Since the end of the New Order regime in Indonesia in 1998, there has been wide variation in the way different social groups have responded to the challenge of re-examining sources of knowledge about the past and the narration of past events. The writing of Indonesian history according to the dictates of New Order orthodoxy has undergone a sustained process of response, reinterpretation and even rejection, resulting in the publication of large numbers of new books on historical themes (Schulte Nordholt, Purwanto and Saptari 2008, 20). Many aspects of the New Order’s version of the past have been subjected to questioning and redefinition, not only through the publication of books, but also through the development of new community-based spaces and media technologies. For 32 years, the New Order exercised tight control over opportunities for discussion and debate on the construction of the past among competing social groups. It successfully limited and contained the sources that legitimated the narration of the past, and instituted a centralist, militarist and eschatological method for the writing of Indonesian history. The hegemony exercised by the state in this area produced a uniform view of the past that tended to focus on the logic of developmentalism, integrating competing sources of knowledge and ways of narrating the past into a single national narrative of the Indonesian nation and its people.

In this chapter, I discuss an experiment with the writing of history that was carried out by kampung neighbourhoods in Yogyakarta in the climate of ‘openness’ that followed the fall of the New Order in 1998. This experiment is a revealing example of the way social groups create their own histories. It presents opportunities for examining the continuing influence of New Order orthodoxy on the way kampung people view history, but it also invites consideration of the extent to which these communities position themselves between official state narratives and their everyday knowledge and practices.

1 Among other ways, state control over the legitimation of the past was maintained through the state’s hold over the writing of history texts used in schools (Schulte Nordholt, Purwanto and Saptari 2008, 11–17).

2 The complex interpretations and associations of the term ‘kampung’, basically ‘urban neighbourhood’, are discussed below.
The particular focus of the discussion is a project entitled ‘Babad Kampung’ (Neighbourhood Histories), part of the twentieth Yogyakarta Festival of Arts in 2008. As a window on the dynamics of present-day kampung communities, the Babad Kampung project illustrates the ways in which the past is being contested and negotiated in the post-1998 climate. It shows the kampung communities of Yogyakarta engaged in a process of reviewing, writing and performing their own individual local histories.

The diversity and complexity of Indonesian social geography in the post-Suharto period often leads to a simplification and narrowing of vision that produces reactionary responses to political and social dynamics. For example, the practice and discourse of decentralization that arose in response to the centralization of power under Suharto and the New Order may take a reactionary form underpinned by a narrow fundamentalism. Henley and Davidson (2010, 2) observe that “the great experiment with reform has in fact produced a re-discovery – or a re-creation – of regulations and identities sourced from the former practices of particular kampung, ethnic groups and sultanates.” Across Indonesia, various groups and communities seem to have revived traditional bonds of ethnicity, district and region as a form of response and reaction to post-New Order developments. On another level, the movement for decentralization or localization is not only a negation of the former regime’s power, but in many ways it is also a reaction to the dynamics of globalization, the disappearance of the local into the vortex of the global. It is becoming increasingly clear that post-New Order Indonesia is witnessing the incorporation of local communities into the market transactions made possible by global transnationalism, in which the Indonesian state is one of many actors.

As an event performed in the post-New Order context, the Babad Kampung project reveals the identity of the kampung as a term, as a place and as a location, presented on the urban stage within the networks of global traffic and the shared working practices of the urban population. It represented a move towards the ‘decentralization’ or localization of specific local histories within the mainstream framework of Indonesian history according to the New Order model. In another sense, it was an expression of local identity – in terms of both place and community – in the context of globalization. The project was programmed in the 2008 Yogyakarta Festival of Arts as a major event, showcasing the festival theme of ‘The Past is Always New’ and signalling a decisive break with previous festivals in its managerial structure (such as its organizational

3 The writer, Yoshi Fajar Kresno Murti, acted as coordinator of the Babad Kampung project.
4 Compare the interesting analysis of the role of the state as a hired strongman in the global context overseeing social life within its borders in Wibowo (2010, 23–81).