
REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING INDONESIA'S MADIUN AFFAIR: PERSONAL NARRATIVES, POLITICAL TRANSITIONS, AND HISTORIOGRAPHY, 1948–2008¹

Akiko Sugiyama

Introduction

When the New Order regime came to an end in 1998 after more than three decades of authoritarian rule, Indonesia entered the *reformasi* era, and a transition toward a democratic system began in earnest. The new turn in the political scene soon led to a wealth of history projects revisiting the country's past in order to steer its way into "new futures." In a fashion that parallels "truth-seeking" investigations in other transitional societies, these endeavors commonly uncovered aspects of Indonesia's national past that had been tightly censored or prohibited as material for public discussions during the New Order years. Consequently, such topics as communism, political violence, ethnic and religious conflict, and corruption began to take the center

¹ An earlier draft of this article was presented at the Joint Conference on Southeast Asian Studies, "Ten Years After: Reformasi and New Social Movements in Indonesia, 1998–2008," held at the University of California at Berkeley, April 25–26, 2008, and organized by the UC Berkeley Center for Southeast Asia Studies. I am thankful to the organizing committee for providing me with the opportunity to present my work. I would also like to extend a special word of thanks to Robin Gold. Finally, I gratefully acknowledge the financial support I received from the University of Macau Start-up Research Fund to complete this work.

stage of intellectual pursuits.² The new intellectual climate in the post–New Order Indonesia has also shed light on the role of personal memory as a “touchstone for new histories,” as victims of violence and suppression slowly began to tell their stories.³ One individual who has been placed under the spotlight in the transitional Indonesia is Sumarsono (b. 1921), one of the few surviving eyewitnesses of *Peristiwa Madiun*, or the Madiun Affair, who discussed his view of the incident on several occasions between 1949 and 2008. A critical turning point in the last years of the Indonesian Revolution (1945–1949), this armed conflict between Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI, Indonesian Communist Party) and the Republican government reportedly took the lives of thousands during the guerrilla warfare that lasted from September to December 1948. This article examines and evaluates Sumarsono’s accounts of Madiun by comparing and contrasting them with the accepted renditions, and by doing so, fleshes out historical references to this important highlight in modern Indonesian history that is often overshadowed by the “politicide” of Communists and Communist sympathizers that took place in 1965 and 1966.

The Course of Events

What is known today as the “Madiun Affair,” or *Peristiwa Madiun*, was an armed conflict between the government of the Republic of Indonesia and the left-wing opposition group, Front Demokrasi Rakyat (FDR, People’s Democratic Front). In the course of the three-month confrontation, intermittent fighting plagued much of Central and East Java.⁴ Although the exact number of casualties is unknown, the Madiun conflict is reported to have claimed thousands of lives and brought devastation and violence to the affected regions.

The initial stage of the conflict began at dawn on September 18, 1948, in the city of Madiun in East Java. A minor clash between the government troops and FDR members broke out and ended with the disarming of the former by the latter. On the next day, the triumphant FDR proceeded to set up the National Front Government to bring order to the city and the surrounding areas. The central government, fearful of the possible disintegration of the young Indonesian Republic, responded immediately by launching a military campaign to seize Madiun, which was in the hands of a force the government leaders deemed “the rebels.” The Siliwangi division of Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI, Indonesian National Army) and Corps Polisi Militer (CPM, Military Police Corps) spearheaded the operation, and swiftly recaptured the city on September 30. Members of the FDR in Madiun, meanwhile, fled the city just in time to avoid confrontation with the government forces and headed west to the Dutch territory to

² Mary S. Zurbuchen, ed., *Beginning to Remember: The Past in the Indonesian Present* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2005). See especially the introduction, “Historical Memory in Contemporary Indonesia,” by Zurbuchen, pp. 3–32. For case studies on Vietnam, see Hue-Tam Ho Tai, ed., *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

³ Zurbuchen, ed., *Beginning to Remember*, p. 6.

⁴ At the time of the Madiun Affair, Java was divided into areas under Republican control and those under Dutch occupation. The Republican territory was concentrated in Central and East Java and Bantam, with its provisional capital located in Yogyakarta. The Netherlands held the western half of the island (excluding Bantam) and the far eastern region, including Madura. The demarcation line had been established under the Renville Agreement.

escape persecution by the Indonesian government. Having recovered Madiun, the government concentrated its effort on hunting down FDR leaders and supporters, who by then were roaming at large across the Republican territory and waging guerrilla warfare in resistance and in the slim hope of gaining popular support for their cause. The military operation continued well into November, during which time skirmishes were rampant and disrupted the lives of those in the affected areas. Although it is difficult to determine when the Madiun Affair actually ended, by December most FDR leaders had either been killed during the guerrilla warfare or captured and executed by the Indonesian government.⁵ By that time, the FDR was in shambles, without leadership, and had lost its stature as an organized opposition.

The Historiography of the Madiun Affair

The historiography of the Madiun Affair is deeply political. From the onset, party politics and the political inclinations of narrators played a seminal role in determining how the bloodshed that reportedly killed thousands was both remembered and forgotten. The earliest references to the event typically consisted of immediate reactions to its outbreak on September 18, 1948. In their radio speeches, political and military leaders of major organizations took their stands firmly and, in so doing, sought to garner support from the public for their causes. For instance, on September 19, 1948, Sukarno (1901–70), the first president of Indonesia, delivered a speech, later published as "*Kepada Bangsaaku*" (To My People), in which he resolutely called for unity among Indonesians to defend the independence of the nascent Indonesian Republic, now under threat from the PKI rebellion.⁶ In response, Musso, the PKI chairperson and a leader of the left-wing coalition, FDR, who had recently returned to Java from Moscow, praised the turn of events in Madiun as an effort by the Indonesian people to establish a popular sovereign state free of imperialism and "bourgeois" rule.⁷ Consequently, the speeches by political leaders combined with the contemporaneous reports in the daily newspapers shaped the binary view of the Madiun Affair as a conflict between "nationalists" and "Communists."

Following the transfer of sovereignty from the Netherlands in 1950, Indonesia formed a new government under Sukarno. In the early years of his postrevolution presidency (1950–65), Indonesia was increasingly entangled with the global Cold War conflict, and the ideological divide between the political left and right, as well as between Communism and Islam, grew deeper. Situated firmly in the context of Cold War politics, a corpus of literature stressed that the Madiun Affair was a disastrous consequence of *bahaya merah* (red peril, red menace), and the phrase, *bahaya merah*, recurred frequently in government documents, as well as publications by Islamic

⁵ Musso, the Soviet-trained ideologue and the de facto leader of the FDR/PKI from August 1948 until his death that same year, was reportedly killed by a gunshot near Ponorogo on October 31. Other FDR leaders, such as Amir Sjarifuddin and Suripno, were captured on December 1 near the Renville truce line and were executed, along with nine others, in Yogyakarta on December 19, 1948.

⁶ Sukarno, *Kepada Bangsaaku* (Jakarta: Panitia Pembina Djiwa Revolusi, 1962). For the English translation of the speech, see Ann Swift, *The Road to Madiun: The Indonesian Communist Uprising of 1948* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1989), pp. 97–99.

⁷ The transcript of Musso's speech is included in George McTurnan Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1952), pp. 293–94. See also Swift, *Road to Madiun*, pp. 101–2.

groups, through the 1950s and beyond.⁸ A handful of short stories published in the early 1950s by Indonesian authors have also explored the theme of the growing “Communist threat” and the ideological rift between Islam and Communism, conflicts portrayed as important factors in fomenting social and political undercurrents of turmoil and violence.⁹

Sukarno’s presidency was also marked by “democratic” experiments with pluralism in national and local politics, an approach that his eclectic ideology of *Nasakom* (Nationalism, Religion, and Communism) encapsulated. Reflecting these political currents, the PKI, reorganized under the leadership of the new chairperson, D. N. Aidit (1923–1965), gained influence in central government and enjoyed popular support. Until the mass killings of purported communists in 1965 to 1966 and the suppression of communism in Indonesia, the PKI endeavored to confront the official statement about its alleged role in staging Madiun by publishing a White Paper, as well as staging public appearances and speeches by the party leaders.¹⁰ Aidit, for instance, repeatedly attacked the military policies of the coalition government led by Mohammad Hatta (1902–80) and maintained that they were aimed at purging leftist influences in the national army. The PKI’s story line stresses that the Madiun Affair was actually a “provocation” organized by the Hatta government.¹¹ Similarly, the Soviet press reported that the Madiun Affair was a “provocation” against leftists orchestrated by the Sukarno–Hatta government, and it welcomed the move by the

⁸ See, for instance, M. Isa Anshary et al., *Bahaya: Merah di Indonesia* (Bandung: Front Anti Komunis, 1955); Departemen Luar Negeri, *Fakta dan Dokumen2 untuk Menjusun Buku “Indonesia Memasuki Gelanggang Internasional”* (Jakarta: Kementerian Luar Negeri, Direktorat V, Seksi Penyelidikan dan Dokumentasi/Perpustakaan, 1958–1959); and Mohammad Sofwanhadi, *Bahaya Merah: Kutipan dari Tadjuk Surat Kabar Surat Rakjat* (Surabaya: Surat Rakjat, 1960).

⁹ For example, Pramoedy Ananta Toer’s “Dia jang Menjerah” (Acceptance), published originally in 1950, narrates the survival of a family whose life was disrupted by the turbulent years of the Japanese Occupation, the return of Dutch forces, and the Madiun Affair. The story revolves around the personal struggles of main characters as they join the Red army around the time of the Madiun conflict, but eventually return home, disillusioned, and withdraw into an apolitical life. S. Rukiah Kertapati’s “Kedjatuhan dan Hati” (An Affair of the Heart), which also came out in 1950, showcases hopes and then disillusionment with Communism. While working for the army as a nurse, the female protagonist falls in love with a rebel and an avid Communist with whom she has a son. His idealism and political zeal wear her out and cause her to return home. Parting ways with the activist father of her child, she settles down with a mundane and faithful neighbor in her home village. The English translations of these short stories are in John McGlynn and William H. Frederick, trans., *Reflections on Rebellion: Stories from the Indonesian Uphavals of 1948 and 1965* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1983), pp. 49–105. Another example is Matu Mona’s undated work, *Peristiwa demi Peristiwa* (Medan: Pustaka Anugrah, 19--?). Set in the midst of guerrilla warfare following the fall of Madiun, the story features the frustrated love affair between Satryo, a devout Muslim and Hizbullah soldier, and Tarminah, the progressive leftist and Marxist.

¹⁰ The first of such endeavors was Partai Komunis Indonesia, Komite Central, *Buku Putih tentang Peristiwa Madiun* (Jakarta: Sekretariat Agitasi-Propaganda C.C. P.K.I., 1951). Aiming to document evidence, the booklet is a collection of relevant newspaper articles and photos that chronicle highlights of political and military affairs leading up to and following the Madiun Affair in 1948. Subsequent PKI publications were more vocal in confronting the official statement about the party’s alleged role in staging the event and triggering the rebellion.

¹¹ D. N. Aidit, *Konfrontasi Peristiwa Madiun 1948 Peristiwa Sumatera 1956* (Jakarta: Jajasan Pembaruan, 1957), preface, n. p.; D. N. Aidit, *Aidit Menggugat Peristiwa Madiun. Pembelaan D. N. Aidit dimuka Pengadilan Negeri Djakarta, tgl. 24 Februari 1955*, 4th ed. (Jakarta: Jajasan Pembaruan, 1964), pp. 17–32.

leftists to launch the armed struggle for independence rather than complying with the diplomatic path taken by the government.¹²

In 1966, Sukarno's "Old" Order was replaced by what became known as the New Order, and in the following year, Suharto (1921–2008) was declared the second president of Indonesia. Widespread violence preceded the regime change. In an armed conflict on September 30, 1965, known popularly as "Gestapu" or "G30S" (Gerakan Tiga Puluh September, 30th September Movement), General Suharto and his aides seized control of the government after suppressing a coup attempt by military officers with alleged links to the PKI. Violence escalated in the following months, as purges and mass slaughters of Communists and Communist sympathizers intensified across the country, especially in Java and Bali. During the bloodshed, PKI's national leaders, including Aidit, were captured and killed, and the party and its mass organizations were banned in March 1966.

The inception of the New Order coincided with the publication of two new additions to the study of the Madiun Affair. Although the politicicide of the PKI and Communists was still fresh in the public's memory, H. A. Notosoetardjo's *Peristiwa Madiun Tragedi Nasional* and Djamal Marsudi's *Menjungkap Tabir Fakta-fakta Pemberontakan PKI dalam Peristiwa Madiun* made an explicit connection between Madiun and G30S, calling the latter "the second PKI rebellion," and focused on collecting "fakta-fakta" (facts) about Madiun to bring about a deeper understanding of G30S.¹³ Meanwhile, the New Order regime tightened its rein on the national past through a series of official investigations into the Madiun Affair. As early as 1966, Suharto endorsed Pinardi's *Peristiwa Coup Berdarah P.K.I. 18 September 1948 di Madiun* as a serious effort to reexamine "lembaran hitam" (black pages) in the history of the Indonesian Revolution.¹⁴

The history writing regarding Madiun carried out under the auspices of the New Order also made extensive use of personal accounts by those military officers who took part in the military operation against the FDR/PKI forces in Central and East Java from late September to mid-December 1948. Firmly anti-Communist and patriotic in character, the officers' recollections vividly narrated traumatic experiences during the campaign and their own lasting pride in their contribution to defeating the Communist forces in Madiun and protecting the Indonesian nation from dissolution.¹⁵ Personal

¹² Ruth T. McVey, *The Soviet View of the Indonesian Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1957), p. 74.

¹³ H. A. Notosoetardjo, *Peristiwa Madiun Tragedi Nasional* (Jakarta: Endang, Pemuda, Api Islam, 1966), p. 9; Djamal Marsudi, *Menjungkap Tabir Fakta-fakta Pemberontakan PKI dalam Peristiwa Madiun* (Jakarta: Merdeka Press, 1966).

¹⁴ Pinardi, *Peristiwa Coup Berdarah P.K.I. September 1948 di Madiun* (Jakarta: Inkopak–Hazera, 1966), p. vii. This work deserves mention not only because it was one of the first official publications on Madiun to come out in New Order Indonesia, but also because it treated the mounting tension in Madiun as a decisive factor in setting the stage for the military showdown. Pinardi suggests, in a close parallel to Sumarsono's own explanation, that the chaos in Madiun, in addition to the defeat of the FDR troops in Solo, prompted Sumarsono to resort to an armed action in order to prevent Madiun from becoming a second Solo (pp. 77–79).

¹⁵ A few examples of monographs dedicated to chronicling military operations that took place from September through December 1948 include the following: Moela Marboen, *Gerakan Operasi Militer I Untuk Menumpas Peristiwa Madiun* (Jakarta: Mega Bookstore, 1965); A. H. Nasution, *Tentara Nasional Indonesia*, vol. 2 (Jakarta: Seruling Masa, 1968–71); Nasution, *Pemberontakan PKI 1948*, vol. 8 of *Sekitar Perang Kemerdekaan*

narratives of the Madiun Affair were not limited to those authored by prominent officers and political leaders. Marking the fortieth commemoration of the killings allegedly committed by the PKI, *Lubang-Lubang Pembantaian* revisited the “national tragedy” through eyewitness accounts—many by villagers—of violence and the endemic plunder and robbery in the countryside.¹⁶

At the same time that the current affairs in Indonesian politics were leaving a decisive mark on the interpretation of the Madiun Affair, foreign researchers were making references to the event in their respective projects and, in so doing, they pursued queries and themes similar to those featured in the aforementioned works. Several researchers placed their studies in the loosely binary context of the mounting opposition between leftists and nationalists, as well as the opposition between nationalism and communism. As Anthony Reid shows, the dismantling of the leftist groups in late 1948 led to a crucial conceptual break, and the revolution thereafter became increasingly “national” rather than “social.”¹⁷ Some non-Indonesian authors interpreted events from a point of view often discredited in New Order publications. Having reviewed the previously classified documents in the State Archives in The Hague, Rudi Kreutzer asserted that the Hatta government, overall, deserved to be held responsible for curtailing the political and military influence of the Indonesian left, executing Indonesia’s “best revolutionaries,” and ultimately averting a full-blown social revolution.¹⁸ Nonetheless, the analytical and conceptual jargon, grounded in such terms as “leftist,” “nationalist,” “communist,” and “socialist,” presents its own limitations. In his in-depth study of the leftist movements in the 1930s and 1940s, Soe Hok Gie illuminates the intricate divisions within the political left and points out that these groupings and internal factions were not necessarily a product of doctrinal differences, but rather reflected personal connections and alliances.¹⁹ Meanwhile, Western sociologists and anthropologists writing in the 1960s and 1970s explored issues related to the ideological schism between Islam and Communism through structural analysis of violence in Central and East Java during the guerrilla warfare. Building on their field studies and interviews with eyewitnesses conducted in the 1950s and 1960s, Robert Jay and Margot L. Lyon proposed that a root cause of the

Indonesia (Bandung: Disjarah-AD dan Angkasa, 1979); and Himawan Soetanto, *Perintah Presiden Soekarno, “Rebut Kembali Madiun . . .”: Silitwangi Menumpas Pemberontakan PKI/Moeso 1948* (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1994).

¹⁶ Maksum, Agus Sunyoto, and A. Zainuddin, eds., *Lubang-Lubang Pembantaian: Petualangan PKI di Madiun* (Jakarta: Grafiti, 1990). This is a collection of twenty-seven eyewitness accounts dedicated to the memories of those victims who had perished in the titular “slaughter holes.” They were published originally in *Jawa Pos* between September 18, 1989, and October 16, 1989.

¹⁷ Anthony Reid, *The Indonesian National Revolution 1945–1950* (Hawthorn, Victoria: Longman, 1974), pp. 146–47.

¹⁸ Rudi Kreutzer, *The Madiun Affair: Hatta’s Betrayal of Indonesia’s First Social Revolution* (Queensland, Australia: James Cook University of North Queensland, South East Asian Studies Committee, 1981), pp. 35, 39. Kreutzer draws his observations from the primary documents located at the State Archives in The Hague, and from interviews with a few eyewitnesses.

¹⁹ Soe Hok Gie, *Orang-orang di Persimpangan Kiri Jalan: Kisah Pemberontakan Madiun September 1948* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Bentang Budaya, 1997). The book was written originally as an MA thesis submitted to the Faculty of Literature, University of Indonesia, in 1969.

bloodshed at the local level lay in the hostility between the two opposing cultural and religious groups, *santri* (orthodox Muslims) and *abangan* (syncretic traditionalists).²⁰

Anticipation of a new intellectual climate and a reinterpretation of the Madiun Affair from fresh perspectives ran high when the New Order regime ended its three decades of authoritarian rule in 1998 and a transition toward democratic reforms began in earnest. The regime change soon fueled the resurgence of a counter narrative about Madiun. Aiming to set the record straight in accord with the PKI's standpoint, some new publications openly attempted to redress the situation and argued for the first time since the mid-1960s that the PKI was innocent in triggering the bloodshed of 1948. They declared that the purported uprising was a provocation staged by Hatta's government to drive out the leftist units in the military.²¹ While the previously silenced voice of the left was making a return "with vengeance," patriotic sentiment continued to inspire Indonesian researchers to undertake new investigations and remember the Madiun Affair as an unforgettable episode in the collective memory of the Indonesian people.²² In 2005, marking the sixtieth anniversary of Indonesian independence, Himawan Soetanto, a military historian and a former lieutenant general who had lived through the turbulent months of 1948 in his youth, revisited the topic in his doctoral dissertation and set out to write a "complete history" of Madiun "in an objective manner" rather than a chronicle of personal experience and emotional struggle.²³ His research resulted in a monograph, *Madiun dari Republik ke Republik*, which documented scrupulously the course of military operations by government troops as well as highlights in international and domestic politics.

The growing tendency to acknowledge multiple voices from Indonesia's national past brought attention to the "leftist" individuals whose political careers had been rarely discussed in public during the New Order years. Sumarsono, a principal actor in the Madiun Affair and one of the few surviving eyewitnesses of the incident, is one such individual. Until recently, the existing scholarship made only limited references to his part in the conflict.²⁴ This neglect has since been redressed. One recent project that explored Sumarsono's view of the Madiun Affair consisted of interviews conducted by Kusalah Subagiyo Tur in 1998 and 2000.²⁵ Together, these interviews

²⁰ Robert R. Jay, *Religion and Politics in Rural Central Java* (New Haven, CT: Southeast Asia Studies, Yale University, 1963), pp. 26–28; Margot L. Lyon, *Bases of Conflict in Rural Java* (Berkeley, CA: Center for South and Southeast Asia Studies, University of California, 1970).

²¹ D. N. Aidit et al., *PKI Korban Perang Dingin: Sejarah Peristiwa Madiun 1948* (Jakarta: ERA Publisher, 2001); and Penerbit Pustaka Pena, *Berbagai Fakta dan Kesaksian sekitar "Peristiwa Madiun"* (Jakarta: Pustaka Pena, 2001).

²² Zurbuchen, *Beginning to Remember*, p. 13.

²³ Himawan Soetanto, *Madiun dari Republik ke Republik: Aspek Militer Pemberontakan PKI di Madiun* (Jakarta: Kata, 2006), pp. ix, xv.

²⁴ Most studies have associated Sumarsono with the youth movement in Surabaya during the early months of the Indonesian Revolution (1945–49). Others have simply introduced him as a member of Pemuda Sosialis Indonesia (Pesindo, Indonesian Socialist Youth) or mentioned in passing his triumphant radio speech on September 19, announcing the formation of the FDR government in Madiun. See, for instance, Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution*, p. 290; Reid, *Indonesian National Revolution*, p. 142; and Arnold Brackman, *Indonesian Communism: A History* (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 91.

²⁵ Sumarsono, "Wawancara dengan Sumarsono (Saksi Utama "Peristiwa Madiun)—Pewawancara: Kusalah Subagiyo Tur," in Penerbit Pustaka Pena, *Berbagai Fakta dan Kesaksian sekitar "Peristiwa Madiun"* (Jakarta: Pustaka Pena, 2001), pp. 79–106. Kusalah is the brother of the renowned Indonesian novelist, Pramodya Ananta Toer (1925–2006). A full English translation of the interviews can be found in Akiko

constituted a chapter in *Berbagai Fakta dan Kesaksian sekitar "Peristiwa Madiun,"* a post-New Order collective memoir offered through the firsthand accounts of those who "directly" experienced the affair.²⁶ Another recent publication is Hersri Setiawan's *Negara Madiun? Kesaksian Soemarsono Pelaku Perjuangan* (Madiun State? Testimony by Soemarsono, an Agent of Struggle).²⁷ This biographical study also derives the bulk of its information from extensive interviews the author conducted with Sumarsono. What is little known is that Sumarsono also produced another document, "De Madioen Affaire" (The Madiun Affair), in 1949, during his detention by Dutch forces. This Dutch interrogation report chronicles the origins and timeline of the event and his life until his capture in October 1949.²⁸ This report, together with Sumarsono's recent communication with me and other interviews he has given, constitutes the most extensive source of information by an eyewitness describing the Madiun Affair.²⁹ Although other individuals reminisced about their experiences in the Madiun Affair, most of these narratives are rather fragmentary compared with those of Sumarsono.³⁰ Moreover, Sumarsono's stories are perhaps the only surviving eyewitness accounts of the event that were offered by a principal actor in the incident because most leading

Sugiyama, "Indonesia's Madiun Affair of 1948: Two Accounts by Sumarsono" (MA thesis, Ohio University, 2002).

²⁶ Penerbit Pustaka Pena, *Berbagai Fakta dan Kesaksian*, p. iii.

²⁷ Hersri Setiawan, *Negara Madiun? Kesaksian Soemarsono Pelaku Perjuangan* (Jakarta: Forum Studi Perubahan dan Peradaban, 2002).

²⁸ Algemeen Rijksarchief, Procureur-Generaal bij het Hooggerichtshof in Nederlands-Indië 1945–1950, nr. 979, Jakarta, November 11, 1949, unpublished document. I am grateful to Dr. William H. Frederick for introducing me to this document and patiently supervising my MA thesis. Full English translation of "De Madioen Affaire" is in Sugiyama, "Indonesia's Madiun Affair of 1948." According to Sumarsono, there were two Dutch interrogators present when he typed out his testimony (personal communication with Sumarsono June 2–3, 2008). "De Madioen Affaire" is one of the four documents included in the dossier nr. 979, which appears to be a personal file on Sumarsono compiled by the attorney-general of the Netherlands Indies. Besides "De Madioen Affaire," the file contains a set of Indonesian and Dutch police reports dated October 26, 1948, on the general situation surrounding the Madiun Affair and a confidential Indonesian report dated November 3, 1949, concerning Sumarsono's involvement in the incident.

²⁹ I conducted interviews with Sumarsono at his home in Bintaro Jaya, Jakarta, on June 2–3, 2008. The author would like to thank Pak Sumarsono and his family for welcoming me on short notice and sharing their stories with me. My gratitude also goes to Vanessa Hearman at the University of Melbourne for providing me with contact information in a timely way. Another recent attempt to revisit the Madiun Affair, which was marked by particular interest in Sumarsono's eyewitness accounts, was the seminar "Sarasehan Madiun 1948," held October 19–20, 2002, in Diemen, Holland. At the seminar, Sumarsono shared his view of the event with dozens of Indonesians based in Europe, as well as Dutch journalists. Ibrahim Isa, a renowned journalist who was present at the meeting, reported on the highlights of the discussions in "Akhiri Fitnah dan Pemalsuan Mengenai Peristiwa Madiun 1948," available from www.polarhome.com/pipermail/nasional-a/2002-October/000051.html and www.polarhome.com/pipermail/nasional-a/2002-October/000052.html (accessed April 10, 2008). See also Harsutejo, *Soemarsono: Pemimpin Perlawanan Rakyat Surabaya 1945 yang Dilupakan* (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 2010).

³⁰ For instance, Kemal Idris, a former TNI officer who joined the military campaign to suppress the Madiun Affair, discussed his views of the event on several occasions. His accounts appear in Pinardi, *Peristiwa Coup Berdarah P.K.I.*, pp. 113–17; Maksum and Zainuddin, *Lubang-Lubang Pembantaian*, pp. 160–66; MEMOAR: *Senarai Kiprah Sejarah Diangkat dari Majalah TEMPO*, vol. 3 (Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti, 1993), pp. 7–10; and Kemal Idris, *Kemal Idris: Bertarung dalam Revolusi* (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1996), pp. 90–98. Political leaders have also discussed the Madiun Affair in different settings over the years. Their stories range from immediate reactions to reminiscences about the event recorded long after the fact, and their narratives often relate to their own political careers. These figures include the first president, Sukarno; the first vice president, Mohammad Hatta; an accomplished doctor and politician, Abu Hanifah; and Suharto, who became the second president of Indonesia in 1967.

members of the Communist Party were either killed during the guerrilla warfare or captured and executed in December 1948.

In the following sections, I examine multiple intersections between Sumarsono's personal experience and broader social and political circumstances. His upbringing and early political career established him as one of a generation of *pemuda*, loosely translated as "young man," committed to the social and political causes of the Indonesian Revolution.³¹ At the same time, a close reading of Sumarsono's accounts illuminate complex and incongruous relations between official statements and personal narratives pertaining to Madiun and efforts to assign responsibility for the outbreak.³² Throughout the years, he maintained that on the eve of the bloodshed, he had received instructions from the PKI leaders to launch a military offensive against rival troops in Madiun. His denial that he had taken the lead in initiating the armed action presents peculiar discrepancies with most renditions, which generally suggest that Sumarsono and his armed comrades had acted on their own. Thus, according to the typical narrative, the PKI leaders were caught "off guard" by the sudden turn of events in Madiun.³³ When read against one another, Sumarsono's accounts exhibit shared features of "survivor's memory" and offer a perspective unique to an individual who experienced the event and had a chance to talk about it after time had passed.³⁴ Recorded just a year after the Madiun conflict, his 1949 statement offers the most exhaustive description of the course of events, including the ebb and flow of political and military groups in the Madiun area. In contrast, the later accounts by Sumarsono discuss retrospectively the cause and consequences of the Madiun Affair (and the Indonesian Revolution) in a broader context of twentieth-century world politics and economy.

Sumarsono's Upbringing and Early Political Career

Sumarsono was born in 1921 in Kutarjo, Kedu Residency, in Central Java. His father, Setjodiwirjo, was an official vaccinator, and his mother, Toekinah, was from a modest social background and illiterate.³⁵ After the death of Sumarsono's father in 1935, his mother became a devout Christian. His mother and his three older sisters, who were also baptized and later married Christians, played an influential role in bringing Christian life to young Sumarsono.³⁶ He received a primary education in Dutch. After attending a missionary secondary school at Kutarjo in 1935, he went to

³¹ For further discussion on the definition of *pemuda*, see Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution: Occupation and Resistance 1944–1946* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972); and William H. Frederick, *Visions and Heat: The Making of the Indonesian Revolution* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1989), pp. 69, 151–52.

³² In this article, "personal narratives" is defined broadly and used as an umbrella term for wide-ranging material, including published biography or autobiography, records of oral storytelling, letters, and diaries. Roxana Waterson, ed., *Southeast Asian Lives: Personal Narratives and Historical Experience* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2007), pp. 3–4.

³³ See, for instance, Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*, p. 290; Reid, *Indonesian National Revolution*, p. 142; and Swift, *Road to Madiun*, p. 90.

³⁴ James E. Young, "Between History and Memory: The Uncanny Voices of Historian and Survivor," *History & Memory* 9, 1–2 (Fall, 1997): 47–58.

³⁵ Frederick, *Visions and Heat*, p. 206.

³⁶ Sumarsono, "De Madioen Affaire," p. 10; and Frederick, *Visions and Heat*, p. 206.

Meer Uitgebreid Lager Onderwijs (MULO, the Dutch intermediate school), at Purworedjo, from 1936 to 1938.³⁷ He moved to Semarang in 1938, where he attended a Dutch-language vocational school. Hoping to obtain a position in government or business, Sumarsono moved to Jakarta in 1939 and received training in English, bookkeeping, and stenotyping. In 1940, he started to work for Borsumij, a well-known Dutch corporation, as a clerk and typist, and stayed there until 1942. Throughout the Japanese Occupation (1942–45) he worked for various companies in Jakarta and Surabaya.³⁸

During his sojourn in Jakarta, Sumarsono acquainted himself with political activism and began to study the political ideas of visionary intellectuals of the time, including Sukarno, Mohammad Hatta, Sutan Sjahrir, and some European scholars.³⁹ Their call for justice and an end to colonialism drove young Sumarsono to join the “*orang-orang yang menentang penjajahan*” (anticolonialists) and support their causes.⁴⁰ From 1938 to 1939, he attended a discussion group organized by Amir Sjarifuddin and Sanusi Pane. At these seminars, Sumarsono first heard Sjarifuddin, then the chairman of Gerakan Rakyat Indonesia (Gerindo, Indonesian People’s Movement), speak of resistance to colonialism and fascism in support of democracy. Sumarsono soon became involved in the antifascist movement and joined the Gerindo. In 1944, he became a cadre member of Sutan Sjahrir’s group and took part in underground agitation against the Japanese.⁴¹

Toward the end of the Japanese Occupation, Sumarsono married the daughter of a Christian clergyman from Kudus, Central Java, and moved to Surabaya to work for the Batavia Petroleum Company. Sumarsono’s political career continued to blossom in Surabaya. He continued to commit himself to the resistance movement against the

³⁷ Sumarsono, “De Madioen Affaire,” p. 10. Sumarsono was one of a handful of Indonesians who had received a Dutch education. Around 1937, the number of Indonesian children who were receiving a Dutch primary education was approximately 93,000 out of a population of 68 million. See David Steinberg, ed., *In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1971), p. 265. Between 1917 and 1942, the number of Indonesians who attended Dutch-medium schools was between 65,000 and 80,000, less than 1 percent of the pertinent age group. In the final year of Dutch rule, fewer than 7,000 Indonesians were receiving Dutch secondary education. Most of them were enrolled in the MULO junior high schools. The figures are cited in Reid, *Indonesian National Revolution*, pp. 2–3.

³⁸ Sumarsono, “De Madioen Affaire,” p. 10; Frederick, *Visions and Heat*, p. 206.

³⁹ Sumarsono, “De Madioen Affaire,” p. 12; Frederick, *Visions and Heat*, p. 207. Although it remains unclear how Sumarsono obtained these materials, his (partial) reading list included Sukarno’s “De Fikiran Rakjat”; Hatta’s “Daulat Rakjat”; lectures by Roland Holst and Rutgers; and Petrus Bloemberger’s “National bewegingen in Indonesia.”

⁴⁰ Setiawan, *Negara Madiun?*, p. 36.

⁴¹ Sumarsono, “De Madioen Affaire,” p. 12; Frederick, *Visions and Heat*, p. 207. Gerindo was formed in April 1937 by a group of young Marxist intellectuals. Amir Sjarifuddin, a founding member of Gerindo, was born in Medan, North Sumatra, on May 20, 1907. He graduated from Europeesche Lagere School (ELS, European Primary School), and continued his education in the Netherlands. In 1933, he received a law degree in Jakarta. During the Japanese Occupation, Sjarifuddin led Gerindo and was imprisoned for his underground resistance activities. During the revolution, he was a leader of the Socialist Party, along with Sjahrir, minister of defense from November 1945 to January 1948 and prime minister from July 1947 to January 1948. In February 1948, Sjarifuddin reformed the leftist coalition popularly known as the Sayap Kiri into Front Demokrasi Rakyat (FDR, People’s Democratic Front), and in August he allied the FDR with Musso’s PKI. His collaboration with the PKI proved fatal. Sjarifuddin was captured and executed by government forces in December 1948 for his involvement in the Madiun Affair. For Amir Sjarifuddin’s biographical sketch, see Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution*, pp. 413–14; and Soerjono, “On Musso’s Return,” trans. Benedict Anderson, *Indonesia* 29 (April 1980): 61.

Japanese and soon joined the Committee of the Younger Generation, an assembly of young activists in Surabaya.⁴² Also during his early days in Surabaya, he “masuk” (joined) the then-illegal and underground PKI. Although his affiliation with the party at this time appears to have been rather marginal (he would later recall that he was not aware of the identities of the party’s top echelon, from whom he occasionally received “mandates”), he kept himself informed about the party’s current platform and the agendas of leading advocates such as Amir Sjarifuddin, Musso, Alimin, and the future chairperson, Aidit, through its organ, *Menara Merah* (Red Tower).⁴³

With the abrupt end of the Japanese Occupation, Indonesia declared independence on August 17, 1945, and soon faced the return of Dutch forces aiming to restore the prewar colonial order. Indonesia thereupon entered the four-year struggle for freedom known today as the National Revolution. As he was a man “obsessed with *kemerdekaan*” (freedom, independence), according to his own recollections, Sumarsono continued to take part in political movements throughout the revolutionary period.⁴⁴ Although he was neither a gifted spokesman nor a radical thinker, his active participation in the resistance movements during the prewar and wartime periods gradually brought him recognition as one of the important young political activists.⁴⁵ In the early months of the revolution, Sumarsono, still in his mid-twenties, began to play an important political role in Surabaya. On September 23, 1945, he was selected as the first chairman of Pemuda Republik Indonesia (PRI, the Youth of the Indonesian Republic). During the time of turmoil around the outbreak of the Battle of Surabaya on November 10, 1945, the PRI under Sumarsono played a complementary role in establishing the municipal government through effective recruitment of members of the urban populace.⁴⁶

In addition to acting as chairman of the PRI, Sumarsono participated in civilian and military affairs at the national level between 1945 and 1947. As a representative of the PRI, he attended the Kongres Pemuda (youth congress) held in Jakarta on November 10 and 11, 1946. There, seven of the twenty-eight youth organizations present, including the PRI, formed Pemuda Sosialis Indonesia (Pesindo, Socialist Youth of Indonesia), and he was selected to be a co-chairperson of the new coalition, along with Wikana⁴⁷ and Chaerul Saleh.⁴⁸ The same conference also made the decision to form

⁴² Sumarsono, “De Madioen Affaire,” p. 10; Frederick, *Visions and Heat*, p. 207. The Angkatan Muda Committee was formed sometime in March 1945. Roeslan Abdulgani, a native Surabayan and young intellectual, was selected by the *pemuda* circles to lead the new organization. Overall, the committee’s leadership was in the hands of Dutch-educated political activists who were in their mid-to-late twenties and early thirties. Toward the end of the war, the Angkatan Muda Committee was engaged in various propaganda activities to concentrate popular efforts to achieve independence. Frederick, *Visions and Heat*, pp. 165–69.

⁴³ Setiawan, *Negara Madiun?*, pp. 41–44.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁴⁵ Frederick, *Visions and Heat*, pp. 207–8.

⁴⁶ Sumarsono, “De Madioen Affaire,” p. 10; Frederick, *Visions and Heat*, pp. 205–6.

⁴⁷ Wikana was born into a noble Javanese family on October 19, 1914, in Sumedang, West Java. After graduating from an ELS and a MULO, he joined the Gerindo and engaged in underground resistance activities during the war. After independence, he became a leader of Angkatan Pemuda Indonesia (API, Indonesian Younger Generation) and later co-chaired the Pesindo after the API was fused into the Pesindo in November 1945. He was appointed the Youth Secretariat of Musso’s PKI in August 1948. His life after Madiun is not well documented. He is said to have disappeared during the killings of 1965–66. Anderson,

Badan Kongres Pemuda Republik Indonesia (BKPRI, Organization of the PRI Congress), a successor organization of the PRI, and Sumarsono was named its leader. After assuming the positions in the Pesindo and BKPRI, he moved to Madiun and made the town his home base until September 1948.⁴⁹ A committed Pesindo leader, he stood by its policy lines through 1946 to 1947, and, in the process, became affiliated with the PKI. In December 1946, the Pesindo became one of the four organizations to form Sayap Kiri (Left Wing).⁵⁰ In late February 1948, the Sayap Kiri was renamed FDR, which eventually absorbed the PKI in late August that year.

While leading the Pesindo and BKPRI, Sumarsono undertook multiple responsibilities in the national army and held the rank of major general. In February 1946, he joined the education staff along with military leaders such as Sudirman and Tahi Bonar Simatupang in Tentara Keamanan Rakyat (TKR, People's Security Army), a precursor to TNI formed in July 1947. Under the direction of Sjarifuddin, then the defense minister, members of the education staff were given the task of laying out the ideological foundation of the army because it was undergoing a transformation from an assembly of regional militias and armed units into a centrally orchestrated national army.⁵¹ President Sukarno also spearheaded the reform initiatives. In June 1946, Sukarno formed Dewan Pertahanan Negara (DPN, Council of National Defense), assuming the chairmanship himself, and appointed Sumarsono as Wakil Pemuda (Youth Representative) alongside representatives from religious groups and the *rakyat* (the people, loosely termed), as well as Sudirman, Ali Sastroamidjojo, and the leading cabinet members, including the ministers of defense, finance, and internal affairs.⁵² Consequently, Sumarsono's participation in the ongoing military reorganization

Java in a Time of Revolution, pp. 455–56; Soerjono, "On Musso's Return," p. 68; and Swift, *Road to Madiun*, p. 57.

⁴⁸ Chaerul Saleh was born on September 13, 1916, in Sawahlunto, West Sumatra. After graduating from an ELS and Hoogere Burger School (HBS, higher civil school), he became a leading student activist in the 1930s and helped establish Perhimpunan Pelajar Indonesia (PPI, Indonesian Student Association). By the end of the war, he was known to be one of the notable radical and charismatic activists of his generation. Along with Wikana and others, Saleh planned the kidnapping of the preeminent nationalist leaders, Sukarno and Hatta, on August 16, 1945, and demanded that the two announce the independence of Indonesia at once in defiance of the Japanese military, which was occupying Indonesia at the time. Saleh briefly held a chairmanship of the Pesindo in late 1945, and later joined Tan Malaka's Persatuan Perjuangan (PP, Struggle Union). Saleh was arrested by government forces in March 1946 because of the PP's opposition to the government and was imprisoned until August 1948. After August 1948, the government released Saleh at the same time as Tan Malaka and other members of the PP (probably hoping, it has been speculated, that they would undermine the PKI and FDR). Saleh was arrested again in 1966 for his support of the discredited Sukarno and died in jail sometime in 1967 or 1968. Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution*, p. 415; Reid, *Indonesian National Revolution*, pp. 26–27, 89, 92, 139; and Soerjono, "On Musso's Return," p. 64.

⁴⁹ Setiawan, *Negara Madiun?*, p. 84.

⁵⁰ Sayap Kiri was a socialist coalition formed in September 1946; it consisted of Partai Sosialis (PS, Socialist Party), Partai Buruh Indonesia (PBI, Indonesian Labor Party), the Pesindo, and the PKI.

⁵¹ Sumarsono, "De Madioen Affaire," p. 11; Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution*, pp. 250–52; and Setiawan, *Negara Madiun?*, pp. 84–87. Sumarsono became a member of Staf Pendidikan (Education Staff) within the TKR in February 1946 and was given the rank of major general in October 1946. The primary task of the education staff was to determine the ideological foundation of the army. The education staff consisted of six other appointees besides Sumarsono, all of whom represented either the Socialist Party or Majelis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia (Masyumi, Consultative Council of Indonesian Muslims).

⁵² Sumarsono, "De Madioen Affaire," p. 11; Setiawan, *Negara Madiun?*, p. 85.

brought him in close contact with national leaders, including Sukarno, with whom Sumarsono "met many times" upon commencing his DPN membership.⁵³

Among these responsibilities, Sumarsono's leadership in BKPRI in Madiun marks one highlight in his early career and offers a rare insight into his role as a *pemuda* activist around the time of the Madiun Affair. As a spokesperson for the DPN, he actively engaged in public speaking at conferences and in radio broadcasts until the outbreak of the Madiun Affair. He routinely talked about the importance of "stirring up the spirit of the youth" (*menggelorakan semangat pemuda*) in the continued struggle against "the Dutch colonizer" (*penjajah Belanda*), a force that still occupied more than half of the Indonesian archipelago.⁵⁴ Unfortunately, most of the details of his speeches remain obscure because they were never recorded, or, if they were, they were lost or possibly destroyed. One exception is his speech at the third youth conference in Madiun on March 26, 1948. Entitled "Pergerakan Pemuda dan BKPRI Sepanjang Masa" and later published in *Risalah Gerakan Pemuda*, the speech outlined the organizational history of BKPRI since its inception in 1946 and called for support from "the revolutionary Workers and Farmers" (*kaum Buruh/Tani jang revolusioner*) in pursuit of "the struggle for democracy" (*perdjoeangan demokrasi*).⁵⁵ Reflecting leftist and Marxist doctrines, Sumarsono identified the cause of "the Youth struggle" (*perjuangan Pemuda*) with the aspiration of the masses, namely, workers and farmers. He stressed that the goal of the youth movement lay in the alleviation of their daily sufferings from the exploitation by "the bourgeoisie" (*kaum bordjuis*), who were harboring capitalism/imperialism, colonialism, and fascism."⁵⁶ Although he stepped down from his BKPRI post shortly after the youth conference in 1948, he continued to advocate for the labor movement and was Wakil Ketua Serikat Buruh Minyak (the senior representative of the oil workers' union) at the time of the Madiun clash.⁵⁷

The Setting

Just a few months after Sumarsono spoke eloquently about the democracy movement at the youth conference, he found himself in the midst of the event known today as *Peristiwa Madiun*. A sequence of developments in national politics in the first month of 1948 had particularly unsettling consequences and set the stage for this armed conflict nine months later. In January 1948, party leaders of the left-wing coalition cabinet under Amir Sjarifuddin were mired in the heated debate over whether to support the Renville Agreement, whose chief objective was to establish terms for a ceasefire between the Dutch and the Indonesian Republic.⁵⁸ Republican

⁵³ Setiawan, *Negara Madiun?*, p. 84.

⁵⁴ Sumarsono's speech was transmitted via the Radio Republic Indonesia in Yogyakarta and via Gelora Pemuda, the radio station operated by BKPRI, in Madiun. *Ibid.*, pp. 87–88.

⁵⁵ Setiawan, *Negara Madiun?*, p. 88; Hardjito, *Risalah Gerakan Pemuda* (Jakarta: Pustaka Antara, 1952), p. 102.

⁵⁶ Hardjito, *Risalah Gerakan Pemuda*, p. 112.

⁵⁷ Setiawan, *Negara Madiun?*, p. 89.

⁵⁸ The negotiations for the Renville Agreement were overseen by the United Nations Security Council and its mediating body, the Good Offices Committee (GOC), which consisted of five members who represented the Netherlands, Australia, Belgium, and the United States. Sjarifuddin's cabinet, formed in July 1947, represented all major (and often conflicting) political groups in the Indonesian Republic at the time, which included Sayap Kiri, Masyumi, and the PNI.

leaders were faced with difficult choices. Accepting the armistice would ensure the continuation of Dutch sovereignty, whereas the refusal to sign the Renville Agreements would trigger an imminent Dutch attack. Meanwhile, the balance of power in the Sjarifuddin cabinet was crumbling from within. The Masyumi, the foremost opponent to the Renville accords, announced its withdrawal from the cabinet on January 15, while the PNI, another leading coalition party, retained its neutral stance. After abortive attempts to build a consensus in the cabinet, Sjarifuddin gave in and signed the Renville Agreements on January 17.

The decision to accept the Renville Agreements left a power vacuum in the government. The Masyumi wasted no time in using the agreements to discredit Sjarifuddin, and the PNI now abandoned the middle ground and announced its disapproval of the Renville terms. In the face of stiff opposition in the cabinet, Sjarifuddin stepped down as prime minister on January 23. His resignation effectively ended the succession of left-wing coalition cabinets that had been in place since November 1945. Fearful of a widening rift in the national leadership, President Sukarno stepped in to mend fences and appointed Vice President Mohammad Hatta as the new prime minister. The new cabinet under Hatta came into effect on January 31 and was formed without the Sayap Kiri after negotiations to sustain a broad coalition ended without success.⁵⁹ In a move that further dismayed members of Sayap Kiri, the Masyumi and the PNI, each of which had secured several spots in the cabinet, then quickly overturned their earlier opposition to Renville and declared their commitment to the terms of the Renville ceasefire. By the end of February, the government leadership was firmly in the hands of the Masyumi and the PNI, and Sayap Kiri was rapidly consolidating opposition forces under its new name, FDR.

The divisive course of events that disrupted Indonesian national politics in January and February 1948 takes center stage in all of Sumarsono's recollections. Sumarsono declares forcefully that the change of government and the subsequent removal of the FDR from the cabinet set the stage for the bloodshed in Madiun:

The original cause of the struggle between the FDR and the Hatta government lay in differences over the cabinet and its formation; its policies concerning the implementation of the Renville; and its internal politics, in particular, regarding the FDR. The FDR considered the formation of the Hatta cabinet to be completely unjust, its international politics tantamount to political capitulation; and its domestic policy, rather than supporting the FDR, was aimed at purging its elements.⁶⁰

In his later account, he continues to discredit the government policies:

So apparently the Hatta cabinet was already prepared to replace the Amir cabinet, which was the one that had approved the Renville Agreement. Nevertheless, upon concluding the agreement, the [Amir] cabinet was denounced

⁵⁹ The hopes for retaining the all-encompassing coalition were crushed when Hatta rejected Sjarifuddin's demand for a Sayap Kiri defense minister. Instead, Hatta opted to serve as both prime minister and defense minister himself. On the political maneuvering surrounding the formation of the Hatta cabinet, see Swift, *Road to Madiun*, pp. 17–21.

⁶⁰ Sumarsono, "De Madioen Affaire," pp. 5–6. Excerpts of Sumarsono's accounts cited in this article have been translated by the author from the original Dutch and Indonesian texts.

and collapsed. Then the Hatta cabinet was formed with former ministers of the Amir cabinet in order to implement the Renville Agreements! This is full of contradictions.⁶¹

Sumarsono's fierce repudiation of the Hatta government finds a parallel in Aidit's 1955 court speech, "Aidit Accuses the Madiun Affair":

In essence, the sixth Indonesian cabinet was a Masjumi cabinet led by Moh. Hatta. From the time of its formation on January 29, 1948, this cabinet pursued a completely Masjumi policy, and the Madiun Provocation was the most important implementation of this policy, i.e., the policy of rounding up and murdering Communists, the policy that the Masjumi leaders still pursue right up to this very day ... I declare that the Madiun Affair was a provocation of the government of Hatta, Sukiman, and Natsir.⁶²

Upon withdrawal from national politics, the FDR immediately began to mobilize at various local sites with the intention of building opposition against the government. In his reports and interviews, Sumarsono refers extensively to the FDR's new strategies and subsequent demonstrations and mass meetings in Central and East Java. In doing so, he also illustrates the FDR's efforts to gain support from farmers and workers by advocating agrarian reform and organizing labor strikes. For instance, the labor strikes in Delanggu, a site in Central Java dominated by cotton plantations, in May to July 1948, marked one of the highlights of the FDR's campaign against the Hatta government, and these strikes led to widespread protests by FDR supporters elsewhere in Central and East Java⁶³:

The FDR went on to organize labor strikes. Strikes by plantation workers in Delanggu, petroleum workers in Cepu, SS workers in Purwodadi, Gundih, etc., made the atmosphere more troubled. This was especially true of the prolonged strikes in Delanggu, which were openly supported by all FDR organizations and led to sympathetic expressions, collection of stock shares, protests, demonstrations, and agitation. All workers and farmers throughout the Republic were influenced by workers' and farmers' organizations. Gradually the Delanggu strikes led to armed conflict, and clearly intensified the situation. The FDR did not diminish their agitation.⁶⁴

As a result, the schism between the FDR and the government grew wider:

The struggle of the FDR against the Hatta government was mounted through the parliament as well as through outside agitation, precipitating the outbreak of mass protests, meetings, resolutions, and, later, strikes. This provoked armed incidents at the local level. The rationalization, confidential negotiations, and

⁶¹ Sumarsono, "Wawancara dengan Sumarsono," p. 93. In his 2008 interview with me, Sumarsono continued to speak of his disagreement with Hatta and about how his government was from the onset adamant about "*membersihkan kiri*" (purging the left).

⁶² The passage is taken from the English translation of Aidit's defense speech at the Jakarta district court in February 1955, "Aidit Accuses the Madiun Affair," in *The Selected Works of D. N. Aidit*, vol. I (Washington, DC: US Joint Publications Research Service, 1961), p. 260.

⁶³ For a sociological study of the Delanggu strikes, see Sigit Wahyudi, *Ketika Sarbupri Menggoncang Pabrik Karung Delanggu 1948: Sebuah Studi Awal Dari Pemberontakan PKI Madiun* (Semarang: Bendara, 2001).

⁶⁴ Sumarsono, "De Madioen Affaire," p. 2

intransigent policies of the Hatta government, which would not pass any proposal of the FDR, drove the FDR to resort to any means of opposition to dissolve the Hatta cabinet.⁶⁵ The politics of both sides led to tensions among the masses, and the schism between the two could not be bridged.⁶⁶

The strained relations between the FDR and the government led to a series of political murders and kidnappings in Solo, a city in Central Java more than fifty miles west of Madiun and a stronghold of the left-wing groups. These included the assassination of the commander of the Solo unit of TNI, Sutarto. Alarmed by the aggression of the government troops, particularly the Siliwangi Division of the TNI in Solo, Sumarsono anxiously observed how the volatile situation in Solo had spilled over to Madiun:⁶⁷

Shortly after the murder of Sutarto, cases similar to the "Sutarto Affair" occurred.⁶⁸ Seven members of the FDR in Solo, five of whom were active battalion commanders of the Brigade ALRI [Angkatan Laut Republik Indonesia, Navy of the Republic of Indonesia] were kidnapped and disappeared without a trace. The FDR again suspected the Hatta government, which would have used the Siliwangi Division for the eradication and destruction of the FDR officials and FDR leaders. The FDR voiced its suspicions to its members ... Armed conflicts were unavoidable, and in Solo, after the case of Sutarto and the disappearance of others, a largescale armed conflict broke out [on] (September 14, 1948). Lt. Col. Suadi from the Sutarto division (Panembahan), supported by Jadeo from the ALRI, and Iskandar from the Brigade Bureau Perjuangan, took the initiative and launched attacks against the Siliwangi division, whose troops had been transported from Yogya. This violent confrontation was carried over to the Madiun Affair. These incidents in Solo alerted local troops in other regions to arm themselves. Troops and organizations that favored the Hatta government, as

⁶⁵ The "rationalization" of the Indonesian National Army, which began in February 1948, was intended to reduce the size of the overextended and increasingly ineffective armed forces by demobilizing poorly equipped and trained troops. The majority of the disbanded units were based in central and eastern Javanese units that had been influenced by the FDR/PKI perspectives. The rationalization was often singled out as one of the root causes of the Madiun Affair because it fueled the perennial rivalry among the military units stemming from political disagreements intensified by differences in ethnic and religious backgrounds. See David Charles Anderson, "The Military Aspect of the Madiun Affair," *Indonesia* 21 (April 1976): 53; Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution*, pp. 261–66; and Swift, *Road to Madiun*, pp. 44–45.

⁶⁶ Sumarsono, "De Madioen Affaire," p. 6.

⁶⁷ Following the redrawing of territorial divisions under the Renville Agreements, the Siliwangi Division of the TNI was relocated from West Java to the Solo area, and West Java was occupied by the Netherlands. Siliwangi soldiers, including its commander A. H. Nasution, were known for their loyal support for the Hatta government. The role played by the events in Solo and their significance in provoking the outbreak of the Madiun Affair has been discussed extensively in major works on the Madiun Affair. In *The Road to Madiun*, Ann Swift writes that the circumstances in Solo "provided the spark which was to set off the revolt in Madiun one week later" (p. 67). Likewise, Reid refers to the mounting tension between the government troops—namely the Siliwangi division and its FDR counterparts—as the prelude to the conflict in Madiun in September. Reid, *Indonesian Revolution*, p. 136. See also Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution*, pp. 261–66.

⁶⁸ At the time of his murder, Sutarto was the commander of the Solo division of the Indonesian Army known as Divisi IV-Senopati. Many of his units were formed by pro-FDR soldiers from ALRI (Angkatan Laut Republik Indonesia, Navy of the Republic of Indonesia) and the Pesindo. Sumarsono recalls Sutarto as a follower of Alimin and a critic of the Hatta cabinet ("De Madioen Affaire," p. 3). It is therefore not surprising that Sutarto's allegiance to the government was often in question because of his radicalism and his popularity in the FDR. Swift, *Road to Madiun*, pp. 14, 46–47.

well as those that stood with the FDR side [began to arm themselves], foreseeing clashes in their areas. The situation was extremely critical!⁶⁹

In the transcript of his 1998 interview, Sumarsono once again recalls how the mounting tension in Solo kept the pro-FDR troops in Madiun staying on guard, and he asserts that the Hatta government was the mastermind of the disorder in the city:

I visited Muso and Amir Sjarifuddin in Kediri. There I was told about the problem of kidnapping and fighting in Solo, the battle had already flared up in Solo, and the commander of Sutarto Division was terrified. Then, some commanders were kidnapped. At least eight people were kidnapped and apparently were later seen in Srambatan, where Siliwangi troops were stationed. Then these commanders were taken to Wirogunan, a state prison. They were kidnapped and thrown into the state prison in Wirogunan. So I could only conclude that the root cause of this kidnapping was government policy! Then, kidnapping also occurred in Madiun. This implies that the same measures used in Solo were going to be used against the leftists, the FDR supporters in Madiun.⁷⁰

While the Solo affairs were symptomatic of what was to take place in Madiun a few days later, it was a series of disturbances in Madiun that culminated in the final collision on September 18.⁷¹ Speaking from the vantage point of an eyewitness who had been based in the city since late 1945, Sumarsono gives a firsthand account of how the growing disorder accelerated the FDR's move toward armed resolution:

The murder of Sutarto, the disappearance of seven FDR members and later of five battalion commanders in Solo, and the battle in Solo, created a volatile atmosphere surrounding the Madiun FDR. When the FDR in Solo called for assistance from the Madiun FDR, the whole Madiun area was full of the provocative pamphlets from Solo and tension quickly increased ... In the meantime, Madiun municipal workers were on strike, demanding a pay raise. The Military Police Corps [Corps Polisi Militer, CPM] could not tolerate this strike, and tried to force the strikers to work, but the workers stood their ground.⁷² ... These actions soon brought the CPM into collision with the TNI units that stood for the workers and the FDR. The situation came close to direct military action. It was hard for either side to show restraint. The strike went forward ... The FDR troops, witnessing these developments with their own eyes, became alarmed and called for the Madiun FDR to move to the attack. Conditions had reached the critical point.⁷³

⁶⁹ Sumarsono, "De Madioen Affaire," p. 3.

⁷⁰ Sumarsono, "Wawancara dengan Sumarsono," pp. 84–85.

⁷¹ In contrast, the existing literature makes little or no reference to the disorder in Madiun and tends to suggest that the Solo affairs alone prompted Sumarsono and his fellow Pesindo officers to take preventative measures against the government troops in Madiun. See Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution*, p. 290; Soetanto, *Perintah Presiden Soekarno*, pp. 141–42; and Swift, *Road to Madiun*, p. 72. Two exceptions in this respect are Pinaridi's *Peristiwa Coup Berdarah PKI* (pp. 77–79) and Aidit's *Aidit Menggugat Peristiwa Madiun* (pp. 25–29).

⁷² The CPM was a close ally of the government and was then headed by Gatot Subroto, a former officer of the Royal Netherlands Indies Army (KNIL, Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger) who had been recently appointed by Sukarno as the new military governor of Solo to restore order.

⁷³ Sumarsono, "De Madioen Affaire," p. 4.

In transcripts of his 1998 and 2000 interviews, Sumarsono once again recalls the simmering tension in Madiun following the clash in Solo. He reiterates that the kidnapping of union leaders by the *pasukan gelap* (mysterious troops) fueled the frustration among the pro-FDR officers in the TNI. His reference to the *pasukan gelap* is noteworthy because it obscures the identity of the aggressors, the CPM, which he identified in his earlier report, in 1949.⁷⁴

At that time, the Sebda [and its] state-employed workers were on strike. They were making socioeconomic demands, but all of a sudden three union leaders were kidnapped by the *pasukan gelap* ... Since we had already asked Territorial Commander Lieut. Col. Sumantri [about the kidnappings], who responded he knew nothing, our officers were infuriated [by his response]. "If that is the case, it must be the mysterious troops, and they need to be removed." In this way, the officers from the Brigade 29 troops became frustrated with the situation, in which strikers were kidnapped, which was unprecedented in Madiun. These officers were former Pesindo.⁷⁵

The Beginning of the Madiun Affair

Having witnessed the offensive actions carried out by the CPM (or the *pasukan gelap*, according to the later accounts) in Madiun, Sumarsono consulted with FDR leaders in Kediri, a city located more than thirty-five miles east of Madiun. There he received instructions to demobilize the instigators of the turmoil in Madiun to avoid further bloodshed in the area. While describing the executive decision to disarm the agitators in Madiun as a preemptive action, his 1949 account further clarifies that this action specifically targeted "the CPM, the Police, and the Siliwangi units":

In the very tense situation discussed above (violent clashes in Solo, strikes in Madiun, etc. ...), the Madiun FDR board members sent me out to Kediri as chairman of the Madiun FDR Action Committee [Komite van Aksi Madiun FDR] to meet the FDR executive committee [members] who were on tour there. I was to deliver a report about the very critical situation in Madiun and ask for further instructions from the executive committee on how the Madiun FDR should deal with these things ... The FDR executive committee (Muso, Amir, Setijadjit, Wikana, Harjono) decided that the Madiun FDR should disarm the Military Police Corps [CPM], the Police, and the Siliwangi units who took violent action against the workers on strike, before the FDR itself was disarmed. The Madiun FDR Action Committee had to lead these disarmament efforts in order to get people to support the FDR.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Sumarsono refers to the *pasukan gelap* liberally in all his recollections recorded since the late 1990s.

⁷⁵ Sumarsono, "Wawancara dengan Sumarsono," p. 95. Brigade 29 consisted of six battalions of mostly PKI/ Pesindo troops under the command of Colonel Dachlan and was stationed in the Madiun area at the time. It was part of East Java Division VI of the TNI under Sungkono, who, like Sutarto, was a commander, who had grown up in the area, whose loyalty to the central government was often questioned. Like Sutarto's Division IV in Solo, Division VI was composed largely of pro-FDR troops.

⁷⁶ Sumarsono, "De Madioen Affaire," p. 4.

Upon return from Kediri, Sumarsono met with “the administrators of the Madiun FDR and the Committee of Action,” and, together, they fixed “the time of action” to execute the instructions:

After I returned from Kediri with the executive committee’s instructions, I met with the administrators of the Madiun FDR and the Committee of Action, and we decided to carry out the instructions. The military committee of Madiun FDR discussed the technical implementation, and the time of action was fixed ... The action took place the night of September 18–19, 1948. There was violence from both sides, but it lasted only until the following morning, when the Military Police Corps [Corps Polisi Militair, CPM], the Police, and the Siliwangi units surrendered and were disarmed by the FDR troops. The disarmament spread to local parts of the residency.⁷⁷

Sumarsono’s later accounts confirm that the Madiun Affair began as “a regular clash” between the Pesindo-led Brigade 29 and the *pasukan gelap*, the suspected kidnappers of labor activists, with the goal of disarming the latter.⁷⁸ Although the overall outline of the event remains unchanged compared with the 1949 report, in a later interview Sumarsono elaborates on his explanation and adds that the incident on September 18 was an act of self-defense on the part of the FDR troops:

The truth is—speaking as an eyewitness to the Madiun Affair—it was a regular clash among the TNI troops—between the TNI and the police, since Brigade 29 was part of the TNI. At that time, Brigade 29 took action against the *pasukan gelap* that had been stationed in Madiun ... I believe they are the ones who kidnapped workers who had organized a strike. There indeed was a strike by the Sebda in Madiun, and its leaders were kidnapped by unknown troops. These incidents led Brigade 29, the troops that had been stationed in Madiun, to take action. So, what happened then was just an ordinary clash ... It is indeed correct to say that the background of Madiun had to do with self-defense, to defend [ourselves] by establishing a national front government in the Madiun area.⁷⁹

Sumarsono further justifies the pressing need for “self-defense” in his response to the interviewer’s question about whether there was any “enthusiasm for opposing the central government”:

No, there wasn’t. There was only an enthusiasm for self-defense, because all the troops were loyal to the central government. The government ordered the attack on us. At that time we were facing a very difficult situation. Troops from Brigade 29, the largest one, consisting of only four battalions, were encircled and attacked from all directions, and were pushed into a corner. We took action just for self-defense.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

⁷⁸ Although the identity of the “*paskan gelap*” is undisclosed in the abovementioned quote, in a few passages later he speculates, “The police and the CPM” were involved in these incidents, thus they were to be disbanded by Brigade 29 (*Berbagai Fakta*, pp. 86–7). His recollection here is slightly more fragmented than the 1949 counterpart. The Siliwangi troops, which he previously mentioned as being responsible for the kidnappings, are notably absent.

⁷⁹ Sumarsono, “Wawancara dengan Sumarsono,” pp. 83–84.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 87.

He then refers back to the aforementioned meeting with the FDR leaders in Kediri on the eve of the military action, and stresses that initiating the Madiun Affair was not his independent act:

Some speculated that the affair was of my doing. This is not correct. I reported to Kediri and I returned to Madiun in the middle of the night ... It was I who reported [the event in Madiun] to Pak Muso and Amir Sjarifuddin as the FDR leaders. They were the leaders of the new movement for fusion. They responded: "Take action." ... I reported the presence of the mysterious troops. So there was no intention to establish a government, not at all. It was just about the problem of kidnapping, and our need to defend ourselves. That was it.⁸¹

When read together, Sumarsono's testimonies about the instructions he received from the FDR/PKI leaders present discrepancies with the existing literature. Most renditions indicate that starting the Madiun Affair was Sumarsono's own act and do not mention that the FDR/PKI leaders directed Sumarsono to resist and disarm those who had attacked their allies and, therefore, these leaders knew about the military action that would erupt on September 18. For instance, the PKI's standard text on Madiun by the party chairperson, Aidit, dissociates the party from the incident on September 18:

In order to make it even clearer that the PKI and the FDR had no plans to carry out a seizure of power in Madiun, I must state that at the time the fighting and disarmament were going on in the army, Comrades Musso, Amir Sjarifuddin, Harjono, and others were not in Madiun. Just at that time, Comrade Musso, together with a party of persons, was on a tour on behalf of the PKI, and they were then in Purwodadi. Comrade Musso and his group only arrived in Madiun at midnight on September 18th. He came at the request of the FDR leadership in Madiun because of the tense situation.⁸²

According to well-known analysts of these events, if the FDR/PKI leadership had any role in instigating the bloodshed in Madiun, it would have been part of their larger plan to carry out an armed takeover to be launched sometime in late 1948—the blueprint that likely prompted Sumarsono and his comrades to start the military action.⁸³ For instance, in *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*, George Kahin describes the onset of the affair as follows:

Events in Surakarta were undoubtedly making the Pesindo leaders at that organization's headquarters in Madiun increasingly uneasy ... For the top Pesindo leaders, who had already defied the government's demobilization orders, it must have appeared that the die had been cast and that they now had only two alternatives, (1) to submit to the government's demobilization order and thereby give up their own personal positions of power as well as a major source of the revolutionary military potential of the new PKI, or (2) to take the initiative themselves and embark upon the revolutionary phase of the PKI's strategy ... It

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 96.

⁸² Aidit, "Aidit Accuses the Madiun Affair," pp. 265–66.

⁸³ Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution*, pp. 291–92; Pinaridi, *Peristiwa Coup Berdarah P.K.I.*, p. 79; Reid, *Indonesian National Revolution*, p. 142; Soetanto, *Perintah Presiden Soekarno*, p. 147; and Swift, *Road to Madiun*, p. 74.

was the later course which Sumarsono and the top Pesindo leaders in the Madiun area chose. The local pro-PKI officers of the regular TNI units stationed in the eastern part of the Republican-controlled area apparently decided likewise, and such officers as Colonel Djokosujono, Lt. Col. Dahlan, and Lt. Col. Sumantri joined with the Pesindo leaders. On their own, without the consent or knowledge of the top leadership of the PKI, they formally launched a revolution against the government of the Republic.⁸⁴

Footsteps after Madiun

In the wake of the Madiun Affair, Sumarsono assumed the post of military governor of the National Front Government, a provisional government for the Madiun area, and took part in outlining its fundamental political and social policies.⁸⁵ However, the government launched a military campaign to quell the rebellion, following President Sukarno's declaration on September 19 that the Madiun Affair was a coup attempt, directed against the Indonesian Republic, and the result of a conspiracy by Musso's PKI. Republican forces succeeded in capturing Madiun on September 30, so none of Sumarsono's executive decisions was put into practice.⁸⁶ Sometime around the time of the takeover, Sumarsono, along with eight companies of soldiers, left the city and headed north into the Dutch territory to escape persecution. After being on the run for two months, they were arrested by Dutch troops in the Demak area in Central Java and charged with "illegal possession of gold and treasury."⁸⁷ Sumarsono was tried at the Dutch military court in Semarang and sentenced to nine months in prison. Although the Dutch authorities were suspicious that he had been involved in the Madiun Affair, he managed to deceive them by adopting a false identity through forgery.⁸⁸

Following his release on July 30, 1949, Sumarsono fled to Jakarta, where he was captured again by the Dutch on October 29, 1949, and taken to the Sipayar prison. This time, he was charged with the identity fraud he had committed during the previous imprisonment to avoid a trial for his involvement in the Madiun Affair.⁸⁹ Not surprisingly, the Dutch authorities, from the onset, focused on discovering his part in the incident. The outcome of the investigation was compiled in "De Madioen Affaire," dated and signed on November 11, 1949. Effectively disclosing the suspect's involvement, the report concluded that Sumarsono was a subversive figure who staged the Madiun revolt and should therefore be banished to New Guinea for eventual execution. When Sumarsono learned about his sentence through his wife, he escaped from the prison on December 13, 1949. He thereafter went to Pematang Siantar in

⁸⁴ Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution*, p. 290.

⁸⁵ Sumarsono, "De Madioen Affaire," pp. 7–9; Pinardi, *Peristiwa Coup Berdarah P.K.I.*, p. 80; and Soe Hok Gie, *Orang-orang di Persimpangan Kiri Jalan*, p. 236.

⁸⁶ Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution*, p. 200; Nasution, *Sekitar Perang Kemerdekaan*, p. 376; Soetanto, *Perintah Presiden Soekarno*, p. 194; and Swift, *Road to Madiun*, pp. 75–76, 98–99, Appendix B.

⁸⁷ Sumarsono, "De Madioen Affaire," pp. 9–10, 13; and Penerbit Pustaka Pena, *Berbagai Fakta dan Kesaksian*, pp. 89–90.

⁸⁸ Penerbit Pustaka Pena, *Berbagai Fakta dan Kesaksian*, p. 90.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 90, 104; Sumarsono, "De Madioen Affaire," p. 14.

North Sumatra, where he stayed for fourteen years and lived as a teacher, maintaining a low political profile.⁹⁰ His association with Madiun, nonetheless, left an indelible mark on his life. In 1965, at the height of the anti-Communist campaign that swept across Indonesia, he was arrested again, this time by the Indonesian government under Suharto, for his suspected connection with the PKI, and he spent the next decade in prison. Soon after his release, he left Indonesia for Australia with his wife. Now in his late eighties, he currently resides in Jakarta and Sydney.

Personal Narratives, Political Transitions, and Historiography

In the historiography of the Madiun Affair, the political orientation of the authors and the spokespeople has played a conspicuous role in interpreting which actors were accountable for the event that reportedly claimed the lives of so many. Sympathizers of the Republican government called it a *pemberontakan* (rebellion) or “coup” instigated by the PKI, whereas the PKI supporters maintained that it was a *provokasi* (provocation) staged by the Republican government to drive out the leftist elements in political and military organizations. Although Sumarsono’s political profile at the time of the Madiun Affair was unmistakably leftist in outlook, a focused reading of his accounts brings to the fore complex ways in which his political affiliation played out in the shaping of his narratives. Sumarsono clarifies in all of his accounts that, in taking part in the incident, he was only following instructions from the PKI leaders and did not play a leading role in initiating the armed resistance against the government forces. His consistent claims defending his innocence and describing the direct instructions he received from the PKI leaders are at odds with most versions of the events, which underscore his independent decision to pull the trigger or, alternately, vehemently deny the PKI’s involvement.⁹¹ As such, Sumarsono’s narratives do not fall conveniently into either side of the partisan debate over who was accountable for this violent clash. Moreover, the conflicting accounts offered by Sumarsono and the PKI concerning the words and deeds of the party leaders on the eve of September 18 raise further questions about whether Sumarsono’s political affiliation has had any substantive influence on the storyline of his narratives. Although the current efforts of the Indonesian left to rewrite the history of the Madiun Affair from their standpoint brought Sumarsono into the public spotlight, his narratives are not measurably influenced by partisan loyalty, and they remind us that the resurgent “counter” narrative of the PKI is not channeled through a single voice.

When read comparatively alongside other reports of these same events, Sumarsono’s accounts illuminate the vantage point of a survivor who lived through several regimes and had a chance to discuss his experience on multiple occasions.⁹²

⁹⁰ Penerbit Pustaka Pena, *Berbagai Fakta dan Kesaksian*, pp. 90–91, 105–6.

⁹¹ D. N. Aidit, “Aidit Accuses the Madiun Affair,” pp. 260–66; Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution*, p. 290; Reid, *Indonesian National Revolution*, p. 142; Swift, *Road to Madiun*, p. 90; and Soetanto, *Perintah Presiden Soekarno, “Rebut Kembali Madiun ...”*, p. 144.

⁹² In “Between History and Memory,” James E. Young characterizes survivor’s memory as follows: “How the survivor has organized this story reveals a kind of understanding unique to someone who has known events both directly and at some remove. The survivor’s memory includes both experiences of history and memory: the ways memory has already become part of personal history, the ways misapprehension of events and the silences that come with incomprehension were part of events as they unfolded then and part of memory as it unfolds now.” Young, “Between History and Memory,” p. 53.

Parts of a rare collection of personal narratives spanning six decades, each of his accounts is a product of the circumstance in which it was produced. For instance, “De Madioen Affaire” was composed during his detention in Dutch prison, with Sumarsono typing out his Dutch testimony while under surveillance by two Dutch interrogators.⁹³ Faced with the impending criminal charge, he remained somber in his tone of speech and described the political background to the Madiun Affair to defend himself against charges based on of his alleged involvement. In contrast, his recent accounts, produced more than five decades later, are informal and spontaneous dialogues between the older Sumarsono and the interviewers, and in these he spoke openly, and at relative ease, about a number of issues ranging from the justification for his actions to his acquaintance with political leaders, including Sukarno, Hatta, and Suharto.

A careful reading of Sumarsono's narratives shows how the passage of time has played out in altering the depth and breadth of his memory.⁹⁴ Since his early account, “De Madioen Affaire,” was recorded just a year after the incident, it offers the most extensive account of the course of events in Madiun and identifies the forces behind the chaos in the city in greater detail than any later recollection. Only in the 1949 statement does Sumarsono identify three parties—the CPM, the police, and the Siliwangi division—as the perpetrators who organized the kidnapping of striking workers and who therefore became the immediate targets of the FDR forces' disarmament efforts on September 18. The meticulous account of the progress on the ground is less evident in later accounts, in which Sumarsono commonly encodes the suspected perpetrators with the phrase *pasukan gelap*. The ever-present “mysterious troops” in his recent recollections bolster his interpretation of the Madiun Affair as an unavoidable result of an act of “self-defense” on the part of the FDR, against the aggressors. This self-defense thesis is a provocative justification of his act that does not appear in the largely descriptive 1949 statement.

However accurate, representative, or partial Sumarsono's narratives may be, his continued assertion of his innocence in initiating the Madiun Affair speaks for its honesty and deserves scholarly attention. This article acknowledges and seeks to illuminate his “distinctive positioning” as a surviving eyewitness to the Madiun Affair.⁹⁵

⁹³ Personal communication with Sumarsono on June 2, 2008.

⁹⁴ His growing temporal distance from the event has given Sumarsono a holistic view of world affairs that provides a context through which he interprets his own political career. For instance, in the 2008 interviews with me, Sumarsono shared his view on the changing relations of power in international politics. Having observed the growing dominance of the United States in world politics in the second half of the twentieth century, Sumarsono maintained that Indonesia had yet to attain *merdeka* because it was stymied by US neo-imperialism. Sumarsono may no longer be fighting physically for freedom and independence, as he did in his youth, but his words speak firmly for his continued commitment to national causes. At various points in the interviews, he stressed his continued support for *Pancasila* (five principles), which he sees as the philosophical pillar of the Indonesian state. Alongside *Pancasila*, his political worldview revolves around his continued admiration for Sukarno and his *Nasakom* (Nationalism, Religion, and Communism) doctrine, as well as the *Sanmin zhuyi*, or Three Principles, espousing nationalism, democracy, and socialism. Personal communication with Sumarsono on June 2–3, 2008.

⁹⁵ Waterson, *Southeast Asian Lives*, p. 14.