The Indonesian Revolution: archives and emotions

Robert Cribb, The Australian National University

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/robert_cribb/13/
KEMBARA BAHARI
Esei Kehormatan 80 Tahun
Adrian B. Lapian
Sanksi Pelanggaran Pasal 44:
Undang-Undang Nomor 7 Tahun 1987 tentang Perubahan atas
Undang-Undang Nomor 6 Tahun 1982 tentang Hak Cipta

1. Barangsiapa dengan sengaja dan tanpa hak menquumumkan atau mem-
        perbanyak suatu ciptaan atau memberi izin untuk itu dipidana dengan
        pidana penjara paling lama 7 (tujuh) tahun dan/atau denda paling banyak
        Rp 100.000.000,- (seratus juta rupiah).

2. Barangsiapa dengan sengaja menyirahkan, memamerkan, mengedark-
        an, atau menjual kepada umum suatu ciptaan atau barang hasil pelang-
        garan hak cipta sebagaimana dimaksud dalam Ayat (1) dipidana dengan
        pidana penjara paling lama 5 (lima) tahun dan/atau denda paling banyak
        Rp 50.000.000,- (lima puluh juta rupiah).
KEMBARA BAHARI
Esei Kehormatan 80 Tahun Adrian B. Lapian

Penyunting: Bondan Kanu moyoso, Hilmar Farid, Ivan Aulia Ahsan dan M. Fauzi
Desain isi: Sari Fredi
Desain sampul: Hartanto "Rebo" Utomo

Cetakan pertama: September 2009

Komunitas Bambu
Jln. Pala No. 4B, Beji Timur, Depok, 16422
Tel/fax: 021-77206987
E-mail: komunitasbambu@yahoo.com
www.komunitasbambu.com


Katalog Dalam Terbitan
KEMBARA BAHARI
Esei Kehormatan 80 Tahun Adrian B. Lapian
Bondan Kanu moyoso, Hilmar Farid, Ivan Aulia Ahsan dan M. Fauzi (editor)
Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu, 2009
(xiv + 410 hlm; 14 x 21 cm)
ISBN 979-373-666-5

Daftar Isi

Catatan Editor ix

A.B. Lapian: Sang Pengilham yang Humanis
A.M. Djuliati Suroyo 1

Modernisasi Pelabuhan Banjarmasin dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Aktivitas Pelayaran dan Perdagangan pada Pertengahan Kedua Abad Ke-20 Endang Susilowati 11

Perdagangan Maritim Sumatera pada Awal Abad Ke-16 Gusti Asnan 37

Iptek dan Dinamika Ekonomi Nelayan Masyhuri 57

Hydrography, Technology, Coercion: Mapping The Sea in South-East Asian Imperialism, 1850-1900 Eric Tagliazusto 81

Posisi Pengetahuan Tradisional dan Persoalan Teritori Dalam Pembangunan: Refleksi Kontemporer Pelayaran dan Perniagaan Nusantara Abad Ke-16 dan Ke-17 Karya Adrian B. Lapian Dedi S. Adhuri 105
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ide Anak Agung Cde Agung dan Perjuangan Diplomasi Indonesia (1945-1949)</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>R.Z. Leirissa</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The West Irian Campaign: On Style and Content of Early Indonesian Foreign Policies</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Pieter Drooglever</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.B. Lapian yang Anak Pejuang; B.W. Lapian yang Pejuang Tiga Zaman</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>F.R. Mawikere</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beberapa Hal tentang Bahasa Ibn</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ajip Rosidi</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Henri Chambert-Loir</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memahami Pemilihan Umum dan Keterasingan Partai Politik: Sebuah Ancangan Struktural</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Benny H. Hoed</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Di Antara Proteksi dan Kemerosotan: Perkembangan Industri Gula di Ommelanden Batavia pada Awal Abad Ke-18</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bondan Kanumoyoso</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menuju Perkembangan Sektor Swasta Indonesia yang Berkelanjutan</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Thee Kian Wie</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kriminalitas dan Kekerasan di Jakarta pada 1950 - 1960an</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>M. Fauzi</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sejarah Turisme Sebagai Satu Kategori Dalam Studi Mengenal Indonesia</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Iskandar P. Nugraha</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Indonesian Revolution: Archives and Emotion</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Robert Cribb</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagined History</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Yong Mun Cheong</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrie Lapian: Ensiklopedi Berjalan, An Epicurean, een Levensgenietter</td>
<td>403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mely G. Tan</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Indonesian Revolution: 
Archives and Emotion

Robert Cribb
Australian National University

During the last one or two decades, the issue of memory has become an increasingly important motif in historical research. Archives and libraries are no longer simply a vast database, a storehouse of undigested information about the past to which historians apply their linguistic, forensic and analytical skills in order to tell the broader community about how human societies work. Instead, we have become increasingly conscious of the special relationship between history and human dignity, between history and the higher emotions that characterize humankind.

The model of archives and libraries as a database was the model that I was trained in 25 years ago and for at least a century mastery of the archives was the defining feature of historiographical professionalism. We learnt the skill, first, of assimilating the internal structure of the archive, comprehending which collections hold which particular categories of documents,

---

*An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the International Seminar "Archives as collective memory of the nations," Denpasar 3-4 September 2007."
how to interpret keywords and brief descriptions, how to fill in request slips so as to maximize the chance of documents actually arriving. We learnt to understand opening hours and holidays and above all delivery times: how to time our requests to ensure a steady flow of useable documents, thereby avoiding that dreadful sense of wasted time that comes from sitting at a reading room desk with nothing to do. We learnt to make fine decisions about what to copy, and how much different forms of copying would cost. And of course we learnt to observe archivists closely. Do they know the collection well enough to give good advice? Will they stretch a point and give access to a collection that is not fully and unambiguously available to the public?

And we acquired higher order skills. We learnt the patient art of taking careful notes of documents, so that the essential meaning of a letter or report could be reproduced on a handful of 5 x 3 note cards; we learnt the discipline of careful citation, so that the sources of our information could be recovered quickly and simply; we learnt the arts of translation – the careful reading of documents in languages that were either foreign or perhaps just antiquated, so that we could put into today’s languages the thoughts, experiences and intentions of people in the past. We learnt to follow hunches, hints that some interesting truth might be revealed by following an apparently mundane trail of paper. We learnt to read against the grain to realize that documents could sometimes tell us about things that their authors had no intention of revealing. In particular, we learnt how to squeeze archives for the otherwise forgotten history of subalterns, of people whose existence consisted of being pushed around and exploited, people who never had the luxury of dictating and preserving their own records, but whose voices and experiences find echo in official documents and can be amplified by the historian’s skill in a way not so different from the electronic magic that rescues old musical recordings from a haze of clicks and scratches. We learnt fortitude, the importance of not being discouraged by missing documents. And we learnt honesty – the principle that the truth which documents reveal is always more interesting in the end than any past that arises simply in our imagination.

In talking enthusiastically about such historiographical skills and above all about historical truth, I mark myself as an old fogey, a pre-Foucauldian who has not properly digested the lesson that all knowledge is about power and that all truths are relative. I have heard many times from my academic colleagues that what people believe about the past is as important as what actually happened, but I still don’t believe it. For me, what people believe is indeed interesting, but it is not as interesting as what actually happened. For me, there are still archives – an often chaotic collection of documents – not The Archive, a mystically constituted text derived from and representing hegemonic knowledge.

To me, memory has become a dangerous word. In the hands of my colleagues, its meaning has moved from half-reliable constructions of the mind that always need to be measured against documentary evidence and against other memories before being given a qualified acceptance. Instead it has become a form of truth as valid as, or perhaps even more valid than, that truth about the past that can be demonstrated by archival research. And yet, it seems to me that we can make a distinction between history and memory that does not denigrate either, that does not require us to put vague, perhaps self-serving recollections of the past on the same footing as the careful, document-based research that I was trained to conduct, and yet does not simply treat memory as a handmaiden to documents.

In everyday life, most people are archivists of a kind. That is to say, we preserve some of the documents that come into our hands. A significant part of this preservation is purely
instrumentalist: we keep financial records, for instance, against the possibility that we might need them at some future stage as evidence or proof in some encounter with the state or with other members of our community. This is the true archivist's instinct that traditional historians love: you never know when a document will turn out to be useful. Of course, this instinct has its destructive counterpart, in the shredder, in the destruction of documents just in case they might be used by someone else against our interests. But we also keep and discard documents as signifiers of the past, sometimes even using the word 'memories' for the physical object, especially photographs, rather than for the mental processes that interpret them.

As a historian, I am pretty thoroughly contaminated by the archival instinct — I never know when it will turn out to be useful, and so I have boxes of documents from the past in my office and in home. I can also admit to having a shredder instinct: I burnt a collection of letters from a previous girlfriend before I got married and I routinely discard documents which I think will not be useful. In this context, however, it is worth reflecting on what I documents I have kept as memories rather than for any thought of usefulness. It seems to me that what I have kept falls into two categories. First are markers of achievement: I did well as school, so I have kept all my school reports. I kept my first history essay at high school for which I received the improbable mark of 22 out of 20. On the other hand, I have kept virtually no records of failure: if there is ever a future historian of Robert Cribb (unlikely), he or she will not be able to use the Cribb archive to identify the scholarships I failed to win, the jobs that I did not get, the languages that I started to learn but never mastered. Of course, not everything that I have kept reflects achievement at the time: some things are there to show how far I've come since childhood.

The collective memory of nations is like this, too. There is no nation, probably no region and no city, that does not use history to catalogue its achievements: Kutai as the first town in Indonesia with street lighting, Bandung for the lautan api and so on. And for Indonesia as a whole, the greatness of Majapahit, Srivijaya, Mataram, Makassar, Aceh and so many others.

And in fact, this memory of achievement was what attracted me to the study of Indonesia in the first place. As a student, I was fascinated by the achievement of Indonesian independence, especially by those final years of revolution between 1945 and 1949. Indonesia was the first Asian country after Mongolia to seize independence from a colonial power and I was fascinated by that battle against huge odds. The Indonesian nationalists in those years faced what should have been a crippling lack of resources — few weapons, not much training, hardly any money, an international environment that was for the most part hostile or at best lukewarm in its support, a determined and sophisticated opponent in the Dutch, and the formidable disadvantages of ethnic diversity and acute political division. My focus from the start therefore was the richness of the strategies which Indonesians used to achieve their goal of securing independence, the sometimes contradictory brilliance of Sukarno, Hatta, Syahrir, Amir Syarifuddin, Sudirman, A.H. Nasution and all the rest, down to my own local heroes in Jakarta such as Imam Syafei, Haji Darip and Sutan Akbar, and then on to the thousands of nameless voters in Dutch-occupied territories who thwarted the Dutch federal strategy by choosing Republican candidates in the elections which the colonial authorities held to give legitimacy to their alternative vision of Indonesia's future.

Yet, over the last 25 years, I have watch with disappointment a steady devaluation of the achievements of the revolution. First, we all know now that colonialism was in its last throes. Less than two decades after Indonesia's bold seizure of independence after three hundred years of a foreign, colonial presence, territories as small and weak as The Gambia and Western Samoa obtained
their independence without a struggle. It is unimaginable that Dutch colonial rule would have survived in Indonesia as late as 1965; in all probability it would have come to an end some time in the first half of the 1950s. Such effort by Indonesian revolutionaries, then, to smash down a door that would soon have opened anyway. The struggle does not look quite as brilliant from this perspective.

And then there is the cost. When I began to study the revolution, I was happy to believe that the armed struggle for independence had been a good thing, an empowering and liberating process by its very nature which made Indonesian stronger human beings and made Indonesian society more just and more focussed than, for instance, its Malaysian or Filipino neighbours. But now, I start to consider the costs: the destruction of life and property, the wholesale displacement of people, the loss of opportunities for education and for post-war reconstruction, the weakening of institutions needed for civil society and the entrenchment of habits of violence and lawlessness, of extortion by the military, of powerful armed gangs, even the contamination of the election process by demands of the national struggle. We do not hear the term ‘national tragedy’ used to describe the four years of revolution; but in all sorts of ways it was a tragedy for the kind of Indonesia we would have hoped to emerge after the end of colonial rule.

Of course, historians are always doing this: qualifying, debunking, diminishing and relativizing. Admittedly, we also resurrect, vindicate, justify and restore, but on the whole historians are not going to be good agents of a historiography of national achievement. As private individuals, we are protected from this process by our insignificance and by the extent to which we control our own archives. But in matters of public history, especially national history, there is not much chance of an achievement-oriented narrative from the professional historians.

We also cherish memories and keep records, however, for emotional reasons. Now, emotion is a complex phenomenon not studied much outside the realm of psychology, but I want to suggest that one of the most important functions of mementos, including historical documents and other objects from the past, is to kindle a sense of shared emotion with people who existed before our time. We know from daily life that disregarding the emotions of others is a sure way to destroy feelings of community. Conversely, sensing the emotions of people in the past is crucial in creating a sense of commonality with those who came before us. In Imagined communities, Ben Anderson identified the role of common experience, especially the common experience of reading commercially printed works such as books, newspapers and periodicals, in creating a sense of community transcending space, in creating a sense of nation. But he only hints at the key role of emotion in this process: community arises not just from reading the same text but rather from believing that the emotions conjured up by a story or a report are similar across the previously fragmented category of readers. The comprehension of words on a page is itself a relatively unmoving experience, but it is transformed if that reading generates a sense of common emotion, whether anger, joy, pride, despair, sadness, passion, regret, humour, boredom, shame or fear. We define ourselves scientifically as rational beings, Homo sapiens, but emotion is actually the strongest force to give us a sense of shared humanity.

I want to suggest here that the sense of empathy created by emotion can be diachronic as well as synchronic. That is, under the right circumstances, our sense of shared emotions can reach back into the past, as well as across distances in the present. In effect, we acquire a set of additional memories—the imagined joys and sufferings of people in the past. These are

---

not empirically defensible memories: they can never be used as evidence of anything in the past.

That reaching back is not easy, and it is not always achieved. The tendency of historians to prefer structural analysis over a focus on the role of personality makes it hard for readers to leap into the minds of those in the past. It is notoriously easy to assume that the emotions of people in the past were weaker than our own, that, for instance, peasants who were born into a life of exploitation and who heard no possibility of anything different in their lives did not feel the anger at their condition which we would feel if we were suddenly plunged into their circumstances. It is easy to imagine that people were less fond of their children in the days when so many of them perished in infancy. Photography is also partly to blame. On the one hand, it offers us a remarkably vivid insight into the past, yet the conventions and practical constraints of early photography wash all emotion from most of the early photographs. Photographic subjects are stiff, neither smiling, nor scowling, nor bemused; nor despairing. The most fundamental problem, however, is that it is difficult to bring people to life except when they are clothed with some touch of personality. And this is where archives play a crucial role.

For the most part, people do not think of archives as places to find emotion. There may be a genre of steamy novels about passion between stacks in archival strongrooms, but they don’t have a wide readership. Nonetheless, when one goes looking for emotion in archival documents, it is remarkable what is to be found, and especially so in archives relating to the Indonesian revolution.

When I began my archival research on Indonesia a quarter of a century ago, I had no interest in emotion. For me, archives in general were important as a source of information and the archives for the revolution in Indonesia, the Netherlands and Britain were exciting for what they contained. Formed in the cauldron of dramatic political change, they were a major source for information on events and strategies. The excitement was compounded by the fact that both Dutch and British archives from the period had only recently been made open to researchers (the Dutch archives under a special relaxation of the 50 year rule which attached special conditions to material relating to living persons).

All the more exciting was the peculiar way in which these had been assembled. Most archives are the product of government administrative imperatives. They are produced by governments for their own purposes and survive because the task of sorting what is administratively useful from what is not is seldom worth the effort. Archives typically have a strong audit function. They provide a record of decisions and actions against which proper performance by officials and by members of the public can be assessed. Were it not for this audit function, a constantly updated compendium of today’s rules would be sufficient for governance purposes. This audit function helps to give archives their coherence, but it tends to work in favour of focus. That is to say, audit archives tend to reflect the working of government in its broadest sense, but no more than this.

The archives of the Indonesian revolution, by contrast, were assembled in a time of people’s war. In the aftermath of the Second World War, nationalist and socialist impulses around the world underpinned a series of revolutionary struggles using one or other form of guerrilla warfare. Guerrilla warfare, as we all know, depends in most cases on a special relationship between fighters and people. The major theorists of guerrilla war – Mao, Giap, Nabution, Guevara – all emphasise this point.

---


4 A Google search for “steam passion” and “archives” on 5 June 2009 yielded 12,200 hits, but the archives were all electronic, not truly archival.
The consequence for governments is a different strategy on the collection of data. Such archives emerge not for audit reasons, but out of the need for intelligence. Combating a total people's war requires a broader vision of society than was ever needed in colonial times.

This imperative explains the sharp contrast between British and Dutch archives for Indonesia in this period. The British, responsible for accepting the Japanese surrender at the end of the Second World War and for supervising the return to civilian government, constructed their task in a minimalist way: they had no interest or intention in being engaged in a colonial war in Indonesia when they had problems to deal with in their own colonies. Their conception of their task was a narrow one which they referred to as 'law and order' but which amounted to preserving peace in the streets and to facilitating a settlement between the warring parts. On these topics, the archives at Kew are illuminating, but when it comes to the social and political currents at work in Indonesian society that are severely limited. Reading these archives is like listening to a band several hundred metres away: especially if you know the tune, you can work out what is happening, but there is no sense of immersion in events.

By contrast, the Dutch archives resemble the contents of a vacuum cleaner. A vast range of materials relevant not just to the negotiations and the military struggle but also to the battle for the hearts and minds of Indonesians found its way into these archives. The richest in this respect is the so-called NEFIS archive—the intelligence archive which became the repository of thousands of scraps of information that Dutch officials suspected might be useful or informative. In this archive one finds inflammatory pamphlets, wall posters, petitions, accounts and receipts, and miscellaneous government and private documents. There is a letter from the young Li Framoedya Ananta Toer of the Indonesian army requesting permission to take the desks and chairs from a school building in Bekasi for military purposes on the grounds that the school is no longer functioning. There is the diary of a local Indonesian official from before the war, writing in a strange mixture of Dutch and Indonesian and telling much of the practical life of a functionary at the bottom of the colonial hierarchy. I found a few bullets, too, and 17 tubes of processed opium which had been found under the footplate of a locomotive entering Jakarta from Tangerang. Attached to it was a letter in Chinese that had been found in the same place, but the letter had no reference to link it to the drug. Another part of the archive consists of interrogation reports. In colonial times, such reports were commonly not much more than a forensic effort to establish evidence of innocence or guilt in criminal cases, but in the revolution they are used as a form of *vox populi*. Interrogators clearly believe that the words told to them in closed questioning sessions will allow them to understand the way Indonesians feel about the political situation, and indeed the reports are a fascinating window into a world of verbal fencing between Indonesians and Dutch. Even beyond such specialist parts of the collection, the archives of the revolution as a whole are richer in humanity than the colonial archives because the administrations on both sides demanded reporting on an unprecedented scale and demanded those reports from people recently recruited into government tasks. In consequence, the rigid formulations of the colonial era—'Ik heb de eer, U Hoog Edel Gestrenge mode te deelen...' ('I have the honour, Sir, to inform you...')—gives way to direct and sometimes sharp, uncompromising local analyses of the situation.

When I began my study of the Indonesian revolution, I valued such materials for the narrow shafts of documentary light that they projected down on to a vast range of human activity during the revolution. To have the tax records of a single village in Java from this period does not enable us to
Robert Cribb

talk comprehensively about the island as a whole, let alone the whole of Indonesia, but it gives us an understanding of how things could happen. Without such documents we would be entirely dependent on speculation.

As time has passed, however, I have come to value these archives still more for what they can tell us about human emotion. The vacuum-cleaner character of the archives and the fact that reports were collected on such extensive a scale from inexperienced rapporteurs means that these archives also provide all sorts of unexpected glimpses into the emotional state of people at the time. Feelings of urgency and energy, of wasted effort and futility, of opportunity and new beginnings. For an instrumentalist historian, these things are nearly as important as village budgets and government policies in understanding why events took the turn they did. But for our purposes today, they allow us to treat memory as a way of reaching back on a personal level to people in the past, understanding their hopes and fears and generating a collective memory not just of the nations but of humankind.

Imagined History

Yong Mun Cheong
Department of History
National University of Singapore

Lapian lives by the sea in Manado. I too live near the sea in Singapore simply by virtue of the fact that Singapore is so small and no one lives too far from somewhere anyway. Of course, Lapian’s house was built on the beach while the sea is not within sighting distance from my residence. For both of us, the sea is the common fascination. Even now, from the distance of Singapore, I can imagine Lapian resting on his patio, imagining how the sea impacted on life in Manado, how the people there lived according to the rhythms of the sea, how the sea created communities and so on. These must be the thoughts that course through Lapian’s mind. A few years ago, these were the thoughts that crossed our minds when we sat down together to gaze at the vast expanse of blue, green azure from the vantage of Lapian’s beach residence.

It was Lapian who invited me to visit. I was inquiring whether he would be available in Jakarta where I thought meeting him would be easier and more convenient. Wisely, he suggested that I take the Silk Air flight to Manado instead.