Gatot Mangkupraja, PETA, and the origins of the Indonesian National Army

Introduction

Indonesian nationalist Gatot Mangkupraja (1898-1968) was politically active throughout his adult life, which extended over the turbulent periods called *tiga jaman* (‘three eras’, under Dutch, Japanese, and Indonesian rule). Even so, he never reached real prominence, and is remembered primarily for his role in the formation of PETA (Pembela Tanah Air, Defenders of the Homeland).\(^1\) Gatot’s fame rests on his own claim that he presented to the Japanese occupation authorities an impassioned petition written in his own blood pleading them to allow Indonesians to form their own defence force. He makes this claim in his memoirs, published in the journal *Indonesia* under the title ‘The PETA and my relations with the Japanese; A correction of Soekarno’s autobiography’ (Mangkupradja 1968:117). Some people cast doubt on the reliability of his claim, resulting in heated debate in Indonesia in 1975 (Lubis 2003:8).

This debate failed to clarify the issue, in part because people’s access to source materials at that time was limited. Gatot’s memoirs merit re-examination because they concern some key issues in modern Indonesian history and also because his memoirs, often cited uncritically, are, as this article will show, riddled with inaccuracies, both large and small.

The key issues Gatot discusses are represented by the three words in the title of his memoirs: PETA, Japanese, and Soekarno. These words relate to the

---

\(^1\) PETA was an indigenous self-defence force established during the Japanese occupation in Java, Madura, and Bali. The civil administration of Java and Madura fell under the jurisdiction of the 16th Army and that of Bali under the Navy, but because of strategic considerations the 16th Army gradually took over the defence of Bali and set up three PETA battalions there. A similar self-defence force, Giyugun, was set up in Sumatra. The Japanese name of PETA was Jawa Boei Giyugun.
genesis of the Indonesian armed forces, wartime relations between Indonesia and Japan, and Indonesian nationalism. Gatot claims that he wrote his memoirs ‘in order to counter the distortion of historical facts’ (Mangkupraja 1968:106); he wished to right the wrong that Soekarno had made in his autobiography that had appeared a few years earlier.\(^2\) Gatot did not deliver what he promised, however; instead, he replaced Soekarno’s distortion with his own more extensive distortion. Natural fading of memory and illness may be partly responsible for the inaccuracies, because the events took place nearly a quarter of a century earlier; he was gravely ill at the time he was writing, and died the following year. Nonetheless, much of the distortion appears intentional: he distorted certain facts, contrived some, and remained silent about others in order to depict his role in history in a particular way. The first part of this article examines the content of Gatot’s memoirs in some detail. This leads to the second part, which investigates the historiographical interpretation of the Japanese occupation as a whole. The circumstances under which Gatot wrote will also be examined. Gatot signed his memoirs on 20 April 1967, which means that he was writing when the violent transition from Soekarno’s Guided Democracy to Suharto’s New Order was unfurling right before his eyes and his long, entangled relationship with Soekarno was coming to an end.

**Memories reconstructed**

Gatot was born in Sumedang, West Java, on 15 December 1898. His father was a well-known doctor who also managed some other businesses. In 1913 Gatot became a student of Sekolah Dokter Jawa in Jakarta, which in that year was renamed School tot Opleiding van Inlandsche Artsen (STOVIA, School for Training Native Doctors). In that same year the students of the school, encouraged by the establishment of the first nationalist organization Budi Utomo (Pure Endeavour), took the initiative to set up the Sundanese nationalist organization Paguyuban Pasundan (Sundanese Association). The fourteen-year-old Gatot took part in launching the organization (Lubis 2003:5). He did not complete STOVIA though, and later enrolled in a Hoogere Burger school (HBS, public high school) in Bandung, but did not finish that either. In 1922 he took up a job at the national railway in Bandung, resigning from it in 1926. He did not need to work for a living thanks to an inheritance from his father, who died in December 1924. In November 1926 the Algemeene Studieclub

\(^2\) Sukarno 1965. In the preface Gatot blamed Soekarno for wrongly claiming to have set up PETA, saying, ‘I do not want anyone else to claim as his own work what I myself did’. As the translators point out in a footnote, Soekarno actually did not make such a claim (Mangkupradja 1968:105-6).
Gatot Mangkupraja, PETA, and the origins of the Indonesian National Army

(General Study Club) was formed in Bandung, supported by the renowned nationalist Dr Cipto Mangunkusmo (1886-1943) (Latif 2008:178-9). Gatot joined the club and there he met young Soekarno, who had just published his treatise *Nasionalisme, Islamisme dan Marxisme*. Thereafter Gatot and Soekarno remained in each other’s proximity for almost their entire lives, until they died in 1968 and 1970 respectively. In 1927 both Soekarno and Gatot became founding members of Perserikatan Nasional Indonesia (PNI, Indonesian Nationalist Union, renamed Partai Nasional Indonesia in 1928). Soekarno was elected chairman and Gatot secretary. In December 1929, while Soekarno and Gatot were attending a political congress in Yogyakarta, the Dutch colonial police arrested them and took them to Banceuy Prison near Bandung. Gatot was given a two-year prison sentence and Soekarno four years, but both were released in 1931. Soekarno was arrested again in August 1933 after publishing his book *Mentjapai Indonesia Merdeka* (Achieving Indonesian Independence) and was exiled until the end of the Dutch era (Legge 2003:121-2).

In that year, 1933, Gatot joined a tour to Japan for commerce and sightseeing led by journalist Parada Harahap (1899-1959). He also attended the Pan-Asian Congress in Tokyo as one of the Indonesian representatives, where he met several influential figures of Japan as well as Asian nationalist leaders such as Chandra Bose of India and Aguinaldo of the Philippines. From these meetings he ‘got the impression that the Japanese were seriously determined to see that Asia is for the Asians’ (Mangkupradja 1968:111-2). Upon returning from Japan he immediately made contact with influential Japanese residing in Bandung, Yogyakarta, Solo, Garut, and Cianjur. In 1935 he made a second trip to Japan, this time with the secret aim of cultivating political connections with Japanese people and conferring with some Japanese military men ‘about preparation for war and schemes’ to achieve independence for Indonesia (Goto 2003:120-1). In his memoirs Gatot remains silent about this second trip, but his wife testified that Gatot made two trips to Japan (Lubis 2003:90). The colonial authorities became aware that Gatot was cultivating connections with Japanese in Java and they decided to observe his activities closely (Goto 2003:312, note 28; Mangkupradja 1968:112). Gatot’s attitude concerning his Japan connections seems complex and ambivalent: on the one hand he is reticent about these secret activities; on the other hand he states, ‘I was to have many acquaintances among the Japanese military, for a great many of the Japanese who opened shops in Java were actually military personnel’ (Mangkupradja 1968:112).

During the Japanese occupation both Gatot and Soekarno collaborated with the Japanese, at least outwardly. Two days after the Japanese surrender, Soekarno declared Indonesia’s independence and assumed its presidency (1945-1967). Gatot’s attempts at politics were, in comparison, far less impressive, with nothing particularly memorable other than his own account that he
submitted what came to be called the *surat darah*, or blood letter. About the reasons for writing it, he contends that in early September 1943 he read an article in the Bandung newspaper *Tjahaja* reporting that Sutarjo Kartohadikusumo (1892-1976), who was visiting Japan at the time, had asked the Japanese government to institute compulsory military service in Indonesia.\(^3\) Gatot claims that, in reaction to this report, he wrote a short article in the same newspaper the following day objecting to the introduction of conscription. He also adds that the Kenpeitai (Japanese Military Police, infamous for its brutality) read his article and detained him for several days for interrogation; the day after his release (one or two days after his release, according to Lubis 2003:39), he was called to Jakarta, where he wrote the petition. The main thrust of his petition was, according to his account, that the indigenous defence force must be a volunteer force that was not to be sent outside Indonesia (Mangkupradja 1968:115-7).

This claim of Gatot’s is baffling in a number of ways. One problem is the timing. When writing his memoirs Gatot could not remember the exact dates or sequence of events. His memoirs say that he learned about Sutarjo’s petition ‘about the beginning of September 1943’ (Mangkupradja 1968:115; Lubis 2003:35). Gatot revised his manuscript several times; an earlier version says it was ‘sometime between 7 and 10 September 1943’ (Lubis 2003:168). To verify Gatot’s statements some historians have tried to locate the two articles in *Tjahaja*, but their attempts have been unsuccessful. There is no doubt that Sutarjo, leading an Indonesian delegation, arrived in Tokyo on 3 September. A journalist from *Jawa Shinbun* (a Japanese-language newspaper in Java) accompanied this delegation and reported on its activities back in Indonesia. The newspapers in Indonesia, relying on the same source (in this case Domei News Agency), began to report on the visit from 4 September, but, for the first few days, the reports did not mention Sutarjo’s proposal for military conscription. On 9 September the Japanese daily *Jawa Shinbun* and the Indonesian daily *Pembangoen* both reported that, on 8 September 1943 at the hotel the delegates were staying, Sutarjo expressed his view to the *Jawa Shinbun* journalist that Indonesians, particularly the youth, were looking forward to the day when they would be permitted to take up arms and go to the battlefront.

There is ample evidence for tracing Gatot’s movements. Japanese intelligence officers in the Beppan (Special Task Force of the 16th Army in Java, responsible for counter-intelligence and special operations) prearranged the date of Gatot’s petition submission to be 7 September 1943 so that the petition could be translated into Japanese before the authorities would announce

---

3 Sutarjo Kartohadikusumo was a career bureaucrat famous for his 1936 petition to the Dutch authorities to grant Indonesia dominion status in the Dutch commonwealth in ten years. After returning from Japan, on 10 November 1943, he was promoted to Resident of Jakarta, a high administrative position that in the colonial era was reserved for Dutch citizens.
its receipt on the following day as part of the monthly celebration of the outbreak of the Greater East Asia War (Yanagawa 1967:117-22, 1997:134). The Japanese had been celebrating the eighth of every month as Ko-A Sai (Festival for Asian Revival) because they had started the war on 8 December 1941. They requested Gatot to come to Jakarta on 5 September; Gatot arrived on that day and stayed with his friend Jakarta Police Chief Muhammad Yasin. First Lieutenant Yanagawa Motoshige (1914-1985) in Beppan, who was the Japanese mastermind behind the formation of PETA and later the chief trainer of PETA, recalled that he met Gatot at Yasin’s house and sat up the whole night explaining to Gatot the reason for the summons, and persuading him to write the petition; the following day Yanagawa introduced Gatot to another Beppan member, Captain Maruzaki, and left for Cianjur leaving Gatot behind.4 Gatot discussed the matter further with Maruzaki and some other Japanese officers, and wrote the petition sometime on the 6th, and on the following morning at 9 a.m. Gatot lodged the petition with Gunseikan (Military Administrator) Lieutenant-General Kokubu Shinshichiro (1894-1984) through Head of General Affairs Department Colonel Yamamoto Moichiro (1898-1978). The official interpreter Nakatani Yoshio, together with Shimizu Hitoshi in the Planning Section of the Military Administrator’s Department, translated it into Japanese (Morimoto 1992:74), and the following day at noon, the occupation authorities broadcast receipt of the petition over the radio throughout Java.

The above indicates that Gatot lodged his petition before Sutarjo made the aforementioned statement. Even supposing that Sutarjo made his proposal on his first day in Tokyo and that Gatot received the news from another source, the earliest possible day Gatot could have heard the news would have been 4 September, and the earliest possible day when his response could have been published in Tjahaja would be 5 September. If indeed the Kenpeitai detained him for several days, this would lead to the impossible conclusion that his detention in Sukabumi and his writing of the petition in Jakarta took place at the same time. This makes us suspect that Gatot’s explanation of his motive for writing the petition is a later invention.

A similar suspicion can be cast on the scene of the writing of the petition. Gatot writes:

I was then taken to the office of Captain Maruzaki, where pen and ink had been prepared for me. In front of Lieutenant Yanagawa and Captain Maruzaki […] in order to prove to them my personal dedication I pricked my left arm with the pen until it bled and then with this blood I wrote a letter of request to the Government of Dai Nippon in Tokyo. (Mangkupradja 1968:117.)

---

Yanagawa showed interest in creating local armed forces right from the beginning of the occupation, and began to train Indonesian youth as soon as the Dutch surrendered, in the back yard of his house in Bandung, starting with just six boys. In January 1943 he shifted to Jakarta and set up Seinen Dojo (Youth Training Centre) in Tangerang. After the Japanese surrender he repatriated but, in response to an invitation from Indonesia, he immigrated to Indonesia in 1964 together with his family, and wrote detailed memoirs of his deeds in Java during the occupation. His memoirs were published in Japanese in the same year Gatot signed his memoirs. After that he kept writing short recollections, which were compiled and published posthumously in book form (Yanagawa 1997).

After immigrating to Indonesia, Yanagawa maintained a close relationship with Gatot until Gatot’s death. Soon after Gatot died, American historian George Larson interviewed Yanagawa. In this interview, as well as in his own writings, Yanagawa denied that he had witnessed Gatot’s petition writing; he had left for Cianjur before Gatot wrote it. Although he did not witness the writing, he was certain that Gatot did not use blood, saying that writing in blood would have been very offensive to Muslims, as they regarded blood as dirty (Larson 1970:46; Yanagawa 1967:134-5). He added that the petition was typewritten. He also stated that the Kenpeitai could not have harassed Gatot, as they were fully aware that Gatot was cooperating with Yanagawa (Larson 1970:46). Gatot indeed admits that the Sukabumi Kenpeitai knew that Gatot had much to do with the Beppan officers, who had more authority than the Kenpeitai, so they did not treat him rudely; on the contrary, he was quartered in the house of Sergeant Kobayashi (Mangkupradja 1968:116). Gatot also states that very early in the occupation Yanagawa gave him a letter (surat jalan) written in Japanese that allowed him to travel anywhere without being harassed by Japanese soldiers (Mangkupradja 1968:113). In light of all this, his claim that the dreaded Kenpeitai detained him for several days for friendly interrogation is implausible.

After the typescript of Gatot’s memoirs left his hand to go to the English translators, Gatot expanded the memoirs into a more detailed autobiography (included in Lubis 2003:19-86). In the expanded version Gatot states that Major-General Sato requested him to produce ‘two copies of the petition’ (dua surat permohonan), one for Commander-in-Chief Harada Kumakichi, and one for Gunseikan (Military Administrator) General Yamamoto Moichiro. Moreover, Gatot says that he took another copy to the editor of the Indonesian newspaper

---

5 Gatot says he chose several boys for such a training (Mangkupradja 1968:119).

6 Lubis 2003:40. Here is another factual error. At that time the Gunseikan was Lieutenant-General Kokubu Shinshichiro. Colonel Yamamoto Moichiro, who arrived in Java in March 1943, was Chief of the General Affairs Department, promoted to Major-General in August 1944, and to Gunseikan in November 1944.
Asia Raya (which he calls Indonesia Raya, one of many errors in his memoirs) to have his petition published. The newspaper indeed published the text of the petition on the following morning, together with Gatot’s portrait photograph. This means that Gatot produced multiple copies. Yanagawa said that Gatot’s petition was typewritten but Jawa Shinbun (9-9-1943) published a photograph of the first page of a beautifully handwritten petition together with the Japanese translation of its full text. A likely scenario is therefore that on the afternoon of 6 September Gatot typed the draft of the petition first, with a carbon copy, and then produced two neatly handwritten official letters; the following day he submitted the official letters to the Japanese authorities; took one typewritten copy to Asia Raya together with his photograph, kept a carbon copy for his own records, and later showed the carbon copy to Yanagawa.

From 9 September, other newspapers and magazines began to publicize the petition with much fanfare, but no contemporary media reported that Gatot’s petition was written in blood. Two decades later, Indonesian historian Nugroho Noto Susanto (1931-1985) began to study the history of PETA and interviewed Gatot in 1963 (Noto Susanto 1968:7-10). Nugroho’s many publications on PETA indicate that he did not have the impression that Gatot wrote his petition in blood until reading that Gatot said so in his memoirs. Apparently Gatot was the first person to announce, 25 years after the event, that he had written his petition in his own blood, stressing the words ‘with this blood’ (dengan tinta darah ini).

Although contemporary newspapers did not say that Gatot wrote the petition in blood, they did say that Gatot’s petition aroused so much enthusiasm that many Indonesians submitted passionate supportive letters, including some written, signed, or fingerprinted in blood. Apparently Indonesian Muslims did not abhor blood as much as Yanagawa thought they did. For instance, the Indonesian newspaper Soeara Asia published a photograph of a petition written by the son of Sultan Hamengku Buwono VII, Ki Ageng Suryomentaram (1892-1962), and signed by ten people in blood (Soeara Asia 13-9-1943). Similarly, a letter from Klakah District, Lumajang Regency, bore 37 signatures in ink, accompanied by the same number of fingerprints in blood next to them (Soeara Asia 25-9-1943). The news about a postcard written in blood appeared in Japan, in Osaka Asahi Shinbun. The report says that Sosroningrat from Bangkalan, Madura, sent a postcard to Gatot with the following content:

I fully support the idea expressed in your letter. I had the same idea and wrote to Soekarno but did not receive any reply. I promise to mobilize the youth in Bangkalan to form part of the homeland defence force. To prove my sincerity I am writing this card in my own blood. I look forward to receiving an order. Banzai! (Osaka Asahi Shinbun 26/27-11-1943.)
Gatot collected the letters and postcards sent to him and showed them to the Japanese authorities (Lubis 2003:42). Yanagawa was aware that these supporting letters and petitions included so-called surat darah, and he attributed this to instigation by some Japanese military men (Yanagawa 1997:134-5).

The concept of surat darah seems to correspond to the Japanese word kessho or keppanjo. Kessho literally means a letter written in blood. Keppanjo means a letter with a fingerprint in blood next to a signature. In feudal Japan keppanjo were much more common than kessho, and were produced mostly by samurai warriors. To make a keppanjo a samurai made a shallow cut in the thick part of his little finger with the sword he always carried, and used the oozing blood to make a fingerprint. Sometimes this was done collectively and secretly when a group of samurai conspired to take serious action such as a rebellion or assassination of political authorities. They used their blood to show that their commitment to the scheme was absolute and that they were prepared to sacrifice their lives for it. During the relatively peaceful Tokugawa Era (1603-1867), this practice turned into a formality for taking an oath of office. A kessho was usually written by one person, not necessarily a samurai, to express his or her strong protest, curse, or determination, and to shock readers.

During World War II, the Japanese military revived some aspects of samurai ethics and introduced them to the occupied land as traditional Japanese culture. In Indonesia the idea of writing letters in blood had been circulated before Gatot lodged his petition. The Jakarta daily Pembangoen reported on 23 July 1943: ‘The fighting spirit of the Japanese youth is nowadays so strong that many are writing letters in their own blood seeking to be allowed to become fighter pilots’. In support of Gatot’s petition, some Indonesians adopted such a practice but, in Indonesia as in Japan, keppanjo were more common than kessho, simply because the former could easily be longer and could be signed or fingerprinted by many people. Did Gatot write a kessho or surat darah? It is likely that when Gatot prepared the copies of the petition there were some Japanese officers as well as an interpreter around him, but it is unlikely that he wrote the petition in the manner described in his memoirs. The petition was an elaborate document of about 700 words. A scenario of Gatot writing several copies of such a letter surrounded by Japanese military officers while pricking his left arm with a pen is highly implausible.

Gatot’s statement about the petition’s content is also problematic. He claims that he opposed Sutarjo’s proposal because it would involve conscription and deployment of Indonesian men to the battlefront outside of Indonesia, but an unprejudiced reading of Gatot’s petition reveals that it is devoid of such a request. Asia Raya published Gatot’s petition first under the following heading: ‘Keinginan Bangsa Indonesia membentok barisan pembela; Tidak hanya dibelakang garis perang, djoega dimedan perang’ (Indonesian nation’s desire to form a defence force; Not only on the home front but also on the bat-
tlefield). At that time battles were being fought mostly outside of Indonesia. In reading the petition Asia Raya’s editor apparently thought Gatot was proposing to send Indonesia’s youth to battlefields outside of Indonesia.

PETA's full name came to be known as Tentara Sukarela Pembela Tanah Air (Volunteer Army of Defenders of the Homeland). In his memoirs Gatot states that PETA was initially called simply Tentara Sukarela (Volunteer Force) and that the phrase Pembela Tanah Air was added later (Mangkupradja 1968:123). This statement is contrary to fact. PETA was initially called Pembela Tanah Air and Tentara Sukarela was a later addition. The Japanese name for PETA was Jawa Boei Giyugun, which means ‘a volunteer army for defending Java’. The Japanese had their own reasons for making PETA a volunteer force. On 16 June 1943, Prime Minister Tojo Hideki (1884-1948) made a promise to grant political participation to the local population of the East Indies. This was an attempt to win the hearts of the people in the midst of Asia’s deteriorating military and economic conditions. As part of this scheme the Japanese planned to allow local people to form their own defence force. With a view to stirring up local people’s enthusiasm, the Beppan officers in Java decided to have an Indonesian person make a request. According to Yanagawa (1967:129, 1997:114), he chose Gatot because he knew that Gatot had already expressed his view in May 1942 to the Japanese authorities that ‘universal compulsory military service’ should be introduced in Indonesia. Yanagawa’s testimony sounds plausible because in the Netherlands Indies, particularly after May 1940 when the Netherlands was occupied by the Germans, both the ‘cooperating’ nationalists and the ‘non-cooperating’ nationalists demanded Indonesia’s independence from the Netherlands. If Indonesia were to become independent it would need its own armed forces, so nationalists of both varieties were supportive of the idea of arming the youth. Moreover, May 1942 was a time when Japanese propaganda about the ‘Liberation of Asia’ was still fresh in Indonesian people’s minds, and the Triple A Movement was being conducted most enthusiastically, extolling Japan as the ‘Light of Asia, Protector of Asia, and Leader of Asia’. Gatot was the chairman of the Triple A Movement in the Regency of Cianjur (Mangkupradja 1968:114; Lubis 2003:33). Three weeks after Gatot submitted his petition, the Empat Serangkai (‘Famous Foursome’, the collective Indonesian leadership consisting of Soekarno, Hatta, Ki Hajar Dewantoro, and Mas Mansur) also presented a letter of support for the creation of a defence force. In this letter too, the idea of Pembela Tanah Air was explicit but the concept of Sukarela was not (Asia Raya 2-10-1943).

7 See Asia Raya of 4 October 1944, which reports the Commander-in-Chief’s announcement to allow the establishment of PETA as follows: Tentara Pembela Tanah Air lahir. 50,000,000 bangsa Indonesia di Djawa bangkit serentak oentoek menghantjoerkan Sekoeto! Tanah Air Kita haroes dibela oleh pengoerbanan darah kita sendiri’ (Army of the Defenders of the Homeland has been born. Fifty million Indonesians in Java stand up in unison to crush the Allies! Our Homeland must be defended by shedding our own blood).
The stipulation that the defence force was not to be sent overseas probably derived from the need Gatot felt at the time of writing his memoirs to claim that he had proposed an armed body with the sole aim of defending Indonesia – not to support the Japanese war effort. Because Gatot, I suspect, was aware that he had not made such a statement in the petition, he added in his memoirs that after submitting the petition he wrote another letter arguing that the defence force should not be sent overseas and showed the letter to Yanagawa (Mangkupradja 1968:121; Lubis 2003:43); but there is no evidence to support this claim either. If we compare his petition and Sutarjo’s statement with no preconceived opinion, we will realize that Gatot and Sutarjo were expressing basically the same idea at the same time in different places. PETA was indeed meant to be a volunteer force with the task of defending the areas close to the soldiers’ respective birthplaces, but that was not because of Gatot’s request. The Japanese planners had their own reasons. They were planning to use PETA mostly for coastal defence. In the event of an Allied invasion, the Japanese Army was planning to retreat to the fortified defence complex in Mount Malabar near Bandung. They knew that PETA could not withstand Allied onslaughts, but it could delay the enemy’s advance by deploying along the coastline and obstructing an Allied landing or by harassing the rear wherever the Allied troops might come, thus allowing time for the Japanese Army to retreat. For that reason PETA soldiers were distributed throughout the island and were requested to remain in their home region, where they had intimate knowledge of the terrain (Morimoto 1992:631). The reason for making PETA a volunteer force was that the permission to form PETA was part of a range of measures taken to win the hearts of the people; the introduction of conscription could not have served that purpose effectively. The Japanese PETA trainers put much emphasis on spiritual strength (seishin) because patriotic fervour could be usefully directed against the Allies.

Gatot accused Soekarno for not telling ‘the entire truth’, but he too seems to have chosen to leave certain matters untold. Despite the title of his memoirs, ‘The PETA and my relations with the Japanese’, he remains rather reticent about this subject. As is well known, Indonesian people in many parts of the archipelago welcomed the invading Japanese troops. Gatot not only welcomed the invading forces but also organized a big welcoming party. One Army unit landed on Merak, West Java, and headed to Bandung via Cianjur, where Gatot resided. A contemporary Indonesian journal reported that Gatot prepared and distributed many little Japanese flags to local people for welcoming the Army, and this facilitated the Japanese Army’s advance, as Dutch soldiers, seeing so many Japanese flags appearing along the road, panicked and fled the area quickly (Pandji Poestaka 15-9-1943:16). Gatot describes his first meeting with Japanese military men as if it were a chance encounter, but one of Gatot’s acquaintances in Cianjur testifies that the well-to-do people
in Cianjur were all well informed about the Japanese Army’s movements as they regularly received telephone calls from their friends in other cities, and that groups of pergerakan people (pre-war anti-colonial activists including Gatot) began organizing the welcoming party a week or so before the Army’s arrival, by distributing little Japanese national flags to people all along the road from Cibeureum to Cianjur and making people practice shouting ‘Banzai Dai Nippon!’ (Lubis 2003:111-26). Gatot chose not to mention this welcoming party in his memoirs.

Gatot admits that he met Yanagawa on the day of Yanagawa’s arrival in Cianjur. Before the main body of the Army arrived, Yanagawa and a few other officers came, disguised in Indonesian clothes, with interpreter Togashi Takeomi, who used to own a drugstore just across the road from the drugstore Gatot owned. Yanagawa said that he had met Gatot for the first time when Yanagawa revealed his identity and delivered a speech on a podium in the alung-alung (the public square in front of the regent’s office) to a crowd that included the Dutch controleur; Gatot walked towards Togashi carrying a Japanese flag and embraced Togashi (Yanagawa 1967:128-9); the flag bore the signature of Otani Kozui (1876-1948), a well-known scholar, explorer, and the 22nd Abbot of the West Honganji Monastery of the True Pure Land Sect of Buddhism. Togashi, on the other hand, says that Gatot came carrying at the end of his foldable walking stick a kakejiku (hanging scroll) that he had received from Otani (Morimoto 1992:72). Togashi’s version seems more plausible. During his two trips to Japan Gatot had met many influential, mostly rightwing, individuals. Giving a kakejiku to an important visitor as a token of respect was a custom practised among well-to-do, well-educated, conservative Japanese. Giving a signed flag to a foreign visitor is a little odd for a person of Otani’s stature. Sundanese historian Nina H. Lubis (2003:6) states that Gatot’s 1933 trip to Japan was a business trip concerning the drugstores he was managing, and that may be the case; but his second trip to Japan for a secret mission, the welcoming party he organized, meeting the invading forces with a kakejiku, and the fact that Yanagawa immediately issued a surat jalan for Gatot, all indicate that Gatot’s relationship with the Japanese was stronger than he is prepared to admit in his memoirs.

According to Gatot the Japanese occupation negatively affected his personal life. After quitting his job at the state railway he began to manage drugstores in Cianjur and a few other cities, but obtaining ingredients for drugs became difficult during the war so his business declined and he had to close some of the shops. While stating this fact he omits mentioning that he had received financial support from Yanagawa. Being a senior intelligence officer, Yanagawa had a virtually unlimited amount of money at his disposal for his special operations, as he received financing from the 16th Army in Java as well as from the Southern Regions General Army (Morimoto 1992:139). Yanagawa
testified that he issued monthly monetary allowances to Gatot after the latter agreed to work for him as his personal consultant (Yanagawa 1967:129). In the preface to his essay Gatot alludes to his ‘poverty’ by saying that he could not afford to buy Soekarno’s autobiography. Gatot was born into a wealthy family with the aristocratic title Raden. The wealth that Gatot inherited from his father declined in his lifetime (as he kept spending his personal wealth on his political activities) but he was still a parliamentarian when Soekarno’s autobiography appeared in 1965. He seems to have used the word ‘poverty’ for its symbolic effect, to send the political message that he had sacrificed his own personal wellbeing to serve the nation.

*History, politics, and historiography*

Why did Gatot reconstruct his memories in that particular way at that particular moment? Why did he publish his memoirs in English first and then keep revising and expanding his manuscript into an autobiography? Nina H. Lubis, who compiled a book about Gatot to support his application to the government to recognize him as a national hero, explains the reason: Gatot’s political career came to an end in 1966 when he lost his seat in parliament and became a pensioner; Indonesian persons who were recognized as having played an important role in the independence struggle received a monthly allowance and the amount depended on how much they had done in that struggle; Gatot had been receiving the lowest amount and was planning to apply for a higher allowance; his life story was to be included with his application to demonstrate that he had made important contributions to the Revolution. Apparently one of the translators of Gatot’s memoirs, Harumi Wanasita Evans or Ruth McVey, heard that Gatot was writing a life story and obtained a typescript of an early draft and published it in *Indonesia*. Meanwhile, Gatot kept editing and expanding his life story to support his application for a higher allowance. In June 1968 he submitted the application but died on 4 October before a decision could be made (Lubis 2003:11-2).

If Gatot had embellished his life story simply to obtain a larger pension allowance, there is no need to scrutinize the embellishments, but his motive was more complex than that. One indication is that the life story included in his application was entitled simply ‘Otobiografi’. The preface to the English version explaining why he resolved to write the ‘Correction of Soekarno’s autobiography’ and much of his criticism of Soekarno found in the English version are not included in the ‘Otobiografi’, which was expanded by adding more information on his actions after the Japanese surrender. It appears that he added the title, preface, and criticisms of Soekarno to the draft when he heard that it was going to be published in America and was likely to be
read by people who had read Soekarno’s autobiography that had appeared in English in America. ‘Correction of Soekarno’s autobiography’ would be an attractive subtitle for an English-speaking readership but inappropriate for an application to the Indonesian government.

In addition to the question of why he wrote his life story, how he wrote it needs to be examined because the kind of self-image Gatot constructed reveals much about what actions the Indonesian national historiography and the state ideology considered appropriate for the Indonesian struggle for independence. Gatot’s memoirs tell us as much about what he thought he ought to have done as about what he actually did.

A further question that needs to be asked is whether Gatot played an important role in the Indonesian struggle for independence by asking the Japanese to set up PETA, whether in the way he described or the way it actually happened. This question is related to the much larger question of how to assess the significance of the Japanese occupation as a whole within the framework of Indonesian national historiography, or the relationship between the Japanese occupation and the Indonesian Revolution. It has been such a sensitive and difficult question that few Indonesian historians have confronted it squarely. The same applies to Japanese and Dutch historians. Indonesian, Japanese, and Dutch historians who have studied the occupation in some detail have largely avoided grappling with the question of its historical significance. Those who have done so are mostly English-speaking historians from outside the three nations. The remaining part of this article examines how this sensitive and difficult issue, particularly the relationship between PETA and the Indonesian National Army, has been dealt with in Indonesia.

The Japanese set up at least one PETA battalion in each residency throughout Java, Madura, and Bali. At the end of the occupation PETA consisted of 69 battalions with 37,812 men plus some guerrilla units with 922 officers. On 18 August 1945, the 16th Army ordered that PETA be disbanded and on 19 August began to collect arms from PETA members. On 20 August, the Panitia Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia (PPKI, Preparatory Committee for the Independence of Indonesia) decided to set up an armed body called Badan Keamanan Rakyat (BKR, People’s Security Force) (Kusuma 2004:529-30). Soekarno announced this decision to the nation on the following day in his first presidential speech over the radio, and called for former PETA soldiers and other men who had received some military training during the occupation to reassemble and form the BKR. Thereafter the Republican authorities changed this armed body’s name and structure four times in less than two years, starting with Tentara Keamanan Rakyat (TKR, People’s Security Force, decreed on 5 October), Tentara Keselamatan Rakyat (TKR, People’s Security

---

8 Kahin 1952; Benda 1958; Larson 1970; Anderson 1972; Lebra 1977; Reid 1979; Friend 1988; Frederick 1989; and Mark 2003, among others.
Force, on 1 January 1946), Tentara Republik Indonesia (TRI, Indonesian Republican Army, on 24 January 1946), and finally Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI, Indonesian National Army, decreed on 5 May 1947 and formalized on 3 June). The majority of the officers of these regular Indonesian armed forces (including Giyugun in Sumatra) were young men who had received their first military training during the Japanese occupation.

The Indonesian Armed Forces derived much pride and legitimacy from the fact that they had fought in the war of independence. But were they originally created and trained by and for the Japanese? This is a debatable question for which there seems to be no clear-cut answer. Those who have given a negative answer have focused on two facts: that the Indonesians created BKR after the Japanese disbanded PETA; and that some PETA soldiers, most notably the battalion in Blitar, rebelled against the Japanese before Japan surrendered. If the Indonesian Armed Forces were formed during the revolutionary confusion and there was a clear discontinuity between the Japanese era and the republican era, what was the significance of Gatot’s petition? The historical significance of Gatot’s petition rests on the perception that there was indeed a direct relation between PETA and the Indonesian National Army, and Gatot obviously expected other people to share this perception. How, then, does the Japanese occupation fit in with the Indonesian national struggle for independence?

Before stepping into this sensitive field, it will be useful to pay attention to the political and historical circumstances under which Gatot wrote his life story. The years around 1965 constitute one of the most turbulent periods in Indonesian history. In the early 1960s, President Soekarno was trying to maintain a precarious balance among the major conflicting domestic forces: the Muslims, the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI, Indonesian Communist Party), and the Army. Indonesia was the country with the largest number of Muslims in the world and had the largest communist party outside the USSR and China. Despite Soekarno’s efforts to bring about national unity under the slogan of NASAKOM (nasionalisme, agama, komunisme, nationalism, religion, communism), these three forces were clearly on a collision course. Around that time the Indonesian Armed Forces launched a project to write their own history of perjuangan (armed struggle for independence), to counter the version that the communists appeared to be planning to write, stressing the communists’ role in the Madiun Incident of September 1948. In 1964 the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces and the Minister for Defence Abdul Harris Nasution (1918-2000) approached Nugroho Notsusanto, who was head of the Department of History at the University of Indonesia and had been interviewing Gatot and other PETA-related people and had just published an article on the formation of PETA (Notsusanto 1964). Nasution appointed Nugroho head of the Armed Forces History Centre. Nugroho’s earliest works
at the Armed Forces History Centre include a study of the PETA battalion’s rebellion in Blitar (Notosusanto 1965).

In 1964 when Nugroho was working on writing the history of perjuangan for the Army, Yanagawa immigrated to Indonesia and began writing his memoirs. The following year witnessed the attempted coup called G30S (Gerakan Tigapuluh September, September 30th Movement). In this incident a faction within the Army, the presidential guard unit, kidnapped and murdered six ‘corrupt’ generals and one lieutenant and announced on the radio that they had established a Revolutionary Council to safeguard President Soekarno. Nasution narrowly escaped the assassination attempt but lost his daughter and a sister.

Major-General Suharto (1921-2008), who was the most senior officer not removed by the coup, reacted swiftly and declared the attempted coup ‘counter-revolutionary’, and he laid the blame for it squarely on the PKI. The G30S provided the Army with an excellent reason to turn their guns against the communists and crush them once and for all. Muslim youth, often organized or supported by the Army, also joined the attack, and murdered innumerable people affiliated with the PKI-related organizations that had begun to crop up soon after the Japanese surrender. Gatot was undoubtedly shaken by the series of events unfurling around him and declared that he, who had been an independent member of parliament (MPRS, Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat Sementara, Provisional People’s Consultative Assembly) from 1962, would join the anti-communist party Ikatan Pendukung Kemerdekaan Indonesia (IPKI, League of Supporters of Indonesian Independence) that A.H. Nasution had created in 1954. Nonetheless, Gatot lost his seat in parliament. Various explanations have been given. Gatot explains that his career ended because there was rejuvenation (peremajaan) in parliament (Lubis 2003:78). His wife states that Gatot resigned due to illness (Lubis 2003:94). A more likely explanation is that Gatot was dismissed because Suharto (or his entourage) considered him to be a Soekarno supporter.9 The month before Gatot signed his memoirs for the journal Indonesia, Soekarno, who was supposed to be president for life, was officially stripped of his presidential title and put under house arrest by order of the MPRS headed by Nasution.

In his life story Gatot does not touch on the contemporary political turmoil, but these changes that included his dismissal from parliament seem to have prompted him to write his life story in a particular way. He was apparently attempting to shield himself from political danger by redefining his position, distancing himself from Soekarno (who was responsible for the political crisis) by using harsh words against him, and presenting himself as a supporter of the Indonesian Army’s preferred ‘core approach’, perjuangan,

rather than the *diplomasi* approach advocated by politicians like Soekarno. Referring to his actions after the Japanese surrender, Gatot states:

The first real battle of the revolution occurred at Bogor, in the neighborhood of Depok, on the night of October 11, 1945. I was then commander of the Bogor BKR. Together with Duleh Abdullah, Affandi, Sofjan, Otje Mochtan, Saptadji, and Sjirifin (all former Peta officers), and assisted by Pelopor troops and local people, we attacked Gurkha forces coming from the direction of Parungpandjang through Tjiseeng. This incident was witnessed by Raden Enoch Danubrata, the police chief of Bogor, and also by a number of officers still serving in the army [...] and other former PETA people. (Mangkupradja 1968:131.)

This passage is meant to prove that Gatot started the first real *perjuangan* leading a group of former PETA. Gatot’s armed struggle for independence, however, did not last long. The British forces politely requested him to come to Jakarta on 22 October, supposedly for a talk, but they arrested him upon arrival and put him in Glodok Prison and later tried him on a small island called Onrust, located north of Jakarta (Lubis 203:66-67, 91). Gatot explains:

At Onrust I was tried as a war criminal and collaborator and was sentenced to fifteen years’ imprisonment. Indeed, I had given aid to the Japanese, but in a positive Indonesian nationalist spirit [...] and not in the spirit of a ‘servant of Japan,’ not in the spirit of ‘Inggris kita linggis, Amerika kita setrika.’ Hence it is my view, down to this day, that the judgment against me as a collaborator was completely unwarranted and that they did not understand my whole life’s purpose.10

From Onrust he was transferred to the prison in Cipinang and then back to Glodok, and was released after 21 months of imprisonment. During this ordeal he contracted tuberculosis and an eye disease from which he never recovered.

The above quotation shows that his relationship with the Japanese, depending on how it was presented and interpreted, could define him as a war criminal. Many of the distortions in his life story seem to have derived from the need to prove that he was not a collaborator like Soekarno was. To prove the point, he used the story of his opposition against conscription, his resultant detention by the Kenpeitai, and the story of using his own blood to write the petition.

Gatot obviously felt, however, that those stories might not be enough to clear the stigma of collaboration because, for one thing, he was still in a friend-

10 Mangkupradja 1968:131. ‘Inggris kita linggis, Amerika kita setrika’ (We shall knock down the English and iron out America) is a slogan Soekarno created and spread during the Japanese occupation.
ly relationship with Yanagawa. How could he justify his lasting association with him? His memoirs include a section called ‘Siapakah M. Yanagawa?’ (Who is M. Yanagawa?) (Mangkupradja 1968:118-20; Lubis 2003:79-83). In the published version this section appears in the middle of the memoirs. In the ‘Otobiografi’ Gatot slightly expanded and edited it and placed it after his life story. In this section he stresses four points: 1. Yanagawa frankly stated that ‘not all Japanese were of one opinion on the matter, but he himself wanted very much to help [Indonesians] achieve their desire for national independence’; he was of the opinion that Indonesia must possess a strong army of her own for that reason; 2. Gatot proposed to set up a volunteer self-defence force because he was against conscription; 3. Yanagawa found in Gatot’s proposal a way to achieve his goal; 4. without the former PETA officers as ‘pushing power’ Indonesia could not have achieved independence; ‘this has to be recognized by Indonesian politicians’ whose attempt at diplomasi failed (Mangkupradja 1968:118-20; Lubis 2003:79-83). These four points boil down to just two: 1. Yanagawa was special; 2. Indonesia could not have achieved independence without PETA. Gatot justifies his association with Yanagawa in this way while distancing himself from Japanese imperialism.

In reality Gatot’s role in the formation of Peta was a minor one. After persuading Gatot to lodge the petition, Yanagawa and his colleagues arranged all matters of PETA administration, organization, and training. While PETA training was underway, on 7 September 1944, Prime Minister Koiso Kuniaki made a promise to grant independence to Indonesia in the future, and preparations for independence were almost completed by the time of the Japanese surrender. These circumstances made the Indonesian nationalists and the Indonesian Army vulnerable to the criticism that independence was a gift from Japan and that the Indonesian Army was a Japanese creation. The Indonesian military needed to construct an official account to deny these allegations. Nugroho Notosusanto took this task upon himself.

Soon after Nugroho began to work for the Armed Forces War History Section, the G30S broke out. Nugroho lost no time in declaring his support for the Army’s official interpretation and provided the Army with a theoretical justification of its bloody crushing of the PKI (Notosusanto 1966; Notosusanto and Salae 1968). Soon afterward he returned to his research on PETA and published a number of books, articles, and conference papers focusing on the rebellion by PETA’s Blitar battalion in East Java. The rebels themselves did not publicly declare their motives. Nugroho, and other Indonesian historians after him, attributed the cause to the general deterioration of living conditions in Java under Japanese rule and the forced mobilization of labour: PETA soldiers worked alongside mobilized labourers in constructing defence facilities, witnessed their plight, and became angry.\^11

Japanese officers who trained PETA soldiers also considered such conditions to be the background of the revolt, but they added that there was something more specific. Yanagawa (1967:179) states that the direct cause was personal, namely that one Japanese civilian in Blitar slept with a platoon commander’s fiancée, and all the platoon commanders of the battalion became angry about this: in fact, the first target they attacked was a hotel reserved for Japanese civilians. Morimoto (1992:545-52) adds a range of other reasons including unacceptably crude behaviour by some Japanese soldiers: there were many incidents where a low-ranking Japanese soldier slapped the face of a high-ranking PETA officer.

The Indonesian and the Japanese interpretations of the significance of the Blitar rebellion also differ. Nugroho considered it to have lasting symbolic power for the Indonesian people’s ongoing struggle. He concludes his 1968 book saying that ‘the Blitar Incident can become the source of inspiration for the People in the present struggle’ (Notosusanto 1968:57). The rebellion was led by a 21-year-old platoon commander Supriyadi. Japanese PETA trainers remember him as an outstandingly intelligent and capable trainee, but they do not have a high opinion of his actions during the rebellion. First of all, the rebellion was poorly organized. Second, the Japanese captured most of the rebels but Supriyadi was not found among them, which means he ran away leaving the other rebels to their fate. This action the Japanese trainers considered unsoldierly (Morimoto 1992:543-603).

These differences between the Japanese and the Indonesian views are significant. The Japanese considered the rebellion an isolated case caused by specific problems, whereas the Indonesians considered it to be a symbol of national resistance against foreign rule and an ongoing inspiration for the entire nation. The collective psychological need for a symbol of national struggle had been so strong in Indonesia that Supriyadi was appointed *in absentia* Minister of the People’s Security in the first cabinet formed in 1945. But Supriyadi never reappeared. He apparently fled to Bayah, West Java, fell ill and died. Indonesia did not witness many large-scale anti-Japanese uprisings during the occupation. The Blitar incident was the only one. There were, however, many smaller rebellions. Indonesian nationalist historians have described all these incidents as heroic actions. In 1975, Suharto declared Supriyadi a national hero, disregarding this young man’s unsoldierly action of running away in front of the enemy, leaving the other rebels to their own fate.

Another point Nugroho emphasizes was the discontinuity between PETA and the Indonesian Armed Forces. He concludes his latest and most comprehensive study of PETA by stating that ‘the watershed of modern Indonesian history was not 8 March 1942 but 17 August 1945 […]. With or without the Japanese, the war of independence would have broken out anyway. With or without PETA, an Indonesian Army would have fought successfully against
the Dutch forces.’ (Notosusanto 1979:192-3.) This conclusion is rather abrupt; after reading the main body of the well-researched and carefully argued book one would not anticipate such a conclusion. The text gives the impression that Nugroho was determined to draw that conclusion regardless of his research findings.

Historians often seek to identify a ‘watershed’ in history. The *tiga jaman* had two turning points corresponding to regime changes: 8 March 1942 and 17 August 1945. Which of the two was ‘the watershed’? The choice depends largely on the viewer’s nationality. From the Dutch point of view, 8 March 1942 is the obvious choice, as that is when the Dutch lost their Gordel van Smaragd (Emerald Belt, meaning the Netherlands Indies) and the privileged colonial lifestyle that went with it. For them Soekarno’s proclamation on 17 August 1945 was no more than an unexpected additional event that they initially wished to ignore. With a view to reinstating the pre-war political status of the Netherlands Indies, they attempted to invalidate the proclamation and the Revolution by arguing that Soekarno was a Japanese collaborator and that the young revolutionaries had been indoctrinated by the Japanese fascists. For Indonesians the obvious choice for the watershed is 17 August 1945, because that date marks the end of foreign domination and the start of independence. From the Japanese point of view, there was no watershed as such. The two dates mark the beginning and the end of their ill-fated conquest of Indonesia; but Indonesia does not assume much prominence in the Japanese public consciousness, as Indonesia was no more than one part of the Southern Region which their armed forces invaded and occupied for a brief period; the general public in Japan would rather forget about the whole event.

Nugroho’s assertion that 17 August 1945 is the watershed in modern Indonesian history had long been a view held by the Indonesian public, made official during Soekarno’s Guided Democracy (1957-1966) by the Ministry of Education and Culture as a ‘proclamation-centred’ (*proklamasi-sentris*) approach, and spread to much of the nation through local bureaucracy, educational institutions, mass media, museum displays, monuments, and a range of other means. But in the wake of Guided Democracy, this approach was officially abandoned (Frederick 1999:28-32). Nonetheless, people in Indonesia as well as Indonesians overseas still celebrate that day, and do not commemorate events that occurred during the Japanese occupation.

In his classic study of Indonesian literature, Dutch scholar A. Teeuw (1979:105) begins the chapter on the Japanese occupation with the following sentence: ‘There is every reason to consider 1942 rather than 1945 as the year of the great break and the beginning of a new period in the history of modern Indonesia’. Teeuw is not discussing Dutch colonialism; he is discussing the sudden upsurge of creative energy among Indonesian authors in the context of overall historical change. His view is far from unique; it echoes views held...
by many Western historians including Elsbree, Benda, and Anderson. These historians saw Indonesian history within the context of Indonesian nationalism. The Dutch colonial administration suppressed Indonesian nationalism whereas the Japanese, particularly in Java, made use of it. For that reason many changes vitally important for the Indonesian nationalist movement took place in Java during the occupation: at the beginning of it former political prisoners Soekarno and Hatta re-emerged as the uncontested leaders of the nation and began to conduct mass mobilization campaigns; in the middle of it many important institutions including PETA were created; towards the end of it the preparatory committees for independence, Badan Penyelidik Usaha-Usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan (BPUPK, Commission of Inquiry into Preparatory Measures for Independence) and Panitia Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia (PPKI, Preparatory Committee for Indonesian Independence), were set up, the state philosophy Pancasila was formulated, the constitutional preamble Jakarta Charter was drafted, and preparations for independence were nearly completed. For these reasons, many Western historians consider the end of Dutch rule as the watershed in Indonesian history. For them the Japanese occupation was a brief ‘interregnum’ during which the ‘prelude to independence’ began. For most Indonesians, however, 8 March 1942 was no more than the date when one oppressive foreign ruler was replaced by another. The proclamation was the beginning of the new era.

Historian Katherine McGregor (2005, 2007:39-60) suggests that Nugroho often made ahistorical assertions because of his personal commitment to the spirit of perjuangan. His statement that ‘with or without PETA, an Indonesian Army would have fought successfully against the Dutch forces’ sits awkwardly with the history of Indonesia, not least because Suharto’s New Order was dominated by ex-PETA officers who were proud of the way they, mostly as teenagers, enlisted as Defenders of the Homeland, acquired the fighting spirit, successfully fought the war of independence, and pursued a military career thereafter. In 1981, when the New Order had been stabilized and most of these erstwhile teenage freedom fighters were approaching retirement age, they formed an association called Yayasan Pembela Tanah Air (YAPETA, Association of the Defenders of the Homeland). President Suharto and Vice President (1983-1988) Umar Wirahadikusumah, both ex-PETA members, became its ‘protector’ and ‘mentor’ respectively. YAPETA carried out a range of activities including publication of a journal Majalah PETA and over a dozen books on PETA. These soldiers interpreted history from their own points of view. They had come into close personal association with individual Japanese men during their formative years, so they are often resistant to generalizations about the Japanese and do not hesitate to admire, or despise, individual Japanese that they came to know personally. The books and articles written by YAPETA members still emphasize a glorious combination of nationalism
and fighting spirit but, unlike Nugroho, they clearly see the origins of the military tradition, or the awakening of their fighting spirit for independence, in their own experience in PETA during the Japanese occupation. Construction of PETA-related monuments also began around this time (the early 1980s) in many different places. A powerful challenge to Nugroho’s interpretation or the ‘proclamation-centred’ approach emerged from within Suharto’s New Order before Nugroho died from a stroke in 1985.

One of YAPETA’s books exemplifies this. Its editor, Purbo S. Suwondo, born on 27 September 1927, enlisted in PETA at the age of 16 in Malang, East Java, joined the BKR in 1945, and later rose to the rank of lieutenant-general. He also taught at the Military Academy and the University of Indonesia, and was appointed Ambassador to the United Nations. The book he edited consists of 33 chapters, mostly short contributions by multiple authors, with the editor’s English summary of the book at the end. Suwondo (1997:280) concludes this summary (in his original English):

True to the spirit of their nationalistic and patriotic conception, all the VHDA members, irrespective of rank, whether already disbanded by the defeated Japanese army or still in their original formation, made themselves immediately available and combat ready, not only to join but practically in every region also to lead the revolutionary army when independence was proclaimed, officially founded on the BKR as a provisional and transitory martial organization to embrace the entire spectrum of military and armed groups that sprang up spontaneously during the early days of the revolution.

Some readers may see signs in this passage of overgeneralization. Suwondo was aware of the possibility of receiving such criticism. In one of the two chapters that he contributed, he elaborates on PETA members’ motives (Suwondo 1997:197-8). He admits that reasons for joining PETA were highly individualistic and diverse, but argues that, when Japan surrendered and Indonesia declared independence, almost all PETA members made themselves immediately available even though at that time the prospects for a future military career were very uncertain. From this he surmises that what motivated ex-PETA members to join the Indonesian armed forces was primarily nationalism and patriotism, not career prospects. He discusses how the PETA training, along with Prime Minister Koiso Kuniaki’s promise in September 1944 to grant independence to Indonesia in the future, inflamed PETA members’ patriotic fervour. The Japanese occupation was an opportunity for Indonesian youth to transform themselves from inexperienced high school students into

---

12 VHDA is an acronym for Volunteer Home Defence Army that Suwondo uses to refer to both PETA and the Giyugun in Sumatra.
spirited freedom fighters. This means that YAPETA members too regard the occupation as a prelude to independence or a proto-revolution.

In 1997, when this book was published, the Asian financial crisis hit the region and fatally shook the foundations of Suharto’s regime. The following year, Suharto resigned. YAPETA remained active for a while but, due possibly to the members’ advanced age or death, they seem to have become less active. Instead, historians born after the Revolution began to publish actively. In 2005, Sundanese historian Nina H. Lubis and her research team published a book on PETA (Lubis et al. 2005). In the same year, Sumatran historian Mestika Zed published a book on the Sumatran counterpart, Giyugun (Zed 2005). These authors entitled their books similarly (PETA cikal-bakal TNI and Giyugun cikal-bakal Tentara Nasional di Sumatra) and argue that PETA and Giyugun were the cikal-bakal (founders) of the TNI. This directly contradicts Nugroho’s theory, and can be considered to constitute part of the post-New Order historical revisionism that historian Gerry van Klinken (2001:323-50) has outlined. Due to efforts by Lubis and others, Gatot was declared a national hero on 9 November 2004 for his ‘contribution to the establishment of PETA that became the cikal-bakal of the Indonesian National Army’; this means that Nugroho’s argument was officially rejected by the newly inaugurated president.

Mestika Zed presents a stronger case for the TNI being rooted in the Japanese occupation. Before the Japanese occupation of Sumatra there was the Koninklijk Nederlands-Indisch Leger (KNIL, Royal Netherlands Indies Army), but it was designed to suppress local rebellions against the Dutch regime and so it did not recruit Sumatran youth; it consisted of Javanese, Ambonese, and some other ethnic groups. Under the Dutch colonial administration no Sumatran youth was able to receive formal military training. Virtually all the officers of the Indonesian National Army created in Sumatra after Japan surrendered had been Giyugun members and had received their first military training from the Japanese. In addition, Zed (2005:80-9) reports that the former Giyugun officers he interviewed did not join the Giyugun out of nationalism or patriotism but rather because they were told to do so by their parents, relatives, or influential local figures who disseminated Japanese propaganda; the attractive salaries and guaranteed provision of food also constituted strong pull factors.

Most non-officer PETA members had had little or no schooling and were illiterate, but most PETA officers came from relatively privileged backgrounds and were high school students or high school graduates. Some had a degree from Leiden University. Some had an aristocratic title. Battalion commanders were mostly local dignitaries such as Muslim clerics and were usually over the age of 35. They were chosen not for their potential military prowess but rather for their ability to command respect from young soldiers and local communities.

Lubis 2005:6. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, sworn in on 20 October 2004, is younger than Suharto by one generation. He was born on 9 September 1949 and entered the Military Academy in 1970.
Suwondo argues that PETA members’ motives for joining the Revolution were not linked to career prospects, but a closer examination of PETA members’ living conditions reveals that they received salaries that were generous in comparison to those of civilian workers. The average aggregate monthly household income in Java at that time was about ten guilders, including earnings both in cash and in kind. The starting salary of a PETA soldier was ten guilders per month. Officers’ monthly salaries were much higher: 300 guilders for the battalion commander, 160 guilders for a company commander, 60 guilders for a platoon commander, and 40 guilders for a squad commander. Pay rises and promotions also took place (Morimoto 1992:263). Food supply for PETA was also reliable in the midst of widespread food shortages. Moreover, when the Japanese disbanded PETA, they paid each PETA member a lump sum equivalent to six months’ salary. It is therefore not surprising if ex-PETA or ex-Giyugun soldiers joined BKR expecting similar conditions. In fact many ex-PETA members successfully pursued military careers after independence. As an example Gatot mentions ex-members of the guerrilla units called I-Go Kinmutai, and says most of the former I-Go Kinmutai members were still active in the Indonesian armed forces, with the lowest rank being a colonel or a brigadier-general. This fact does not seriously undermine Suwondo’s interpretations, as attractive remunerations do not make soldiers less patriotic. It simply means that there were more complex factors at work in people’s reasons for becoming soldiers.

YAPETA cultivated an amicable relationship with its Japanese counterpart that consisted of former PETA trainers, and exchanged information for writing a history of PETA. Former PETA trainer and an I-Go Kinmutai organizer Morimoto Takeshi published a voluminous book on PETA in 1992, which compels us to modify our understanding of the relations between Japanese military men and PETA. Most historians who have studied PETA training have focused on the training of officer cadets at Bogor. Morimoto’s study shows that the training at Bogor was very brief (the first batch trained for two months, the second batch for four months and ten days, and the third batch for one month) and, after the initial training, trainees returned to their respective places of origin and recruited local boys as non-officer soldiers. Much of their training was conducted by Indonesian PETA officers. The number of Japanese trainers attached to deployed PETA battalions was only 407. At the time of the Japanese surrender PETA consisted of 37,812 members, who formed 6,003 squads, 1,242 platoons, 276 companies, and 69 battalions.

15 Lubis 2003:48. Japan surrendered when I-Go Kinmutai was still in the process of formation; being guerrilla units they did not have battalions; the largest unit was a company. At the time of the Japanese surrender its Indonesian members consisted of two company commanders, 120 platoon commanders, and 800 squad commanders, 922 men in total with no private soldiers yet recruited (Morimoto 1992:727).
Shigeru Sato

(Morimoto 1992:726-27). This means that there was less than one Japanese trainer per two platoons. As the former Indonesian trainees turned trainers, the Japanese trainers’ role became an advisory one. One of the reasons why some PETA members rebelled against the Japanese was that, whereas the Japanese trainers at Bogor presented themselves as exemplary soldiers and commanded respect, those who were attached to the deployed battalions tended to be more lax; their position was basically a sinecure, and therefore they often indulged in alcohol and sex rather than providing advice to PETA. Such behaviour invited PETA soldiers’ contempt.

Nugroho and others attribute PETA rebellions to the fact that PETA members worked alongside forced labourers (Notosusanto 1979:150-4). Morimoto’s work (1992:261-542) shows that many of the numerous fortifications along the coast were constructed by deployed PETA battalions with little Japanese supervision. PETA officers approached local government officials to mobilize local people, including women and children, as labourers. This means that Indonesian officers played a much greater role than previously thought, either in positive or negative ways. They were certainly not mindless puppets easily indoctrinated and manipulated by the Japanese.

PETA had no autonomous line of command above battalions and was subordinate to the Japanese Commander-in-Chief. This became a problem when Japan surrendered and British-Indian and Dutch troops arrived. The war of independence broke out, but ex-PETA officers had no combat experience and their military know-how was limited. The Japanese were preparing for repatriation, but due to the shortage of shipping space and other factors, they had to wait up to two years in concentration camps. Some of the ex-PETA officers approached their former Japanese trainers in the camps seeking advice on how to wage war against the fully equipped Allied troops, or instructions on how to use the weapons such as trench mortars that they had taken from the Japanese Army. Some Japanese were willing to visit the battlefield for a few months to give Indonesian freedom fighters hands-on instruction; however, these relations could not last long primarily because of the fear factor: the Indonesians were afraid to be discovered still to be cooperating with the Japanese. A relatively small number of Japanese military men, estimated variously at between 700 and 1,500, chose not to repatriate and joined the Indonesian war of independence (Morimoto 1992:673-707).

Now we need to return to the question of whether 17 August 1945 constitutes the watershed in Indonesian history in relation to PETA. There was a break of two days between when the Japanese commenced dissolving PETA and when Soekarno instructed ex-PETA members and others to form BKRI. There was no similar gap with regard to other institutions such as Hizbullah, Barisan Pelopor, and PPKI. The reason seems straightforward: PETA could pose a significant danger to the Japanese but the other institutions could not.
The key political institution PPKI was formed on 12 August 1945, three days before the Japanese surrender; Marshal Terauchi appointed Soekarno as its chairman and Hatta as vice-chairman; it met for the first time on 18 August, the day the Japanese decided to disband PETA and one day after Soekarno’s proclamation of independence; PPKI decided on 20 August to set up BKRI. This fact seems to diminish the significance of the gap between PETA and BKRI, because PPKI set up by the Japanese kept functioning and decided to reassemble PETA to form BKRI. PPKI bridged the transition from PETA to BKRI. It appears as though the Japanese authorities wanted to disband PETA but the Indonesian authorities did not.

Gatot points out that from its inception PETA was meant to become Indonesia’s national army in the future, and that this became clearer after Prime Minister Koiso made a promise in 1944 to grant independence to Indonesia. Gatot discussed this matter at Chuo Sangiin (Central Advisory Council) in June 1945, soon after Soekarno made a speech on the state philosophy Panca Dharma, and Indonesian leaders came to consider PETA training to be part of the preparations for independence (Asia Raya 20-22-6-1945; Lubis 2003:55-7). Gatot states: ‘Cita-cita Tentara sukarela Pembela Tanah Air agar kelak menjadi Tentara Nasional Indonesia teryata tercapai juga’ (The ideal of PETA later becoming TNI also evidently materialized) (Lubis 2003:55). The translators appear to have mistranslated this sentence as ‘After Independence was declared, the desire to form an Indonesian National Army from the PETA became a reality’ and put a footnote to it: ‘This should not be interpreted as indicating that there was any organizational continuity between the PETA (which was disbanded in the first week after the proclamation of independence) and the Indonesian National Army’ (Mangkupradja 1968:129). This footnote is off the mark, as the main thrust of Gatot’s assertion is that there was indeed continuity between the two organizations. This assertion, although rejected by Nugroho and others, has been adopted by YAPETA, Lubis, Zed and others.

Concluding remarks

Gatot Mangkupraja was imprisoned twice for his political activities. For the first case both the accuser and the accused could provide a relatively straightforward explanation. The second case was much more complex and Gatot struggled to provide ingenious justifications of his relationship with the Japanese. He apparently contrived the story of his detention by the Kenpeitai and of writing a surat darah in order to present an image of being anti-Japanese and pro-Japanese at the same time. He was anti-Japanese because he considered the Japanese to be oppressive foreign rulers. He was pro-Japanese because he was convinced that some Japanese were sincere in wanting to help Indone-
Shigeru Sato

This was the source of his profound ambivalence. This ambivalence, shared by many Indonesians, constitutes a historiographical conundrum. It was also a source of profound embarrassment to Gatot. Probably because of that he deleted from his ‘Otobiografi’ the passage cited earlier about his associations with Japanese ‘military men’ who opened shops in pre-war Java.

Gatot’s petition stirred up Indonesian people’s enthusiasm, but in a sense it was probably an anticlimax for him because he did not receive much political limelight. Empat Serangkai’s submission of a supporting letter was reported with a larger photograph than Gatot’s little portrait. The Commander-in-Chief approved the establishment of PETA only after the Empat Serangkai supported it. Gatot apparently felt bitter that credit went to those ‘prominent’ nationalists (Lubis 2003:41-7). Even Sutarjo Kartohadikusumo, who expressed the idea of arming Indonesian youth only casually in Japan, was promoted to Resident of Jakarta. Gatot must have been frustrated feeling that his contributions had been insufficiently recognized. In his life story he complains that, when he started a movement to promote cotton cultivation in 1958, not a single government official nor his wife, from president down to the lowest government official, showed any interest in supporting his project and he had to spend his own money to distribute seed to farmers free of charge (Lubis 2003:78). Apparently such frustration had been festering for a long time. Feeling seriously disturbed after 1 October 1965, and also seeking financial stability, he attempted to present an image of himself as a sincere Indonesian nationalist who, symbolically at least, shed his own blood to achieve Indonesian independence.

The lack of public attention for Gatot can also be explained in terms of the tendency among Indonesians to dissociate the Revolution from the Japanese occupation. However, both political and military preparations for independence began and accelerated during the occupation. For that reason the ‘proclamation-centred’ approach does not work well. To assert, as Nugroho does, that the Japanese occupation was irrelevant to the Indonesian Revolution is as unsatisfactory as to attribute the Revolution to the Japanese. In the wake of Guided Democracy the Indonesian government officially abandoned the ‘proclamation-centred’ approach. However, the clear dissociation of the independence era from the occupation did not end quickly in Indonesian historiography, and it was not until after the turn of the twenty-first century that the books by Lubis and Zed appeared and that Gatot was admitted to the pantheon of national heroes.

The historical significance of an individual person’s actions can be assessed only in relation to the complex and dynamic process of historical change. Gatot played only a minor role in the formation of PETA. However, his role has a profound and lasting historiographical significance because it relates...
to the question of how to interpret Indonesia-Japan relations during World War II. A demythologized Gatot may not look as glorious as the image he constructed for himself. But the enthusiastic response to his petition in wider Indonesian communities, and the subsequent roles that ex-PETA members played in Indonesian history, are not diminished by the unmasking of the myth. Historical reality, after all, need not be embellished or hidden in order for Indonesians to be proud of their history.

References

Anderson, Benedict Richard O’Gorman

Benda, Harry J.

Citra dan perjuangan

Frederick, William H.

Friend, Theodore

Goto, Ken’ichi

Kahin, George McTuman

Klinken, Gerry van

Kusuma, RM A.B.

Larson, George Donald

Latif, Yudi
2008 Indonesian Muslim intelligentsia and power. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.


Mangkupradja, Raden Gatot 1968 ‘The PETA and my relations with the Japanese; A correction of Sukarno’s autobiography’, *Indonesia* 5:105-34.


Reid, Anthony 1979 *The blood of the people; Revolution and the end of traditional rule in northern Sumatra*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Sukarno 1965 *Sukarno; an autobiography as told to Cindy Adams*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.
Suwondo, Purbo S. (ed.)
Jakarta: Sinar Harapan.

Teeuw, A.

Yanagawa Motoshige

Zed, Mestika