Contestations of Memory in Southeast Asia

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CHAPTER 6

Remembering, Misremembering and Forgetting: The Struggle over Serangan Oemoem 1 Maret 1949 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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Introduction

This chapter is about the ways in which Indonesians have tried to keep their memories of war alive, and the controversy over one particular wartime event: the Serangan Oemoem 1 Maret 1949 or SO 1 Maret (General Attack of 1 March, 1949), which took place in Yogyakarta. The incident was part of what is called the Second War of Independence (Penang Kemerdekaan ke Dua). The controversy became a national issue because of the involvement of two prominent figures in Indonesian history, the late Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX of Yogyakarta and Soeharto, ex-President of Indonesia.1

Indonesians have used various means to keep the memories of the Serangan Oemoem 1 Maret 1949 alive — monuments, movies, museums, books, comics, rituals and organizations — a commemorative effort I regard as the most systematic, organised and complete in Indonesian history. I do not know of any other historical episode related to the Dutch Occupation that has been so elaborately commemorated. Under the New Order, the local government, participants of the war and people in Yogyakarta seemed to have agreed not to forget this battle that so shaped the Republic of Indonesia. Increasingly elaborate commemorations of the event were held during the 1980s, which received strong support from the central government in Jakarta.

Remembering and collectively commemorating a particular event are not easy processes. How is the event to be remembered — through books, movies and monuments? What should be remembered — the battles, the signing of an agreement, the strategy or the spirit? And who should be remembered and how — as leader, soldier, initiator or architect? All these are questions to which answers should be agreed upon by those who participated in the event and know the details well. Otherwise, the commemoration might fail to achieve its ends.

Any such acts of remembrance contribute to the shaping of current relationships and may be read at one level as a kind of commentary on them. As Fentress and Wickham have put it, “recalled past experience and shared images of the historical past are kinds of memories that have particular importance for the constitution of social groups in the present” (Fentress and Wickham, 1992: xi). Discussing the formative work of Halbwachs (1950) on social memory, these authors built on his proposition that “social groups construct their own images of the world by establishing an agreed version of the past” (Fentress and Wickham, 1992: x). Such agreed accounts of the past can achieve a social effect only if they are communicated to others, and in this process disagreement sometimes occurs concerning the version to be accepted, the things to be remembered and the things to be forgotten. There is thus a politics of remembering and forgetting, and a politics of creating and revising social memory (Benfell, 1999). In recent years, historians have become increasingly sensitive to the relations between their craft and the wider field of social memory (Hutton, 1993). Memories of war often contain difficult political and moral issues, and a number of works have probed into the continuously changing ways in which wars are recollected and publicly commemorated as the events recede while political conditions continue to alter in the present (Fussell, 1975; Benfell, 1999; Winter and Sivan, 1999). Given the diversity of opinion about what actually happened in the past, in addition to the different political interests that may be at stake, agreement is something that cannot be taken for granted. It is in the process of achieving the agreement that contestation and negotiation take place over what can be, should be and will be allowed to be remembered. The controversy over the Serangan Oemoem 1 Maret 1949 shows how the content of a social memory can be contested.

Social memory, as Fentress and Wickham (1992: xi) maintain, is “often selective, distorted and inaccurate”, but it can also be “extremely
exact, when people have found it socially relevant from that day to this to remember and recount an event in the way it was originally experienced”. What is more important from the anthropological or sociological point of view is not the accuracy of the representation or description of things to be remembered, which is the concern of the actors, the participants and the historians, but distortions most commonly brought about by “a series of external constraints, usually imposed by society” upon remembering (Fentress and Wickham, 1992: xii). It is these constraints surrounding a particular version of social memory that are the chief concern of this paper, and not the question of accuracy per se.

Here, the social context, and the relations between those who have the interest and the power to influence the content of the history, can be seen to account for the changes in the way a particular episode of history is written. The development of the controversy showed how views of this episode in Indonesian history changed as Soeharto’s power and the army’s popularity declined in the late 1990s. It also revealed the individuals and groups with an interest in this period of history and how they have attempted to revise it. In this case study, I would like to show that stories about the past are not stories that can be easily passed on to the new generations, when the stories themselves are believed to have been invented and when there are contesting versions of the same story.

Serangan Oemoem 1 Maret 1949 and Its Meanings

Serangan Oemoem 1 Maret 1949 — sometimes called Enam Jam di Yogyakarta (Six Hours in Yogyakarta) — was a general attack launched by the Indonesian army on Dutch positions in Yogyakarta on the morning of 1 March 1949 (Haryasudirjo, 1997). Although it only had a small impact on Dutch control of the city (the Indonesian army was able to occupy the city for only six hours), the attack was considered a political success since it attracted world attention. As a result, the United Nations urged the Dutch to start negotiations with the government of the Republic of Indonesia. This put Indonesia’s representatives in a stronger position in their negotiations with the Dutch, and they were subsequently successful in securing the support of the United Nations.

The negotiations produced six agreements to be implemented by both sides (Indonesia and the Netherlands), one of which was the acknowledgement by the Dutch of the existence of the Republic of Indonesia in Yogyakarta as a state within the United States of Indonesia. This meant that Dutch troops had to be withdrawn from the city of Yogyakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. The implementation of the agreement was arranged and supervised by the Committee of Three Countries (the United States of America, Australia and Belgium). The withdrawal took place on 29 June 1949 and was observed by the late Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX and the late Paku Alam VIII, Vice-Governor of Yogyakarta. On that day, Dutch soldiers left Yogyakarta peacefully and withdrew to Magelang. At 11 am, when Yogyakarta was already emptied of Dutch soldiers, the Indonesian army and freedom fighters entered the city from various directions. This event is known as the Return of Yogyakarta (Yogyakarta Kembali) (Kompas, 2 March 1997).

For Indonesians, especially the people of Yogyakarta, the return of Yogyakarta to the Republic on 29 June 1949 was an important historical episode that must not be forgotten. It was the outcome of the successful combination of diplomacy and armed struggle that was the SO 1 Maret 1949. It is also regarded as the beginning of the end of Dutch colonisation in Indonesia, because from that date on the Dutch gradually withdrew their soldiers from the whole of Indonesia. It is from such a perspective that some Indonesian leaders have viewed the event. Its political significance lies in its success in attracting world attention and the acknowledgement of the government of the Republic of Indonesia (Angkatan Perserjata, 2 March 1997; Kompas, 2 March 1997).

Nevertheless, while Soekarno was President, the SO 1 Maret 1949 was relatively unpopular among Indonesians in the outer islands, not was it commemorated. It was only when Soeharto came to power in 1969 and Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX became Vice-President that the SO 1 Maret 1949 started to gain in popularity. This can be explained by the fact that Soeharto and the Sultan were the main protagonists in the attack. It is believed that the Sultan had been the initiator of the attack while Soeharto, then a lieutenant colonel, was the architect and commander of the attack. Both men were from Yogyakarta and shared the opinion that the SO 1 Maret was an important, if not a decisive, event in the history of Indonesian armed struggle against the Dutch.

In the 1980s the popularity of the SO 1 Maret 1949 increased from year to year. In almost every annual commemoration of the attack, the president prepared a written speech to be read by the vice-governor of Yogyakarta, Paku Alam VIII. The story of the General Attack became
Keeping the Memory Alive through Monuments

Annual commemorations of the SO 1 Maret 1949 began in the 1980s, when the local government of Yogyakarta succeeded in building a 1 March Monument in the centre of the city to immortalise the event (Dinas Sosial, 1993). Since then and up till 1998, the people of Yogyakarta gathered every year to commemorate the Attack, keeping alive the social memory of the event.

In the 1980s the mayor of Yogyakarta proposed an even bigger monument to commemorate the SO 1 Maret 1949: the Monumen Yogyakarta Kembali (Monument of the Return of Yogyakarta). The proposal was accepted by the governor of Yogyakarta, Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX. It was the Sultan himself who designated the site where the monument should be constructed — in the village of Jongrang in the northern area of Yogyakarta. This site was chosen because the Dutch soldiers left Yogyakarta taking the northern route. Moreover, the village was situated along the axis of Mount Merapi and the palace, the axis that — according to the Javanese belief system — symbolically and spiritually connects the supernatural guardion of Mount Merapi and the Kings of Mataram, the dynasty of Hamengkubuwono.

As explained by the Sultan, the construction of the monument was a form of veneration, a way to remember and commemorate the heroic soldiers who sacrificed their lives to free Yogyakarta from Dutch occupation and return it to the people of Indonesia. The monument was meant to arouse the spirit of struggle among later generations of Indonesia and enable them to relive the history of Indonesia's struggle against all forms of colonialism or oppression. The Sultan claimed that the return of Yogyakarta in 1949 sounded the death knell for Dutch colonialism, since after this, other provinces were gradually returned to the Republic of Indonesia (Kompas, 30 June 1985).

Similar sentiments were expressed elsewhere. A Kompas article of 1989 noted that the monument was meant to "remember the struggle of those who had defended the former capital city of Indonesia. The peak of its success was the withdrawal of the Dutch soldiers on 29 June 1949. This event was known as the Return of Yogyakarta and had inspired the construction of the monument" (Kompas, 5 July 1989). Again in 1992 it was reported that the construction of the monument was an expression of the "appreciation and the gratitude of Indonesian people today to the soldiers who had sacrificed their lives for the return of the capital city of Indonesia at that time [Yogyakarta] to the Republic Indonesia" (Kompas, 5 December 1992).

Of the monument President Soeharto said that it was intended not only to remember or glorify the past but to "immortalize the meaning of that great event, so that it becomes the national tradition of our nation, a nation of freedom fighters" (Kompas, 7 July 1989):

If we today build the monument it is actually an expression of our deep gratitude both to those who had struggled, who had fought, and to God.... We build our future, but our roots are deeply implanted in our long history of struggle. We should always be aware of the continuity of our struggle, so that our younger generations will not live without any clear direction, or without any roots to our past....

The monument of the Return of Yogyakarta is only a point of remembrance in our long history of struggle. We commemorate the past, but it is also a message for the future.

The monument was officially opened by the President on 6 July 1989. The date was also symbolic. There were three possible dates to choose from: 29 June, 6 July and 10 July. 29 June was the day Dutch soldiers left Yogyakarta. This date was felt to be unsuitable because it might be interpreted as a commemoration of the withdrawal of Dutch troops and not the return of Yogyakarta itself (although this was actually two sides of the same coin). 6 July was the date of President Soekarno's and Vice-President Hatta's return from exile to Yogyakarta, while 10 July marked the return of the Commander-in-Chief of the army, General Soedirman and Syafrudin Prawiranegara to Yogyakarta. 6 July was finally accepted as the date for the official opening of the Return of Yogyakarta Monument. It was the day Soekarno and Hatta returned to Yogyakarta and were warmly greeted by the people lining the road from the airport to the city of Yogyakarta to catch a glimpse of their leaders (Kompas, 5 July 1989). The return of the leaders to Yogyakarta
symbolised the resumption of Yogyakarta's function as the capital city. That was a very "clear sign that the Republic of Indonesia never disappeared, and that the Indonesian army never surrendered to the Dutch", said one of the committee members.

The monument was built in the shape of a cone with its tip cut off. It is reminiscent of the gunungan, the symbol of a mountain, sacred in Javanese-Hindu cosmology. The complex consists of two main parts: the main building and the courtyard. In the courtyard is the plaza, the playground, the wall called rana, and a pool encircling the monument. The plaza is used for ceremonies, public gatherings and public activities. It is separated from the rest of the building by a wall 3 metres high and 60 metres long stretching from east to west.4

On the outside of this wall is inscribed the legend Gapura Papat Ambuka Jagad (Four Gates Opening the World [to us]).5 This is the candrusengkala, a Javanese way of stating the date of an event through a meaningful sentence. The phrase can be interpreted to mean 1949, which is to be read in reverse as 1949. On the inside, in inscribed in gold paint, are the names of the 408 soldiers who died in the General Attack of 1 March 1949 and other guerilla wars before and after the attack in Wehrkreise III (Battle Area III), as Yogyakarta was designated, from the start of the Dutch invasion on 19 December 1948 to their surrender on 29 June 1949.

Amidst the names of the heroes is inscribed the famous poem by Chaitir Anwar, the pioneer of modern Indonesian poetry, entitled "Antara Krawang dan Bekasi" (Between Krawang and Bekasi).

Kami cuma tulang-tulang berserakan
Tapi adalah kepunyanmu
Kauhlag lagi yang tentukan nilai tulang-tulang
Berserakan

Ataukah jiwa kami melayang untuk Kemerdekaan,
Kemenangan dan harapan atau tidak untuk apa-apa
Kami tidak tahu, Kami tidak bisa lagi berkata
Kauhlah sekarang yang berkata.

We are only scattered bones
But they belong to you
You are the one who will have to decide
What our scattered bones are worth

Whether we died for the cause of Freedom
And victory and hope, or whether it was all for nothing.
We don't know, we can no longer speak.
Now it is left to you to speak.

The main building, the monument, is covered with small white ceramic tiles. It has three floors. On the first floor, which is about 4.5 square metres, are a museum, a library, the main hall, a souvenir shop, a VIP room and a small meeting room. The museum conserves artefacts, or their replicas, related not only to the General Attack but also other important episodes in the Indonesian struggle for Independence. Thus we find here, for instance, the replicas of three Indonesian Navy ships which were used in the war for Independence.

On the second floor are dioramas showing 10 scenes of important episodes in the history of the return of Yogy and 40 reliefs showing scenes of the Indonesian independence struggle. The ten dioramas show, among other things: the invasion of Yogyakarta by the Dutch, the consolidation of the army, the planning of the attack, the departure of Commander-in-Chief General Soedirman to the countryside to conduct war, Roem-Royen negotiations, the departure of the Dutch soldiers from Yogy and the celebration of Independence Day on 17 August 1949.

The entire third floor is named Garbha Graha, meaning a place for meditation. It is a place to reflect upon the exhibits that the visitors have seen in the museum. Here visitors find an Indonesian flag hanging from a pole in the centre of a round room with a cone-shaped ceiling. The room is about 29 metres in diameter and 14 metres high. On the wall opposite the entrance is inscribed a short poem by Soeharto.6 On the right and left sides are relief of hands, symbolising the diplomatic struggle and the armed struggle for Independence. Visitors are expected to spend a moment to reflect upon the struggle of the Indonesian heroes for the independence of Indonesia.

Keeping the Memory Alive through Rituals

The collective remembrance ceremony of the SO 1 Mar 1949 is held annually at the plaza of the 1 March Monument in the centre of Yogyakarta. According to newspaper reports, this ceremony started in 1985, perhaps on the initiative of some influential bureaucrat.7 1985 was also
the year the competition to design the Monument of the Return of Yogya was held and the winner announced (Kompas, 16 January 1985).

In 1985, the ceremony was held on the night of 28 February. It was opened by Brigadier-General Sarjono, a veteran who had taken part in the attack of 1949. He read out the inscription on the monument and ignited the torch symbolising the spirit of 1 March and the struggle for Independence. A speech had been prepared for the occasion by President Soeharto, the architect of the attack, which was read by Paku Alam VIII, Vice-Governor of Yogyakarta. Before that, the speech of Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX, Governor of Yogyakarta, was read by GPH Mangkubumi. Thereafter some people went home while others maintained an all-night vigil until dawn. The ritual was said to be both tirakatan and syukuran. Tirakatan means staying awake the whole night until dawn, while syukuran means praying to God to express gratitude for His blessings.

In 1986 the commemoration was a little different. This time an event was also held in Jakarta, where many of the ex-participants of the 1 March attack, including its commandant (Soeharto), were living in prosperity (many had since become high-ranking bureaucrats). The ceremony was held in the Mataram Pavilion of Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (Miniature Garden of Beautiful Indonesia), attended by about 100 ex-participants of the attack. Soeharto gave an improvised speech touching on his personal experience in commandant, how he consolidated the army and the guerillas in and around Yogyakarta, the reason behind the attack, and so forth. The commemoration was referred to as both syukuran (thanksgiving) and silaturahmi (a restrengthening of social relations) (Kompas, 22 March 1986). The secretary-generals of the Ministry of Manpower, Sutopo Yuwono, and of the Ministry of Information, Abdul Kadir, veterans of the 1 March attack, were also present.

In 1987, the commemoration was even more organised. It was held simultaneously in Yogyakarta and Jakarta, made possible with the establishment of the Organisation of Battle Area III Yogyakarta, officially founded by the President on 28 October 1986. The commemoration in Jakarta included activities such as a tennis championship, a week of movies about the independence struggle, a blood donation drive and other social and cultural activities. The peak of the commemoration was a night of syukuran on 28 February, which was attended by veterans and their families, as well as members of the Organisation of Battle Area III. In Yogyakarta the commemoration included a re-enactment of the attack staged by student regiments from universities in Yogyakarta, members of the army, veterans, and some 20 members of the second generation of Battle Area III from Jakarta (Kompas, 21 February 1987). The night before the re-enactment, a commemoration was held at the plaza of the 1 March Monument, during which Vice-Governor of Yogyakarta, Paku Alam VIII, gave a speech. He emphasised that the SO I Maret was not just a military action but a combination of military action and diplomacy (Kompas, 2 March 1987). The audience also encircled the monument wearing yellow young coconut leaves around their necks. This modestly staged commemoration was meant “to keep alive and to continue the spirit and values of the struggle for Independence” (the Mayor, quoted in Kompas, 2 March 1987).

A similar commemoration was held in 1988. It started with a night of vigil (tirakatan) at the plaza of the monument. The next morning the re-enactment, led by veteran Brigadier-General Sardjono, was carried out in all areas within the city of Yogyakarta, involving about 1,700 participants (Kompas, 2 March 1988).

A very similar commemoration ceremony was held in Yogyakarta for the fortieth anniversary in 1989. The tirakatan was held at the plaza, opened by the reading of President Soeharto’s speech, written by Paku Alam VIII. The night before, a sarasehan — an informal forum for sharing ideas and experiences — was held at Tegalrejo Monument, on the west side of Yogyakarta. The forum was attended by members of the Organisation of Battle Area III and its younger generation (generasi penerus). On the same day, ex-members of the student soldiers’ Brigade III-17 held a commemoration in one of the villages where Indonesian troops had camped and had been helped by the villagers during the attack. The next morning, the re-enactment of the attack was again staged by ex-freedom fighters and youth. That year, another event relating to the commemoration of the SO I Maret 1949 was held in Yogyakarta. This was the official opening of the Monument of the Return of Yogya. It was a great success for it became a reunion for hundreds of ex-freedom fighters, members of the army and veterans (Kompas, 7 July 1989).

In addition to these annual rites of commemoration, the government-produced docudrama Janur Kuning (Yellow Young Coconut Leaves) also helps to keep the SO I Maret alive within the social memory of
the people. It portrays the history of the General Attack as Soeharto wished it to be remembered.

Up until 1997, the commemoration of the SO 1 Maret and the building of the Monument had gone very well. The film, history books and commemorative rituals had passed without much scrutiny by the people, although the controversy over who had actually initiated the attack had started as early as 1985. However, at that time Soeharto had been too strong to challenge. But with the economic crisis of 1997, Soeharto was forced to step down, and rumours, gossip and criticism swirled around him and his family. The political situation deteriorated rapidly, and within a short time Soeharto had become a very unpopular figure. Many of his former close friends and allies tried to avoid anything that might link them to Soeharto or his children.

The controversy over the initiation of the SO 1 Maret, which seemed to have been settled since 1989, the year Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX passed away, now reemerged and entered a new phase. Those who had not dared initially to speak about the controversy now joined in. The Sultan’s supporters came to include a number of prominent historians and bureaucrats, as well as some veterans (Moedjianto, 1999; Suahartono, 1999; Suwarno, 1999, 2000; Merdeka, 1 March 1998; Kompas, 9 October 1998; Kompas, 1 March 2000). In the meantime, Soeharto’s supporters were experiencing considerable difficulty in their efforts to defend the latter’s version of events (Haryasudirdja, 2000).

The Controversy

Although Soeharto and Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX had been close allies in the early years of the New Order, they later drifted further and further apart as the Sultan declined to serve a second term as vice-president. However, on the surface, in a typically Javanese way, they publicly maintained good relations until the Sultan passed away in 1989.

Before 1985, not much attention was paid to the SO 1 Maret — even today, only a small group of people in Yogyakarta really care about this historical event and its place in Indonesian history — but in 1985 a controversy emerged over who actually initiated the attack. It was the late Purwokusumo, the mayor of Yogyakarta, who raised the question when he was interviewed by a journalist from Suara Merdeka (Voice of Independence), the daily newspaper in Semarang, Central Java (Atmaksumah, 1999). The question was then taken up by the President’s assistant.

People knew that the attack was led by Soeharto, but they did not know much about who had suggested the attack, nor did they think it important to know. In certain circles it was known that Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX was the initiator of the attack. For the Sultan sometimes told his close friends the history of the incident (Atmaksumah, 1999). By his own account, it was he who first had the idea. Thus when Soeharto began to claim that he himself was the initiator, people started to wonder which version of the events was true and who had actually planned the attack. The controversy became interesting not only for historians but also for the public because its outcome would eventually expose ‘the liar’. Would it be Soeharto or the Sultan? Honesty, pride and reputation were at stake in this controversy. Nevertheless, the Sultan preferred to keep a low profile. He did not want to have a debate but he knew that Soeharto was lying.

At that time Soeharto’s version of the SO 1 Maret was circulated widely and came to be accepted as the true version because he was in power. During his presidency the SO 1 Maret was immortalised in various forms: the building of the Monument of the Return of Yogyakarta (Kompas, 2 September 1986; 26 April 1988; 27 January 1989); the production of the film Janur Kuning and the publication of his autobiography as well as a book on the history of the attack by SESKOAD (Kompas, 7 March 1989). Moreover, it was Soeharto who usually gave the keynote speeches at commemorations of the SO 1 Maret, and he would invariably tell the same stories about the history of the event from his perspective.

Soeharto saw the SO 1 Maret as part of the overall strategy of the army to drive the Dutch away from Indonesia. The first attack on Yogyakarta (which had been seized by the Dutch on 11 December 1948) took place on 30 December 1948. Soeharto claimed that if this attack had not been carried out, there might not have been any other subsequent attacks and the history of Indonesia would have been different (Kompas, 31 December 1994). Like other Indonesian military leaders and people in Yogyakarta at that time, Soeharto had been very disappointed when the Dutch managed to seize the city of Yogyakarta and capture the political leaders Soekarno and Hatta. The people lost their faith in the Indonesian army. What concerned Soeharto at that time was how to regain the people’s support and renew their confidence
that they could defeat the Dutch, and how to show that the Indonesian army still existed and remained organised (Kompas, 1 March 1989). The only way, he thought, was to launch guerilla attacks on various Dutch positions in Yogyakarta.

At that time Soeharto was only a lieutenant-colonel. The Commander-in-Chief was General Soedirman, who was sick and had been taken to the countryside by his soldiers. From his hiding place Soedirman gave commands to his subordinates, one of whom was Soeharto, on how to launch the attacks. For one week Soeharto consolidated the army in Yogyakarta, establishing four war fronts (north, south, east and west) and organising the army on each front. On 30 December 1948 the first attack was launched to show that the Indonesian army was still alive and active. This was followed by other guerilla attacks on the nights of 9 and 16 January 1949, and another on the night of 4 February.

In his book, Soeharto: Pikiran, Ucapan dan Tindakan (Soeharto: My Thoughts, Words and Deeds) (1991), Soeharto said that one day while listening to the radio with Purwadi, a liaison officer, he learned about the debate that was to take place in the United Nations about the Dutch position in Indonesia. Soeharto also learned that the Dutch had told the world about the success of their polizeiactie (police action). They had succeeded in occupying Yogyakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. It was also said that the Indonesian National Army (TNI) no longer existed, and that the extremists — they meant the guerillas — were disorganised. Soeharto was furious. He had led four night attacks on Yogyakarta, but they seemed to have had little influence on the Dutch position in Indonesia and how the world saw it. The night attacks had gone unreported. Thus he concluded that the strategy would have to be changed.

He then planned an all-out daylight attack on Yogyakarta. On the morning of 1 March 1949, when the siren was sounded at six in the morning to mark the end of the curfew, the Indonesian army and freedom fighters attacked the city from four directions. For six hours Yogyakarta was occupied by Indonesian freedom fighters. Then they had to return to the countryside as more Dutch soldiers came from Magelang to recapture the city. This is a rough version of Soeharto's account of SO 1 Maret 1949.

The Sultan did not have much to say about the attack, for as a ruler of the Mataram Kingdom he did not participate in it himself.

But at that time he was also the Minister of Defence and Security of the Republic of Indonesia, and he had his own story about the idea for a general attack, and how the attack might be launched on the city and its timing. It was said that when the Sultan met his close friends, he did not hesitate to tell them his own account of the SO 1 Maret, but when asked to tell the story openly to the public, as a counter to Soeharto's version, he refused. He tried to avoid arousing any conflict on the subject (Armakusumah, 1999).

Long before the controversy was taken up by the mass media, he told the editor of his book Takhla Utuk Rakayat (Ruling for the People) (1982) about the situation in Yogyakarta before the attack took place. He said that social conditions in Yogyakarta at that time were uncertain and the people's morale was low. He sensed this and was worried that if things were to continue in this way, the situation might deteriorate and the people's support for the government of the Republic of Indonesia would weaken. He decided that a shock therapy was needed to arouse the people and awaken their fighting spirit. He pondered over the best way to provide such a shock therapy.

When he learned from the radio that the problem of Indonesia and the Dutch would be discussed at the United Nations at the end of February, his concern was how he could send news to the world that the Republic of Indonesia still existed, and that the Dutch did not really control the situation in Indonesia as they had boasted. An idea came to him but time was running out as it was already mid-February. So he sent a messenger to Commander-in-Chief Soedirman in his hiding place, to ask for his permission and agreement to carry out his plan. General Soedirman gave his permission and suggested that the Sultan contact Lieutenant-Colonel Soeharto, the army commandant of the Yogyakarta area.

The Sultan managed to send a message to Soeharto asking him to come to the palace to meet him late at night. This secret meeting took place on 13 February in the house of GBPF Prabuningsrat, his younger brother, in the complex of his palace. At this meeting where no-one else was present, he sought Soeharto's agreement to prepare a general attack on the city within two weeks. That was the only meeting between the Sultan and Soeharto with regard to the plan. Thereafter contacts were made through messengers (Kompas, 2 March 1997; 1 March 1999).
Herein lies the controversy over who was the originator of the plan. According to the Sultan, it was his idea to launch a sudden attack on Yogyakarta, but Soeharto claimed otherwise. The debate is pointless since there was no other person present at the crucial meeting who could corroborate either party's account and put an end to the controversy. The only witnesses were Prabuningrat (the Sultan's brother), an abdi dalam (palace guard) and an assistant of Soeharto at that time, Marsoedi, who were present when Soeharto was brought in to meet the Sultan but who were not privy to the discussion (Kompas, 2 March 1997). What transpired at the meeting remains a secret, and Soeharto never disclosed anything to anyone. From whom came the idea of launching a general attack on the city? No-one knew, except Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX and Soeharto.

Indeed Soeharto never even mentioned this meeting. This made some people who knew about the meeting surprised, and others furious. It also led them to conclude that Soeharto was trying to give the impression that the attack was his own initiative. The Sultan's younger brother, Prabuningrat, and Marsoedi, Soeharto's assistant, were particularly upset for Soeharto's version had deleted and changed some important parts of the history of the event. They could not understand how Soeharto could have so easily forgotten such an important meeting.

Not once in his improvised speeches at events commemorating the SO 1 Maret did Soeharto ever mention his meeting with the Sultan in the palace, emphasizing instead the political significance of the attack and his own role in its organisation (Kompas, 2 March 1986; 1 March 1989; 31 April 1994; 20 March 1995). The story of the attack became his personal story, which no-one dared to challenge. The story of SO 1 Maret became a means for his own self-glorification. Soeharto was undeniably the 'leading man' of the battle — even the Commander-in-Chief, General Soedirman, accepted this (Kompas, 9 March 2000) — but Soeharto downplayed the role of others who had also made significant contributions to the success of the 1 March attack, specifically Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX.

While some people had reservations about Soeharto's story, many others who did not know much about the controversy accepted his version of the events. Some historians felt this was dangerous. Soeharto's version concealed certain important historical facts, and this could have a negative impact on the teaching of history, and indeed on the standing of history as a scientific enterprise (Kompas, 9 October 1998).

Who Cared about the Controversy?

It was historians and those interested in history who really paid serious attention to this controversy (Kompas, 9 October 1998; 24 June 1999). Historians are expected to settle such disputes about the past but unfortunately, historians are not gods. In this case they needed more informants in order to get to the bottom of the story, but there were none except for Soeharto's former assistant, Marsoedi. Some historians were of the opinion that if the question were not resolved, people might grow skeptical about the role of historians in general (Kompas, 9 October 1998). If historians could not settle the matter 'scientifically', they feared, then history as a 'scientific endeavour' would be seen as having nothing significant to contribute to society. Such skeptical views on the role of history and historians might endanger the future of the discipline, they felt.

Aside from historians, there was little real concern with the controversy. Reactions could be divided into three categories. First, there were those who thought that the issue was unimportant since it did not affect their daily life. Many Indonesians did not even know that a controversy existed. For them the issue was really a local one (that is, confined to Yogyakarta) and a contest between two parties — Soeharto's circle and those who supported the Sultan's story. The second group comprised those who were mildly interested in the controversy for the ramifications it had for Indonesian history. They agreed that the writing of Indonesian history should be based on empirical facts or what really happened in the past. Many of those who fall into this category are educated people, veterans of the attack, or those with an interest in Indonesian history. They followed the controversy and were curious about its results but did not join in the debate. The third group comprised a small handful of people who were really involved in the controversy. They were divided into two camps: the group that defended Soeharto's version, mostly military men and veterans, and the opposing side who believed in the Sultan's version. The two parties agreed that the leader of the attack was Soeharto, but there was disagreement on the initiator.

On the Sultan's side were some prominent Indonesian historians, most of whom were civilians (Suwarno, 1999, 2000; Moedjianto, 1999; Suharto, 2000). Their interest was more in revealing 'the truth of the matter'. While they accepted the fact that Soeharto was the leader
and conductor of the attack, they questioned why Soeharto did not say that he had met the Sultan before the general attack, claiming instead that he only met him after? Did he not remember that his assistant Marsoedi and the Sultan’s younger brother had helped him to prepare to meet the Sultan? How could he have forgotten such an important moment, yet recall in great detail how he prepared for the attack? Did he not consider the meeting important? Why should he hide those facts? Why has he not mentioned this meeting in his numerous accounts of the event in public? These questions were never put to Soeharto, either directly or indirectly, so they remain unanswered. Thus we can see that although the controversy seemed to be about who had initiated the attack, it had shifted to why Soeharto had kept silent about his meeting with the Sultan.

For those who supported the Sultan’s story, his version seemed more plausible, since the Sultan was then the Minister of Defence and Security of the Republic of Indonesia, while Soeharto was only a lieutenant-colonel. It would make sense if Soeharto had been the executor of the Sultan’s idea in the field, for the Sultan’s position did not allow him to be the executor. If this interpretation is accepted, the emergence of Soeharto’s version can be understood from two perspectives. First, it is unlikely that Soeharto had really forgotten about this meeting. How could he forget it, even the fact that he had to change his clothes before meeting the Sultan, while he could recount in great detail his strategy to launch the attack? His assistant still remembered it vividly. We may conclude that Soeharto concealed that important part of SO 1 Maret’s history. Why should he hide it? We can infer that Soeharto wanted to be remembered as the person who had launched the idea of the attack, and not only as the executor of the Sultan’s order or idea. The fact that he was the architect of the attack did not seem to satisfy him. If he could be remembered as both the initiator and the architect, and the attack recalled as a political success, then Indonesians might conclude that he had played a very important role in the process of defeating the Dutch politically because, without that attack, there would not have been any significant change in the relations between the Netherlands and Indonesia. Thanks to the attack, the bargaining position of Indonesia’s representative in their negotiations with the Dutch was strengthened. The fact that the Indonesian military could launch such an attack in daylight, and had managed to seize the city of Yogyakarta for several hours, was proof that the Indonesian government and military were still a force to be reckoned with.

From a military point of view, however, Soeharto may have downplayed the meeting because he judged it unimportant. Soeharto and the Sultan only met once, and their meeting lasted for only a few hours. There was no information on what the Sultan and Soeharto had discussed. As it did not have a bearing on military strategy, Soeharto might have felt that this meeting was forgettable. If that is the case, I would agree with Moedjanto (1999), a historian at Sanata Dharma University, that accounts of the war for Indonesian Independence have been much too centred on the military. Such an interpretation gives the impression that the Indonesian military was chiefly responsible for freeing the country, while in fact it was the civilians who had played a more important role. Without the support of the people, the military would not have succeeded in carrying out their plans.

The End of the Controversy?

Today historians and some influential intellectuals in Indonesia are of the opinion that Soeharto lied, and that he has concealed some important episodes of the history of SO 1 Maret. Their main concern is no longer who initiated the attack but why Soeharto did not tell the public that he had met the Sultan beforehand? Soeharto never answered this question; indeed we do not know if he was ever asked. However, had he confirmed that he did meet the Sultan, this would certainly have weakened his claim that he was the initiator of the attack. This seems to be the interpretation favoured by some Indonesian historians.

In 1999 historians began to challenge Soeharto’s version of the history of the SO 1 Maret (Kompas, 1 January 1999). A seminar on this topic was held in Yogyakarta and on the morning of 28 February 2000, an interactive dialogue was aired by the Radio of the Republic of Indonesia Studio II. Three historians were involved in the dialogue, the main conclusion of which was that the Sultan, and not Soeharto, was the initiator of the SO 1 Maret. Criticism was also levelled at the army, which was judged to have been insufficiently objective in writing about this controversial episode (Kompas, 1 March 2000).

The army’s version can be found in the book published by SESKOAD. The book mentions that both Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX and Soeharto had listened to the radio, from which they learned the
news about the debate that was to be held in the United Nations on
the relations between Indonesia and the Netherlands. This gave both
the Sultan and Soeharto the idea to launch the general attack. However,
it skirted the question of who precisely came up with the idea. Thus
the military's version was a compromise designed to put an end to the
controversy, but as Anhar Gonggong, historian and bureaucrat in the
Ministry of Culture and Education (now Ministry of National Educa-
tion) charged, finding a compromise should not have been the aim
(Kompas, 1 March 2000).

In the meantime, the new government seemed to have become
aware of the dispute over the SO 1 Maret from the newspapers and felt
the need to resolve it. Thus it was decided that the government would
re-open the discussion on some controversial episodes in Indonesian
history and would try to rewrite them so that they would look "more
objective" and not as " politicized " as the versions under the New Order.
The State Secretary said that the government would " straighten " some
episodes in Indonesian history, which had been " twisted " by Soeharto's
regime (Kompas, 24 June 1999; 1 March 2000). Concerning the 1 March
attack, the government had obtained new documents that strongly sup-
port the Sultan's version. The head of the National Archives, Mukhils
Pahi, declared during a press conference that the initiator of the 1
March attack was Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX, and not Soeharto.
His statement was based on a recorded interview conducted by the
BBC with the Sultan when, as Vice-President, he had visited England
in 1984 (Direktorat Sejarah, 1999; Kompas, 1 March 2000: 10 April
2000). The new government's version of some contentious episodes in
Indonesian history was published in 2000 in the form of a National
History Supplement (Suplemen Sejarah Nasional). 31

Conclusion

I have tried to show in this chapter how some Indonesians attempted
to construct their social memory of an important episode in Indonesian
history, the SO 1 Maret 1949. The development of its commemoration
was in some way related to those who were in power at the time. The
SO 1 Maret was never considered important while Soekarno was in
power. Under Soekarno's regime, the date worth commemorating was
1 June, the birth of Pancasila or the Five Principles of the State.

When Soeharto took power the commemoration of the birth of
Pancasila ceased. There were even efforts to write a new history, in
which Soekarno would no longer appear as the creator of Pancasila. The
New Order emphasised instead 1 October, the date Soeharto and his
army took control of the situation, then wrested power from Soekarno
in a systematic way. With the stabilisation of the economic and poli-
tical situation, Soeharto became a more popular president and desired
to make himself more and more powerful. Some of his close aides
ominated him as Bapak Pembangunan (Father of Development). In
1985, at the peak of his power, he issued his own version of the SO
1 Maret, which as we have seen was questionable to some historians
and many people in Yogyakarta. However, they remained silent about
Soeharto's account, neither accepting it nor openly denying it. The
Sultan himself did not challenge Soeharto's version and did his best to
avoid an open controversy. He allowed Soeharto to tell his version of
events to the people of Indonesia unchallenged.

Today the Indonesian political map has changed significantly. Once
Soeharto was no longer in power, the threat for those who dared to
challenge him quickly diminished. Thus it was their moment to put
forward different versions of some controversial episodes in Indonesian
history. Social memories about the SO 1 Maret may yet change under
the new political situation — even after this chapter was written, I
received a manuscript of yet another account of the event from Batara
Hutagalung (unpublished).

What is interesting about the controversy is that the government,
and almost everyone who knew and cared about it, seem to have paid
attention only to written versions of the episode. No-one has paid any
attention — as far as I know — to how it has been represented in other
media, such as the dioramas within the Monument of the Return of
Yogy or the old film. No-one has questioned if a new version ought
to be presented on film or video. Indeed if a new version is not spread
and socialised as systematically as the old one, it might not be possible
to revise the social memory of the people on this contentious episode
in Indonesian history.

Over the past decade, the effort to spread a new version of the
history of SO 1 Maret continued vigorously for some time (Kompas,
10 April 2000), before gradually losing impetus, though space does not
permit me to write at length of these developments. Not long after the
initial debate, there was a strong will in some circles to make changes
to the existing historical narrative about the SO 1 Maret. The new government gave its support to this initiative, and seminars were held at which various suggestions for a revised account were put forward. However, further research would be needed in order to know how successfully any new version has since been disseminated to the public. Some other efforts to revise school textbooks, particularly with regard to the narrative of the events of 1965–66, have been stymied by the hostile reactions from those who feel threatened by such changes. The rewriting of Indonesian history thus promises to be a slow and continuing process.

From 1999, some significant changes were introduced to the annual ritual of commemoration, but this was discontinued in subsequent years. Shortly after Soeharto’s fall, a ‘counter-monument’ was built inside the Yogyakarta Kraton, on the western side, not far from the entrance to the Kraton courtyard, to commemorate the Sultan’s contribution to the event. In Javanese, such a monument is called tetenger (‘a sign’). A new ritual was performed at its inauguration, but it never became established as an annual public ritual, as some would have wished. The attempt to create an entirely new ritual was unsuccessful, due partly to a lack of commitment from both central and local governments, as well as from those who had particular interests in the ‘truth’ of the event. The effort was hampered by a lack of funds, the absence of any obvious concrete benefit to be gained from conducting such a ritual, and the declining number of surviving veterans who had been personally involved in the events. Since Reformasi, Indonesia has seen several changes of government, and in the context of continuing rapid social and political transformation, such a ritual quickly loses its national relevance. These developments at least tell us something about the views and attitudes of ordinary Indonesians towards a piece of their national history, whose relevance to their daily lives may not be obvious to them. But to Indonesian historians concerned for the integrity of the nation’s memory, and of their own discipline, it is hardly trivial. In the aftermath of Soeharto’s fall, they committed themselves to the task of meluruskan sejarah or ‘straightening history’, a history whose narrative had in more than one place been ‘bent’ by a regime which had no qualms about using history as a means to legitimise its own hold on power. In contesting that official narrative, what was at stake was not just a concern for accuracy, or the duty of historians to discover as much as possible ‘what really happened’, but also a deeper moral principle.

Notes

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2. This was the badge worn by Indonesian soldiers and guerrillas during the attack, so that people in Yogyakarta could distinguish them from the Dutch soldiers and thus give them support.

3. Syafruddin Prawiranegara was at that time the Minister for Foreign Affairs, as well as acting Prime Minister and President of the Emergency Government (Pemerintah Darurat) of the Republic of Indonesia based in Padang, Sumatra. After the Dutch occupied Yogyakarta, President Sukarno and his Cabinet members were arrested and sent into exile (1948–49). When the Dutch withdrew from Yogyakarta, Sukarno, Hatta and Syafruddin were able to return.

4. This description is based on my own observations as well as the description given by Sri Utami et al. (2000) in their museum guidebook.

5. The words are intended to convey a mystical meaning: the world, or cosmos, formerly closed to the self, by means of the gates, becomes open so that the self can enter.

6. The text of the poem is as follows:

   [Rakyat dan ABRI selalu menangkal
   Perjuangan dan Cita-cita pemanggung gagal
   Negara Pancasila terap jaya dan kehil
   Berkas Ridho Tubuh Yang Maha Tanggul]

   The people and the Army will always stand united
   Their struggle and ideals must never fail
   The nation of Pancasila will be eternally victorious
   By the blessing of the One Almighty God.

   One may detect a Javanese flavour in the use of words like mampanggul, as well as a certain militarist tone.

7. See References for a full list of newspaper reports consulted.

8. GPH stands for Gusi Pangrango Haryo, the title of one of the officials within the Yogyakarta Kraton.

9. SESKOAD: Sekolah Staff Komando Angkatan Darat (Army Staff College).

10. GPH: Gusi Bendara Pangrango Haryo, the title held by the Sultan’s brother.

11. See also Anon. (2000).

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Heddy Shri Abitna Putra


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PART III
Traumatic Memories: Interpenetrations of Collective and Personal Experience