to describe general intellectual patterns among Indonesian historians in reconstructing contemporary Indonesian history. The larger goal of this paper is to assess the impact of major Indonesian historical discourse upon the level of anachronism in reconstructing contemporary Indonesian history and logical bases of the historiography. What role the basic discourse of historiography played in the emerging of existing Indonesian history has never been satisfactorily explained. An attempt will also be made to explore the relevancy or irony of current intellectual trends toward new understanding and new interpretation of contemporary Indonesian history.

Before going on to speculate about natures of Indonesian historiography, it would be helpful to look at firstly some issues around the study of history. In the last few decades, we have stood witness to a remarkable world-wide resurgence of intellectual liberation in philosophy, theory and methodology of history. The rise of what are commonly termed postmodernism, which was starting to question the truth of historical description constructed by common historians. According to postmodernism, it is wrong to imagine that historian accurately portray the past. Historical description is historian concept of the past, or a subjective creation of the historian. Description of the past is not about the past itself, because historical evidences are merely texts which depend upon other texts. It could not be denied that postmodernism concept does contribute to strengthen concept of relativity in understanding the past, in which historical objectivity is deeply questioned.¹

The limitations of study of history are most strikingly revealed in its shared definition of what counts as objective. The paradox can be expressed simply, an objective historical reconstruction apparently is a noble dream, quoting Charles A. Beard and Carl Backer, than precedent or method, methodology and theory of history have led us to expect. It is becoming even worse whenever history is the raw material for nationalist ideology or political legitimacy.

Ideology is a central category in linking the past with historical reconstruction. In this situation, historical objectivity is moving far away from empirical past and truth, but a fully subjective reconstruction of the past is considered undoubtedly as the real history instead. Quoting Eric Hobsbawm, if there is no suitable past, it can always be invented. However, this ideological abuse of history is mostly based on anachronism rather than on simple lies or fictions for which no evidence exists.

It is different, however, from most of postmodern views which argue there is no distinction between historical writing and fiction, and this deconstructive consciousness of the narrative is still based on availability of historical evidences or facts. It is not solely an objectivised empiricist enterprise and neither grasping the meaning of texts without reference to originating reality. This narrative historical statement is based on evidence and subject to evidence, of which there is clear difference between fact and fiction despite the fact that there are differences in interpreting the facts or texts.

2. Four controversies

There are in fact many controversies in Indonesian history during the last fifty years. Four of them, *Serangan Umum Satu Maret* (1 March Attack) of 1949, *Gerakan 30 September* (30 September Movement) of 1965, *Surat Perintah 11 Maret* (11 March Instruction) of 1966, and social-political role of Indonesian armed forces have recently been attracting more attention from the public. This situation can be explained in connection with the end of Soeharto era and dominant role of military in Indonesian politics since 1998. It seems that every section of the society came up with various historical evidences, which are considered reliable to deconstruct history of those four, because those events had close relation to the history of Soeharto either as individual as well as his regime. Far more critical is the question of what might be called "political legitimacy", the extension of central figure of Soeharto over more and more role in history for political purposes. Soeharto and his regime are considered creating and

using history in order to strengthen their political power. History was used as the main vehicle to admit all actions by the name of government or state and a source of intense pride to Soeharto personally.

Concerning *Serangan Umum 1 Maret* of 1949, a new monument was built in Yogyakarta after the resignation of Soeharto from the presidency. This new monument is regarded as the opposite one to another similar monument built earlier by Soeharto during his reign. Soeharto, who lead the early morning attack over the capital city of Yogyakarta on 1 March 1949, and who then the President of Indonesia during the New Order, was blamed for historical fraud or manipulation. He was accused a liar for considering himself as the man who firstly proposed the idea of how importance for the Republic of Indonesia to attack Yogyakarta during the day and also as the most important figure during the attack. Draping himself in hero clothes, people tend to say that Soeharto has turned history into his own advantage and denied the important role of other figures in historical processes.

As written and shown widely in Indonesian history books and films,² the Dutch military forces took over the Republican capital city of Yogyakarta on 19 December 1948 when diplomats of two delegations were negotiating. Most of Indonesian political elites included President Soekarno and the Vice President M. Hatta were detained and exiled to outside Yogyakarta. The commander in chief of Indonesian armed forces Soedirman, who was sick at that time, together with other military elites fled into rural areas for guerilla war, while an emergency government of Republic of Indonesia (PDRI) was found in West Sumatra led by Sjafruddin Prawiranegara. The Sultan of Yogyakarta, Hamengkubuwono IX, who was one of the republican elites, opposed the Dutch military intervention. He continued to support the republicans openly, but the Dutch could do nothing to the Sultan, because of his sultanate historical background which had close relation to the colonial government, the weakness of Dutch military forces itself, and the Sultan himself who was strongly supported by the people. The Sultan palace was one of rarely

found places around the city, where many republican supporters could hide out from the Dutch troops safely. The palace was also a meeting point for the republicans to contact each other or to discuss a plan before attacking Dutch military positions.

The continuation of conflict between the Dutch and the Republic of Indonesia attracted more attention from international world. This situation is often associated with the growing concerns of USA in the name of United Nations to political instability of the region in connection with starting of cold war in Europe. When international world, particularly the Western Block was concerned with minimizing the political impact of the conflict, Indonesian elites were trying to find the best way how to stop Dutch military intervention. In an interview with BBC Radio, Sultan said that he sent a letter to Soedirman by February 1949 in getting support and permit from the Indonesian chief of armed forces for a military action to attack Dutch positions in Yogyakarta during the day light. The purpose of this attack is simply to show the international world that Indonesia still exists in order to bring the Dutch into negotiation table. Sultan also informed that he met Soeharto, who was Indonesian military commander for the city of Yogyakarta, before the attack was carried out on 1 March 1949.

However there is paradox concerning this event, whenever Soeharto claims that he did play the most important role in the whole process of the attack since the beginning in his autobiography. Similar to the Sultan, Soeharto did mention in his autobiography that he took initiative to the attack after listening to the foreign radio which broadcast the debate on Indonesia in the United Nations. By the attack, Soeharto wanted to prove that Dutch was lying to the world. Despite his strong claim, however, Soeharto also mentioned at several occasions that Sultan did have important contribution at that particular event. Soeharto claim was then supported generally by most Indonesian historians as well as historical witnesses, who usually performed no critical attitude toward available information from both sides due to limited knowledge or political interest.

So, what went wrong here? Most of Indonesian films and history books included the text books for school student during the New Order era then described Soeharto as the first man who proposed the idea of the day light attack of 1 March 1949, besides describing that the Sultan was also a very important figure who had provided a great support to the Indonesian side. To those of Sultan supporters, who most of them were by coincident also Soeharto's enemies during the New Order, such version of history was considered a fake. When Soeharto stepped down from his power, they demanded to place the Sultan name instead of Soeharto as the first man who proposed the idea of the attack. A partial and indirect approach to the need of changing direction of historical description was made also by comparing the integrity level between Soeharto and Sultan. Considering their experiences with Soeharto during the New Order, Sultan is considered honest and humble while Soeharto is snobbish and treacherous. Unquestionably Sultan's information is appreciated higher than that of Soeharto. More positively, the anti-Soeharto group draw strength from what is called "wise king". They believe that Sultan, as a king of Javanese kingdom, never tells lies to the people.

The second and the third controversies could not be separated in a historical process. The *Gerakan 30 September* is a name used by a military group who killed Army generals and attempted to take over political power in 1965 led by the army colonel namely Untung. This movement is often associated with highly political competition, which involved Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), President Soekarno, Army, and the muslim group since late 1950-s. PKI was then blamed for the movement, because some of their elites were found with the rebel leaders during the action. Moreover, *Harian Rakjat* which is considered as PKI newspaper supported the movement in her first edition after the movement. In Surakarta of Central Java, the mayor who was PKI member announced his support to the movement on 2 October 1965. A similar action was taken by PKI members in Yogyakarta, where a march was organized to support the move-

ment at the same day, when in fact the movement in Jakarta has already collapsed.

In another side of the society, the anti-movement group who opposed PKI, affiliated organisations, and other left wing ideologies was growing very fast, particularly among the students, Army, and the muslim groups as early as October 1965. They asked President Soekarno to take action over PKI, who was considered being responsible for the killing of generals and attempted coup. President Soekarno rejected the demand, which then created mass demonstration everywhere. The physical conflict between groups of different ideologies could not be avoided, even after the supporters of both sides included school and university students were already killed in several areas. In fact in terms of Soeharto, he personally supported the anti-Soekarno and PKI demonstration since the beginning.

These uncertain situations could not change President Soekarno decision. He pointed out in several occasions, the cause of *Gerakan 30 September* or *Gerakan 1 Oktober* (Gestok) could not be blamed just to PKI. He still retained his general ideology of nationalism, communism, religion or NASAKOM as Indonesian national ideology. Meanwhile, the Army under Major General Soeharto and other anti-communist military officers started to take tough action to the PKI and their supporters. The military commanders in Jakarta, West Java and East Java for example, declared the prohibition of PKI despite there was still reluctance of President Soekarno to blame PKI in late 1965.

A stronger demand to restrict and ban PKI produced a deep political crisis. The killing of people who considered members of PKI and supporting organisations has been started as early as the end of 1965, particularly in Java, Bali and Sumatra. In this situation as written in most history book in Indonesia, President Soekarno signed an order instructing Soeharto to take all measures considered necessary to guarantee security, calm, and stability of the government, revolution, and personal safety and authority of the President on 11 March 1966. A day after, this instruction which well known as *Surat Perintah 11 Maret* or

Supersemar was used by Soeharto in the name of president to ban PKI without President Soekarno's knowledge. The process of removing President Soekarno from his power to Soeharto had slowly begun, and the killing of PKI and affiliated organisation members was continued. Politically and historically, the *Gerakan 30 September* of 1965 then is considered identical to PKI and affiliated organisations as well as to Marxism and communism. The event itself during the New Order is popularly abbreviated to *G30S/PKI*, from which it could be considered unquestionably that PKI was a part of the attempted coup.³

The sudden fall of Soeharto produced another euphoria against everything associated with Soeharto, particularly in connection with *Gerakan 30 September* and *Supersemar*. The opponents of Soeharto, particularly those who were associated with PKI and affiliated organisations came up with different evidences concerning the role of PKI, Army, Soekarno and Soeharto in *Gerakan 30 September* of 1965 and beyond. PKI supporters denied the involvement of their organisation in the movement, and accused the Army and Soeharto personally as the main actor behind the action. According to this view, the event was a consequence of political struggle within the Army and a part of military way to take over the power from President Soekarno. A newspaper owned by the Indonesian armed forces is blamed by the communist loyalist for spreading rumors about the involvement of PKI and its affiliated organisations in *Gerakan 30 September*, which contributed greatly to growing anti-PKI demonstration later.⁴

Concerning Soeharto, the event is regarded as a manifestation of Soeharto systematic social and political engineering to gain political power step by step by using PKI as a scapegoat. Following this argument, as a relatively unpopular officer, Soeharto did understand that he could not seize power at once. So, Soeharto had to find somebody else acting for his will. There is also paradox concerning this event, however, because other Soeharto's opponents, who are mostly anti-communist, then accused Soeharto himself of being a communist. According to this new accusation,

Soeharto was associated to the left wing group during the revolution of 1945-1949, when he was fighting Dutch around Yogyakarta and central Java. Colonel Untung who led the coup was considered as Soeharto man, who deliberately did not touch Soeharto during the rampage into homes of army general in the very early morning of 1 October 1965.

The killing of PKI and affiliated organisations members and the discriminated policy of the New Order left a considerable pain to their families. Clearly, the important shift in the structure of politics influenced people's way of looking at the past event and making appreciation. Whenever Soeharto image has been damaging by the *Reformasi*, members of PKI and affiliated organisations proclaimed their innocence. In an interview with one of prestigious Indonesian weekly magazines, for example, a prominent member of communist women organization argued that *Gerwani* knew nothing about politics, military training and *Angkatan Kelima* (Fifth Forces). In fact, the latest oral history research around Yogyakarta, however, found considerable evidences about the involvement of *Gerwani* in those military activities. Ironically, in another side of society, after 35 years, there is still small number of people, especially among the muslim group considering the killing after the collapse of *Gerakan 30 September* as a tragedy of history which should not happened. It might be the only exemption, when a prominent muslim poet who made a journey to East Java during that critical time wrote a poem to express his sadness, by describing a virgin who did her first shampooing with blood. So, in terms of historical understanding, both sides either present historiography tradition or its critics tends to blame something outside the group being responsible for the attempted coup and the mass killing rather than to understand why it happened in historical contexts.

The political argument against the view that *Supersemar* exists coming out loudly after the declining of Soeharto. This view is supported by the fact that there is no evidence to show the original form of the instruction.⁵ Following this view, there is more critical question which argues that Soekarno issued no political mandate to

Soeharto. Soeharto just received a military order from the President, but it was then deliberately turned over by Soeharto to become political authorisation. *Supersemar* is obviously very much a means to political power for Soeharto despite continuing opposition from Soekarno and his loyalists toward Soeharto actions until early 1967, when *MPRS* (Provisional People Consultative Assembly) named Soeharto formally acting president.

The *Supersemar* itself is considered as the second attempted coup after *Gerakan 30 September*. Soeharto is accused of using his military power to compel Soekarno signing the instruction on 11 March 1966. It is also assumed that Soekarno was under military threat when he was signing the instruction. Another view even describes Soeharto and his aides have drawn up *Supersemar* before leaving for Bogor. Moreover, the anti-Soeharto group also came up with other different information, which mentioned different time and people who met Soekarno in Bogor on 11 March 1966 compared to what has been written in standard history book. Instead of three army generals namely Amir Machmud, M. Jusuf, and Basuki Rachmat, the new information mentions another army general Maraden Panggabean who arrived in Bogor with other generals by late mid night of 11 March 1966 and then asked Soekarno to sign the instruction under his pistol threat. Because of that, the transfer of power from Soekarno to Soeharto through legalisation of *Supersemar* by *MPRS* is illegitimate, and can be easily regarded as constitutional coup.

The final controversy is concerned with the history of social and political role of Indonesian armed forces. The military experiences during the revolution, the use of military actions to recover from regional movements and ideological conflicts in 1950-s, the involvement of military officers in economic and political activities during the Guided Democracy era, produced wide opportunities for Indonesian armed forces especially the army to play dominant role, particularly during the New Order. History of Indonesian armed forces was written in a parallel to the glory of the nation. Indonesian armed forces is considered doing

nothing wrong to the country and its people in the past. It is unquestionable that the dominant social and political role of *Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia* (ABRI) is legitimised by her history as well as by the national history.

When the New Order collapsed in 1998, the dominant roles of ABRI and her past are questioned. Newly political atmosphere stimulated new way of thinking, which provided evidences about significant contribution of Indonesian armed forces on creating authoritarian regime, human right abuses, imbalance economic distribution and conglomeration, social conflicts and other national disturbances. An additional perspective on the meaning of historical objectivity produced new understanding on ABRI. Like most other institutions during the New Order, ABRI was characterised by her failure to represent the majority of people. These comments, though focused mostly on the low level of historical consciousness in Indonesia, have dark implications for future historiography of Indonesia.

There is a need to reinterpret facts concerning history of ABRI and its role in national history. ABRI is no longer sacred or untouchable institution along side with changing Indonesia. Despite people unhappiness with civilian political elites, people prefer to put civilian domination or supremacy over military in daily social-political life of the country rather than let the military return into power through its multi function concept.

3. From history to myth

Indonesian historiography finds herself in between unexpected role of political actors and subjective historical reconstruction, which imply, however, that all facts claim objective. It seems there is no more room for having responsibility to historical fact and criticising the politico-ideological abuse of history. The historiography situation has changed so little since 1957, because Indonesian historiography still relied heavily on reconstruction of the past being a symbol of national efficacy rather than a way to understand the society. History as a construction is an ideology, of which the empirical facts are transformed to be myths.

Indonesian-centric historiography which replaced the colonial centric historiography created even more problems concerning the truth of history. Despite its social scientific approach which reconstructs the past more accurately in academic sense due to its neutrality and advanced, Kuntowijoyo argues that history "contributed nothing and contradicted nobody". He then continues that history is "like those living in an ivory tower..alienated from its society" because its lack of social critical function.⁶

The controversy of *Serangan Umum Satu Maret* of 1949 is a consequence of more elites and symbolic nature of Indonesian historiography. Indonesian historiography tends to ask questions in searching for the role of big man or hero of each of the event. It is very rarely in the course of its deliberations that historians discussed suggestion that *Serangan Umum Satu Maret* should be considered as a process not a product of history. This means the place of Soeharto or Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX in the course of the event will be described as one part of a bigger historical process. They were not the only actors who made the day attack possible. There were many more figures, in fact, taking apart in the event.

The replacement of Soeharto with Sultan will not be able to construct a less subjective historiography. But the real hurdle is political, which partly reflects more on ideological preference than the truth of the past. There will be no significant change in historiography if the main goal of deconstructing the event is just replacing Soeharto with Sultan, because the symbolic process of history becoming myth as the case of Soeharto will be repeated under the name of Sultan. The association between ideological preference and myth has its root in theory of inter-subjectivity. They are a troubling and unsettling category mediating between the real past and historical reconstruction.

For more critical questions, this situation can be explained in terms of several other reasons. Firstly, description still concerns big man or hero in political history and ignores the social process of the event. There will be more unnecessary data coming out in connection with legitimating or mystifying the role of Sultan in history. This means the

construction past events is no longer history but a myth. Secondly, there are some evidences that some other names, such as Bambang Sugeng, A.H. Nasution and Soedirman also thought a similar thing as the Sultan and Soeharto did simultaneously. Thirdly, the eye witness who said that Soeharto met the Sultan, in fact, was left outside when Soeharto entered the main building. He was not fully aware what happened inside. Fourthly, an officer who was traveling with Soedirman mentioned how difficult it was to send a letter to the Sultan from Soedirman by courier. The letter from Soedirman, in fact, was handed over to Sultan after the attack. Therefore the question is, how can a statement in the new constructed monument mention about the support of Soedirman if the letter arrived late as mentioned above? This is definitely an anachronism, in which people interpreted historical fact beyond its time frame.

A similar problem occurs in the case of *Gerakan 30 September* and *Supersemar*. It seems that a recent need to deconstruct history of *Gerakan 30 September* and *Supersemar* mainly based on cumulative distrust or dislike to Soeharto rather than search for more objective history. It is hard to deny that official history concerning both events is still far from the real past since many reliable data are not available. Moreover, the spirit of anti-communist ideology behind the historiography during Soeharto era produced no more than one sided history. However, the reason for writing a new history, in fact, was encouraged by the spirit against Soeharto rather than the process of appropriate intellectual development in order to find historical reality and truth. Consequently, despite these deconstructive consciousness, another narrow perspective is pushing historical reality inexorably down the path of myth. In short, the recent need did not change structurally the basic paradigm of Indonesian historiography.

This nature can be easily found in the way of people formulating the critical questions against the present version of history. Despite some enthusiasm to gain genuine fact, little has been done because they could not avoid to use history for

ideological abuses as the New Order regime did. Most of issues were associated merely to Soeharto or the New Order regime, who was considered manipulating the information. Questions which identified the place of their group in historical context of the event can hardly be found. Moreover, they also tended to bury any evidences which will bring them into similar characteristics with the New Order. It can be seen from the issue of Soekarno is better than Soeharto, people who were associated to PKI and its affiliated organisations did nothing harmful to their opponents when they were dominant in national politics, or the presence of PKI leaders in Halim Perdana Kusumah airport is just coincident. The only advantage atmosphere is the existence of general way of thinking against Soeharto and the New Order in public. Therefore, in accordance with the fundamental structuring principle of the argument it is easy for them to manipulate public discourse upon contemporary Indonesian history by the name of historical objectivity.

It is still hard to accept the view that Soeharto never received any instruction from Soekarno on 11 March 1966. Soekarno himself mentioned about the instruction as a mandate for Soeharto in several occasions, included in the additional document of *Pidato Nawaksara* (Nawaksara Speech), which was handed in by Soekarno to *MPRS* (Provisional People Consultative Assembly) in connection to his attempt to defend his presidential policy. If the mandate is never been issued, Soekarno should be aware and would mention it during his life. So, the main issue here is the critical question of whether Soeharto and his colleagues changed the original meaning of the instruction from military mandate to political mandate in order to legitimise their political ambition, and whether Provisional People Consultative Assembly also manipulated the content of the instruction rather than a question of, whether *Supersemar* exists in Indonesian political history.

The paradox of this event becomes more complex by mentioning different information provided by A.H. Nasution, who was the leader of the Provisional People Consultative Assembly. On one occasion,

Nasution said that he never knew precisely the content of *Supersemar*. He also mentioned that he did ask Soeharto about *Supersemar* but Soeharto did not answer his question. In an interview with one of prestigious magazines in Indonesia, however, Nasution informed that he received the document of *Supersemar* from Amir Machmoed, and then it was handed over to Abdul Kadir Besar, who was the general secretary of the people assembly at that time. Despite those different information, in fact, there is a strong evidence that Nasution has told Soeharto that he has an authority to form a cabinet after receiving a mandate from Soekarno. As the leader of Provisional People Consultative Assembly, Nasution also used *Supersemar* as legal basis for appointing Soeharto to be acting President after removing Soekarno from power in 1967. All documents of Provisional People Consultative Assembly concerning the transfer of power from Soekarno to Soeharto and a policy against communism or other left wing ideologies based legally on *Supersemar*. This *Supersemar* is also a mile stone for the New Order regime. Therefore in terms of political and intellectual history, *Supersemar* does exist in Indonesian history, although in process its history has been mystifying at certain level and its mechanics remain a big question for historian.

This means that Nasution obviously knows something about *Supersemar*, or speculatively he might try to cover up something concerning his role in Indonesian political history.⁷ This speculation is not irrational in the sense of the whole process of Indonesian political history since 1950's, where this former army chief of staff was deeply involved in many aspects of state matters. Part of his fascination can perhaps also be attributed to his involvement in inter military conflicts, such as military operations in connection with conflict between local and central government, founder of a political party in 1955 general election, introduction dual function concept of Indonesian armed forces, a target of *Gerakan 30 September* movement, and expelling Soekarno from his presidency by approving and legalising the holder of *Supersemar* instruction.

The remaining questions are, when did the coup take place? Was it on 30 September 1965, 11 March 1966, January 1967, or all three were series of coup? Who did carry out the coup? Was it PKI, Soeharto, Army, Provisional People Consultative Assembly lead by Nasution, or CIA by the name of Western Block? What was 30 September 1965 movement? Was it a struggle for power within the communist groups, within the Army, between the Army and the communist group, between Soekarno, Army and the communist group, political engineering by Soeharto, or apart of Cold War? It is not the main concern of this article, however, to answer these questions.

With reference to the last controversy, in terms of Indonesian armed forces, the dominant role of military in Indonesian politics and in the whole life of this country is obvious from the proportion that Indonesian historiography and its derivatives is occupied by anachronistic value in interpreting historical facts. One and simple example of these is the birth of Indonesian armed forces. ABRI considered 5 October 1945 as the birth date of Indonesian armed forces, ABRI found its own institution, and ABRI was originally from the people. These claims, in fact are historically indistinct and inconsistent, why?

Three days after the proclamation of Indonesian independence, the transitional parliament, PPKI, on 20 August 1945 found *Badan Keamanan Rakyat* (BKR) in order to take care of national security together with the people. The formation of BKR is a moderate realisation of the youth demand for a national armed forces. However, the position of BKR in Indonesia historiography is dualistic. BKR is often associated to the first armed struggle since Indonesian independence, but the formation of BKR is not considered as the beginning of Indonesian armed forces institutionally. The formation of *Tentara Keamanan Rakyat* (TKR) on 5 October 1945 by President decree is regarded officially as the date birth of Indonesian armed forces instead.

What is the logical problem of Indonesian historiography concerning military? While ABRI considered that she was originally from the people, she should asso-

ciate herself with BKR rather than TKR. As a national armed forces, TKR had professional nature since the beginning, but the institution of BKR was found as a part of people involvement in armed struggles. Almost all BKR members, particularly the commanders were also local civilian political activists. The BKR officers were usually members of *Komite Nasional Indonesia* (Indonesian National Committee) or KNI, a quasi parliament, at national or local level. Moreover in many areas, BKR could not be differed from *laskar* or the militia, a para military organisation formed by civilians or political parties. This means, between civil and military function in BKR there is no clear distinction, which is parallel to the claim of ABRI upon her social and political role during the New Order. In terms of TKR, one thing should be considered that the formation of TKR in many places was just a transformation of BKR. TKR officers were no more than BKR officers with military rank and file according to professional military structure. Although M. Hatta, Indonesian first vice president, used the term of *Tentara Rakyat* (People Army) to mention Indonesian armed forces, what he means by people army is a professional armed forces.⁸

In addition to the predominance of thinking within Indonesian armed forces that they found their own institution, a striking evidence from the past is considering different perspective. Both BKR and TKR as institutions, in fact, were formed by legitimate formal authorities under Indonesian constitution rather than solely by the people. As mentioned above, BKR was found by transitional parliament of PPKI and it was put under a quasi parliament of KNI for the operational, while TKR was found by the government. The greater part of this evidence once again declined consideration that Indonesian armed forces were born by the people in order to legitimise the historical right of military to dominate social and political life of the nation.

As mentioned above, the Indonesian armed forces claimed that her role in social and political life of the country has deep bases in history. This claim is primarily associated to experience during the war against the Dutch between 1945 to 1949,

when the military played important role in all aspects of the country life. The absence of Indonesian government and civilian bureaucracy in many places during the war accentuated the important role of military, particularly in the rural areas where military built their headquarters in connection with the guerilla war strategy performed by Indonesian armed forces. However, there are also evidences that many civilians acted as both military officers and civilian bureaucrats to rule the country during the war.

A military doctrine or concept which put together civil and military function in one institution is only suitable for emergency condition, such as when Indonesians were fighting the Dutch to defend her independence, but not for a normal situation. The only possibility for the ABRI to claim the continuation of her dominant role in social and political life is when she considers that Indonesia always lives in emergency situation. This consideration includes the right of Indonesian armed forces to be considered as the first citizen of the country, because ABRI is the only group who is able to save, stabilise, and protect national unity and interests. ABRI is a symbol of patriotism and Indonesian nationalism. Thus, another myth is created through Indonesian history.

4. Epilogue

It is true that both existing historiography tradition and its critics agree on less subjective reconstruction of the past. But when it comes into reconstruction process, both are trapped in anachronism due to political preferences or ideologies. Thus, history is no longer regarded as a structure of explanation, but as a system of legitimacy. Consequently, redefining the role of the individual or group in history is one of the most complex challenges faced by Indonesian historiography. Although more attention has been paid in the last few decades to this particular problem, Indonesian historiography is still not able to exemplify how to understand properly the role of historic actors. Despite Kuntowijoyo argument that social science approach to history is able to answer the question of actors in a non-ideological terminology at

academic level, in fact, the general picture of historical writing in Indonesia is still characterised by ideological approach.

The problem in the tradition of Indonesian historiography is a concerted effort at domesticating history which ignores inter-subjectivity problem methodologically, and the lack intellectual understanding toward historical discourse for most people who considered themselves historians as well as within the society. Those conditions can be easily found in the way of Indonesian historiography deals with Soekarno, Soeharto, communism and Indonesian armed forces as mentioned above.

Indonesians did reconstruct their contemporary past using historical knowledge, but in the process, it was quickly altered into mystifying the past which produced myth rather than history. The Indonesian-centric historiography tends to simplify the past, in which historical processes received less attention as compared to the historical products. Relevant to most postmodern deconstructing consciousness, there is no clear distinction between fact and fiction in most Indonesian historical writing since anachronism has been part of the tradition. They possibly did not lie or manipulate history, but they just did not know how to interpret the past texts within its time frame. For most people, history is just an ideology. So, the public truth is not necessarily the truth of history. In terms of telling the truth about history, Indonesian might not yet ready living with less subjective history; they are happy enough living with myths.

Perhaps the most urgent requirement for deconstructive consciousness historiography is restructuring the basic concept of Indonesian-centric historiography, because the present Indonesian-centric historiography tradition has been polluted by concept of history as ideology. Restructuring the concept should be based on universal and rational philosophy, theory, methodology, and method of history. Despite the uniqueness of Indonesian history and the fact that there are always hard facts in history, it is hard to deny that objective past in history as a universal concept and reconstructed past is relative reality. It is useless to defend the argument that Indonesian history should be reconstructed in

accordance with how Indonesian people thought, because every practicing historian knows that reconstruction history is based on spacial and temporal frame as its happened in order to avoid anachronism, but at the same time the historian herself is limited by time, sources, tools, and intellectual capability. It should be noted, however, that such a focus on universality or relativity is strongly opposed by most Indonesian prominent historians. Finally, the new concept of Indonesian-centric historiography should be characterised by deep consciousness to the humanness of history. It is widely accepted that history concerns the past of human being, which means that history is a reconstruction of the past human society humanly. People could learn about the past failure and success of human being from history, but historical reconstruction is not concerned with justifying the right or wrong of every human activities in the past.

5. Notes :

1. The attack is responded by most practicing historians by admitting that they are able to discover the truth of the past although they realise there are some facts probably true. In reply to the attack, C. Behan McCullagh proposes 'correlation' theory of truth in order to prove that historian perception of the world is real not just impressions of it. According to McCullagh, the truth of historical description does not depend "just upon other texts but also by personal experiences which are produced by things in the world."
2. Some of those films are *Serangan Fajar* and *Janur Kuning*. The *Janur Kuning* is regarded as Soeharto official film concerning the event of 1 March 1949.
3. A film directed by a famous Indonesian film director Arifin C. Noor is regarded as official version of Soeharto concerning the attempted coup 1965 and *Supersemar*. During the New Order era, the film was showed up at the television every year to commemorate

the event. However, it was stopped after the resignation of Soeharto.

4. This is concerning the report of *Angkatan Bersenjata*, the newspaper which described cruelty of PKI members in torturing and killing the kidnapped army generals. But some doctors who did autopsy later pointed out that there was no strong evidence to prove such accusation. Another argument of the anti-army coalition is concerning the involvement of army in preparing the first edition of *Harian Rakjat* after the attempted coup 1965.
5. The Indonesia National Archive identified 3 different versions of *Supersemar*, but none of them could be considered as the original.
6. Historically, Indonesian historiography moved from colonial and euro centric historiography to ideological historiography of decolonisation, in where national or Indonesian centric historiography based on. At the later stage, Indonesian centric historiography is characterised by social scientific approach. It is hard to deny that colonial centric historiography is highlighted by subjective reconstruction of the past event, but Indonesian centric provides no better, if not even worse, solution concerning a similar issue despite of the social scientific approach.
7. It is not easy for most people, however, to be critical toward the role of A.H. Nasution in history, because he was already considered as a hero of democracy against Soeharto regime by later generations, especially for people who opposed Soeharto government.
8. When Hatta was Prime Minister, he consistently rationalised the ideology and bureaucracy of Indonesian armed forces.

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