Indonesian National History Textbooks after the New Order

What’s New under the Sun?

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Since the fall of Soeharto, rewriting and re-imagining Indonesian history has topped the agenda for many historians of Indonesia. For one part, the agenda stems from a criticism that the New Order’s national history was state-heavy, unidimensional, and militaristic (McGregor 2007). Some believe the regime ‘bended’ (*membengkokkan*) the existing version of national history by reducing or even falsifying historical facts, for example, about the 1965 tragedy (Asvi Warman Adam 2001). This criticism has some validity. But the problem of Indonesian historiography today does not essentially stem from the New Order legacy, for which nobody is fully justified in entirely blaming Soeharto’s regime.

For the most part, the state-centered nature in the writing of national history is rooted in what has been generally known as Indonesia-centric historiography. It is an approach of history writing that focuses on Indonesia(n) itself as the main subject and actor of the past events and as a self evidently coherent unit with an intrinsic meaning and historical destiny. The Indonesia-centric historiography originally developed as a direct counter by nationalist historians like Muhammad Yamin (1945, 1953) and Sanusi Pane (1950–1) against the so-called Neerlando-centric historiography. By the latter approach, Dutch historians of the colonial time wrote the history of Indonesia from the perspective of the white, powerful men (mostly Dutch government officials) in charge, and neglected the existence of the indigenous commoners, ignoring or denying their historical agency (Sartono Kartodirdjo 2001:29–32). The Indonesia-centric historiography was thus originally a political tool for the nationalists in order to bolster the construction of Indonesian national identity and unity. It conveys a retrospective postcolonial perspective in the framing and re-presenting of the past. But it also reproduces the state centered approach of the Dutch.
Though possibly appropriate to the early years of independence, the Indonesia-centric historiography cannot usefully be employed today, especially if it is intended to carry out the same mission as it was sixty years ago. The reason is not so much that the New Order has manipulated and used it for legitimizing its power, as that it no longer suits the state of the art of the demand for historical narratives and for a plurality of voices. As educator Y.B. Mangunwijaya (1986) argued more than two decades ago, the younger Indonesian generation had increasingly embraced what he called a ‘post-Indonesia worldview’ in which a state construction of national identity is no longer compatible with the era when subjectivity was essentially borderless. With Indonesian society democratizing today, the nature of the relationship of the state to its population has become more and more engaging, and recognition of individuals’ participation is a key to understanding and situating the past. In this new atmosphere, the Indonesia-centrism in the nationalists’ sense has become outdated.

Like any other state-centric historiography, the nationalists’ Indonesia-centrism produces a top-down history that almost entirely aims to legitimize the existence of the state or state institutions (Curaming 2003:1). As Henk Schulte Nordholt (2004:1) suggests, state-centrism ‘streamlines the complex and multidimensional narratives about the past’ and ‘erases competing histories and lots of (semi) autonomous local narratives in favor of a new centralized meta-narrative of the nation-state’. It creates the birth, growth, and glory of a nation, mixing them ‘with crises which were always overcome’. State centered histories are also often exclusively based on state centered archives. So, while it holds true that the Soeharto regime disguised the emergence of non-state historical narratives in order to legitimize its power, it also has to be noted that the post-New Order agenda to rewrite Indonesian history originally stemmed from the problems of reductionism of the nationalists’ state-centric historiography.

The aim of this essay is therefore to review whether and to what extent, after the fall of the New Order, the writing of Indonesian national history especially in the form of Indonesian-language textbooks by Indonesian authors has reflected a new perspective or approach in the way the democratizing Indonesian society today reconstructs its past.¹ By national history, I mean a history that more or less authoritatively provides a standard version of events and timelines about the making of a nation-state. As historian Daniel Woolf (2005:xxxv) argues, a national history reflects a standard measure of how a

¹ The textbooks are selected from KITLV collection of the past five years. I thank Henk Schulte Nordholt for his comments on an earlier draft of this essay.
nation’s institutional evolution is collectively identified, selected, and constructed. In particular, a textbook on national history can be an efficient tool both to engineer and to spread ideas systematically. Especially because the intended readership includes the younger generation (school and university students), teaching staff, and researchers, and because the authors are specialized and trained experts affiliated with higher education and research institutions, the textbooks can be politically strategic for any attempt to construct through educational institutions a new collective national identity.

With the Indonesian society democratizing since the fall of the New Order, foreign and Indonesian historians of Indonesia have published, or revised and republished, books on Indonesian history to deal with issues formerly neglected or forbidden, for example on political prisoners, human rights violations, and Soeharto’s family businesses. In this case, most foreign historians of Indonesia have benefitted from a broader readership because, unlike in the New Order era when scholarly works circulating in Indonesia underwent strict censorship, today their works are equally accessible to both international and Indonesian audiences.2 While their works have much influenced the Indonesian scholarship on history, they cannot possibly reflect how Indonesians themselves understand and construct their own history.

Meanwhile, Indonesian historians have reflected critically on Indonesian historiography in reaction to the calls of two authoritative academic communities. The first was the Seventh National Conference on History held in 2001 by two organizational entities that otherwise can be categorized as holding ‘formal authority’ in the field: the Society of Indonesian Historians (Masyarakat Sejarawan Indonesia, MSI), and the Indonesian Department of National Education. For the first time after Soeharto, the conference re-introduced the then-popular imperative phrase ‘to straighten the history’ (meluruskan sejarah), which had appeared as the title of B.M. Diah’s provocative collection Meluruskan Sejarah (1987). The second call was the workshops organized in 2005 by a group of Indonesian and non-Indonesian historians, who, although working for academic and research institutions in Indonesia and elsewhere, did not officially act on behalf of these institutions. The workshops discussed the need for exploring the everyday events and actors that had been neglected in the national history, emphasizing the centrality of alternative approaches and sources.

Apart from these authoritative calls from the two academic communities, in Indonesia today various groups of mostly non-academic, young historians

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have also taken independent initiatives to write Indonesian history. Although in this review I will not deal with these independent initiatives because I limit myself to national history textbooks, I would highlight the works of three of these groups because in my opinion they have offered an alternative media to the way Indonesian history could be discussed at schools. The first is *Jurnal Pendidikan Sejarah AGSI*, published since 2010 by the Association of Indonesian History Teachers (Asosiasi Guru Sejarah Indonesia, AGSI) in cooperation with Indonesian History Institute (Institut Sejarah Indonesia, ISI). The AGSI journal claims to present ‘a deconstructed perspective in history teaching’ intended for high school teachers. The second is *Historia*, first published in 2009, which is claimed by its founders to be the first Indonesian history magazine available both online (www.historia.co.id) and in print, and is aimed to be on par with the corresponding sort of publications in other countries, such as *Geschiedenis Magazine* in the Netherlands. The third is the online journal www.etnohistori.org, which aims to ‘promote an alternative methodology in history and anthropology in a popular way’. Although the breadth of their actual use and accessibility has still to be surveyed, these works by young, mostly independent, Indonesian scholars have presented a history in a less formal and, especially in the online format, a more interactive way as readers can actively participate in the on-going discussions on a variety of topics.

**Indonesia-centrism**

My first review concerns *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia* (SNI, 2008), an updated version of the first and second editions (1975, 1982), products of the New Order. SNI is selected for review because of its legacy. The former version of SNI, especially the 1982 edition, was the one and only national history textbook prescribed by the New Order. It was used in higher education and as a standard source for the writing of textbooks for the other schools at a lower level (senior and junior high school, primary school). After the New Order fell apart, now what does the updated edition of SNI offer?

Not much, actually. The latest edition of SNI (hereafter the 2008 SNI) does not provide space to explore the evolution of the New Order reputation. This is surprising given the fact that recent trends of study pay a close attention to the New Order political tracks, especially with regard to human rights issues (see for a recent example Kammen 2013:159–84). While it is meant to be an updated edition, the 2008 SNI offers very few new materials compared to the previous SNI (especially the 1982 edition). The entire series of the 2008 SNI is characterized by insertions of materials into various chapter topics,
which I shall show by a content analysis in comparison to the corresponding volume of the 1982 SNI. If this is the case, then why has the SNI been revised and re-published? The new editors of the 2008 SNI, distinguished historian R.Z. Leirissa and prominent archeologist R.P. Soejono, say that the updated edition is meant to cover the more recent developments in Indonesian history. Although the previous SNI had become a standard textbook for Indonesian and international scholars alike, so they say, it had not undergone revision for 25 years. Meanwhile, the publisher, Balai Pustaka, proudly argues that the SNI is unique and has to be republished because ‘it is the first national history textbook authored all by the historians of Indonesian nationality and that it employs Indonesia-centrism’. Neither the new editors nor the publisher give commentary on the post-1998 changing political context that might have become the background to the update.

The 2008 SNI follows the same structure as its predecessors, which is of no surprise because it is meant to be an updated version (edisi pemutakhiran). It consists of six volumes, each dedicated to exploring one principal period in Indonesian history, from prehistory to the coming and development of Hinduism and Buddhism, then Islam and later Western colonialism, the emergence of a nationalist movement, the late colonial state, and finally the Japanese and the Republic of Indonesia periods.

Volume 1 provides a little more details of exploration on the agricultural tools and household implements during the bronze-iron period in addition to an executive introduction to sketch the history of research in Indonesian archeology. Volume 2 deals with the coming and indigenization of Hindus and Buddhist civilization, approximately from the fifth to fifteenth centuries. To a large extent, colonial paradigms were reproduced here, especially in the framing of the period as a break from pre-history. Meanwhile, rather than dealing directly with the responses of the Islamic kingdoms to the coming of the European people at the end of the sixteenth century (as the 1982 SNI does), Volume 3 first explores the coming of Islam and the emergence and development of Islamic kingdoms throughout the Indonesian islands, detailing the Islamization of Sumatra, Java, Nusa Tenggara, Maluku, Sulawesi, and Kalimantan.

Volume 4, which focuses on colonialism, starts with introductory chapters on maritime and inter-continental trade in the seventeenth century that set a context for European arrival and imperialism in Asia in the eighteenth century. In the 1982 SNI, the introductory topic did not deal with maritime and inter-continental trades but directly with the European trading activities in the Indonesian islands. The addition of ‘maritime and inter-continental trades’ to the 2008 SNI might have to do with the rising academic interest in maritime history in Indonesia (for example by Singgih Tri Sulistiono 2004).
Apart from the new introductory topic, the rest of Volume 4 echoes the 1982 SNI volume. The responses to Western colonialism remain to be characterized as a nineteenth-century business of individual localities that lacked a shared concept of unity among the different areas or peoples in the archipelago. This pattern of narrative creates a background to the episode of Indonesian national awakening in the twentieth century that would lead to the creation of a nationalist Indonesian state, which is the theme of Volume 5. In Volume 5, the Indonesian national awakening is depicted as growing parallel to the modernization of the colonial state, the Netherlands Indies, which shows an increasingly dominant Dutch power. The dynamics studied cover not only the political but also the economic, social, cultural, and administrative areas. What Volume 5 fails to emphasize is that the narrative on Indonesian national awakening and nationalist movements of the early twentieth century was to a large extent a product of the 1940s. It was a retrospective postcolonial construct and political agreement among nationalist leaders and historians. Together, Volumes 4 and 5 set aside the wider processes of modernity, which had become one of the main characteristics of the Indonesian society of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, of which nationalism was a part. Both volumes ignore the role of intermediary educated elites, such as schoolteachers and low-ranking government officials, who had cooperated with the Dutch and became part of the colonial system, but who, later, turned to become the principal backbone of the state system formation of independent Indonesia.

In contrast to the 1982 SNI, Volume 6 of the 2008 SNI shows fundamental changes not so much in the addition of new materials related to the New Order as in the change of periodization with a huge impact on the way the New Order was legitimized. Just like in the 1982 SNI, the sub-periodization in the 2008 SNI begins with the Japanese occupation (1942–1945) followed by the Revolution (1945–1949), the Liberal Democracy (1950–1959), the Guided Democracy, and the New Order. Both editions share perspectives on the first three sub-periods. For instance, both view the 1950s as a dynamic road to disaster, a period of political, military, and economic experiments, which led to regionalism, military operations, and a frequent shift of political administrations. Yet despite similarities, the two editions of SNI diverge in the last two

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3 According to Ki Hadjar Dewantara, the decision to commemorate the twentieth of May as a national Awakening Day was made by President Soekarno in 1948. Nationalist leaders like Radjiman Wedyodiningrat, Agus Salim, Wurjaningrat, Surjopranoto, and Ki Hadjar Dewantara himself agreed to the decision, but Vice President Muhammad Hatta was said to have disagreed and was quoted as saying ‘We have only one national day, that is the seventeenth of August’. Ki Hadjar Dewantara 1952: 6–8.
sub-periods, especially regarding the end point of the Guided Democracy and the legacy of the New Order.

In the 1982 SNI, the analysis of the Guided Democracy-period ends with an exploration of what is said to be the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI) offensives, including but not limited to the areas of public education, mass communication, and cultural life. The New Order period then begins with an elaborate victorious episode of the army crushing the (alleged) PKI attempt of the 30 September 1965 coup d’état, followed by the issuance of perhaps the most magical⁴ political document in Indonesian history, Surat Perintah 11 Maret (aka Supersemar), a presidential letter that supposedly marked the power transfer from Soekarno to Soeharto. Thus, in the 1982 SNI, the crushing of the September 30 Movement by the Army is placed as a historic monument that creates a legacy for the New Order.

In the 2008 SNI, the failed 30 September 1965 coup d’état was moved to the chapter on Guided Democracy. The subsequent chapter on the New Order period, begins with the issuance of the Supersemar. It means that what in the 1982 SNI was seen as a presumable legacy and was described as a glorious victory in crushing the PKI movement, now switches to become all but a case of a violent sub-episode stemming from Soekarno’s Guided Democracy. It gives the impression that Soeharto had nothing to do with the 1965 tragedy and that he merely took power after the issuance of the Supersemar, which seems highly unlikely. This is why in the sub-section of this chapter, dedicated to conflicts, violence, and the Human Rights Commission during the New Order, the 1965 massacres, and related cases are not discussed at all. That sub-section only addresses the cases of Malari (1974), Tanjung Priok (1984), Talangsari Lampung (1988), Dili (1991), and the attack on the Indonesian Democratic Party headquarters (1996). Although the chapter on the 1965 tragedy explores in detail the military operations that countered the September 30 Movement in the immediate aftermath of the event, the mass killings that took place in the years after are completely ignored. The 2008 SNI is a good example of the theory that history is less about facts than perspectives on a past event, and about ignoring or erasing uncomfortable facts (see Woolf 2005:xxxv–vi).

Another national history textbook considered here is *Indonesia dalam Arus Sejarah* (IdAS, 2012). IdAS is selected for review for several reasons. From the

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⁴ I call it ‘magical’ (‘sakti’ in Indonesian) not only because Soeharto used this mythical letter to justify the power he would brutally exercise for the next thirty years, but also because the original or authentic version of the letter has never been publicly seen or circulated.
edition’s appearance, the expertise of its authors, and the fine editorial work of
distinguished historians Taufik Abdullah and A.B. Lapian, one may assume that
IdAS resulted from serious human-resources and financial investments, presum-
ably by the Indonesian government. In addition, IdAS can be categorized
as an authoritative textbook of Indonesian national history because the authors
are historians, archeologists, anthropologists, artists, and linguists, all of whom
are prominent figures in their respective fields. Thirdly, the prefaces are written
by top government officials such as President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono him-
self and three of his (former) ministers. Last but not least, the co-publisher is
the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture. The editors have their own
say on why it was necessary to publish IdAS next to the existing national history
textbooks. Bearing the concept of ‘national history’ in which to assume a ‘main-
stream history’, the SNI, so they say, has not included ‘newly founded sources,
events, and territories—many regions remain as terra incognita’ (see Editorial
Preface).

IdAS is published in nine volumes: eight for contents and one for ency-
clopedic facts, timelines, and indexes. Printed in A4-format glossy paper and
bound in hardcover, IdAS contains information-rich texts alongside colorful
photographs and illustrations, maps, graphs, and sideline content pointers. The
first five volumes explore the same periods as the first five SNI volumes: the
prehistory, the Hinduism and Buddhism period, the coming and development
of Islamic civilization, Western colonialism and the local responses to it, and
Indonesian national awakening and movement against colonialism. This col-
laborative work thus employs the same teleological perspective as the SNI.
While in the SNI the time from the Japanese occupation to the New Order is
considered as one period, IdAS divides it into three periods: the war and the
Revolution, the post-Revolution years, and the New Order. A content analysis
of each volume makes clear what the IdAS actually is about.

The prehistory period (discussed in Volume 1) gets wider coverage than in
the SNI, starting from the episode of the earth’s formation and pre-animate
beings to the existence of human beings with prehistoric technology and socio-
economic system during the bronze-iron age. A review chapter on the develop-
ment of archeological research on Indonesian prehistory helps readers better
understand the other topics discussed in this volume because it presents past
and on-going debates on the topics raised, for example on the periodization
of Indonesian prehistory. This equips readers with a frame or context to the
details of archeological findings explored in the related chapters.

Making use of the template of periodization from an established historiog-
raphy proposed by Dutch historians in the past, the editors dedicated Volume 2
to the study of the so-called Hindu and Buddhist period. This volume discusses
the spread and influence of Indian civilization in Indonesian islands. It explores in great detail the developments of Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms throughout the archipelago, paying close attention to the making of political and administrative systems, the rise of the dynasty system of monarchies, land and maritime trades, religions, and tangible monuments. Unfortunately, the entire narrative seems to be aimed at elaborating the end results of the influence of Indian civilization (*What was there?*), whereas the process of inter-relations between Indian and local civilization (*How did things happen?*) is hardly examined.

Volume 3 on Islam and Islamic civilization explores not only the emergence of Islamic kingdoms in the Indonesian islands but also Islamic military, and Islamic heroism, intellectual achievements and education systems, trade, economic and political systems, arts, literature and language, religion and religious communities, material culture, and the Islamic responses to Western colonialism. Throughout the volume, attempts are made to show that Indonesian Islam is influenced by the great Islamic tradition of the Middle East in terms of theology, rituals, and religious practices and that, at the same time, it is culturally distinctive compared to Islamic civilization in other parts of the world. Although some chapters make a claim to insert that by the development of Islam the civilizations that had stemmed from local and Hindu-Buddhist traditions were recognized, none of them explore whether and how the older civilizations co-existed with (in) an increasingly influential Islam.

Volumes 4 and 5 are dedicated to encounters with Europeans in the Indonesian islands and their impact on the local society in the widest sense. Although these volumes focus on the Europeans’ presence, they do not view the Europeans as the main historical actors. Instead, the European presence serves as a background to the heroic and (eventually) victorious military and political struggle of indigenous Indonesians against their domination. The European episode begins in Volume 4 with the coming of the Portuguese and their trade networks, followed by the early encounters with the Dutch. After the Dutch displaced the Portuguese, new trade networks developed and ‘pacification’ gradually took place first under the administrations of the Dutch East India Company, then under the Netherlands Indies, with intervals of French-assigned and British administrations (Willem Daendels, 1808–1811, and Thomas Stamford Raffles, 1811–1816). In the context of these political and economic dynamics, European settlements grew, and Catholicism and Christianity spread.

Volume 4 delves into to the local’s armed responses to the European establishment in the Indies up to the end of the nineteenth century. It discusses nothing of the structure of colonial rule, which included Indonesian elites.
Consequently, the authors continue to represent colonialism as an alien thing, operating outside Indonesian history. Two thirds of the 32 chapters focus on waging war against the Dutch colonial rulers by local kings, who are depicted—as in SNI—as local heroes, with local loyalties. But they consistently lacked unity, and this failure to step out of individual or parochial concerns, so the authors argue, established a political legacy for the making of ‘Indonesia’. As readers enter the twentieth century in Volume 5, they discover how the nature of the local’s responses drastically changed. Thanks to the spread of Western education in the early twentieth century, a shared-sense of unity gradually grew and expanded among local leaders and the general masses, only to crystallize, by the late 1920s, in an idea of Indonesia: one nation and one national identity. Not military but political strategy characterized the national movement in the early twentieth century. Though it criticized colonialism, the movement embraced the modernity associated with colonial powers as it pushed for changes in the economy, education, arts, transportation and communication, the press, and political organization. These issues consume roughly half of Volume 5. Unfortunately, the Volume misses the point that by embracing ‘imperial modernity’ many Indonesians did participate in the colonial system whether they liked the Dutch or not.

Volume 6, dedicated to the ‘War and the Revolution period’, deals with the Japanese occupation (1942–1945) and the so-called Indonesian Revolution against the returning Dutch power (1945–1949). Although more materials are inserted to make the IdAS volume on this period richer in historical data and facts than its corresponding SNI volume, the IdAS story line is not that different from the SNI. Volume 7 discusses the political, economic, social, and cultural dynamics from 1950 to 1965. By naming this time-span the ‘post-Revolution period’, the authors imply that in this period the newly born state, emerging from ten years of war, settled down. This impression is not completely accurate, given the regionalism and the mass desire for participation in public spheres during the period. As in the 2008 SNI, this volume ends with a chapter on the September 30 Movement episode, though the name ‘PKI’, which has always been known as ‘Gerakan 30S’ in the New Order’s national history, is now erased. Like the SNI, the G30S is seen as an attack on the state ideology, Pancasila, and the Communists are portrayed as responsible for the grave problems. But there are also differences between IdAS and the 2008 SNI. Unlike the 2008 SNI, IdAS presents some passages of the Communist’s perspective on the plot and on leading figures of the September 30 event. In addition, in the final chapter of this volume IdAS deals with regional cases related to the failed coup d’etat, which are obviously missing in the SNI. But like SNI, IdAS does not deal with the mass killings that took place in the years after the September 30 movement. The
IdAS story on this particular episode of tragedy is quite similar to the SNI story, but with more details on the minutes of the army counter attack of October 1965, incorporating incidents in different geographical areas and possibilities of the ‘plots’ of the whole event.

Volume 8, on the New Order, provides an elaborate chapter on the aftermath of the September 30 tragedy and on the Supersemar, which is said to be ‘the legacy to correcting the Old Order’ (p. 17). Although the perspective used to explore the episode is very much the same as that in the SNI, this chapter has covered both sides by dealing with both Soekarno’s and Soeharto’s versions of the story. The rest of the volume focuses on many aspects of developments during the New Order, ranging from the economy, population, education, public health, foreign policy, student movements, regional cases of Papua, Aceh, to East Timor, Chinese affairs, dual functions of the military, the 1997 crisis, and the fall of Soeharto. In general, this volume praises the New Order’s achievements but criticizes some aspects of it. Unlike the 2008 SNI that deals with actual cases of human rights violations during the New Order except for the September 30 tragedy (the 1974 Malari, the Talangsari and the Tanjung Priok killings), the chapter on human rights in this volume only explores the theories, legal matters and organizations of human rights.

In general, the IdAS includes more topics than the SNI. The IdAS narratives explore issues more extensively, but do not necessarily offer a deeper analysis. The two differ in other ways as well. While the structure and the reasoning in the narratives throughout the six SNI volumes are clear and consistent, those of the IdAS are not so much. IdAS looks like a compilation of individual, only loosely connected works. Photographs and illustrations are mostly not incorporated in the main texts on the corresponding pages where they appear though they might be relevant. Here and there, texts are merely translations of foreign-language sources with no marks to indicate direct quotations and, although sources are footnoted, they do not always contain correct information from the referred sources. While in the SNI various issues of trades, administrations, and religions are discussed within international frameworks, in the IdAS they are isolated from local perspectives. The topics concerning international affairs are dealt with partially in the IdAS (for example, New Order foreign policy) although many more topics could have been discussed in an international frame (for example, those concerning the haj, human rights, foreign aid, Indonesia’s position in ASEAN and the UN). In this sense, the general editor

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of IdAS, Taufik Abdullah, is right when saying that IdAS is not meant to be a revised edition of SNI.

Regardless of these differences, if judged from the periodization employed, both the SNI and the IdAS share the perspective of Indonesia-centric historiography. Framed and structured around state-centrism, both the SNI and the IdAS take for granted the historical process and the mutual interactions among peoples by which different civilizations developed and formed what would become Indonesian identity. The periodization gives a strong idea of discontinuity; the narratives shift between domination and resistance. For example, the period of Islam is discussed with an entire focus on Islam and Islamic influence while the preceding Hindus and Buddhist period is completely ignored. Did Islamic civilization immediately replace the centuries-long Hindu and Buddhist civilizations in the archipelago? How did these civilizations interact and influence the creation of a new society? Similarly, while on the one hand it is said that by the end of the sixteenth century Islam had become a predominant culture in the Indonesian islands, on the other hand it is also shown that the so-called culturally embedded Islam was suddenly missing in the later centuries except in the form of sporadic (armed) resistance against the Europeans. How did Islam or Islamic identity look then and today, when Islam is pitted against the West? How did Islam and the European civilizations co-exist and possibly influence each other? Why do some periods seem to be based on religions or religion-related civilizations and others on politics? Throughout the SNI and the IdAS volumes it is clear that most of the elements that formed Indonesian identity came from foreign/non indigenous sources. But why is the domination and resistance paradigm used mostly in connection to the European presence in the archipelago? Was there no resistance from the Hindus or Buddhist communities in the thirteenth century against the coming of Islam, which is said to have increasingly become dominant and influential?

None of these issues is accorded satisfying analysis in the SNI and IdAS. The reason is that the periodization, comparable to colonial historiography, follows a retrospective thinking, which uses the formation of the Indonesian state as its point of departure. The official narrative is that the Indonesian state was born out of war and armed revolution in the 1940s. In this context, resistance against domination is a logical paradigm for a historical narrative. To create a stronger legitimation for this paradigm, the events that preceded and followed the birth of the state are also studied from the perspective of domination and resistance. That is why, although unconventional topics (literature, arts) and peripheral geographical territories (Ternate, Tidore) are included (especially in the IdAS), these national history textbooks propose nothing new in comparison to per-
spectives taken within colonial historiography. They miss the opportunity for a new theory in which the history of Indonesia is studied as the history of encounters, interactions, and mutual influence between different civilizations taking place over the course of centuries.

Islam-centrism

While in the above-mentioned works, the impact of Indonesia-centrism is especially great, elsewhere we can see the emergence of what I would categorize as ‘Islam-centrism’, and which is a direct reaction to the Indonesia-centric historiography. Like any other ‘centrism historiography’, Islam-centrism focuses on Islam and other related elements, and situates these at the center of the historical stage. As the following publications under review reveal, Islam-centric textbooks make use of the nationalist’s construction of national history either by minimizing ‘Indonesia’ and emphasizing Islam or by placing Islam at the center of the historical narrative.

Sejarah Nasional Indonesia: Perspektif Baru (SNI-PB, Indonesian national history: a new perspective) provides a good example of Islam-centric historiography. Andalusia Islamic Education and Management Services, in cooperation with Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII, Council for Islam Propaganda in Indonesia) and Ibn Khaldun University in Bogor (www.uika-bogor.ac.id), has published this textbook for high school students. Unfortunately it is not known how much the SNI-PB is actually used. I assume it has been used in the high schools that fall under the auspice of DDII and Ibn Khaldun University.

The periodization structure of this textbook echoes that of the standard national history textbook.6 But, unlike the standard national history textbook which attempts to legitimize the existence of the Indonesian state, this textbook presents narratives and argumentation in an attempt to legitimize the existence and dominance of Islam in the making of it. On the prehistorical origin of Indonesian men, for example, this textbook completely rejects Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution that has been employed by standard national historiography to underline the archeological findings at the Sangiran and Ngandong sites. The reason given is ‘all Darwinian scholars are atheists’ and ‘do not know Adam was the first man on earth according to Koran’ (Vol. 1, pp. 24–6).

6 Judging from the structure of the periods, this book should consist of three volumes. Volume 1 covers the prehistory period up to the development of Islamic kingdoms, Volume 2 from the emergence of colonialism to the national awakening. Unfortunately, Volume 3—presumably from the Second World War to the New Order—is not yet written (see the Editorial Preface).
The authors recognize the influence and spread of Hinduism and Buddhism, but put forward the idea that ‘Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms fell apart because of moral decadence like corruption and injustice, for which Islam easily gained influence’ (p. 35). They express their doubt about the glory of Majapahit Kingdom on the grounds that no historical evidence, except for what the authors categorize as a chronicle (babad), supports its claim (p. 60). The authors refute the standard historiographical account that sees Hindu and Buddhist literacy as a primary indicator of the Indonesian shift from prehistory to history. Their argument is that the Hindu and Buddhist literacy can only be found in the form of inscriptions (prasasti) and among religious elites, not in paper texts and among the general commoners. The Indonesian period of history, they argue, began from Islam, which ‘by very nature of the teachings of Koran had introduced literacy since its first coming to the Indonesian islands’ (pp. 67–9). They continue by saying that those who wrote on the episode of Hinduism and Buddhism did so only after they had met Muslim scholars (p. 69) and that all the stories about the greatness of Hindu and Buddhist civilization, as seen in the material heritage like Prambanan and Borobudur temples, ‘were created by Dutch Orientalists in order to bury the facts about the glory of Islam’ (pp. 70–1).

It is not just any Islam that the authors defend when they deal with the Islamic period of Indonesian history. They create categories that amount to an argument for a ‘true Islam’. All elements besides Islam are challenged, negated, or simply ignored. The influence of prehistory, as well as the deep roots of Hindu and Buddhist civilizations in Indonesia are flatly denied and dismissed with the extraordinary statement that ‘it is not supported by historical evidence’ (pp. 39–41). According to the authors, Hindu and Buddhist temples are not ‘purely Indonesian in character’ (p. 71). Unlike mosques, they are just ‘dead heritage’ (p. 74). Meanwhile, any affairs connected to the European presence in Indonesia are identified as ‘colonialist, secular, Western, and liberal’, which all count ‘against Islam’. According to the authors, the only justified Islam in Indonesia is Sunni Islam, which, they argue, came directly from the Arab peninsula to the west coast of Sumatra in the thirteenth century and to the north coast of Java in the fifteenth century. The authors degrade any account which suggest that it could have been traders from India, Iran, or China that brought Islam to Indonesia (pp. 74–84).

Finally, in the later parts of the textbook, the authors argue that not all the Muslim Indonesian men and women who struggled for Indonesian independence were truly Muslim/Islamic nationalists. Soekarno, Wahidin Sudirrohusodo, and Ki Hadjar Dewantoro are categorized as secular and not Islamic nationalists because of the Western influence on their thinking (Volume 2, p. 59). The authors describe Raden Ajeng Kartini, a Javanese noble woman who
is considered a female modernist in Indonesia-centric historiography, as ‘very much influenced by Western feminism’ because she ‘refused [Islam] religious teachings on polygamy, [the superior position of] men over women’ (p. 53). On explaining Pancasila as the ideology of the Indonesian state upon which the country’s founding fathers agreed, the authors write it is ‘a clear proof of secularism, which is purely Western-made and was brought to Indonesia by Christian people, nobleman elites, and European educated Indonesians’ (p. 51).

Overall, the authors of this textbook copy the structure of the standard national history. But, instead of digging into the nationalists’ idea, they make their own version of Islam the main (and only) subject and actor of the historical arena and events. The coming and development of Islam to the Indonesian islands is described as ‘good and peaceful’, whereas that of the other civilizations, especially European and Christian, as ‘coercive and intolerant’ (SNI-PB Vol. 2, p. 35). However, in justifying the wars that the Islamic kingdoms could have waged in order to extend their political and economic power, the authors defend their position on the ‘peaceful coming and development of Islam’ by saying that Islam had to be supported by wars and power politics in order to gain influence and control over the people and the archipelago (SNI-PB Vol. 1, p. 108). Throughout the texts, the authors build arguments on false or fake premises, though their positions are taken seriously due to the way they resonate ideologically.

*Api Sejarah* (AS) is another example of a textbook that carries an Islam-centric perspective. The AS uses the ‘typical’ periodization of the standard national history, especially from the periods of the coming of Islam to the Indonesian national awakening, movement and independence. This periodization is ‘copied’ from the SNI as a framework in order for the author to focus on the role and contribution of Islamic or Islam-related events, leading figures, people, and institutions in the making of Indonesia and on being Indonesian. Thus, in discussing the Indonesian national awakening, for example, the AS merely discusses the roles of Indonesian Islamic leaders and organizations, while emphasizing their attribute as Moslems rather than as Indonesians. In other words, the AS has the same periodization as that of the SNI but its contents deal merely with Islam and issues that glorify Islam.

*AS* begins with a chapter on the Islamic resurrection and its impact, followed by its coming and development in the archipelago. The rest of the chapters explore Islam and Islamism throughout the nationalist-made periods of Indonesian history: from the armed struggles against Western imperialism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to the nationalist awakening in the early twentieth century up to independence, to Soeharto’s New Order and beyond.
In general, I find the AS narrative extensive but unconvincing. Its argumentation is weaker than that of the SNI-PB although it deals with historical events and facts in detail. Although the narrative rambles a lot, this textbook has emerged from a deep commitment to counter the Indonesia-centric history that has marginalized the position and role of Islam. As stated in the preface, the standard national historiography has ‘de-Islamized’ Indonesia and does not accord a timely space and perspective for Islam given its great impact on the nation-state today (AS Vol. 1, pp. xix–xx).

Concluding Remarks

Thanks to the democratization of the Indonesian society following the fall of Soeharto’s New Order, Indonesian historians have enjoyed the freedom of expression in their scholarly exploration and thinking. Despite the historians’ best wishes, this new atmosphere has not fundamentally changed the way the national history of the country is presented. The post-New Order historiography has not progressed beyond Indonesia-centrism, that is, the nationalists’ post-independence retrospective approach in re-presenting the past. The nation is understood as a fixed and static entity with little room for a plurality of voices, and no attempt is made to situate Indonesia in a wider context of global connections, or relations with its Southeast Asian neighbors. Although a broader scope of topics is now explored, the perspective is built upon the legitimacy of a rigidly imagined Indonesian nation-state. Consequently, national history is framed around predictable and agenda-driven narratives. One of these frames is Islam.

Islam-centric historiography emerges as a direct counter to the prevalent Indonesia-centric historiography. As the editors of SNI-PB put it, ‘the teaching of Indonesian history has not provided a space and perspective worth enough for the enduring role and participation of Islam. It gives the impression that Islam was not a determining and primary factor in the making of Indonesia today. The history of Islam in Indonesia has been treated as a separate subject from the national history of Indonesia’ (SNI-PB Vol. 1–2, p. V). In the Islam-centric approach, Indonesian history has been about nothing but Islam. In this sense, the failure of the Indonesia-centric historiography (Bambang Purwanto 2006) to recognize different elements that together have contributed to the making of Indonesia and Indonesian identity, is once again repeated.

The rationale for Islam-centric historiography may also be understood in the context of the post-Soeharto Islamic revival, in which contestation of discourses is mushrooming thanks to the growing spirit of democracy in Indonesia.
Regardless of this new spirit, Indonesian history writers today seem merely to return to the path of colonial historiography in the sense that they make history a tool for biased policy, emphasizing the central role of a particular group of people, instead of constructing the past critically. Thus for more than a hundred years the historiography of Indonesia has been trapped in a perspective that swings from one extreme to another, centred on Dutch colonial, Indonesian national, or Islamic narratives.

Despite the recent popularity of ‘centric’ historiography in Indonesia, only a limited number of historians since 1998 have carried out the actual work of producing a ‘new’ history. This might indicate that fewer historians than expected have indeed employed a perspective that encompasses the older path of historiography. This includes but is not limited to the academic historians who praise the idea of a people-oriented daily life history. Although these historians are all seeking for new perspectives and methodology in writing Indonesian history, it does not necessarily mean that their shared efforts have resulted in a new prototype of history textbooks.

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