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## **‘Fake News’ about the Indonesian Past**

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After the fall of the authoritarian Soeharto Regime in 1998, new versions and theories about history emerged in Indonesia. Some of these, such as theories about the origins of the nationalist movement to overthrow Dutch colonial rule, were based on sources and arguments going back to the 1950s. The foundation of the nationalist movement has been a key point for ‘history wars’, revealing fault lines in the ways that citizens see themselves within the Indonesian nation. The case of the origins of the nationalist movement demonstrates how alternative versions of ‘truth’ can be mobilized for political ends. It also demonstrates how Islamic movements have re-centred themselves in Indonesian political and social life.

**Keywords:** Fake news, Indonesia, Islam, Sarekat Islam, Islamist, Budi Utomo, National Awakening

### **Introduction**

‘Fake news’ has been high in the minds of journalists, netizens and politicians since the term was first popularized by the former President of the United States, Donald Trump. For historians, truth in history is a foundation of the discipline’s claim to authority and standing as a public institution. In political arguments, truth is often less important than supporting interests or viewpoints. While historians recognize the contentious nature of claims about the past, teachers of history emphasize to their students the primacy of fidelity to evidence, including the need to accumulate as much as evidence as possible about a claim. How is it, then, that something that is most likely not true can become accepted as a ‘fact’

of Indonesian history, and what does that tell us about the politics of history in Indonesia? The case of the founding of the Indonesian nationalist movement provides insight into the processes by which claims are made and alternative versions of narratives come to be accepted as ‘true.’

Up until very recently, standard accounts of Indonesian history in Indonesian, English and Dutch sources identified the year of origin of the Indonesian nationalist movement as 1908. George Kahin’s major account, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*, was the product of research on Dutch and Indonesian sources, as well as interviews with many of the leading figures in the nationalist movement. It simply stated that ‘the first organized cultural-nationalist movement was launched between 1906 and 1908 through the efforts of ... Mas Wahidin Soediro Hoesodo’, who inspired students in the medical school in Batavia (STOVIA), notably Raden Soetomo and Raden Goenawan Mangoenkoesomo, by whose struggles ‘there was founded in October 1908, an organization called Boedi Oetomo (Pure Endeavour)’ (Kahin 2018, 64–65). In line with this standard account, Indonesia celebrates 20 October 1908 as the ‘Day of National Awakening’ (*Hari Kebangkitan Nasional*). In Indonesian interpretations of the day, the modern nationalism embodied in this moment led to the Indonesian nation being ‘restored’ after 300 years of Dutch rule (see Soeleiman 2008). Such interpretations were re-emphasized in conjunction with the centenary of Boedi Oetomo, which came a decade after the fall of the Soeharto regime.

In this standard account, the successor of Boedi Oetomo was Sarekat (also spelt Sjarekat or Syarekat) Islam, the Muslim Association or Muslim League, acknowledged by the majority of historical sources as the first mass political movement in Indonesia. Kahin and others date its founding to 1912 (Kahin 2018, 66). Indonesian history text books from recent years continue to support this chronology, providing the more detailed information that Sarekat Islam came out of organisations founded by two people, Haji Samanhudi in the city of Solo and Raden Mas Tirtoadisuryo of Bandung in 1909. These organisations were trade associations set up to challenge ethnic Chinese trade monopolies, particularly so for Haji Samanhudi’s organisation, Sarekat Dagang Islam (the Association of

Muslim Traders) (Ernawati and Ismawati 2009, 78). This dating is supported by multiple sources. US historian of the city of Solo, George Larsen, critically examined the Dutch sources in documenting the details of the early years of the development of nationalism in that city. The sources that Larsen investigated were based on information from one or more informants in Sarekat Islam, who said that Haji Samanhudi first became involved in organising when he became a member of Boedi Oetomo in 1909, before joining forces with Kong Sing, a renegade organisation of Chinese traders. After splitting with Kong Sing, Samanhudi and his followers then sought help from Tirtoadisuryo to turn their 'reksorumekso' (mutual guardianship) group into a formal branch of Tirto's Sarekat Dagung Islam (Larsen 1987, 38–39).

For those familiar with this account, it is surprising to see how publications coming from a new generation of Indonesian postgraduate scholars have emerged unchallenged. In these accounts, the order has been reversed: Boedi Oetomo was preceded by Sarekat Islam! To take one example, an article on resistance to colonialism published by two students in the *International Journal of Nusantara Islam* states categorically that Sarekat Dagang Islam was founded on 16 October 1905, equivalent to the Muslim Javanese date of Sha'bān 16, 1323 H, Legi Monday (Mustakif and Mulyati 2019, 8). The fact that the authors are students indicates that their supervisors and the editors of the journal in which they published had no problems with their statement of the founding date.

How, and why, should such a fundamental reversal, which also changes the sequence and explanations of Samanhudi's actions, have come to be accepted as an alternative 'fact'?

### **Centennial Disputes**

Discussion of the date of the founding of Sarekat Islam emerged in public in 2008, the centenary of Boedi Oetomo. That particular year saw a variety of articles in the media retelling the story of the 1908 founding and discussing its importance for the Indonesian nation. Such accounts focussed on the idea of 'rebirth' or 'reawakening' under the darkness of Dutch colonial rule (Soeleiman 2008).

Such praises for the importance of the day encountered a backlash. For example, according to one critical blogger writing at the time of the centenary, the date of 20 May 1908 as the beginning of the nationalist movement had become a commonplace of history, legitimized in textbooks, without reference to the facts:

The tendency to reprint this tradition of national awakening has implications in two areas: on the one side this recognition is the most popular and all sides wish to celebrate that popularity; yet on the other hand it's as if we've closed the debate about whether there are different facts which, viewed objectively, truly are closely connected with the moment of national awakening.

### **The Facts of the History of National Awakening that have been Marginalized**

It's common for us to hear that Highest Endeavour was recognized by the Dutch as the first nationalist movement, and this colonial legacy has, as a 'tradition,' succeeded in marginalising the reality that there is another version which has been proclaimed by activists from the Islamic movement, especially from the Greater Family of the Crescent Moon [Political Party], that the real truth is that SI [*Syarikat Islam*] which was founded on 16 October 1905 was the true motor of national awakening.<sup>1</sup>

The writer, Badrut Taman Gaffas, used the language of 'objectivity' to raise the status of the 'fact' of the 'real' nationalist movement. Specifically, by referring to it as '*hakikat*', a word of Arabic origin that refers to Divine Truth, Gaffas presented his view as having a higher, indeed unassailable, level of veracity. His account was backed by reference to a number of other sites, specifically linked to Muslim organisations.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The original of the last section is, '*Sudah lazim kita dengar bahwa Boedi Oetomo diakui oleh belanda sebagai organisasi kebangsaan pertama dan warisan penjajahan tersebut secara "tradisional" berhasil meminggirkan kenyataan bahwa ada versi lain yang disuarakan oleh aktivis – aktivis pergerakan Islam khususnya Keluarga Besar Bulan Bintang bahwa hakikatnya SI (Syarikat Islam) yang berdiri 16 Oktober 1905 adalah motor kebangkitan nasional yang sesungguhnya.*'

<sup>2</sup> 'Pergerakan Umat Islam Dalam Sejarah Nasional Indonesia,' *ICMImuda.org*, March 22, 2007. *Wayback Machine* <  
[http://web.archive.org/web/20181202062927/http://www.icmimuda.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=43&Itemid=33](http://web.archive.org/web/20181202062927/http://www.icmimuda.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=43&Itemid=33)>, '20 Mei Bukan Hari Kebangkitan Nasional,' *Swaramuslim.net*.  
*Wayback Machine* <  
<http://web.archive.org/web/20080416024151/http://swaramuslim.net/gallery/sejarah/index.php?page=harkitnas>>

Gaffas then established a genealogy of sources to show how Muslim publications had presented this ‘critical’ view, but been ignored or suppressed by the mainstream. His main authority was Kiai Haji (titles implying Muslim authority) Firdaus A.N., who turned out to be the main source for other writers he cited on this topic. The author of this blog went on to explain that Firdaus was a leader and Muslim writer who struggled to challenge the received wisdom in his 1997 book, *Syarikat Islam Bukan Budi Utomo: Meluruskan sejarah pergerakan bangsa (Muslim League Not Highest Endeavour: Correcting the History of the National Struggle)*. Gaffas regretted that this work was very difficult to obtain and observed that it deserved wider readership through re-publication and the internet. I eventually tracked down Firdaus’ book. It turned out on close reading to rely on circular arguments, *ad hominem* attacks on key Boedi Oetomo documenters, rhetorical flourishes and quotations from scripture that sought to give Sarekat Islam a theological foundation.

I had to trace the key evidence for the revision of the history of Boedi Oetomo through a variety of sources. The student article by Mustakif and Mulyati referred to a small publication by A.C. Rofiq which is a critique of the most recent attempt to create an authoritative account of Indonesian history. The history being criticized was *Indonesia dalam Arus Sejarah (Indonesia in the Course of History)*, the multi-volume product of a major revision by a large number of well-recognized Indonesian historians (Gunawan *et al.* 2012). Among the ‘errors’ Rofiq identified in his critique of the book was the date of the founding of Sarekat Islam. Rofiq was careful to explain that the date of the founding of Syarikat Dagang Islam on 16 October 1905 was preceded by the Arab ethnic association, Jamiat Khair, founded on 17 July 1905. He stated that Syarekat Dagang Islam’s 1905 founding was followed by the establishment of Sarekat Islam in 1906, thus further shifting key dates. Rofiq gave his main source as Haji Tamar Djaja, who was given the information directly by Samanhudi on 25 July 1955. This source, according to Rofiq, was confirmed by Mohammad Roem, an early nationalist leader and former prominent member of Sarekat Islam, who had led the negotiations with the Dutch for recognition of Indonesia’s sovereignty in 1949 (Rofiq 2016, 125). Rofiq’s cited source for this was *Api Sejarah (The Fire of*

*History*—or *History on Fire*) by a self-proclaimed ‘Muslim historian’, Ahmad Mansur Suryanegara (2009). The book-cover claimed, ‘This book will drastically change your view of Indonesian history’, and included a circular stamp asserting that the book was ‘stating that which is hidden and has been hidden away.’ Suryanegara in turn also mentioned his source as a book by Mohamad Roem, (2009: 373 n.68). Roem’s book, however, only mentioned the year of 1905 without giving a source, and did not refer to Samahudi by name (1972, 16).<sup>3</sup> The book was published by the Bulan Bintang (Crescent Moon) political group. Roem’s authority may have stemmed from his membership, but he was born in 1908, and so could not have been an eye-witness.

All of the references I have been able to trace via trains of citation go back to a series of newspaper articles, the longest of which was helpfully reprinted by Firdaus (1997, *lampiran 1*). This was by journalist Tamar Djaja, head of the Society of Muslim Writers, and originally published in the first issue of the newspaper *Daulah Islamiyah* in 1957. Djaja had interviewed the aged Samanhudi in 1955, a year before the latter’s death at the age of eighty-eight. Samanhudi provided the founding date and information on his background as a wealthy batik merchant from the Laweyan quarter in Solo. However, when Djaja knew him, Samanhudi was a poor and forgotten man. He split from Sarekat Islam in 1915 after a falling out with the chair, Cokroaminoto, and explained that this was the source of his misery. All of Samanhudi’s money had gone into the organisation, so that when he was expelled, he was left with nothing. His factories were taken over by ethnic Chinese merchants. His misery was slightly alleviated in the last two years of his life, when the Indonesian government granted him a pension for his service to the movement (1997, 37–42). Djaja’s article channelled Samanhudi’s sense of outrage.

Djaja himself (b. 1913) was an active politician in the Islamic party, Masyumi, particularly associated with the Bulan Bintang group. The name ‘Bulan Bintang’ was revived as a separate political party in 1998, after the fall of the Soeharto regime. Djaja’s early education in West Sumatra was in schools that

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<sup>3</sup> He provided the interesting information that in a 1916 demonstration, Sarekat Islam members were prevented by the Dutch authorities from using a Turkish flag.

followed the Wahabi reformist movement in Islam. He was active from the late 1930s onwards in publishing articles and booklets documenting nationalism and the role of Islam in Indonesia's national struggle, and by the 1950s was head of the publishing section of the Department of Religion, including being on the board of the magazines *Aliran Islam* (the Islamic Stream), *Al Islam* and *Anti-Komunis* (JejakIslam1 2015). It is likely that it was thanks to Djaja, who published a series of articles on the Islamic origins of the nationalist movement in the mid-1950s, that Samanhudi's pension was granted. These same articles led, in 1956, to a successor organisation to Sarekat Islam, Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia or PSII, claiming its fiftieth anniversary (Matanasi 2020). Firdaus, according to the bio-data on the back cover of his book, had been a member of Djaja's Society of Muslim Writers and the PSII and had been one of the writers with Djaja who had been active in the mid-1950s in advocating for greater recognition of Muslim leaders. The Djaja version of the founding of the nationalist movement circulated in the Muslim educational system of *pesantren* during the New Order era, but only re-emerged into wider public discussions after the fall of Soeharto in 1998.<sup>4</sup>

The respected historian of Islamic nationalism, Deliar Noer, was the first to raise questions about Djaja's account based on some of the newspaper articles. Noer claimed that he rechecked Tamar Djaja's assertion with Haji Samanhudi while he was still alive, and the latter denied it. Noer also implied that Samanhudi's mental health was in decline.<sup>5</sup> Deliar Noer further demonstrated through his own archival and oral history research that there was no evidence at all to support the 1905 date (Noer 1973, 102 note 2). He took Djaja to task over this in debates in the daily *Abadi* in 1957 (Matanasi 2020). Noer's writing is significant here, because he was a follower of Muhammadiyah, and represented its rationalist approach to Islam that could reconcile it with the social sciences. He was, as C. W. Watson observed in a commentary on Noer's biography, from the last generation of founding nationalists, with conservative views on Islam (Watson 2006, 163–165). Noer elsewhere said of the debate that Tamar Djaja,

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<sup>4</sup> Information from Nadirsyah Hosen, July 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Firdaus 1997, 12, refuted Noer's claims about Samanhudi's health by saying that he had been well enough to travel to Jakarta from Solo, and moreover must have been of sound mind because he could remember the details of the founding of Sarekat Islam. This is one example of Firdaus using circular arguments.



'just believed whatever Samanhoedi told him, and moreover promoted it' (Matanasi 2020). Djaja's claim for Samanhudi represented a position of one faction of conservatism Islam.

Samanhudi had a lot of reasons to make his claim. Along with a desire for recognition, he was also motivated by dislike of Tirtoadisuryo, and so wanted to play down the latter's role as a founder of nationalist activism that led to Sarekat Islam (Van Niel 1970, 10). At the same time as Samanhudi's role was being elevated by Muslim politicians, Tirto was being promoted on the left side of politics. One of the chief proponents of this elevation was the famous novelist, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, who had been carrying out research into early activists before his arrest during the anti-communist purges that began in 1965. After his release from prison in 1979, Pramoedya published a non-fiction version of the story of Tirto, while also fictionalising it by making Tirto the protagonist of his famous series of four novels, *Bumi Manusia (This Earth of Mankind)* (Pramoedya 2003). Pramoedya's advocacy reclaimed a radical heritage for Indonesian nationalism and located the origins of Indonesian nationalism in the modernity of the early twentieth century. Tirto's role as a hero of the left was not acceptable to anti-communist Muslim politicians who were strongly opposed to Pramoedya.

However, there is more to the debate than either settling old scores or right-wing antipathy towards Tirto. The publications promoting 1905 as the founding date of the nationalist movement also express antipathy to Boedi Oetomo (and ignore Larsen's evidence that Samanhudi had been a member!). By asserting their own legitimacy through claiming priority, the people who saw themselves as heirs to Sarekat Islam also sought to de-legitimize Boedi Oetomo. At the heart of this debate was the question of what constituted the basis of Indonesia's nationalist movement. Firdaus, and those who drew on his writings, claimed that Boedi Oetomo was 'anti-Islamic' and based on regional and ethnic exclusivity, not on true nationalism. The standard histories agree that promotion of Javanese culture was an important element in Boedi Oetomo's formation and platform. Tirto, as a member of the Javanese aristocracy who had studied at the medical school where Boedi Oetomo was founded, was closely associated with this stream of nationalism.

In the accounts of Firdaus and others, evidence that Boedi Oetomo was problematic was that the organisation used Dutch rather than Malay (later Indonesian), and that it collaborated generally with the colonizers, meaning that it was favoured by colonial authorities, who were responsible for elevating it in historical accounts (Firdaus 1997; Suryanegara 2002). However, while Boedi Oetomo members did use Dutch, much of its writings were in Malay (Indonesian) or in Javanese. At this stage of the nationalist movement, the Indonesian language had yet to gain general acceptance and Javanese provided a potential vehicle for expressing national sentiments. Further, none of the founders of the movement evidenced anti-Islamic sentiments in their writings, although their form of Islam was the more traditional mixed Javanese style. Finally, the founder of the modernist movement Muhammadiyah, Kiai Haji Ahmad Dahlan, was, like Samanhudi, a member of Boedi Oetomo.

The main evidence for saying that Boedi Oetomo was anti-Islamic was that a number of its members were apparently also Freemasons. Freemasonry is, in literature associated with Islamic groups, part of a great Jewish conspiracy. Proponents of piety draw on a literature that has deep roots in the Middle East to advocate their version of history. This same conspiracy literature has been used to demonstrate that such a conspiracy was aimed against Islam, which as a religion under threat, was in need of strong defensive action. This literature, including *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, had been in underground circulation at least since the 1980s. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, *Mein Kampf* was also freely available in Indonesian translation, and Holocaust denial was, and is, common in Indonesian discourse. The main culprits in the conspiracy against Islam were identified as the Jews. Much of the anti-Semitic literature in circulation in Indonesia has been directly translated from, or drew upon, Arabic- or English-language propaganda (eg Barraniq and Al Mahjub 2001; Husaini 2002; see Hadler 2004; Suci 2008). Saudi funding of education and religious institutions, including translations of Islamic texts that have a decidedly Wahabi leaning, have played an important role in directing Islamic discourse in the post-Soeharto era (Salim, 106). There is no awareness in Indonesia that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is a Russian forgery. The Masons were, in the paranoid world-view spread

in Islamic writings such as this, part of the World Jewish Conspiracy (Al-Buhairi 2001; Maulani 2002; Djaelani 2003; Maheswara 2008).

Local variants on the Zionist conspiracy literature raised the intensity of paranoia. Freemasons were linked to Theosophists as a way of discrediting the latter, and both were lumped in as participants in the global conspiracy with Rotary, Marxists, Coca Cola and the Australian-born Protestant media baron, Rupert Murdoch. There was also an attempt to identify Chinese with Jews, ironically going back to British colonial racism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One of these conspiracy theories specifically included the Javanese feminist, Kartini, and the leftist writer, Pramoedya, as part of the plot. Boedi Oetomo was likewise identified by association with Theosophical streams of Javanism (Saidi and Rizki 2008). A short history of Freemasonry originally published in English was translated into Indonesian in 2012 in a way that deliberately added references to Zionism that were not in the original. The original refuted the 'myth' of Freemasonry's link to Zionism as a Nazi fabrication; the new version not only reversed the meaning of this explanation but also added a new subtitle 'The Oldest Zionist Network to Control the Indonesian Archipelago (Van der Veur 1976, 2; 2012). President Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur)'s advocacy of dialogue with Israel fed directly into the hands of the conspiracy theorists (Tim Peneliti 1999). While much of this conspiracy literature should not even be dignified with the designation 'history', there are few Indonesian works that question its factual status. I have attended seminars in which university historians treated these fantasies seriously.

### **Decolonisation and Opposition to the New Order Regime**

What might seem a minor dispute over a date, points towards larger problems with separating fact from fiction in popular views of Indonesian history. These are ultimately problems that go back to the authoritarian New Order regime of General Soeharto, and especially to opposition to that regime's ideological agenda.

The 2008 debates over Boedi Oetomo's status, particularly in social media, revealed the kind of double obstacle that Indonesians were facing in writing

history. One commentor on the blog by Badrut Gaffas summarized this double problem well. Ni Sulistyowati, a respondent to the original posting, supported Gaffas's aim of correcting (the Indonesian term most often used is 'straightening', *meluruskan*) history, saying that it was important to get rid of the colonial legacy of history, and that young people have been adversely affected by government manipulation of history during the Soeharto period. A number of complex arguments were caught up in these statements. They draw on the general problem of New Order 'manipulation' (*rekayasa*) of information and laudable attempts to decolonize history.

The Soeharto regime's 'manipulation' of history drew on its hostility to open and critical views of the past. 'Education' for the regime was about producing compliant and docile citizens. Children were taught using text books with a single authoritative view that could not be questioned. 'Learning' consisted largely of repeating by rote. The hegemonic discourse of the New Order state precluded challenging authority. (Parker 1992). Thus, when the New Order fell, people were suspicious of any government-supported views, but left without critical tools to evaluate either these views or alternatives to them.

For Muslims, unravelling the New Order's views of Islam meant going back to the colonial period and challenging its views. Prejudice against Islam pervaded most aspects of Dutch scholarship of the colony, particularly studies of Java. The Dutch study of the court cultures of the central Javanese kingdoms had been marked by a particular blindness towards the religion (see Day 1983; Florida 1998). In the post-colonial period, fascination with other aspects of Indonesian culture, such as Bali's exotic version of Hinduism, emphasized the difference between Indonesia's Hindu-Buddhist past and its predominately Muslim present (Vickers 1987). Only a handful of Western scholars of Indonesia wrote on Islam in the mid-to-late twentieth century.

Exemplary Indonesian scholarship on this problem of Orientalism can be found in the writing of Ahmad Baso, whose 2005 book on deconstructing Orientalist views of Indonesia was a major breakthrough in Indonesian post-colonial writing. Baso, from Makassar, has been a significant public figure, serving a term on the national Human Rights Commission (Komnasham). He

comes from the stream of Nahdlatul Ulama, NU, inspired by Gus Dur and non-government social organisations linked to the movement (Watson 2006, 202–208). He published a series of works on Indonesian Islamic thinking, under the title of *Pesantren Studies*, taking inspiration from the Indian *Subaltern Studies* writers. Baso was also a student of Azyumardi Azra, the major Indonesian writer on the history of Islamic thought, and one of the most senior and highly respected Muslim academics in Indonesia. Baso's work demonstrates that the activist Islamist scholarship that has produced conspiracy theory literature is not representative of all Muslim writing. Baso's work is one of many serious challenges to the version of history created by the New Order.

Soeharto's rule was based on a vision of Javanism, and in this vision, Islam played little part. Champions of Javanism, such as the powerful Presidential Advisor in the early years of the regime, Soedjono Humardani, bolstered Soeharto's own preference for this reified and monumental vision of culture (see Pemberton 1994). This cultural vision overwhelmed the category of 'religion', deliberately pushing Islam into the background. It also led to an unfortunate backlash against Javanism, which explains why Boedi Oetomo was viewed negatively by some Muslim groups. During the New Order period, marked symbols of Islam, such as the crescent moon, were absent from performances of national culture. For a while in the early 1980s there were even attempts to ban girls from wearing the Muslim head-dresses for women (called *jilbab* in Indonesian) at school, largely in reaction to the boost given to public expressions of Islam by the Iranian Revolution and the initial flows of Saudi funding. Up until the end of the 1980s, Islam was regarded as a threat to the regime, and military intelligence incited terrorist acts from Muslim groups in order to enact suppression of religious groups as a 'threat from the extreme Right (*ekstrim kanan*)', balancing out the 'threat from the extreme Left (*ekstrim kiri*)' of communism. Heavy-handed tactics such as the 1986 massacre at a mosque at Tanjung Priok, Jakarta, and the 1989 wiping out of a religious sect in Lampung, ultimately proved counter-productive. Such actions legitimized the use of violence as the last resort of anti-government groups. In the case of the Lampung massacre, government force provided support for the hard line taken by preachers

such as Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, spiritual guide for the movement later infamous as Jemaah Islamiyah.

The New Order's patent lack of success in sidelining Islam from the national political culture was revealed in the failure of one of the government's many propaganda museums. Katharine McGregor has documented the creation of a museum dedicated to presenting Islam as a threat, the Museum of Eternal Vigilance, *Museum Purba Wisesa*. This was one of the more obvious attempts by the Soeharto regime to impose its version of history on the nation. It was also one of the most unconvincing—the precise aims and even the name of the museum kept changing. The final naming reflected the confusing nature of the enterprise, since it was in a form of esoteric Old Javanese with no clear reference to the museum's contents. This museum presented the 1980s threat of militant Islam as a continuation of the House of Islam (*Darul Islam*) movement's attempt to overthrow the Republic in the period between the late 1940s and 1962, when Kartosuwiryo, the head of the House of Islam, was executed. More generally, the regime favoured the use of terms such as '*ekstrim*' or '*fanatik*' to describe what they regarded as a dangerous version of Islam (McGregor 2006; Formichi 2015).

Thus, the New Order version of history located Islam, or at least Islam as a political force, outside the mainstream of Indonesian society. This identification and removal of Islam as a social threat had the effect of making advocates of Islam a 'majority with a minority mentality', as leading Dutch sociologist, W.F. Wertheim, put it (1987). By the end of the Soeharto period, Islam had become a major rallying-point against the regime, and the role of Muslim former political prisoners and political exiles in resistance to the New Order enhanced their credibility. Some even became Reform-era parliamentarians.

This Soeharto-era background explains both why Muslims felt that their religion was under attack, and why such sentiment was a fertile breeding ground for conspiracy theories. The conventional historiography facing Muslims in the 1990s limited the credit attributable to Islam as a force in the struggle against the Dutch. Muslim writers could quite correctly point to continuities between colonial and New Order ways of presenting Islam in history. Thus, it was easy for writers with a political agenda of re-instating Islam at the centre of Indonesian

political and social life to selectively make use of pre-Soeharto texts such as the writings based on Djaja's work.

The general trend in historical writing on Islam, as in other historiography, confirmed Gadjah Mada University historian Agus Suwignyo's (2014) view that writers have been shifting from 'Indonesia-centred' to 'Islam-centred' history. In some of the cases he cited, from the new versions of national history, the authors went further than those quoted above and rejected Darwin's theory of evolution, denied that Hinduism and Buddhism created civilisations in Indonesia, and attacked Indonesia's founding feminist nationalist Kartini because of her opposition to polygamy. Generally, they threw out any aspect of history that did not suit their narrative. As Suwignyo pointed out, such shrill intolerance does not always make for convincing history, but it is indicative of a more totalising trend in history writing. In the heady rush to overthrow New Order authoritarianism in historical writing, evidence was one of the first casualties. Indonesian Muslims have responded to exclusion with new resurgent histories to fill the ideological vacuum left by the fall of Soeharto.

The Islam-centred re-writing of history has been part of broader trends in early twenty-first century Indonesia. One of these is a push to make Islam the centre of the Indonesian state, that is to use Islam as a way of challenging liberal or secular views of the nation state. On national and regional levels, Muslim political leaders have attempted to shape legislation and preclude attempts at opposition as anti-Islamic (Salim 2015). An example of this was the movement to depose Basuki Tjahaja 'Ahok' Purnama as governor of Jakarta. Ahok's opponents seized on a statement they deemed as blasphemous, and under the banner of defence of Islam mobilized supporters in large numbers in a mass demonstration in Jakarta that led to his removal from office and jailing.

At the same time, a range of other groups have evoked interpretations of history in support of a plural state or in opposition to Islamicized politics. These other groups cover the full political spectrum, from leftists seeking redress over the mass murder of people associated with communism in 1965, to rightists seeking to revive or reclaim aspects of Soeharto's military-dominated power base. The Hindu-Buddhist past of Indonesia is one of the many points of contestation

in this struggle over history, as it provides an example of the multi-religious basis of the modern nation for liberal pluralists.

Indonesia provides an object lesson in how and why 'history' can be politicized. The case of Sarekat Islam's origins shows how focus on one legitimating event can feed upon and in turn feed into broader conspiracy theories. Studies of the politics of history are often based on Western, particularly US, examples, such as recent controversies over slavery. Indonesia demonstrates wider tendencies, especially how an event can move from fiction to fact. Observers in the West were surprised by the way that the Q-Anon conspiracy theories took hold during the Trump Presidency. Perhaps if they had been paying attention to cases such as Indonesia, they might have seen such a calamity coming.

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