

Subdued Clamor from Sumatra: Voicing alternative memories, narratives, and histories

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The foundation of a nation entails the establishment of a shared imagination that can bond together its national citizens. For ex-colonized countries at the beginning of their independence, a common historical narrative and shared memories have been used as powerful tools to define a new national identity. In the case of Indonesia, which has achieved its independence through warfare, revolution, and diplomacy, the creation of national history and collective memory has revolved around anti-colonial sentiments melted with patriotic and heroic actions directed to safeguard the newborn nation. In this process, the central political authority has played the main role in determining an official historical narrative/narration of the new state and in fixing a set of shared cultural elements that could represent the national population as a whole. In the name of national unity, political stability, integration, and economic development, the central authority enforced the official narrative and memory, especially in the first 50 years of Indonesian independence. These efforts were, however, counterbalanced by strong oppression of and negotiations with other stories and perspectives, such as the ones of the regions or social groups in the periphery. After the fall of Soeharto's authoritarian regime, the political decentralisation and a more relaxed control of the central power over local authorities paved the way for questioning the official narrative and memory. Bottom-up initiatives, locality, local identity, have started to contest the official version of history and tend to foreground perspectives, for instance from the victim's perspective of the national revolution or other minor voices that have been ignored to this very moment.

This panel focuses on the efforts of local communities on the island of Sumatra to subvert or counter centralising narratives, to create alternative memories and to encourage different ways of looking at the construction of the nation by bringing up unheard voices of the so-called "agents", "victims", and "witnesses" of all but forgotten historical events.

List of speakers:

1. Alan Darmawan, PhD student Dept. of Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia, University of Hamburg
2. Al Azhar, Cultural specialist Pekanbaru
3. Timothy P. Barnard, Historian of the Malay world at the Dept. of History National University of Singapore
4. Will Derks, independent scholar of the Malay world

5. Jan van der Putten, scholar of the Malay world at the Dept. of Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia, University of Hamburg
6. Roberta Zollo, PhD student Dept. of Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia, University of Hamburg