

**PUBLIC HISTORY: AN EFFORT TO INCREASE INDONESIAN  
HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMI**

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**ABSTRACT**

The writing of public history has become one of the methods of history that have developed and are in great demand. The difference between history in general and public history is the selection of groups that are used as research sources. Through this research, the author find that public history can be used as a way to raise historical consciousness in Indonesia. Historical Consciousness relates to thinking of ourself in time as historical beings and being aware of belonging to a specific group with a particular history and identity. The current global pandemic presents a challenge for historians. Documenting the history at the time the event was still taking place was a challenge in itself since no one knew how the end of the event was written. Public history has been widely used in European countries to record daily life and events that occurred in society during the pandemic. The historical sources collected from the public will play an important role on writing the historical event and also as a lesson in the future. The method used in this paper is a historical method consisting of 4 stages, namely heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and then historiography.

**KEYWORDS:** Public History, History, COVID-19 Pandemic, Historical Consciousness

**INTRODUCTION**

Historical consciousness is often cited as an important part of social life. Hilmar Farid said that developing historical consciousness is something that must be done to build the nation's future. History itself has two functions, namely intrinsic and extrinsic functions. According to

Kuntowijoyo, he divides the function into 4 things which are history as a science, history as a way of knowing the past, history as a way of expressing opinions and history as a profession. As for the extrinsic functions of history, Kuntowijoyo also divide it into 10 different functions. Those 10 functions are moral education, reasoning education, political education, policy education, change education, future education, beauty education, auxiliary science for other disciplines, evidence or justification, background and references (Kuntowijoyo, 2001).

According to Hans-Georg Gadamer, historical consciousness is the epistemological condition of modern man and that it was the most important development in the last 500 years. He considers historical consciousness as the ability to be fully conscious of the fact that everything around us is historical and, consequently, that everything is relative to this fact, this historicity (Thorp, 2014). Historical consciousness enables us to critically assess the circumstances around us and enables us to attain the "right" knowledge. Different experts have different opinions regarding the notion of historical consciousness. John Lucaks believes that historical consciousness focuses on memory and deals with historical events. (John & Russell, 2017) Furthermore, LM. Paska explained that historical consciousness is not limited to memories of the past but how it interprets events in the past.

Soedjatmoko saw that historical consciousness is not only related to one's attitude but also about how one can face reality by using present, past, and future perspectives. According to A.B Lapien, historical consciousness is a purification of history where it focuses on the basic studies of what, who, when, where, and why. This shows that Soedjatmoko sees that historical consciousness is related to the importance and usefulness of history as a study of the past and has a direct connection with the present and future, whereas AB Lapien focuses more on historical consciousness as an event and science, such as understanding historical theory and methodology used in historical science.

We all know that in recent months the COVID-19 pandemic has hit various countries around the world, including Indonesia. The covid-19 pandemic has led to major changes to the world order, especially in the areas of health, economy and social life with a very short period of time. The COVID-19 pandemic does not only affect a country as a whole, this pandemic also affects each individual differently. The COVID-19 pandemic will be an event that will be remembered by the public considering its huge impact and a historical event in the future. As a historical event, this pandemic period will go through a historiography process, a process of writing history based on sources that have gone through criticism. The use of different sources will result in different points of view in writing. Given some of the extrinsic functions of history as lessons for the future, it would be very good if the historiography of this pandemic could be written from various points of view. The public will save their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic as a collective memory. It is this collective memory belonging to the community that can be written as a history based on a public point of view which until now is still often missing

from the writing of Indonesian history. This use of public history can open new perspectives in historiography in Indonesia. Public involvement in writing history can also foster a sense of belonging to history, considering that this event was experienced directly by the community.

Based on the description above, this study aims to examine how public history can increase historical consciousness in Indonesia, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The application of public history itself has been widely used in several countries to complete the gaps in historiography. The use of public history is also accompanied by the aim of creating a sense of historical consciousness that exists in each individual. Something that might be considered a normal thing that happens at this time can be an interesting lesson in the future. Likewise, a pandemic that is happening at this time will be a lesson for the community in the future.

This study uses the historical method which is divided into 4 stages, namely heuristics, source criticism, interpretation and historiography (Notosusanto, 1971: 17-24). The author makes a critique of the physical and validity of sources and data that have been obtained through heuristic stages. Furthermore, internal criticism in which the writer sorts out data and sources in accordance with their relevance to the research theme. After making a critique, the writer makes the third stage, interpretation. The author looks back at historical data and sources and establishes their meaning and relation to the facts. The last stage of the historical method used by the writer is historiography where the writer must compile and write the historical event in complete writing. Criticism sources are used to see the source authenticity and level of credibility. Source criticism is an attempt to assess, examine to know its quality, and filter and select the collected sources to obtain the original and trustworthy source of its truthfulness. The main purpose of source criticism is to select and inspect data, until the fact is obtained. The facts acquired are then analyzed and then interpreted according to the chronology. Interpretation is to capture and explain the facts that have been tested in truth, then analyse the sources that will eventually produce a series of events that take place. In this stage the author is required to observe and reveal the facts acquired and the relationship between one fact with the other facts then make the sequence of events which need the principle in the sorting of time, and connect separate events into a series of historical events (Gottschalk, 1975 : 33-40).

### **Defining Public History**

Memories as memories of the past will always be used in dealing with problems or as a consideration in decision making in the future. Currently the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as part of the United Nations which is engaged in education, science, and culture is running a program called the memory of the world. Starting from consciousness of the condition of preservation and access to the world's historical documented heritage, UNESCO started the memory of the world program in 1992. War, social

upheaval, and resource shortages are long-standing problems in the world. Some important collections belonging to certain countries or institutions are often the victims of these problems. One of the official Indonesian agencies participating in this program is the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia. ("Memory of the World", 2020)

The study of memory is not something new to history. Over the years, historians have studied memories to find out changes that have occurred, for example, the government employs historical analogies in making public policy. What distinguishes the study of memory that existed in the past and that which is carried out now is not the problem being studied but the approach used. Past studies mostly attempt to describe the beliefs of a group or an institution about their past. Recently, the approach used is more to understand the interrelationship between various versions of history according to the public. In this sense, the recent study of memory has expanded the kind of discussion included in traditional historiography, presenting the professional study of history not only as history but as one of many existing studies in societies compete for influence. the public at a certain time and place. (Glassberg, 1996)

Recently, the writing of public history has become one of the historical methods that have been developed and in demand. In its application, the theory and methodology used in writing history in general. Most universities, which have public history programs, teach history as usual before adding training to practice public history. In contrast to writing history in general, public history has a lot to do with and collaborate with the public, officials, and other groups. The important thing to underline from public history is the cooperation with non-historian groups. What distinguishes history in general and public history is the selection of groups that are used as research sources. The term public history itself was introduced in the 1970s. The emergence of public history itself is considered as an impact of the rift between historians regarding the sources used in historical writing. If explained in simple terms, public history refers to the use of the historical method by historians outside of academic history writing such as for government, museums, society, and the private sector. (Cauvin, 2018)

In the United States, the practice of public history itself has been practiced since the early 19th century when white people volunteered to give their time to tell stories about their society, historical objects, and places. The central government at that time was involved in writing history, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries. Many museums exist which are the result of government and community collaboration. They invite people to participate in interpreting, maintaining, and preserving the history they have through the museum. Many of the people involved in the program are part of academic historians who are also part of the American Historical Association. The development of technology also influenced the storage of research resources at that time, such as using micro-films. This gave rise to a new specialization in either archiving or historical writing. During this period historians also began to be divided into academic historians and those who practiced public history. The absence of the term public history at that time caused what was done

at that time to be referred to as part of "applied history". (Brennan, 2016)

Public history as a term and a new concept emerged in the United States around the 1970s. Almost all western countries experience the same thing where there has been an expansion of interpretation in history which includes the oral history movement, as a method that encourages wider coverage for historical projects involving certain communities. The term "public history" which is widely known and practiced today was invented by Robert Kelley at the University of California. The development of Public History with this new concept gave birth to a journal which is the official publication of the National Council for Public History with its headquarters at the University of California. The emergence of this public history is also an impact of the global economic depression that has occurred which has reduced employment in the academic field which has led to a reduction in the number of doctoral students. This is also the case with historians where there are too many historians for little employment. (Cauvin, 2018)

There are many differences of opinion in defining what public history is. Initially, the National Council of Public History defined public history as a movement, methodology, and approach that encourages the collaborative study and historical practice; historians have a mission to make their views public and useful for the public (Zündorf, 2017). This is questionable considering that public history may indeed have been a movement in 1970, but in the following era, public history became a field of study in various countries such as Germany and the US.

Public history is defined according to its context, as a scientific discipline, public history focuses on understanding how history is made and interpreted in the wider community. It has been defined as 'a historical practice by academically trained historians who worked for a public institution or as freelancers outside the university'. As a practice, public history means doing history for and with the public. Public history as a scientific discipline or as a practice both has the same focus on the public.

The birth and development of public history coincided with the evolving role of historians. Although the term 'public history' was first used in the 1970s in the United States, public history as a retrospect of the use of historical communication developed in various countries with different contexts. Public practice in history is not something new in history and as many of the historians admit that they have done public history without realizing it. Public history has succeeded in developing in various countries due to the various contexts and definitions of public history itself. The definition of public history has undergone several changes. Although the use and application of history are still centered on the practice of public history, there are many broader and more varied definitions offered by researchers of public history. This makes it easier for historians to communicate history with the wider community as a way of validating academic research. (Cauvin, 2018)

### **Historical Consciousness and Public History**

Historical consciousness is something that only humans have and therefore humans are often referred to as historical beings. Humans can tell history about themselves because humans themselves understand the related concept "at a time" (Aisiah et al., 2016). A nation that has no historical consciousness is a nation that has no identity. Therefore, historical consciousness must always exist in every citizen. From several descriptions of the understanding of historical consciousness in the introduction section, it can be seen that historical consciousness exists in each individual. This is a condition when an individual remembers a historical event and the meaning of the event he has experienced. Every individual must have a relationship with historical events both large and small. This is following the opinion expressed by Carl Becker, everyone is a historian for themselves.

Although historical consciousness arguably has to start with knowing historical facts, historical consciousness is not only limited to knowing historical facts. Knowledge of historical facts and memory of historical facts does not guarantee historical consciousness. Historical consciousness includes several aspects, namely: first, knowledge of historical facts and their casual relationships; second, filling our minds with logic; third, increasing our conscience with wisdom and wisdom to face the present and future by studying and reflecting on past experiences. Historical consciousness itself is a state of mind which is the power to be active in the dynamic process of history. Historical consciousness itself can also be a driving force for development (Ismail., 1990).

Human history can be constructed into various types, such as the history of an individual, local history, social history, or even the history of a nation. In writing history, it will be impossible not to include the interaction of the research subject with the environment and the people around him (Frimannsson, 2017). One aspect of the definition of historical consciousness according to Karl-Ernst Jeismann is that historical consciousness combines the relationship between past interpretation, present understanding, and future perspectives. He also emphasized that historical consciousness is the ability to create connections between the past, present, and future that is owned by an individual. In its application, one's historical consciousness is a tool to create meaning in history. The historical consciousness of an individual allows them to see patterns in history, not only as a collection of unrelated events (Thorp, 2014).

In Indonesia, historical consciousness is often reflected in love for the homeland and nationalism. According to Taufik Abdulah, historical consciousness can be seen from two features, namely those originating from the regional concept of history which is ethnic-cultural in nature as well as a national concept that is growing and being cultivated. Historical consciousness is the consciousness that the past is history, where history is based on truth and not on mythology. Soedjatmoko explained that historical consciousness is an attitude of the soul and a way to confront



reality, with social reality, in today's perspective, from the perspective of the past, and the perspective of the future at the same time. Furthermore R.Z. Leirissa explained that true consciousness is an understanding of the nature of historical studies, namely the consciousness that history is a dialogue in three dimensions. The first dimension is the dialogue between the historian and his historical sources; the second is historians with other historians and the third is historians and society. A historical consciousness can be achieved by socializing historical studies to society. Historical consciousness also cannot be separated from the socio-cultural and community context according to T. Ibrahim Alfian. (Ayatrohaedi & Widdyastuti, 2012)

Historical consciousness also embodies a national personality where historical consciousness is an intellectual orientation that is needed to understand the national personality. Historical consciousness can also guide humans in understanding themselves as part of a nation. Historical consciousness is not something static, but it can experience changes and differences. (Ayatrohaedi & Widdyastuti, 2012) Historical consciousness is also important because it is not only questioning the origin which strengthens feelings that can sharpen the view in and out of social unity, but it is also important to strengthen the urge to achieve common goals after learning from past experiences. Another interesting thing is that history as a story in the past depends on the present. What is meant by depending on the present is that a historian does not face this reality alone, the task of a historian is to deal with the remnants of past events in the form of facts in the form of statements, symbols, and existing realities. Historians are tasked with explaining these facts, and in interpreting them, they must be influenced by the present. (Ayatrohaedi & Widdyastuti, 2012)

The fall of the New Order in Indonesia was an era that brought back historical consciousness, marked by the emergence of community organizations, non-governmental organizations, historical groups, and publishers that published historical works that were previously banned. This freedom that was owned by the public began to give birth to a public history where history began to become part of society and not only from the government's point of view. (Brahmantyo, 2017) History as a people's identity has begun to be presented again. The consciousness that the past is a part that shapes society today. Efforts to take advantage of history as part of identity are carried out by re-exploring the memories stored in society. Two important elements that are often found in writing public history are the involvement of ordinary people and the involvement of people who do not have academic abilities in carrying out historiography. In practice, neither party becomes the dominant party and makes this history a shared history. Broadly speaking, public history can be called history for the public, about the public, and by the public. (Cole, 1994) Public history has the aim of restoring historical goodwill to society which can only be achieved through the cooperation of historians and society. The scope of the public in public history is very broad. The public referred to in this scope can be individuals, groups of people, media, schools, research institutes, campuses, companies, and others. (Hanggoro, 2012)

Public history is broad in scope and the methods vary widely. Nonetheless, public history has a distinctive feature, namely that the involvement of the public is to restore and maintain the collective memory that is owned by the public. This involvement is also an effort to build historical consciousness in society. Public history will always go hand in hand with public collective memory and this collective memory will influence the formation of identity. Sources that are used in public history research can be obtained from archives, oral history, and places where historical events occur, either public or historians.

### **Using Public History**

In doing so, there have been several different approaches to public history. The first approach is public history that is driven from the bottom up (bottom-up). This is usually done not with initiation from professional historians but with the public first. The second approach is the opposite of the first approach where this approach is a top-down approach which is usually initiated by certain institutions such as museum managers. The third approach is a research and research-based approach. Public histories using this method may be projects driven by universities, academics, or historians. These three methods can be found in Indonesia and the use of this approach can be adapted to the objectives of each study. (Sayer, 2017)

Public involvement in writing history cannot be done without assistance from historians. The use of public history must still go hand in hand with the use of the historical methodology in general where criticism of the incoming sources remains to be done. In this case, historians as experts do not have exclusive rights over an event in the past, and sharing authority is commonplace in public history. There is recognition from historians to the public who are involved in the process of public history itself following the objectives of public history, namely, to return history to the public and foster a sense of ownership of the history of an event. Public history also makes invisible parts of historical events visible. (Hammond, 1996)

For example, in an article by Barbara J. Howe on the history of women in America. According to him, the role of women in history is often forgotten and history has been dominated by politics and men. The development of public history in America has generated an interest in the history of women in America. In her writing, she describes the steps she took in writing about the role of women in American history. The first step is to find out what achievements and achievements of women leaders in the past that have brought changes to women in general or their groups. In the next stage, to describe how the role of women amid events that is thick with a political atmosphere and full of men's roles, he takes the point of view of the people around the related figures which he thinks will be more illustrated. how the changes are brought about. According to him, this step is important considering what experienced by women describes the history of women from the perspective of women themselves. According to him, this step can also



increase women's consciousness of their history. The groups of women he studied were not only limited to playing a certain role in a certain period but also brought changes for the better for the lives of American women in the future. (Howe & Bannan, 1996)

In Indonesia, history writing by involving public groups has been done in several cases. An example is a book *Ladang Hitam Di Dewa Island: The 1965 Massacre in Bali* by I Ngurah Suryawan. This book is one of the books that detail the impact of massacres on murderers and victims and describes the locations where the massacres took place. In his book, he wrote how the sources he got said that most of the killings originated from the military, which lists the names of those who have been killed. Another example is when a PNI leader who was charged with the low sentence of 3 years for rape was suddenly killed. Before he was killed, rumors spread that the leader was a PKI, so he was killed because he was a PKI member, not on the charges of rape. Not only that, he explained in his book the stories of the massacres that were not widely discussed, such as those in the Candikusuma area. The killings are usually carried out where the citizens are gathered in the field and slaughtered before the bodies are allowed to be washed away. There was also a massacre that was carried out in a shop owned by China, where blood from the victim was found pooling, which eventually burned the building. From the testimonies of residents, it is stated that they often heard voices from the place where the massacre had been carried out. (Vickers, 2010) It can be seen that the use of public history can raise parts of the story that are sometimes not written down in historical research in general.

The development of technology has also had an impact on writing history, including public history. Digital media is one of the places for the public to share, store, and notify historical events that happened to them, as has been done by public historians in general. Basically, in public history, there is no theoretical difference in the implementation of traditional public history or using assistive media such as digital media. The use of digital media such as websites that are specially designed to collect data is not new, but it is very helpful in writing history, especially public history.

An example of using digital media websites as a place for people to share what they know from an incident is on a website created by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to reconstruct the stories of children who are victims of the Holocaust. The museum collects information from people around the world through an online database they have created which allows them to understand more about the lives of children in the areas where the events took place. The data that was collected was then checked and managed into a data bank regarding the children who were victims of the incident. The results of the research can be accessed by the public interested in knowing more about the victims. A dedicated community section also provides a column for comments from people looking for their families who may have been victims of this incident.

Another example of using website digital media as a place to collect and share stories about

experiences of an event can also be seen on the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank. This site was created in 2005 and was created especially for those who experienced hurricanes Katrina and Rita. This site was created in collaboration with several institutions, namely George Mason University, University of New Orleans, and the Smithsonian Institutions National Museum of American History. This site collects resources related to the experiences of those who experienced hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Not only that, collecting sources directly from those who experienced these events is expected to help historians reconstruct history in detail using the sources collected by the community. The results of the historiography will also be widely accessible to the public from various generations, both now and in the future. The sources collected on this site are photographs, stories of experiences, oral history, videos and there is also a map of the distribution of the two storms.

The use of digital media in archiving is also used to collect data about everyday life during the COVID-19 pandemic. In times like this, documentation becomes more important than usual. COVID-19 will end one day, how this event will be remembered depends on how we store memories regarding COVID-19. This pandemic brought many changes in various fields around the world. Various document-filing projects during a pandemic are undertaken to collect as much and as complete a data as possible on life during a pandemic. A project hashtag #covidstreetarchive implemented in Australia originated from a historian who studied the Influenza Pandemic that occurred in the early 20th century. Through this hashtag, he hopes that this can make it easier for historians to reconstruct life during the pandemic in the future.

Several websites were also opened to gather various experiences during the pandemic period in various regions, one of which is A Journal of the Plague Year. On this site, thousands of stories from various parts of the world are collected. The documentation collected is very diverse, ranging from sharing with medical personnel and officers looking after the situation to a great grandmother who uses the zoom app to meet her granddaughter who is in a different country and cannot visit her due to the pandemic. Not a few posts also discussed how COVID-19 changed their daily lives, such as how social distancing took place around them and changes that occurred such as additional procedures for surgery. Apart from A Journal of the Plague Year, there is also a website specifically created to document the experiences of people in Milwaukee living their daily lives during a pandemic. This website is a project of the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. As with other websites, on this website, the people of Milwaukee share the changes that have occurred during the pandemic in their area.

Even though in Indonesia there is no special website or special project that collects people's experiences during the pandemic period, not a few people either consciously or unconsciously contributed to documenting their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many photos relating to people's experiences during the pandemic were shared on social media along with short stories about these photos. On various social media, COVID-19 patients who have successfully

recovered share their writings about their experiences as patients starting from the initial verdict to recovery. This post was made to increase public consciousness of the dangers of COVID-19 itself. The stories shared are mostly in the form of experiences of those who have successfully recovered from COVID-19. In the story that was shared, it was written how they got COVID-19 from the beginning, how the isolation and treatment they did before they finally recovered. Not only patients, several medical personnel who are on duty in the hospital, and face-to-face with patients share experiences and changes that have occurred in their work environment considering that hospitals are the most affected places from this pandemic. Most of the stories they write are parts that sometimes escape media coverage. Some people also have started writing about their daily lives after seeing people share their experiences on social media. From the experiences shared by the community in the future, it will be very useful for historiography during COVID-19 pandemic.

## **CONCLUSION**

Viewed from the definition of public history, it can be concluded that anyone can write a history about each one considering that each individual is part of the defined public. Something called history does not have to be a major event. There are still many historical events that are not recorded or are not known because they are not recorded and reported. In this case, one way to write or rediscover history is to involve the public. The existence of cooperation between people who are part of the public can lead to a more complete history writing with varied perspectives.

One of the events that will become history in the future is the events that occurred during the pandemic that we are currently experiencing. Many changes have occurred in various fields such as education, social life, and of course the economy. This change occurs not only in one or two countries but throughout the world, including Indonesia itself. The pandemic also presents a new challenge to the writing of historiography during the COVID-19 pandemic given the many changes caused by this pandemic. Writing a history about the events that occurred during this pandemic will be more complete if it involves how the community itself lived through it. Community involvement can increase consciousness of the history of each individual. They are not telling about other people but about their histories of being part of the events surrounding the pandemic. As happens in many foreign countries, history writing has worked a lot with the community regarding an event.

Community involvement in historical writing, in future history writing, can be more relevant to the public considering that historiography is written by taking a public point of view. By engaging the public in the writing of public history will bring new sides in the historiography regarding the events surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only having a new side of historiography, the involvement of the community in writing history during this pandemic can

create a sense of belonging to history considering that the history is written is an event directly related to them. Not only can it raise awareness of the history of the community, with the more relevant a history writing will also be more lessons that can be taken by the community from an event as it is one of the functions of history that is as an education for the future.

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