
REMEMBERING HISTORY, W/RIGHTING HISTORY: PIECING THE PAST IN PRAMOEDYA ANANTA TOER'S BURU TETRALOGY

Razif Bahari

The narration of time is a crucial determinant in the writing of both fiction and history in—the now old—*Orde Baru* Indonesia.¹ It not only impinges on the way the present is bound to the past within the scheme of cause and effect, but serves as well to show how truth and meaning relate to a discourse that urges the reader always to discern the temporal landscape beyond the text's internal configurations. For the writing of history in the former New Order Indonesia, the contingencies of truth and meaning are profoundly unsettling.² I do not mean this in a positive sense—that a

¹ *Orde Baru* or the New Order, as former President Suharto's regime was self-named, came about after the bloody military putsch of October 1, 1965, which saw the systematic assassinations of army generals associated with President Sukarno's Guided Democracy regime and mass executions of his sympathizers alleged to have communist affiliations, and which heralded the abrupt end of Sukarno's revolutionary nationalism. The New Order (as opposed to the Old Order of Sukarno's rule) which was founded on the purported premise of rational modernity, development, and a return to the "rule of law," was seen by Pramoedya as an oppressive regime that resurrected the colonial mode of rule. (Pramoedya made a trenchant remark about how developments in New Order Indonesia were becoming "increasingly irrational": "When I was young, part of the revolution, it was unimaginable that the 'freedom to be free' could turn into the 'freedom to be unfree' of today. How can it be like this? And so what is the use of the revolution and of freedom, if conditions are worse than during the colonial period?" See "'Weekend Focus' Interview with Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Radio Netherlands, July 22, 1995, trans. Alex G. Bardsley, www.radix.net/~bardsley/radio.html).

² Pramoedya's unease with the New Order's rendition of history is quite apparent in his writings. Factors and actions in his own history led to his incarceration between 1965-1979, the banning of his published

cogent and restorative debate compelled Suharto's *Orde Baru* regime to question either its significance or its authenticity within the flow of Indonesian history. *Unsettling* here alludes to the tensions of narrative paradox. On the one hand, it suggests the absence of choices and alternatives in framing history within a discourse that narrowly construes truth. On the other, it insinuates the virtual capacity of discourse to deepen the resonances of dissent and to open narration to difference, not as a construct of reference, but within narrative structure and time. Matters of truth, meaning, and time (and, in this instance, the correlative issue of intellectual dissonance) are implicitly held up to scrutiny in all narrations. In *Orde Baru* Indonesia, however, they stand resolutely at the core of discourse and inhere critically in the authority asserted over the past by historians of the state. The full diversity of the past is therefore either expanded or constricted into particular types of narrative structures. Both prose fiction and historiography³ lay claim to the process of revealing the past in pre-Independence Indonesia, but their way of knowing history is contentious and contestatory, not only in intention but also in performance and experience.⁴

work, and the confiscation and destruction of his unpublished writings, personal archives and research materials by the New Order government. Those actions included: his association in 1958 with Lekra, the Institute of People's Culture, which championed the radical nationalist ideals of the 1945 revolution; his involvement with *Lentera* (Lantern), the weekly supplement of the left-wing tabloid, *Bintang Timur* (Eastern Star) as editor from 1962–65; and his open idolization of Sukarno (he describes himself, even to this day, as a “*pengagum dan pengikut Soekarno*” [admirer and follower of Soekarno]); see Interview with Pramodya, “*Saya tidak Pernah Jadi Budak*” (I was never a servant); *Tempo* 4, March 30–April 5, 1999. <http://www.radix.net/~bardsley/budak.html>. Much of this disquietude is reflected in the *Buru* tetralogy, where the portrayal of turn-of-the-century Indonesia under Dutch colonial rule becomes an allegory of *Orba* (the abbreviation for *Orde Baru*) under Suharto. In fact, it can be said that Pramodya is really challenging two centers of authority in the tetralogy: Dutch colonialism and *Orde Baru*. The parallels between the two are many. Under the New Order, as under the Dutch, the fulcrum of society was the state and its administrators. Both regimes held that the populace was unsophisticated and innocent and could be easily corrupted by partisan politics. As a result, the people were politically demobilized to form a “floating mass,” connected to and controlled by officialdom. The state-endorsed ideology of *Pancasila*—much like colonialism's ruse of bringing order, stability, and “civilization” to the East Indies—came to serve as an instrument for the *Gleichschaltung* of social organization and thought, and was used by the regime to impose state prerogatives and hierarchies on the nation and to confirm its own legitimacy. The New Order's continuation of long-hated colonial ordinances limiting the expression of critical opinion, and its insistence that all ideological discourses (including those on history, politics, culture and language) be under the state's command and dominion, reveal how those who held power in Indonesia felt pressed to assert a measure of legitimacy. The demise of Suharto's New Order in May 1998, after months of student-led mass demonstrations, widespread civil unrest, rioting, and public pressure, and the subsequent handover of power to Suharto's protégé, B. J. Habibie, did little to divest history of the shroud *Orba* had used to mask and disguise it, particularly in relation to the official account of the event of the G30S-PKI (the purported September 30, 1965 PKI communist conspiracy that the military under General Suharto claimed it subverted). In fact, Pramodya regards Habibie's short-lived interim government and, by extension, the self-styled reformist government of President Abdurrahman Wahid elected in June 1999, as being no different from Suharto's New Order regime, flippantly coining the term “*Orbaba*” (*Orde Baru yang baru* or the *new New Order*) to describe them. See Interview with Pramodya, “*Saya tidak Pernah Jadi Budak*,” <http://www.radix.net/~bardsley/budak.html>.

³ I wish to distinguish, here and elsewhere in this essay, between history (the occurrence of events in time) and historiography (the inscribing of events into a narrative form, the writing of history).

⁴ The complex arguments linking historiography and fiction have been made elsewhere and are too lengthy to reproduce here. For the present study, I have drawn particularly on the works of Hayden White, *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); and Paul Ricoeur, *Time and*

This essay focuses primarily on the way that Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru* tetralogy—novels that evoke past time through subjective remembering, for the most part through first-person narration—explores history and makes it discernible. The past that each examines (the external referent of the text) is the past largely eschewed or appropriated by historiography first under the royal courts of ancient Java, then under Dutch colonialism, and later under the *Orde Baru* state apparatus, the lived past of Indonesia's first nationalist awakening and the strains of dissent and conflicts that anticipated *Kemerdekaan* (Independence) and persisted in its aftermath. I am not concerned, however, with the specific historical or factual content of these novels (i.e., I am not trying to get at the so-called facts of the matter as they may or may not have occurred in the real world). My aim instead is to disclose certain narrative strategies, as well as the conception of writing history these strategies convey, in order to reveal the imbrications of truth and meaning that lie at the heart of the *Buru* tetralogy. It is through (historical) truth and the courage to correct the inaccuracies, falsities, and fallacies of history—wrought firstly by "*produk perkahwinan . . . antara kolonialisme dan feodalisme*" ("the product of marriage between colonialism and feudalism"), and lately by *Orba*—according to Pramoedya, that Indonesians can finally shed their "*budaya panutan*" ("culture of followers" or herd mentality).⁵

Historiography under the *Orde Baru* era was largely intended to affirm the regime's morally correct role within Indonesian history.⁶ The government therefore used

Narrative, trans. Kathleen Blarney and David Pellauer, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984-88); while the theoretical base of Gadamer's hermeneutics (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ed. Garrett Barden and John Cumming [New York: Seabury, 1975]) and Barthes's writings on myth (Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers [New York: Hill, 1972]; and Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard [New York: Hill, 1986]) have served as secondary, but no less pertinent, points of departure. I refer the reader to these writers, as well as to Dominick LaCapra, *History, Politics, and the Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); David Cowart, *History and the Contemporary Novel* (Carbondale: South Illinois University Press, 1989); Robert D'Amico, *Historicism and Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Suzanne Gearhart, *The Open Boundary of History and Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); and Gary Morson, ed., *Literature and History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986) for significant insights into the commingling of history and fiction and the way in which our knowledge of the past is shaped.

⁵ See Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Arti Penting Sejarah" (The importance of history), Speech at the Launch of the Cultural Work Media, July 14, 1999, National Library, Indonesia, <http://www.radix.net/~bardsley/arti.html>.

⁶ See, for example, Nugroho Notosusanto's accounts of the abortive Communist coup of September 30, 1965 in *40 Hari Kegagalan "G-30-S,"* Monograph Series No. 1 (Jakarta: History Centre, ABRI, 1966), as well as his thoughtful essay on the problems of analyzing contemporary Indonesian history, in Nugroho Notosusanto, *Masalah Penelitian Sejarah Kotemporer* (Jakarta: Yayasan Idayu, 1978). See also Sartono Kartodirdjo's fine primer on new Indonesian history from the time of Dutch colonialism leading up to the emergence of the *Orde Baru*, in Sartono Kartodirdjo, *Pengantar Sejarah Indonesia Baru: Sejarah Pergerakan Nasional dari Kolonialisme sampai Nasionalisme*, vol. 2 (Jakarta: PT Gramedia, 1990); this book is also helpful in showing how history can be framed in discourse to serve as a crucial narrative determinant. Additionally, see Goenawan Mohamad's *Sidelines: Writings from Tempo, Indonesia's Banned Magazine*, trans. Jennifer Lindsay (Victoria: Hyland House, 1994); and B. B. Herring, et al., *New-Order-Indonesia: Five Essays* (Townsville, Queensland: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1988); and Ruth McVey's "Building Behemoth: Indonesian Constructions of the Nation-State," in *Making Indonesia: Essays on Modern Indonesia in Honor of George McT. Kahin*, ed. Daniel S. Lev and Ruth McVey (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1996), pp. 11-25. All these sources offer important insights into *Orde Baru* historiography and its relation to myth and ideology.

strategies both to suppress and to engender the past, that is, to arrest dissonance in the discourse of history as well as to assert continuity between the glories of *Orde Baru* prosperity and stability and the continued development of the modern nation-state that it purportedly ensured. Suharto himself frequently linked his regime to the restoration of the “true” Indonesian state:

The New Order is nothing else but the life pattern of the People, Nation, and State which we have restored to the implementation of the purity of *Pancasila* and the 1945 Constitution.

The New Order was born with a strong resolve to straighten out again the history of the course of our Nation and State, founded on the philosophy and moral of *Pancasila* as well as on the truest direction as set forth in the 1945 Constitution. The New Order, is, therefore, a total correction to every kind of deviation of our history in the past from 1945 up to 1965. The New Order also preserved and, as a matter of fact, defended the justifiable and rightful deeds during our past experience and history. Therefore, the New Order is in principle a total correction of ourselves, by ourselves, a total correction of our errors for our own benefit. This total correction covers all our minds and deeds, our spirit and actions, which must all, once again, be restored to the purity of the ideals of Independence, to the implementation of the purity of *Pancasila* and the 1945 Constitution.⁷

The New Order security and intelligence bodies comprising the State Intelligence Coordinating Body (Badan Koordinasi Intelijen Negara, or Bakin), the Coordinating Agency for the Maintenance of National Stability (Badan Koordinasi Bantuan Pemantapan Stabilitas Nasional, or Bakorstanas), and the attorney general’s office, insisted that a diversity of discourses on the past would compel the dehiscence of all that was held noble and authentic. Thus, in almost every case, the rationale for censorship offered by the attorney general’s office when it decided to ban certain historical studies (which had been a leading target of the censors) was usually that the offending work “inverts the facts” which could “lead the public astray” and ultimately “disturb public order.” Under President Suharto’s New Order regime (1966–98), the state-scripted dominant historical discourse—as disclosed in school textbooks, biographies of national heroes, monuments, and national commemorations—expressed a particular national narrative, in which anti-communist campaigns and the military figured as guardians of the nation and as central leitmotifs. Stefan Eklöf characterizes this national historiography of the New Order regime as “extremely monolithic” and “all but void of nuances and [providing] no room for discussions of alternative interpretations.”⁸ Historical censorship thus presupposes an official history. In at least one case, this was made explicit. In 1990, the attorney general banned *Permesta: Kandasnya Sebuah Cita-Cita* (Permesta: The end of hope), by K. M. L. Tobing, an account of the Permesta Rebellion in Sulawesi during the late 1950s. According to the censorship decree, the book was banned because it “contains analyses that conflict

⁷ Address of State by former President Suharto before the House of People’s Representatives on the occasion of the Thirty-first Independence Day of Indonesia, delivered in Jakarta on August 16, 1976. Source: Department of Information, Republic of Indonesia.

⁸ Stefan Eklöf, “Looking to the Future: Existential Meaning in Contemporary Indonesian Perceptions of History and the Nation,” *Nordic Newsletter of Asian Studies* 4 (2002), <http://eurasia.nias.ku.dk/nytt>.

with the work *Cuplikan Sejarah Perjuangan TNI Angkatan Darat* (Aspects of the history of struggle of the national army)," a work published by the Armed Forces.⁹ New Order historiographer Nugroho Notosusanto, in fact, goes so far as to affirm that the Indonesian Education Ministry desired to "achieve absolute uniformity in the presentation of national history. Such a uniformity would, in this view, become an important factor in molding the national character."¹⁰ The agenda of the government plainly crystallized in the consequences of the official discourse: the New Order intended to keep a firm hold not only on history, but also on the truth of that history.

Certainly many of the "truths" of New Order historiography have been denounced and subverted by critics and writers alike, and recent historians in Indonesia have become aware that all historiographic assumptions are tenuous. But still, even today, the history textbooks used in Indonesian schools are written by state-sponsored historians whose pattern of writing and structures of narration embedded in their discourse are largely mythic.¹¹ The concept of myth that is crucial to New Order historiography refers to the exaltation of the static, to the adherence to a pattern of discourse that eschews equivocation and ennobles all that is fixed and unvaried.¹² It functions both to coerce belief and to compel silence in the laying out of history, and its overriding power for the state stems from the intransigence of tautology: its truths are a matter not of confirmation, but of affirmation; it turns not on the intrusion of external facts, but on the self-verifying immediacy of its own narrative structure. Myth

⁹ Tim Jaringan Kerja Budaya, *Menentang Peradaban: Pelarangan Buku di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Jaringan Kerja Budaya dan Elsam, 1999), p. 34.

¹⁰ Notosusanto, *Masalah Penelitian Sejarah Kontemporer*, p. 40; my translation.

¹¹ See Barbara Leigh, "Making the Indonesian State: The Role of School Texts," *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* (RIMA) 25,1 (1991): 29, in which she quotes a report that President Suharto had instructed Nugroho Notosusanto, a former Minister of Education and Culture, to "revise school history lessons to emphasize instability in the rule of the country's founder, first President . . . Sukarno in the 1950s." Cited by Virginia Hooker and Howard Dick in their "Introduction" to *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia* (Kuala Lumpur and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 3. While it is true that as early as 1965 essays (such as Mohammad Ali's "Historiographical Problems" in Soedjatmoko et al., eds., *Introduction to Indonesian Historiography*, [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965], pp. 1-23) had appeared advocating a more objective approach to the writing of history, and history textbooks, like Sanusi Pane's *Sedjarah Indonesia* (1945), already existed to urge historians to rid the academy of "ideological differences" that contaminate the pursuit of truth, the overriding concern with historical hegemony remained, and official New Order historiography continued to prop up the myths on which the regime had been constructed. On historical mythologization and the suitably reinvented Javanese traditions which the New Order embodied, propagated, and relied on for its legitimacy, see Pramoedya's "Maaf, di atas Nama Pengalaman" ("My apologies in the name of experience"), trans. Alex G. Bardsley, www.radix.net/~bardsley/apolog.html. One such myth that the Javanese elites in the New Order engendered, as Bardsley points out in his "Afterword" to Pramoedya's aforementioned essay, is the notion that they are inheritors of a "high," essentialized, and originary courtly Javanese cultural tradition with divine mandate (*wahyu*) to rule: "[The New Order] rulers . . . represent their regime as 'indigenous' and culturally pure, as legitimate as if they were parthenogenetically descended from the 'successful kings' of yore. The New Order secures past history by an indigenist exclusion of the causes of change . . . [its] second legitimating function is to secure the present against the ghosts of the past."

¹² See Barthes's *Mythologies* for a discussion of this concept.

in the hands of the regime is epic in scope and heroic¹³ in value. As Suharto himself insists,

Today, if we look back at the passage of history, it is obvious that our major asset in achieving victory was our unity and readiness to make sacrifices in defending our Independence and its lofty ideals. Herein lie the noble values, ideals, and aims of the struggle that unified us together. . . [*Pancasila*] reflects the identity of Indonesia and stimulates the emergence of a highly unifying spirit and strong nationalism . . . Such a spirit of unity and nationalism enhances love for our Motherland, and awakens our determination to protect and defend our country.¹⁴

Such a pronouncement legitimates the regime's rhetorical agenda, which is neatly compressed into the lapidary dictum "one Indonesia, one race, one language." In short, the mythical conception of history serves as the founding matrix for historiography under the New Order era, and its discourse of closure bears directly on the openly dissentient narration of history in Pramoedya's Buru tetralogy.

One of the most intriguing forms of dissent against the history propagated by the state was shaped by a group of Indonesian writers who published their first important works during the early 1950s—among others, Utuy Tatang Sontani, Mochtar Lubis, Achdiat Karta Mihardja, Idrus, and Pramoedya. Their social-realistic¹⁵ fiction stands

¹³ It is interesting to note what Minke says about heroes: ". . . people need heroes to caress their souls. And if there aren't any, they'll scrape up anything." (COAN, p. 535; American edition, p. 321)

¹⁴ Address of State by former President Suharto before the House of People's Representatives on the occasion of the Thirtieth Independence Day of Indonesia, delivered in Jakarta on August 16, 1975. Source: Department of Information, Republic of Indonesia.

¹⁵ I use the terms "social-realistic" and "social realism" here not to denote the works of writers who have traditionally been linked with the leftist LEKRA movement, but in the broader, more flexible Lukacsian sense, meaning they are concerned especially with the relation of the resulting literary work to what their authors conceive to be the "objective" social reality of the time. Such works usually (though not exclusively) reflect the class conflicts, contradictions, crippling economic and intellectual conditions, and alienation of the individual human being living in that era. The social-realist writers whom I have categorized in this sense, by "bringing to life the greatest possible richness of the objective conditions of life," and by creating "exemplary" characters who manifest both the internal stresses and the progressive tendencies of their era, in fact—and often "in opposition to [their] own conscious ideology"—make their fictional world a "reflection of life in its total motion, as process and totality." In other words, such authors make their fictional world a reflection of life which accords with socialist views of the contradictions of bourgeois society, and socialist predictions of the course of future development. See Georg Lukacs, "Art and Objective Truth," in *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. Arthur D. Kahn (London: Merlin, 1970). It should be added that the Marxist emphasis on the economic bases of society, and on the importance of class structure and class conflict, have strongly influenced the work of these writers, who themselves may or may not have been committed to Marxist doctrines. For a discussion of social realism as a generational norm in Indonesia during the 1950s and 1960s, see Keith Foulcher, "Post-Modernism or the Question of History: Some Trends in Indonesia Fiction since 1965," in *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia*, Virginia Hooker and Howard Dick, eds., Kuala Lumpur and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 28-29. In this respect, "social realism" here should also be distinguished from the more politically partisan "socialist realism" concept advocated by Lekra artists who believed that "the artist had a task and a responsibility which was service to society and more specifically to the *rakyat* [masses] of which he forms a part . . . The artist should side with the ordinary people, with the majority group in the nation, without abandoning their function as *sasterawan* (literary men)." See A. Teeuw, *Modern Indonesian Literature*, vol. 1 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), pp. 134-39, for his discussion of

as the dominant narrative force in Indonesia from the early 1950s to the mid-1960s and reflects a small but compelling cluster of literary tenets: the belief that objective reality is available to the writer and translatable into a story; the perceived coincidence between the sign and its referent; the assertion that to narrate life is to represent it in the whole of its authenticity; the faith that literary engagement can transform the world into something other than it is. Of course, not all Indonesian writers of this period adhered to the ideas of social realism, but the writers who did inscribed its precepts rigorously in their novels.

Yet these novelists' dissent with official history has something paradoxical about it. The paradox is not that dissent should spring from writers of fiction, but that it inheres in narratives that focus exclusively on the present. The paradox is easily set straight, however, if we pursue the larger field of intention (i.e., what the novelists meant to reveal and transform) and context (the implicit dialogue that social realism maintains with temporal causality and historical narration). Since the domain of the past had become the exclusive (and exclusionary) enterprise of the state both under the New Order and the Guided Democracy period before it, and since writers could not directly contest the official version of that domain by narrating the past, social realists set about depicting the full scope of the real in the present. On the one hand, their novels convey a reality that is less discursive than experiential (i.e., it is "lived" life written into discourse, rather than discourse reframed in another discourse) and thus less overtly vulnerable to corruption by other narrations. On the other hand, the causal arguments in these novels imply a past necessarily divergent from the one trumpeted by the historiography of the state. While state historians sought to expurgate the contingencies of dissonance with a mythic historiography, social realists contested the state's myths by creating a mythic discourse in reverse: their novels portray a specific present that suggests a specific past. Indeed, instead of implying the ennobling continuity of an epic past, this fiction calls forth the bathos of the mock epic.¹⁶ Rather than ennoble the individual, social realists esteem the virtues of the collective, and rather than deify the heroic, they celebrate the mundane and quotidian. In this way, social realism places itself in what Paul Ricoeur in another context calls

the Marxist versus *Angkatan 45* literary polemics. According to this conception, the artist should aspire to create *seni berisi* (meaningful art) or *l'art engagé*. The slogan *l'art pour l'art* (art for art's sake) was scorned as a typical product of a capitalist bourgeois society. (The term "*seni berisi*" is Bujung Salleh's, from his "Ke Arah Seni Berisi. Sekitar Soal 'Tendens'" (Towards meaningful literature. The problem of "tendency" in art), *Indonesia* 4,6/7 (1953): 337-44. [N.B. This reference is not to the present journal, but to one of the same name, published c. 1953-54 by Badan Musjawarat Kebudayaan Nasional. Eds.]

¹⁶ Mock epic here is subtended by the concept of allegory as used by Stephen Slemon in his article, "Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of History," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 23,1 (1988): 157-68.

the “sphere of the horrible”¹⁷—the countermyths of poverty, isolation, alienation, and the like that the state sets out not only to forget but to annul.

These contentions are well illustrated by Achdiat K. Mihadja’s collection of short stories, *Keretakan dan Ketegangan* (Cracks and tensions) (1956). Set for the most part in post-independence Indonesia, the stories tell of the suffering and misfortune that befall a motley group of misfits, members of society’s underclass, in their struggles with injustice, falsehood, corruption, poverty, and widespread unemployment. The picture that emerges from the stories is not so much a portrait of development that the state envisaged, but a collage depicting the conditions of urban life created by the migration of large numbers of people from rural areas, the breakdown of traditional values and social units, the human dislocation resulting from structural change, extensive unemployment, and the high incidence of personal violence. In the first story in the collection, the destruction of family life wrought by upheaval and revolution adds a layer of meaning to our understanding of the war, inflation, hunger, fear, hate, sabotage, and fanaticism which together made up the price to be paid for a nation’s idealism. Here was a country riven by anarchy within, invasion from without, a country cracking from outside pressure, disintegrating from internal strain. Revolution was at its height. Some were convinced the terror had to occur, either to sweep away the remnants of the old colonial regime or, from a more critical perspective, because the revolutionaries had inadvertently introduced authoritarianism into their seemingly democratic principles. Others believed that the Revolution had simply been swept off course and viewed the terror and lawlessness with dread, fearing that all the gains of revolution and independence had been lost as a result of the frantic policies of the period, which engendered ongoing foreign and civil wars, multi-layered internal political strife, constitutional paralysis, economic hardships, and religious conflicts. According to the orthodox nationalist perspective, execution of these policies constituted a grand strategy for national self-determination, but for Pak Sarkam—one of the characters in *Keretakan dan Ketegangan*, a peasant whose house was torched to the ground by a group of insurgents who terrorized his village in the name of revolution; whose wife was killed in the crossfire of a gun battle between the military and rebel forces; whose elder daughter became the mistress of a military officer in the city; whose son was arrested for theft and his other daughter forced into prostitution—they add up to an incomprehensible and very personal tragedy. We are also made aware that what is personal at one point in time becomes political at another. The exigencies of the struggle for independence led the revolutionaries to wage terror on supposed counterrevolutionaries and collaborators, heralding mayhem and mass suffering.

This disquiet about the state’s attempts to expunge and annul the personal dimension of human tragedy brought about by the vicissitudes of war and revolution is echoed in Idrus’s novelette, *Surabaya* (1948).¹⁸ Written after the events of November 1945, which saw internecine skirmishes around the city between Indonesian and British forces (the battle was eventually lost by the Indonesians, but interpreted by them as a

¹⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, pp. 188-9.

¹⁸ *Surabaya* appeared together with a collection of his short stories and a play in *Dari Ave Maria Ke Djalan Lain Ke Roma* (From Ave Maria to other roads to Rome) (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1948).

moral victory), the story gives a sobering account of the lives of Surabaya's city dwellers amidst the euphoria of nationalism that swept the nation. Poverty, deracination, lawlessness, and a brutish everyman-for-himself attitude, wrought by revolution, maim the spirits of the refugees and grip them with paralyzing fear and uncertainty, as the third-person omniscient narrator reflects: "Distress and trepidation can be seen and heard everywhere; on people's faces, by the cacophony of cars on the roads . . . in the noise of dogs howling . . . Nobody seems aware of where they are going."¹⁹ The collage of vignettes painted by Idrus, which shows destitute refugees fleeing the mayhem and violence in Surabaya, confronts the reader with the immediate brutality of war: the gruesome picture of women killing a young man, whom they discovered trying to flee Surabaya by disguising himself as an old man, by dropping huge rocks on his head; of women prostituting themselves to the guards at their refugee camp for more food; of a newlywed severely beaten by a lynch mob after she was wrongly suspected of being an enemy spy because she was wearing the red, white, and blue of the Dutch. Although the narrator struggles against demoralization and tries to see openings for change and hope, there is little in the narrative to relieve the images of loss and victimhood. Interestingly, the author interprets the plight of the refugees in their exodus from Surabaya and how they behave towards one another as a symbol of social disintegration.

Indeed, what these stories seek to counter is the unqualified success that the state has had in depersonalizing the fate of human beings in politics. The state's categories of reference and conventions of argument have ensured that in key areas the human consequences of the action of state policies are not a subject for consideration. The preeminent case is the treatment of war by the state; it is as if the concepts and terminology have been so well screened so that we do not think of people as being involved at all. It is much the same with respect to poverty. If it even appears on the state's agenda, poverty is likely to be presented as a structural condition rather than a human tragedy. This is where Achdiat's and Idrus's stories, which focus on people pursuing their ordinary lives, can provide an important corrective. It is partly a matter of the level of analysis, which brings different aspects of a subject into focus. It is also a function of particularizing an issue by presenting it as a problem in someone's life. We, the readers, are thus encouraged to think and to feel differently than before and to make connections which might otherwise have escaped us.

The novels of social realism do not, however, co-opt or manipulate the historical within a dissident narrative structure, but, rather, convey the sense that history is received in an eternal and unvariable story that conforms to life itself. The representation of time in these novels is an example. When social realism implies temporal causal antecedents (i.e., argues that the past must have been thus to produce a present that is thus), it does so without accounting either for the aporias of time or for discourse as a conditioner of time. Social realist fiction generally represents a brief period with external markers (rhetorical markers conventionally used in textual narratives) of time clearly delineated. This is true, for example, in such prototype social-realist works as Pramoedya's *Perburuan* (The fugitive) and *Keluarga Gerilya*

¹⁹ Idrus, "Surabaya" in *Dari Ave Maria Ke Djalan Lain Ke Roma*, 1948, Reprint (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2000), p. 120. My translation.

(Guerrilla family), in which the felt presence of time is at once specific and eternal. It is specific in the way that hours, days, and weeks oppress the characters and intensify their suffering, but eternal in that the vastness of time afflicting the characters knows no origin and portends no end. The same organizing principle informs Mochtar Lubis's novel, *Djalan Tak Ada Ujung* (A road with no end) (1952) at a more metaphorical level. The motif of the road recurs throughout the novel from the first page, when the wheels of a truck drum through the empty streets, following their own twisting road with no end—a motif that grips the protagonist Isa's imagination and haunts his dreams in terrible nightmares:

The wheels of a patrol truck with hard-faced soldiers drummed through the empty streets. It turned to the right, went straight ahead, then to the left, then to the right, then on and on through the silent, empty and deserted streets, traveling through a night of dark drizzle on a course endlessly turning—a road with no end.²⁰

Just as the revolving wheel turns and spins endlessly (which recalls, here, the cyclical wheel of time, or *Swadarshan Chakra*, of Hindu mythology), transporting the truck and all on board on its tortuous and interminable journey, so too are Isa and thousands of meek *wong cilik* (little folk), such as himself, borne like driftwood, trapped in a vicious circle of fear and uncertainty. These novels embody a sense of time as repetition and sameness, and preclude the troublesome uncertainties of narrative that reveal the self engendering a personal and variable time pertinent only to the individual experiencing it. Like historians of the regime, social realists assume that linguistic existence is merely a copy of another existence outside language, which we commonly call the "real." Such thinking, of course, affirms that the pure and direct relation of facts is simply a matter of getting things straight. And getting things straight, in turn, is equal to affirming truth. Narration thus becomes for the social realists both sign and proof of reality, a mechanism enabling history to tell itself.

With the referential illusion firmly embedded in its narrative, social realism at once opens itself to the world and closes itself to the contingencies of its own storytelling. It urges a kind of necessity and certitude in what it relates (i.e., it imitates the actual) and thereby converts the real into a series of essences by reciprocally asserting both its own truth-value and the value of its truth. Within this scheme any particular myth (e.g., that New Order values embody the values of the "true" Indonesia [*"nilai Indonesia sejati"*]) or that the Javanese people are the chosen people of God) may be countered or neutralized by a divergent myth (e.g., that the young bourgeois are disillusioned or that the rural peasants are isolated and poor), but the mythic foundations of both discourses are bound up by the same narrative assumptions. The purpose of myth, as Roland Barthes suggests, is "to immobilize the world."²¹ Myth establishes the structure within which human beings must envisage their possibilities, and it advances a hierarchy of values and meanings within that structure. Thus it forecloses the possibility of change and affirms the constancy of its truth based on

²⁰ Mochtar Lubis, *Djalan Tak Ada Ujung* (A road with no end), trans. A. H. Johns. Originally published in 1952; English translation first published in 1968 by Hutchison. Reprint, Singapore: Graham Brash, 2001, p. 17.

²¹ Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 155.

what it contends is the solid terrain of the real. There is a prevailing irony here, of course, since mythic discourse actually deprives things of their historic quality by denying origin and openness and emptying reality of happenstance. Like a parent responding to a child's persistent questioning, myth says forcefully that things are as they are because that is how they are.²²

What the historiographic discourse of the regime achieved by mythifying the past in the sphere of the admirable, and what the social realists grafted on the past through mythic counterpoint in Ricoeur's sphere of the horrible, is eroded and dispersed in the novels of the Buru Tetralogy. Though by no means single-voiced in their propositions or tied to a precise set of literary tenets, these novels portray the individual self (most frequently, but not exclusively, through first-person narration) seeking definition by commingling the past and present in the process of remembering. This process may be activated either voluntarily or involuntarily, but it turns consistently on a bimodal correlation: the self in search of definition; the definition of self perceived always within the flow of history.

Utuy's early historical novel, *Tambera* (1949) sought to accomplish much the same feat, but with less success. It is set in the time around 1600 when the Dutch were establishing themselves in Banda. After a fairly peaceful beginning, the relations between the Dutch and the Bandanese deteriorated rapidly, for the Dutch not only built a fort, but also set about establishing an exploitative monopoly of cloves. Under the leadership of the young Kawista, fierce opposition flared up, but this was snuffed out by the Dutch, with heavy losses on the Bandanese side. The principal figure in Utuy's story is the young Bandanese, Tambera, a dreamy, sensitive youth who meets and falls in love with Clara, the niece of the Dutch commandant Van Speult. Tambera is so fascinated by Clara's knowledge, by her being so completely different, that he betrays his own people. He applies to become a soldier for the Dutch, and even prematurely abandons his mother's deathbed when his new duties call him back to the fort. Clara and the West and the new and the strange have him completely in their power, and three centuries will pass, as we understand from the novel, before the Tamberas begin to free themselves from this spell.

This is certainly a work committed to the ordinary Indonesian. Except for the Van Speults, the main characters come from the lower echelons of Bandanese society. They are buffeted by forces over which they have no control. First there is the intrusion of the Dutch VOC (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie) personnel into the island, and then the Bandanese are faced with the capitalist economic transformation of their home. Their failings are presented as part and parcel of life, and there is an understanding that it is only by working collectively that they can grow as individuals and improve their lot. Utuy uses folklore and symbolism to establish that the lives of his principal characters remained linked to the traditional village culture of the Bandanese. We note, for example, Wubani's traditional beliefs in the existence of *machluk lembut yang djahat* (diabolical sprites) and of the importance of maintaining blood-ties; Swamin's cave dwelling, and his ascetic philosophy that embraces fasting as a means of purification; the shaman Ki Dukun's prescription of small green chilies, onion, and egg, which he instructs Wubani to bury in order to protect Tambera from

²² Ibid., p. 153.

Clara's bewitching spell. Tambara's mother, Wubani, plays a key role in bringing an awareness of the communal past into a present which, in her own words, knows only one law: "You eat somebody or you are eaten."²³

Superimposed on this picture of ordinary but dislocated life is another text about the evils of imperialism and colonialism in Banda and what must be done to make the society whole again. No reader can have any doubt about the economic and social costs of an externally imposed, and to some extent, externally propelled, capitalism, nor about the need for workers and peasants to take collective action to repel colonial magnates such as Van Speult, Willington, and Huyten, expose the corrupting influence of capitalism's mercenary and venal dealings, and resist the appeals of the tribalism promoted by Kawista and his followers. But because of its rehearsed nature, the political argument in the novel too often stands at a remove from the lives we are following. It has a reductionist, doctrinaire quality, not easily digestible in a novel about people involved in their everyday affairs.

While it can scarcely be denied that the text exudes a sense of political purpose, the novel is much more than an exercise in "propaganda," and, at the same time, it is more convincingly "historical" than a pure romance, though some scholars have questioned its portrayal of historical events in Banda in the 1600s.²⁴ Like its politics, the novel's history is largely internal: not an analysis of the national archive or public record, but impressions and recollections drawn from the private consciousness. There are two elements to the politics of this narrative. The first is an interpretation of external intervention in terms of unmitigated violence and exploitation, which clearly is intended to release Indonesians from the psychological bondage of colonialism. The second is a description of precolonial values and social patterns that might promote rethinking about the post-imperial order. Arguably, Utuy has mixed success with his first objective and very little at all with his second. We are given diagnosis and prescription, and they accord neatly—much too neatly to generate either good fiction or sound politics. Despite the vibrancy of the characters and the immediacy of the action, the proletarian emphasis in this novel is overly deliberate, and one can see shades of the Soviet socialist realism of the 1930s. History is nudged by the author to move in directions that support his agenda, and the author's political agenda is evident in the way he shapes the characters and manages the plot. At last, the story is a good deal less interesting than the novel's themes and the assumptions they embody.

Nevertheless, whatever flaws this novel might have, we do not turn to it for a "dates and facts" historical narrative, because we would be disappointed if we did. The nub of our interest lies in the novelist's presentation of history as a space within which to search for meaning, open up new ways of seeing and patterning, and posit suggestive connections between then and now. This may be done by revisiting the past (as was done in some early Indonesian novels, such as Utuy's *Tambara*, discussed above, as well as M. R. Dajoh's *Pahlawan Minahasa* [1935], and Abdul Muis's *Surapati* [1950]). Alternatively, it may take the form of presenting the past encapsulated

²³ Utuy T. Sontani, *Tambara* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1949, second edition, 1952), p. 210. My translation.

²⁴ See for example Teeuw, *Modern Indonesian Literature*, vol. 1, p. 192: "As a historical romance the book is weak, at least if one expects to find in it some familiarity with the epoch in which the story is set. On this point the writer clearly falls short as far as both facts and background are concerned."

through symbols, cultural fragments, or personal remembrances (as was usual in later Indonesian novels, such as Y. B. Mangunwijaya's *Durga Umayi* [1991], Pramoedya's *Arok-Dedes* [1999], and Remy Sylado's *Ca Bau Kan* [1999]). Whatever the mode, history is preeminent in these novels: it places the individual in "real" time and serves as the backdrop against which characters are revealed, ideas conveyed, and beliefs posited or disaffirmed. While any of these functions may be played out in the novels, history emerges most resonantly as what Hayden White terms "the content of the form." It is offered both as a consequence of memory and as the originator of memory; it gives meaning to the narrative and shapes that meaning. Above all, however, history occupies the narration in a way that subverts the structured rigidity of mythic discourse and advances in its place the contingencies of time and meaning. Though clearly sharing social realism's opposition to the historiography of the New Order regime,²⁵ these novels differ from social-realistic fiction in stripping history of its structured oneness, of its mythical enactment of progression, and, most important, of discourse that prohibits dissent in the narrative capturing of the past.

Prose fiction mediates by self-assertion rather than by self-effacement. This is especially true of the *Buru Tetralogy*, but in an ironic sense, since what is asserted is the impossibility of narrative assertion. On the one hand, the tetralogy reveals (and asserts) the determinants of its own form, and thus lays bare the contingencies of narration as a way of knowing the past. On the other hand, it is self-effacing in the content of its form, in what it proposes about the discourse of history. In contrast to the single-voiced discourse of myth that shapes social realism and New Order historiography and asserts authority over the real (i.e., truth) and the meaning of the real, the *Buru tetralogy* offers a different claim on history and historical truths. Propositional rather than assertive, this claim implies the recognition that to know the historical is to mediate and to narrate it with the voice of a subject in the present who is also positioned within history. If one of the proclaimed truths of our existence is that "being" means always being in time, it is a derivative but no less cogent conclusion that we are also in history—we belong to history: "[h]istory is like a home from where we traverse the world. If one does not know where one departs from, then one does not know where one's direction is."²⁶ As Wilhelm Dilthey suggests, the only way to be objective about history is not to objectify it, not to devise a subject-object dualism that

²⁵ Chris GoGwilt describes the setting of the *Buru tetralogy* as "the historical scene for a reading of the present" and writes that the historical past it depicts is "deeply shaped by an absent, unrepresented history: the bloody events of 1965-6, when the revolutionary nationalism of Sukarno was overthrown by Suharto's military-backed regime. Officially, Pramoedya's voice has been silenced in 'New Order' Indonesia, from 1965 to the present. In the *Buru tetralogy* . . . those events and their aftermath form a point of reference for situating Pramoedya in present-day Indonesia, and for evaluating his work's struggle to preserve historical record against the official amnesia of the 'New Order.'" Chris GoGwilt, "Pramoedya's Fiction and History: An Interview with Pramoedya Ananta Toer, January 16, 1995, Jakarta, Indonesia," in *Pramoedya Ananta Toer 70 Tahun: Essays to Honour Pramoedya Ananta Toer's 70th Year*, ed. Bob Herring (Stein: Yayasan Kabar Seberang, 1995), p. 2.

²⁶ "Ya, karena, menurut saya, sejarah itu penting. Sejarah itu kan rumah tempat orang melanglangi dunia. Jadi, kalau dia tak tahu dari mana ia berangkat, ia tak mengerti tujuan." Pramoedya, "Yang Tidak Setuju, Ya Minggir Saja" (Those who don't agree, well, step aside), Interview in *Tempo*, no. 9, May 4-10, 1999, reproduced at <http://www.radix.net/~bardsley/minggir.html>; my translation.

plays out the myths of a univocal epistemology.²⁷ Thus, in *This Earth of Mankind*,²⁸ the first novel in the tetralogy, the whole notion of creating a self is tied up with Minke's urgent desire to find his place in time and history. Change in turn-of-the-century Indonesia under Dutch colonial rule is perceived as both virtual and real within the meditations of the narrating self. In the same fashion that Faulkner portrays post-Civil War society in *Sartoris* as "silent, sickly desolate of motion or any sound,"²⁹ Nyai Ontosoroh establishes the silenced voice or voices, in her metaphor, as the foundation of stasis:

Everybody in authority praises that which is colonial. That which is not colonial is considered not to have the right to life . . . Millions upon millions of people suffer silently, like the river stones. You, Child, must at least be able to shout. Do you know why I love you above all others? Because you write. Your voice will not be silenced and swallowed up by the wind; it will be eternal, reaching far, far into the future.

(COAN, pp. 336-7; American edition, pp. 82-83)

This notion of stasis-induced silence is especially relevant to the writing of history, for it points to the silence of the masses engendered by the hegemonic control of the historical archive, both of the colonial Netherlands East Indies government³⁰ and the New Order regime, that Pramoedya allegorizes. Colonialism, through its myriad discourses—from political treatises to lowbrow reports by missionaries and administrators—and institutions (schools, law courts, media, to name but a few), deploys this archive to establish the legitimacy of the colonizer, in the process effacing the native voice in order to facilitate colonization. How this archive has been appropriated in contemporary history in order to interpret colonial confrontation is determined as much by assumptions that govern how the archive is read as by present sociopolitical pressures brought to bear on the historian to make use of certain

²⁷ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Pattern and Meaning in History*, trans. and ed. H. P. Rickman (New York: Harper, 1961). White, Ricoeur, and Gadamer often draw on Dilthey's writing to flesh out the fundamental issues that both philosophers and historians face in dealing with the past.

²⁸ All references to the Buru tetralogy are to the Penguin Australian editions (translated by Max Lane): *Bumi Manusia* (This earth of mankind) and *Anak Semua Bangsa* (Child of all nations) published together under the English title, *The Awakenings* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1981); *Jejak Langkah* (Footsteps) (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1990); and *Rumah Kaca* (House of Glass) (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1992). Quotes from the tetralogy in this essay will be marked by their abbreviated English titles as *TEOM*, *COAN*, *FS*, and *HOG* respectively. References to the American editions (*This Earth of Mankind*, *Child of All Nations*, *Footsteps* [all New York: Penguin, 1990], and *House of Glass* [New York: Penguin, 1992]) have been added by the editors.

²⁹ William Faulkner, *Sartoris* (New York: Grosset, 1929), p. 7.

³⁰ Max Lane in an introduction to his translation of *This Earth of Mankind*, describes this "culture of silence" in Dutch East Indies: "The [Dutch East Indies] government presided over a colony, the exploitation of whose resources made one of the smallest countries of Europe, Holland, one of its richest. This exploitation needed a special condition for its continuation: the maintenance of an attitude of acceptance on the part of the colonised and the governed. The colonisers' determination was that the native people, especially the toiling classes, of the Netherlands Indies should remain for ever submerged in a 'culture' of silence. This made exploitation easier and gave some Dutch their reason to exhibit the traditional colonial feelings of cultural arrogance and superiority." Max Lane, "Introduction" in *Awakenings* (Victoria: Penguin, 1980), p. vii.

interpretative strategies. In "Realisme Sosialis dan Sastra Indonesia—Sebuah Tinjauan Sosial," Pramoedya asserts Maxim Gorky's idea that "[t]he people must know their own history,"³¹ and he affirms this principle throughout his fiction. As Maarten Nijman, the Dutch editor of the *Soerabaiasch Nieuws van den Dag*, and one of Minke's "informal" teachers, proclaims in *Child of all Nations*, "People can believe in many things that are not right. History is indeed the story of liberation from wrong beliefs, of struggle against stupidity, against ignorance." (COAN, p. 429; Am. ed., p. 195) The challenge for Pramoedya, then, is not only to recover the past by setting narrative over and against the historiographic myths of both the colonial archive and the New Order regime, but also to undermine the myth-generating mechanisms that constitute the founding matrix of such writings.

In the Buru tetralogy, history does not stand outside individual consciousness as a form imposed, but rather, impinges on the consciousness of characters and forces its way into their considerations. History supervenes against the discourse of myth in these novels because it both shapes and is shaped by the private affairs of the self. In a practical sense, the most transparent manifestation of this reciprocity appears in the mechanisms of plot. While the social realists transferred life to literature through logical causality and traditional emplotment (i.e., by depicting past events accumulating to produce present consequences), the Buru novels turn on what Lennard Davis in another context calls "teleogenic" plots—the ordering of action and information to suggest "the transformation of past events by subsequent ones."³² The novelists of social realism generally conceive their plots as reporting the real through a temporal unfolding that leads to an inevitable conclusion (in a narrative sense rather than a deterministic one). The Buru tetralogy, in contrast, unravels the plot of the past and transforms the potential for historical knowledge into a web of relations and interactions between the self and history. Its teleogenic plotting thus works on two levels: firstly, the fragmented composition compels the reader to reconfigure the design of storytelling through the evocation of a past that is not static but dynamic and ever changing; secondly, the external referent of the narrative, the history of Indonesia, is now an internal component of the self and thus open to re-formation as the individual claims authority not over truth but against myth.

The teleogenic plotting of history is perhaps most purposefully exemplified in the prominent role of the narrator-protagonist;³³ the use of documents and published texts

³¹ Pramoedya, "Realisme Sosialis dan Sastra Indonesia—Sebuah Tinjauan Sosial" (Social realism and Indonesian literature—A social analysis), Seminar Paper delivered at the University of Indonesia in early January 1963. The phrase is quoted on pp. 15 and 18 of the 1980 revised text of the seminar paper, circulated in typescript and photocopied form. See Keith Foulcher, *Social Commitment in Literature and the Arts: The Indonesian "Institute of People's Culture" 1950-1965* (Victoria: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1986), pp. 120-23, for a discussion of Pramoedya's commitment to historical analysis.

³² Lennard Davis, *Resisting Novels: Ideology and Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 213.

³³ I am referring here to Minke in the first three novels whose life and growth as a pioneer of nationalism, and of Indonesian nationalist awakening itself, can be said to be anthropomorphised. See GoGwilt, "Pramoedya's Fiction and History," p. 7, in which he argues that "[i]n some respects the formal structure of the first three novels, narrated by Minke, fits the genre of what Partha Chatterjee calls 'nationalism's autobiography.'" The term "nationalism's autobiography," attributed to Chatterjee, is from Partha

(some of them fictional), letters, diaries, transcripts of court proceedings, newspaper reports; and the use of conspicuously historical figures and events. The tetralogy is full of references to prominent nineteenth and twentieth centuries historical figures such as Eduard Douwes Dekker, the liberal Dutch colonial functionary who wrote (under the pseudonym Multatuli) the novel, *Max Havelaar* (1860)—a scathing indictment of Dutch colonial injustices and oppression of the East Indies, and a novel that has had a significant influence on Pramoedya; the tyrannical early-nineteenth-century Dutch Governor-General of the Netherlands East Indies, General H. W. Daendels; Governor-General J. van den Bosch and his Culture System (an iniquitous forced cultivation system that imposed Dutch monopoly over its colony's cultivation of exportable crops like tea, coffee, quinine, sugar, etc.); C. Snouck Hurgronje, who advocated association with local native aristocrats to bolster Dutch rule over its colony; and so on. Some of the characters in the tetralogy are patently modeled either directly or indirectly on prominent historical figures such Marie van Zeggelen (first Dutch woman parliamentarian in the *Volksraad*), Kommer (the Indo journalist-cum-author of early proto-Indonesian novels), Tirta Adhi Soerjo (a prominent early nationalist figure after whom the character of Minke is modeled), and Raden Adjeng Kartini (the daughter of a provincial aristocrat from Jepara who became the first Western-educated native woman in the twentieth-century East Indies). Pivotal historical events that shaped the course of early Indonesian nationalism are interwoven too into the narrative to provide the backdrop and intertexts to *his*-story, for example, the establishment of the Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan movement in 1900, the formation of Boedi Oetomo, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, and so forth. Pramoedya seems to do his utmost to create a "truthful" verisimilar rendering of a particular historical event or episode: and he is undeniably an excellent "realist," as evidenced by the horribly convincing descriptions of the terror and suffering that are necessarily part of a revolution, descriptions found in earlier works such as *Keluarga Gerilya* and *Perburuan*. Yet it is precisely the prominence in the Buru tetralogy of "real" historical figures and events that, paradoxically, exposes not only the illusion of verisimilar writing, but also of historical writing itself; the very skill with which the author succeeds in blending his fictional and his historical characters makes it almost impossible to say which is which.

Another element in the Buru tetralogy that points us to the paradoxical nature of all historiography, and of the remembering character shaping the narration of history, is that of intertextuality and the use of texts. Narrators who consistently evoke the past in the first person most often give their historical accounts the feeling of a memoir. First-person narration generally provokes anxiety over matters of truth, less because a narrowed perspective suggests overt unreliability than because special pleadings are inherent in a highly personalized discourse on the past and because of the associative uncertainties of memory. To diminish the imputation of reliability in their treatments of the historical (and, conversely, to enhance the authenticity of their perspectives), narrators of memory often insert a wide variety of texts into their discourses: news items, reports, photograph albums, maps, portraits, and the like. These texts appear in narrated form, of course, and bear on two issues that directly confront all first-person discourse: firstly, the preoccupation with providing corroborative evidence to buttress

the remembering narrator's evocation of events; secondly, the fundamental role of interpretation in the discernment, not of the truth, but of the meaning of discourse. While social realism derives its historiographic impact largely from the way it collapses truth and meaning into a structure that seeks to close itself to interpretation (i.e., to make truth evident and available for all to see), the "novelists of memory" imply several possible answers and intimate that each text engenders several possible questions. In this sense, the narrative not only states and asserts, but also possesses a horizon of unasserted possibilities of meaning (i.e., propositions) that lie beyond intention and beyond myth.

For example, the Buru tetralogy contains preexisting texts both as a sign of the real and as a mechanism for foregrounding the operations of interpretation. Minke's reliance on letters, court testimonies, newspaper reports, and other documents to piece together the past (Indonesia's as well as his own) reveals the reciprocity between history as a formative component of the self and the self as a formative component of history. The texts validate the "realness" of the past (i.e., confirm that people, places, and events actually exist), but the meaning of this past must be determined. What is crucial about the determination of meaning here is that Pramoedya does not set out to reconstruct the past as *past*, as if it were an isolated whole within its own structure of meaning. Instead, as narrator, he draws on texts as framers of experience and integrates them into his own thoughts, desires, and needs in the present. Minke does not stand apart from all that surrounds and precedes him; he is firmly attached to history; he is *in* history. As Joel Weinsheimer writes, summarizing Gadamer, "[o]ur present, our difference from the past is not the obstacle but the very condition of understanding the past . . . and the past to which we have access is always our own past by reason of our belonging to it."³⁴ The history that Minke is in, of course, is only knowable through his narration of it, laid out by the multitude of telescopic relations among the events, notes, and documents of the past. The texts themselves stand inert and lifeless until they are awakened to meaning by memory and narration. History is thus set forth as a component of narration and is shaped by Minke's complementary needs to interpret the past and to define himself.

The Buru novels make abundant use of fragmented memoirs, letters, diaries, archival material, and so on. All these are edited and manipulated to form a seemingly concrete basis for the verisimilitude of the text and the reliability of its rendering of the past. The apparent objectivity and verisimilitude of this account, however, are problematized by the narrator-protagonist's prologues to segments in the novels in which he admits that the story he is about to tell, though reproduced from memory, notes, and letters, is fraught with his own imaginings and fantasies. *This Earth of Mankind*, for instance, opens with:

In the beginning I wrote these short notes during a period of mourning: she had left me, who could tell if for a while only or for ever? (At the time I didn't know how things would turn out.) . . .

Thirteen years later I read and studied these short notes over again, I merged them together with dreams, imaginings. Naturally they became different from the original. Different? Ah! But that doesn't matter!

³⁴ Joel Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 134.

And here is how they turned out. (*TEOM*, p. 1; Am. ed., p. 15)

Situated on the outer limit of the narrative, these prefatory intimations of the accounts' lack of objectivity constitute a frame for the novel's story; and since frames are quite literally liminal, paradoxical constructions, at once participating in the meaning of the objects they demarcate and occupying a place in the world beyond, we might read these prologues and qualifications as an implicit interrogation of the boundaries between such oppositions as written and oral, truth and non-truth, history and fiction. We are continually reminded of the fact that we are completely dependent on the narrator, whose source of information is his notes commingled with "imaginings" (*TEOM*, p. 1; Am. ed., p. 15), "re-ordering[s]" (*TEOM*, p. 49; Am. ed., p. 74; *FS*, p. 122; Am. ed., p. 162), "dreams" (*HOG*, p. 97; Am. ed., p. 102), and "fantas[ies]" (*COAN*, p. 537; Am. ed., p. 323; *HOG*, pp. 285 and 288; Am. ed., pp. 302, 305). The same goes for the letters, reports, and accounts by other characters with which the four novels are interspersed, no matter how authentic they appear to be. In the novels, for instance, one frequently finds remarks that suggest the selectivity and subjectivity of Minke's narration: "After re-ordering, it came out as follows" (*TEOM*, p. 49; Am. ed., p. 74); "So that this story of mine runs in order, let me first of all relate what happened . . . I've put together the story below based on what . . . others told me; and this is how it has ended up" (*TEOM*, p. 116; Am. ed., p. 157); "I don't think I could tell my imagination it was wrong if I said that the papers also reported this event . . . I'm afraid I must end my fantasy here" (*COAN*, p. 257; Am. ed., p. 323); "Now allow me to fantasize a bit about this particular character, and forgive me that I am unable to imagine what he looks like" (*COAN*, p. 255, Am. ed., p. 321).

Whereas Pramoedya appears eager to set up alternative and seemingly more reliable frames of historical reference, at the same time he is determined to break these frames, thereby effectively reminding the reader of the fictionality of all historical "sources" and of the fact that, in trying to determine the meaning of a text, at best we are merely interpreting an author's verbal recreation of the past. Therefore the reader is implicated in the creative process: he becomes part of the fictional frame, part of the *process* of historiography, which includes the past, a mediated text, and a historiographer, who may either be an author or a reader.

That being said, the importance of Pramoedya's perspective on both colonial Dutch and New Order historiographies lies less with what he denounces than with what he conceives as the alternative. Instead of inventing new myths that dispute the old ones, he posits a counter-discourse in which history is "reconceived":

In the form of the Buru novels, I wanted to reconceive the history of Indonesian independence, because until that time the movements for independence were seen in terms of the so-called Ethical Policy of Dutch colonialism at the turn of the century. The popularity of the tetralogy when it first appeared in Indonesia indicates where the importance of the novel form lies.³⁵

Thus when Pramoedya contemplates a historical discourse of his own, he calls forth the creative authority embedded in the metaphor of his Lusi river imagery:

³⁵ Pramoedya in the interview with GoGwilt, "Pramoedya's Fiction and History," pp. 10-11.

Historical facts emerge from literature the way water, flowing through different channels, comes to shape a stream or lake. Embedded in literary form remain the facts of history. Whatever distortions of history there are in literature stem from the deficiencies of autobiography, the circumstances of the author's existence.³⁶

In the Buru tetralogy, Pramoedya clearly opens the theme of history to the reader, but it is the novels' teleogenic plotting that impels his view of history beyond myth. It reveals the transformative power of individual memory to undermine the inertial monologism and fixed continuity of the past and to show instead that history is necessarily malleable. Such thinking reverses the traditional formula of first-person plotting, "Once I was lost but now I am found," and posits in its place an open-ended "I" whose discourse is epistemically fundamental to both the self and the understanding (i.e., the writing) of history.

The conception of history as the discourse of remembrance configures the opposition to myth. In the tetralogy, Pramoedya relies heavily on the exigencies of memory to disclose the unreliability of a single-voiced historiography. As his remark on "reconceiving" history suggests, Pramoedya's concern is with retelling, with re-narrating, and re-creating the past to lay out the historical in an alternative frame. The Buru tetralogy traces the history of anticolonial Indonesian nationalist awakening at the turn of the century through an individual, Minke. The first novel, *This Earth of Mankind*, is set amidst the tensions and contradictions created by the collision of the liberating aspects of the expansion of capitalist industry and its technology, on the one hand, with the power of the colonial state, on the other. Though Minke's travels are not limited to Surabaya and the native politics of the world of Java, this doubly coded area of colonial mapping and native inscriptions of the earth is the central site of departure and return for him.

The tetralogy can be read as a critical reflection on dominant and oppressive white Dutch colonialism. It is also a text that addresses the contradictions of native political practice, within the structure of feudal Javanese internal colonialism. I emphasize the need to be aware of who "constructs" history, as discussed in the earlier part of this essay, in order to suggest that the tetralogy provides a textual space for considering an alternative inscription of the history of Indonesian nationalist awakening. If, as Frederik Barth suggests, one response to colonialism is the strategic demarcation of cultural boundaries which involves "the codification of idioms" and "the selection of signals for identity and the assertion of value for these cultural diacritica, and the suppression or denial of relevance for other differentia,"³⁷ then, in the context of inscribing the history of the turn-of-the-century Indonesian nationalist movement based on a non-colonial construction, the Buru tetralogy represents an important textual formation of the struggle over which "diacritica" came to be relevant and which did not.

³⁶ Pramoedya's answer to the question: "How would you characterize the relation between history and novel writing?" reminds GoGwilt of the imagery of the Lusi river described in Pramoedya's "Things Vanished," the first short story in his anthology *Stories from Blora*, an imagery which to GoGwilt demonstrates "a powerful interplay of memory and forgetting." *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 10.

³⁷ Frederik Barth, "Boundaries and Connections," in *Signifying Identities: Anthropological Perspectives on Boundaries and Contested Values*, ed. Anthony Cohen (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 21.

The first novel, *This Earth of Mankind*, offers a set of signals that identify a coded idiom of native difference from the dominant imperial Dutch culture:

Metaphors/Concepts of	Colonial Dutch Culture	Native Culture
power	nuts, screws, and bolts train	<i>elephants and rhinoceros</i> horses, cattle, buffalo
war	bullets	spears and arrows
authority	white man's law government's law	village law <i>Muslim law</i>
language	<i>Dutch</i>	<i>Malay</i> Javanese Madurese, etc.
education	<i>HBS</i> <i>Doctor Jawa School</i>	"university of life"
knowledge	<i>European history</i> auction papers	Babad Tanah Jawi wayang stories Panji stories Personal stories, e.g. Nyai Ontosoroh's

The diacritica mapped out above become, in the emergence of Minke's critical consciousness in the proceeding novels, the objects of scrutiny in an analysis of the hierarchical relationship between Native and Dutch cultural values and of the ways in which different cultural valorizations have an impact on the historical archive. As we begin to see, the root motive of this archive is not curiosity, but domination. Through it, the colonialist is able to "know" the Native, not for altruistic or humanistic purposes, but instead as a means to power. Miriam's letter to Minke in *Child of All Nations*, for example, tells us that the archive through which knowledge about the Dutch East Indies is generated and assembled within colonial institutions of research and explication in the metropolises of Europe is administered by western colonial personnel:

The European nations have studied the character and capabilities of the Indies Natives, while on the other hand the Natives hardly know anything about Europe. Come to the Netherlands, Minke; you will be astounded to see the collection of material we have about the thinking of your ancestors, beginning with what was chiseled onto stone up until what was inscribed onto palm leaves. And none of it, not one thing, was saved by its heirs, your people, but by Europeans, Minke, Europeans. (COAN, p. 353; Am. ed., p. 104)

By using this colonial archive, Europeans maintain their exploitation and oppression by containing the subjectivity of native peoples in the images, stereotypes, and representations deployed in colonial discourse. What is exchanged and delivered back to the Native is a representation of him/herself as, for instance, the civilized barbarian or the evil non-conformist, to name two sides of the same coin. Abdul R. JanMohamed explains this phenomenon in relation to colonial literature in his essay, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature." His critique is relevant to the production of history when he observes that:

. . . just as imperialists "administer" the resources of the conquered country, so colonialist discourse "commodifies" the Native subject into a stereotyped object and uses him as a "resource" for colonialist fiction. Once reduced to his exchange-value in the colonialist signifying system, he is fed into the manichean allegory, which functions as the currency, the medium of exchange, for the entire colonialist discursive system.³⁸

We should examine this dehistoricizing process of "othering" more closely. The European characters in the tetralogy are quick to remind their native counterparts of the native people's contretemps, defeats, and failings in history, while at the same time selectively replaying and reinforcing white civilization's past victories. While Western triumphs in the East have been preserved to serve as proof of supposed white superiority, reports of native defeat memorialize their "inferior" way of life, thinking, and values, as Miriam de la Croix writes to Minke:

On those still nights in this big and empty building, if Papa is not tired we like so much to sit and listen to his explanations about the fate of *your* people. How *they* gave birth to hundreds and thousands of leaders and heroes in their struggle, against European oppression. One by one *they* fell, defeated, killed, surrendering, gone mad, dying in humiliation, forgotten in exile. Not one was ever victorious in war. We listened and were moved, and became angry also to hear how *your* rulers sold concessions to the Company, benefiting no one but themselves. It was a sign that their character and souls were being corroded. *Your* heroes, according to Papa's stories, always emerged out of a background of selling concessions to the Company; and so it was over and over again, for centuries and no one understood that it was all a repetition of what had gone before, and that as time went on the rebellions all became smaller and more and more stunted . . . According to Papa, the fate of humanity now and in the future is dependent on its mastery over science and learning. All humanity both as individuals and as peoples, will come tumbling down without such mastery. To oppose those who have mastered science and learning is to surrender oneself to humiliation and death. (TEOM, pp. 143-44; Am. ed., pp. 191-92; my emphasis)

This notion of a timeless and fixed native essence works as a normalizing discourse to codify difference, to fix the Other in a timeless present where all native actions are repetitions of their static and torpid "natural" habits, traits or characteristics—a process that strategically useful to a colonial society that prides itself on its march of

³⁸ Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 64.

progress, its “mastery over science and learning.” The Native here is othered by being homogenized into a collective “they” which is distilled even more pointedly in the quote above as “*your people*,” “*your rulers*,” “*your heroes*.” The abstracted “*your/they*” is held culpable, as if anything the Native is or does is not the result of a particular historical event, but an instance of a pre-given custom or trait:

Listen again to the gamelan, said Papa once more. It has been that way for centuries. And the gong in the life of the Javanese has still not arrived. The gamelan sings of a people’s longing for a Messiah. Just longing after him, not seeking him out, not giving birth to him. The gamelan translates the life of the Javanese, a people who are unwilling to seek, to search, who just circle around, repeating, as in prayers and mantras, suppressing, killing thought, carrying people into a dispirited universe, which leads them astray, where there is no character. (TEOM, p. 145; Am. ed., p. 193)

This colonial version of history and the way it lays claim to the process of revealing the Indonesian past to its colonized subject—its way of “knowing” history—is, the tetralogy argues, contentious and contestatory, not only in intention but also in performance and experience. Even at the beginning of the tetralogy, Minke already expresses skepticism in response to the lessons of his Dutch masters, who speak from within the colonial archive where the “universal” adequacy of its representational logic is dutifully accepted as transparent. For example, in the second chapter of the first novel, Minke reflects on what the seemingly benign, institutionalized voice of the Director of his school has said:

The Director of my school once told my class: your teachers have given you a very broad general knowledge, much broader than that received by students of the same level in many of the European countries. Naturally this breast of mine swelled. I’d never been to Europe. So I did not know if the Director was telling the truth or not. But because it pleased me, I decided to believe him. And, further, all my teachers had been born in Europe, and educated there. It didn’t feel right that I should distrust my teachers. My parents had entrusted me to them. Among the educated European and Indo communities, they were considered to be the best teachers in all of the Netherlands Indies. So I was obliged to trust them. (TEOM, p. 2; Am. ed., p. 16)

As the tetralogy progresses, Minke realizes that colonial education does not equip him to understand the contradictions of the colonialism he sees around him:

I was a child of a conquered race. The European teaching that I had received had not equipped me to understand Japan, let alone the greatness of Europe.

What I was feeling then was that Europe had obtained its glory from swallowing up the world, and Japan from overrunning China. How strange it was if every glory was obtained only at the cost of the suffering of others. (COAN, p. 309; Am. ed., pp. 48-49)

This leaves him with a feeling of anomie: “From the very beginning, our studies took the form of learning rules and categories. We were forced to bow down to things, dead and living, so that you disappeared among all that you learnt. The learning you received made you feel worthless, drowning your personality.” (FS, p. 34; Am. ed., p.

54) In the second novel, during a consciousness-raising discussion with Ter Haar, which is worth quoting in full, Minke is told:

Capital wanted to turn all the Natives into its coolies. The Natives' land would become its own land. So the capitalists resisted with all their might any moves for European education to be given to Natives. They were afraid the given source of their power, cunning and evil, would be revealed. But capital needs more than just coolies; it also needs foremen who can at least read and write. So schools were set up to teach a few people to read and write. Then that too wasn't sufficient; they needed some who could count. And those schools needed teachers, so a Teachers' School was set up. Then they felt the need for a few people who could speak a little Dutch. The primary schools that were operating were divided into grades I and II; students in first grade received a little tutoring in Dutch. So, as things developed, capitalist interests in the Indies found they needed educated Natives for their own enterprises. And so on, and so on. More advanced schooling, at high-school level, in special subjects were instituted for Natives: Agriculture, Administration, Medicine, Law. It could not be avoided. It was necessary because of the growth and development of capitalism itself—including the medical school you yourself are about to enter. And you're given good money to stay with the Government, to make government service attractive. (COAN, p. 494; Am. ed., p. 271)

Minke also realizes that, just as "uncooperative" Natives are tagged with racist labels that identify them as predictably savage and primitive, the extraordinary Native is praised precisely for his usefulness as an instrument in the service of colonial exploitation, as this exchange between Governor-General van Heutsz illustrates:

"The Government has high hopes that the educated Natives will help it carry out its work, its work in implementing the new Ethical Policy, a policy based on the Netherlands repaying its debt to the Indies . . . And if the result of educating Natives is simply to produce a question factory like yourself, then, that, of course, would be disappointing to the Government."

"But, Sir, all my life, I have only ever asked you two questions, once when you were a general and once as Governor-General."

"Yes, but questions asked in public, and such sharp questions," he smiled, and smacked his lips a little. "Yes-yes, perhaps you didn't realise just how sharp your questions were. The Government's efforts will have been of little use if all they produce are such cutting questions as yours. And of not much use to the Natives either." (FS, p. 169; Am. ed., pp. 222-23)

In these passages it is clear that education in the colonial context becomes an ideological apparatus by which the dominant colonial culture attempts to school members of subordinate cultures to accept their perfunctory and less-than-human status—in fact, to acquiesce to their own negation as social subjects. What Abdul JanMohamed observes in this context is useful: ". . . the most crucial aspect of resisting hegemony consists in struggling against its attempt to form one's subjectivity, for it is through the construction of the minority subject that the dominant culture can

elicit the individual's own help in his/her oppression."³⁹ For colonialism to function as an efficient sociopolitical and economic system, the colonized must to some extent agree with their degraded status. Thus Minke is constantly made to see by his colonial "teachers" that Java is a "nation of worms" (*TEOM*, p. 143; Am. ed., p. 190), made to feel like "a monkey that had been put in the wrong cage" (*FS*, p. 19; Am. ed., p. 37) under their gaze, and that he is a "child of a conquered race" (*COAN*, p. 309; Am. ed., p. 48). The colonized Native's sense of dishonor has always been a crucial aspect of any colonial system: the colonized is required simultaneously to accept the standards of the oppressor's value system, and the responsibility for his or her exclusion from it. While the Natives are forced to acquiesce, at least superficially, to their dishonor and denigration, they covertly maintain a fierce sense of honor. But where the white master's honor is established as a given, the Native's honor is hard bought. An important aspect of Minke's story, then, is detailing how he creates a sense of personal honor as he rejects his social negation by Dutch colonial system. His struggle provides the basis for a strong critique of the subject-space he has been denied within the colonial system. As he stakes out a clear position of subjectivity for himself, he carefully reconstitutes it in a way that highlights its epistemological space and value, which diverge from the position relegated to him by the Dutch.

The incidents of colonial exploitation become for Minke the material for his own storytelling about the milieu that surrounded a nationalistically awakened native intellectual in "this earth of mankind" in turn-of-the-century Indonesia. We can say that in the *Buru* tetralogy, Pramoedya attempts to locate in the archival texts of history information about the specificity of native experience in the colonial encounter. This shift in the object of investigation from the colonizer to the colonized is constitutive to the production of post-colonial knowledge; the epistemology of this approach involves the overturning of binary oppositions. The Native transforms himself from "passive victim"—a code of colonial discourse in which the colonized are placed in an inferior (passive) position—into an "active agent." By positioning the Natives as active agents, Pramoedya enables his readers to gain a fuller understanding of the workings of the drama of the colonial encounter in Indonesia from a native point of view.

Minke's critical consciousness is formed when he acquires the hermeneutical skill of interpretation, learning to read the painful experiences of not only historical negation, but also negation in the day-to-day life of colonial Netherlands East Indies society, as evidence that Dutch colonialism is grounded in a racist, oppressive ideology. Minke is made painfully aware that:

. . . the Natives of the Indies, and especially the Javanese, who have been defeated again and again in battle for hundreds of years now, have not only been forced to acknowledge the superiority of Europe, but have also been forced to feel inferior. And the Europeans, wherever they saw Natives not contracting the disease of inferiority, viewed them as a fortress of resistance that must be subjugated . . .

³⁹ Abdul JanMohamed, "Negating the Negation as a Form of Affirmation in Minority Discourse: The Construction of Richard Wright as Subject," *Cultural Critique* 7 (1987): 247

Is the European colonial view appropriate? It is not only inappropriate, it is not right. But colonial Europe doesn't stop there. After the Natives have fallen into this humiliation and are no longer able to defend themselves, they are ridiculed with the most humiliating abuse. Europeans make fun of the Native rulers of Java who use superstition to control their own people, and who are thereby spared the expense of hiring police forces to defend their interests. Nyai Roro Kidul [The Powerful Goddess of the South Java Sea] is a glorious creation of Java whose purpose is to help preserve the authority of the native kings of Java. But Europe too maintains superstitions—the superstition of the magnificence of science and learning. This superstition prevents the conquered peoples from seeing the true face of Europe, the true nature of the Europe that uses that science and learning. The European colonial rulers and the Native rulers are equally corrupt. (*COAN*, p. 332; Am. ed., p. 76)

The hermeneutics of remembering and writing history in Pramoedya's scheme claim historical authenticity not through the proclaimed objectivity of the referential illusion, but by the insertion of a self (Minke) into the telling of a (his) story. In fact, history in the Buru tetralogy is conveyed by several "selves" in a series of scattered recollections, as they try to piece together the "dismembered" and brutalized past of their own histories. The reminiscences of Pangemanann, the native intelligence officer working for the Dutch, and also a tortured admirer of Minke, illustrate this process:

I tried to remember what Minke had written in his manuscripts. But my memory sometimes disappeared into a kind of night-time darkness, and then sometimes a flash of lightning would illuminate the dark. But what it illuminated and what remained hidden never came together. It was all a broken jumble. (*HOG*, p. 334; Am. ed., p. 355)

The tetralogy's narrative rejects the traditional perspective of third-person omniscience for more stylistically and technically intricate machinations in the novels, where the retelling of the past grows ever more personal and subjective. The long and ruminative sequence on the checkered history of the Netherlands Indies and its colonial forays into other parts of the world at the beginning of chapter seventeen (*COAN*, pp. 531-38; Am. ed., pp. 316-25) illustrates the intensity of the subjective within a discourse whose subject is history. The narrator first proposes: "So that the story runs in sequence, I have put together a selection of writings and opinions that I have heard at one time or another and which are connected with this story of my life. Some of the material I obtained several years after the events, but that is not important" (*COAN*, p. 531; Am. ed., p. 316), and then lays out how such a retelling of history can be opened to diversity (through personal imaginings) and dissent:

"In the history of the Netherlands Indies (I did not need to learn this from a book or a teacher) the Dutch were not just proud, but almost arrogant, about the strength of their army (*COAN*, p. 534; Am. ed., p. 320) . . . And if I keep on drawing upon my imagination, I can come up with some more ideas . . . And if I let this imagination of mine get out of control altogether, this would be the next part of the story (*COAN*, p. 536; Am. ed., p. 322) . . . Probably he was famous throughout the land . . . and a pile of other probablys as well. My imagination can be squeezed no further (*COAN*, p. 535; Am. ed., p. 321) . . . I don't think I

could tell my imagination it was wrong if I said that the papers also reported this event. I'm afraid I must end my fantasy here (COAN, p. 537; Am. ed., p. 323) . . . Whether all these stories are true or not, only Dulrakim knows. I was amazed at the number of stories he had stored away. He told all these stories as though they had nothing to do with him personally. Uh! you sailor, you *untiring* collector of stories . . . " (COAN, p. 538; Am. ed., p. 325)

What emerges from the lengthy sequence that brackets the historical here points to the two important levels of the tetralogy that oppose social realism: firstly, the way in which history, still the referent of the narrative, is demythologized through the drawing forth of a range of dialectical propositions; secondly, the mediation of history by a subjective voice whose very subjectivity implies a hermeneutics based not on "being there" (i.e., the "objectivity" of social realism), but on narration and memory—history that is "true" not because it inheres in an abstract or found discourse outside the text, but because it is tied to a subjective life that is always bound up with the past, with history. In the tetralogy this "withinness" supersedes "being there" and reveals that history (and historiography) must always be redeemed outside the static structures of myth and within the discernment of a narrating self. The double redemption of history and the self is embodied through the evocation of an individual past and, as Proust puts it, "the joy of rediscovering what is real."⁴⁰ Proust's discovery of the real hinges, of course, on the way in which the self and history open the contingencies of their truths to each other and on the way in which these contingencies are narrated.

Thus when Minke contemplates his writing in relation to the past (both his own and that of events outside himself), he rejects the exhortation of Maarten Nijman, Dutch editor of the *Soerabaisch Nieuws*, who said that "[w]hen you are writing about reality, you must make sure that you provide enough documentation" (COAN, p. 429; Am. ed., p. 195), enough "evidence and witnesses" (COAN, p. 427; Am. ed., p. 193), and not to allow "[t]he spirit of this story—your spirit, your enthusiasm—[to] influence the story too much" (COAN, p. 426; Am. ed., p. 191), or his old landlord Telinga's feeble, fatalistic protestation that "it must be true if it's written in the histories" (COAN, p. 311; Am. ed., p. 51), that is to say, in any single-voiced discourse. Minke recognizes that discourse may congeal into a solidified mass of repetitive musings:

The old people teach us through their legends that there is a mighty god called *Batara Kala*. They say it is he who makes all things move further and further from their starting point, unable to resist, towards some unknown final destination. And I too, a human blind to the future, could do no more than hope to know. Uh! while we never really understand even what we have already lived through.

People say that before mankind stands only distance. And its limit is the horizon. Once the distance has been crossed, the horizon moves away again. There is no romance so strong that it could tame and hold them—the eternal distance and the horizon . . .

Whether light or shadow, nothing can escape being pushed along by *Batara Kala*. No one can return to his starting point. Maybe this mighty god is the one whom the Dutch call "the tooth of time" (*de tand des tijds*). It makes the sharp blunt, and the

⁴⁰ Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol. 3 (New York: Random House, 1981), p. 913.

blunt sharp; the small are made big and the big made small. All are pushed on towards that horizon, receding eternally beyond our reach. Pushed on towards annihilation. And it is that annihilation which in turn brings rebirth.

I don't really know whether this beginning to my notes is fitting or not. At the very least everything must have a beginning. And this is the beginning I have written. (COAN, pp. 281-82; Am. ed., pp. 13-14)

But he opts finally for the creative dispersion of subjective narration over the sterile imposition of the referential illusion. In this way, Minke combats the implicit agenda of myth according to which change bears no meaning and meaning can undergo no change. This process is explicitly carried out through the retelling of personal accounts, testimonies, recollections, and the "re-ordered" narratives of other characters in the tetralogy, all of which are merged into Minke's own narration of historical events: Annelies's recounting of Nyai Ontosoroh's story about her wretched childhood and how she was sold by her own father to Herman Mellema (TEOM, pp. 49-72; Am. ed., pp. 74-103); the Japanese prostitute Maiko's court testimony about her ignoble involvement in the flesh trade that plies from Nagoya to Hong Kong, Singapore, Batavia, Surabaya, and, finally, Wonokromo, and her illicit liaisons with both Herman and his son Robert Mellema (TEOM, pp. 126-32; Am. ed., pp. 169-75); Robert Jan Dapperste (alias Panji Darman)'s reports of Annelies's deteriorating mental condition during the journey to the Netherlands, the land to which she has been extradited (COAN, Chapter 2); the letters of the liberal Dutch journalist, Ter Haar, and Miriam Frischboten née de la Croix (FS, pp. 122-27; Am. ed., pp. 162-70); and, of course, there are the accounts of Pangemanann, the policeman who spies for the Dutch colonial authorities, who takes over the task of narration following Minke's exile, and whose notes make up the last novel, *House of Glass*. Pramoedya controverts the rigid chain of chronological progression, first by inserting the various motley characters—whose lives had been affected by the history he is telling and who in turn brought life to this history—squarely within it, and then by undermining the possibility of temporal certitude. Despite Minke's apparent concern with the correct order in the chain of events he is narrating ("So that this story of mine runs in order" [TEOM, p. 116; Am. ed., p. 151]; "Also because I consider the time sequence to be important" [TEOM, p. 126; Am. ed., p. 169]), he is quick to remind us that his retellings are "re-ordered", and "merged . . . together with dreams, imagining" (TEOM, p. 1; Am. ed., p. 15), to suggest that "human consciousness invents and re-invents its own histories,"⁴¹ that the alternative of a contingent fact can only be another contingent fact. Nothing can be preserved for the present without being changed, and Minke's rumination on the "*Batara Kala*" and "*de tand des tijds*" confirms both his own indeterminacy in history and the tentativeness with which his discourse exposes the aporias of being in time.

The narrated texts also inform the historiographic concerns of the Buru tetralogy. Though intercalated by a number of texts (e.g., the letters, court testimonies, newspaper articles, notes, and paintings), the tetralogy is overtly shaped by Pramoedya's view of narrating history. Most pertinent here is the way in which text, memory, and history are balanced on the fulcrum of interpretation to convey that history is always provisional. While Pramoedya explicitly sets the tetralogy over and

⁴¹ Max Lane, "Introduction," in *House of Glass*, p. viii.

against the texts of social realism as an example of a mode of writing, he does not deny it a social agenda. Here the social coincides intimately with historiography and with the appropriations of the past under Dutch colonial rule, as well as with more conventional methods for conveying the past. From the chronicles of the *Babad Tanah Jawi* and the myth of *Nyai Roro Kidul* and the legend of *Si Pitung*, to the recurrently invoked images of the gong and gamelan interspersed prominently throughout the narrative, the tetralogy affirms how interpretation of the past is always ongoing, always contingent on memory even when a text offers compelling evidence of truth. Memory forgets, revises, and transforms, so that the past remains ever open to rewriting and reinterpreting in ways that defy the design of myth. The texts that Pramoedya infiltrates in the Buru tetralogy are both in history (existing in “reality,” outside his novels) and about history (used by Dutch colonialism and—by implication—the *Orde Baru* to tell their versions of the “truth”). They are converted to narration within the frame of memory, and what they recover is history itself. As Pramoedya writes:

. . . it is not the materials of history that I examine, but its spirit. This I began with the tetralogy *Bumi Manusia*, particularly working on the currents that ebbed and flowed during the period of Indonesia’s National Awakening. And so there came to be a new reality, a literary reality, a downstream reality, whose origin was an upstream reality, that is, a historical reality. A literary reality that contains within it a reorientation and evaluation of civilisation and culture, which is precisely not contained in the historical reality . . . Step by step I am writing [my way] to the roots of its history, that for the moment is not ready to be published, or perhaps may never be published. In this way I have tried to answer: why did my people get to be like this, like that?

. . . whatever befalls [writers], their personal experience is also the experience of their people, and the experience of their people is also their personal experience. A part of this experience, small or large or the whole lot, will erupt in their writings, and will return to their people in the form of new realities, literary realities. That is why the truth of fiction is also the truth of history . . . Writers will bring it to life more clearly in their works, within which the killers and the killed will be immortal, instead of just actors in history. The holy robes and masks will be scattered.⁴²

The reconciliation between a past once closed to interpretation and a memory desiring to interpret recaptures history as subjective meaning engendered to annul myth. In short, nothing is preserved for Pramoedya; nothing is remembered and given meaning, without being altered.

Pramoedya’s Buru tetralogy speaks explicitly to the textual foundation of memory and narration and the contingencies of writing history. Its historical referents are open both to the narration’s changing paradigms and to the reader’s creative interpretation. The change in narrator from Minke, whose voice weaves the first three novels, to Pangemanann, who narrates the last, for example, most prominently offers varied and

⁴² Pramoedya, “Maaf, di atas Nama Pengalaman” (My apologies in the name of experience”), trans. Alex G. Bardsley, www.radix.net/~bardsley/apolog.html.

conflicting perspectives on the same set of incidents. It contrasts the narrative of the colonized to the narrative of the colonialist, as each character explores the ideological and dominative underpinnings of colonialism. *House of Glass* prompts us to focus on textual economies of morality and power, as we are presented with the colonizer's and colonialist's side of the story for the first time. Here we see the sociological and textual dimensions of colonial representations of "history" and the efficacy of those representations and assertions in both justifying colonialism as an enterprise and displacing the colonizers' collective guilt for their policies in the East Indies. This shift in narrative stance not only provides a counterpoint to the native version of history, but also throws into explicit focus the politics of narrating history. The tetralogy can thus be seen as doubly contestatory: as historical novels—fictionalized literature, but a literature with a conflicted relationship to its own fictionality—the tetralogy subverts the myth of its own veracity/accuracy (for example, through the framing narration of Minke, which, ironically, is prefaced by the salutary caution: "Thirteen years later I read and studied these short notes over again, I merged them together with dreams, imaginings. Naturally they became different from the original. Different? Ah! But that doesn't matter!" [TEOM, p. 1; Am. ed., p. 15]); and it destabilizes a single-voiced discourse that asserts truths about the past (e.g. Dutch newspaper reports about the royal mass suicide or *puputan* [ending] carried out in response to the Dutch invaders in Klungkung, Bali in 1908; discrepancies between what was reported in the English and Dutch newspapers of the Aceh War, etc.). In addition to casting doubt on Minke's own recollection of events, the tetralogy challenges all narrative that pretends to assert truths rather than to propose meanings. While the demythologization of Dutch colonial superiority is deeply embedded in the tetralogy, Pramoedya offers no alternative myth. Instead, his focus shuttles back and forth between the writing and the reading of texts, demonstrating how both activities are bound up with our understanding of the past.

Fiction is superior to history here (and, implicitly, to myth), not because of the truth-value of its discourse, but because of its propositions about truth. The epistemological fabric of narration always implies the hand of the weaver, which in turn affirms the presence of a self through which meaning (here the historical meaning of intellectual dissidence) is mediated and engendered. It is in this sense that the novels of the Buru tetralogy afford history the most diverse and profound possibilities. As with Ricoeur, "the meaning of history resides in its aspect as a drama of the human effort to endow life with meaning."⁴³ Time is always corrosive, and memory can never recoup time itself, but can recover only the meaning of time for a remembering self. This is what Pramoedya proposes at every turn of the tetralogy and what places his narrative in opposition to the assertive truths of social realism and colonial (and by extension *Orde Baru*) historiography. For Pramoedya, the writing of history cannot be collapsed into the reductivist and debilitating paradigm of myth. Evoking the historical past for Pramoedya is conceived not as experiencing that past as it once might have been lived, but as filtering time through the consciousness of a remembering self at once in history and open to history. Thus time is not a chasm that is merely bridged to recover the historical. Rather, as Gadamer writes, it is "a ground which supports the

⁴³ White, *The Content of the Form*, p. 181.

arrival of the past and where the present takes its roots."⁴⁴ This interplay (or dialogue, as some would have it) between present and past defines the narrating selves of these novels and their discourses on history. In contrast to social realism and the ("official") historiography of the state, therefore, the Buru tetralogy lays out history as a series of disruptions of time, of self, of narration, and, most important, of the referential illusion of truth and wholeness. To respect the wholeness of the past means to leave it open to inquiry, to refuse to neutralize the contingencies of history by transforming them into a safe zone of myth. Indeed, the Buru tetralogy works consistently to decenter the paradigm of myth and to reconstitute the center as a moveable construct that always questions the past and remains subject to the hermeneutics of dissent.

⁴⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," in *Interpretive Social Science*, ed. Paul Rabinow and William Sullivan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 152.