

Private Memories, National Histories: Indonesia and the Japanese Occupation

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Historical Consciousness and Collective Memory

- “A common past, preserved through institutions, traditions, and symbols, is a crucial instrument in the construction of collective identities in the present... memories [convey] an idea of origins and development, of challenges overcome, with collective protagonists and individual heroes confronting difficult conditions and threatening enemies” (Seixas, 2004).
- Development of Indonesia as a nation? Enemies of the past?
- Collective memory as “stories in which experiences, expectations, and transformations are *collective*, that is, socially or culturally significant” (Straub, 2005).
- Historical legacies and calls for symbolic and financial recompense in Indonesia and elsewhere.

The Japanese Occupation and Indonesian Historiography

- “There is a national amnesia about remembering the wartime past in Southeast Asia” with the exceptions of Singapore, Burma, and the Philippines (Blackburn, 2010).
- According to Lam (2015), Japanese period forgotten because:
 - It was short-lived
 - More immediate political concerns took precedence
 - Fukuda Doctrine mended relations
- Oral history interviews with Indonesians who lived through the Japanese Occupation suggest there is more to the story.

Oral History Interviews

- 16 oral history interviews:
 - Five in Java (Salatiga and Jakarta)
 - Five in Biak
 - Five in West Timor (Kupang, Oesao, Nunbees)
 - One in Ambon
- Oldest participant was 105



Interview with Selfiana Randongkir
(born 1911), Biak, 19 July 2016.

The Japanese period is *remembered*



Interview with Mozes Ronsumbre
(born 1938), Biak, 22 July 2016.

- Stories of the Japanese Occupation told in vivid detail
- Very few oral history participants showed any signs of distress or visible sadness



Interview with Josefus Burdam
(born 1940), Biak, 21 July 2016.

Talking about war

- “Everyone had to work hard, because if you didn’t work, you were beaten by the Japanese.”
- “You had to use your hands. There were no tools, there wasn’t anything at all.”
- “They didn’t tell us quickly with sharp weapons. They did it with sticks, with firewood, with stones.”
- “Every family that had a clean house had it taken by the Japanese.”



Interview with Robert Ronsumbre
(born 1933), Biak, 22 July 2016.

The Dutch period was more comfortable

- “We [the Ambonese] love the Netherlands more than Indonesia.”
- “[The Dutch period] was more comfortable. The Indonesian people could eat and sleep soundly.”
- Under the Japanese, schools closed down, a coupon system (*jatah*) was established, people were “unable to go wandering outside their houses”
- Candles had to be extinguished at night and people were not allowed to wear white because flames and bright clothes were visible from the sky during air raids.



Interview with Marie Parinussa (born 1925),
Ambon, 1 August 2016.

Different experiences of the Japanese



- Cooks and tailors were exempted from taking up more gruelling jobs
- Food and clothing shortages not experienced by all

Interview with Sterling Sumargo (born 1929), Kupang,
7 August 2016.

Forgiving (not forgetting)

- “How can we be religious if we still hate?”
- “We cannot believe in an eye for an eye (*kejam berbalas kejam*).”
- “We felt scared, but maybe the culture of Kupang is an unassuming (*lugu*) one? Kupang people are more able to forgive.”
- “We have been religious for a very long time, and hatred for the Japanese is not in accordance with our ethical code (*kode etik*) as human beings.”



Interview with Yakob Natu Abineno (born 1937), Nunbees, 4 August 2016.

Commemoration and Memorialisation



Sparrow Force Monument, Oesao, 9 August 2016.



Second World War Monument, Biak, 20 July 2016.



Ambon War Cemetery, Ambon, 30 July 2016.

Thank you



Goa Jepang, Biak, 20 July 2016.