



POST - REFORMASI WRITING IN INDONESIA: THE RISE OF PLURAL VOICES BEYOND STATE NARRATIVES

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of Indonesian historiography from the centralized and hegemonic pattern of the New Order to a more plural form in the post-Reformasi era, and its implications for writing the history of Islamic civilization. During the New Order, the state monopolized the production of historical knowledge through curricula, textbooks, films, the Indonesian National History project, and strict control over archives and sensitive themes such as the 1965–66 massacres, state violence, and ethnic conflicts. The 1998 Reformasi disrupted this singular authority and opened space for non-state actors independent scholars, local communities, pesantren, victims' organizations, women's activists, and investigative journalists to articulate alternative narratives highlighting the experiences of marginalized groups. This pluralization encouraged the development of local history, women's history, oral history, and multidimensional as well as phenomenological approaches that integrate written archives, oral testimonies, and cultural sources. In the study of the history of Islam in Indonesia, the focus is no longer limited to the state and canonical ulama, but also includes local ulama networks, Sufi orders, pesantren, and the everyday lives of Muslim communities. The article argues that post-Reformasi openness not only enriches historical themes and actors but also demands methodological and ethical renewal, so that pluralization does not collapse into relativism but instead leads toward a more democratic, reflective, and inclusive historiography.

Keywords: Indonesian historiography; New Order; 1998 Reform; historiographical pluralization; history of Islamic civilization; history of Islam in Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesian historiography is not only a campus topic, but also about “who gets to tell the story” of the past. During the New Order (1966–1998), history was written in a very centralized way and closely controlled by the state through school curricula, textbooks, films, monuments, and the *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia* project. As a result, the state became the main storyteller, while society was mostly placed as the listener. History was written to support stability and to justify Suharto’s rule, for example through big themes like “development” and “anti-communism”. Many school textbooks also explained the G30S/PKI event from a military point of view, showing the PKI as the enemy and Suharto as the savior. This kind of writing pushed aside many social experiences, especially those that did not match the state’s ideology.¹²

A major change happened after Suharto fell in 1998. Reformasi was not only a political transition, but it also changed how people saw “historical truth”: the state’s official story was no longer accepted automatically. The economic and political crisis and the opening of democratic space encouraged more groups to speak up—academics, human rights activists, local communities, journalists, and victim groups of state violence. Decentralization also gave regions more space to bring up their own local histories. However, this openness created a new tension: history became more diverse, but it could also become more chaotic if there were no clear standards about evidence and how history should be written. Because of that, this article focuses on the shift from state-centered history to more plural history after 1998, with special attention to what this means for writing the history of Islamic civilization in Indonesia.³⁴

Several important studies have discussed these issues from different angles. McGregor explains how the New Order built strong historical institutions and a military-based way of telling the past, so history worked as support for power, not simply as a record of events.⁵ Darmawan, Sjamsuddin, and Mulyana study textbooks and show that New Order ideology still “haunts” the Reformasi period, especially in how G30S/PKI continues to be framed through a military lens.⁶ Utama discusses current debates about where Indonesian historiography is heading and argues that Indonesian history writing needs to face issues of violence, justice, and voices that were silenced in the past.⁷ Wibowo and Djono propose a multidimensional approach in historiography and history education, stressing the importance of source criticism and reading events

¹ Katherine E. McGregor, *History in Uniform: Military Ideology and the Construction of Indonesia’s Past* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2007).

² Wawan Darmawan, Helius Sjamsuddin, and Agus Mulyana, “The Past Ghost: The Expression of Narrative Ideology in History Textbooks during the New Order and Reformasi in Indonesia,” *Paramita: Historical Studies Journal* 28, no. 2 (2018): 224–233, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15294/paramita.v28i2.15043>

³ Arief Budiman, Barbara Hatley, and Damien Kingsbury (eds.), *Reformasi: Crisis and Change in Indonesia* (Clayton, Australia: Monash Asia Institute, 1999).

⁴ Richard Diprose, Dave McRae, and Vedi R. Hadiz, “Two Decades of Reformasi in Indonesia: Its Illiberal Turn,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 49, no. 5 (2019): 691–712, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2019.1637922>.

⁵ Katherine E. McGregor.

⁶ Wawan Darmawan, et. al..

⁷ Wildan Sena Utama, “Ke Mana Arah Historiografi Indonesia Hari Ini?,” *Lembaran Sejarah* 20, no. 1 (2024): 1–5, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22146/lembaran-sejarah.97590>

from more than one perspective.⁸ Fatiyah shows that pesantren historiography has become more diverse: it is not only about famous figures, but also about institutions, social relations, culture, and education in Muslim life.⁹

Even though these studies are very helpful, there is still an area that has not been discussed clearly enough: how the political change in 1998 also changed the “rules of the game” for deciding what counts as historical truth. Many works focus on changes in textbook content, curriculum debates, or the rise of new themes, but they do not always address key questions such as: what kinds of evidence are considered strong, who is treated as a reliable source, and how to write about victims in a fair and responsible way. At the same time, the rise of many versions of history can also create space for weakly supported stories, including “alternate history” styles that sometimes prioritize sensation over verification. This is where this article’s novelty lies: it does not only talk about new actors and new themes, but also highlights changes in how historical truth is tested and made accountable, especially in the study of Islamic civilization history.^{10 11}

The goal of this study is to map the shift from a state-controlled historiography to a more plural historiography after Reformasi, and then explain its impact on how the history of Islamic civilization in Indonesia is written. This article offers two main contributions. First, it provides a clear framework to see who produces historical narratives, what media they use (textbooks, archives, testimonies, community publications), and what methods appear after 1998. Second, it stresses the epistemological impact: the need for stronger awareness about evidence, honesty in using sources, and ethics in writing—so openness does not turn into the idea that “all versions are equally true.” With this position, the author’s research is presented as a library-based historiographical study that connects political change with changing ways people decide historical truth, using Islamic civilization history as an important example of that broader shift.¹²

METHOD

This article uses a qualitative design with a descriptive-analytical approach and relies mainly on library research. The reason is that the study does not aim to measure variables in the field, but to understand how Indonesian historiography changed from the New Order to Reformasi era and what the changes mean for writing the history of Islamic civilization. Library research is suitable because the “data” in this study are ideas, arguments, narratives, and ways of using evidence found in texts. In short, the

⁸ Bayu Ananto Wibowo and Djono, “Paradigma Multidimensional Historiografi Indonesia dan Upaya Pengajarannya dalam Konteks Pembelajaran Sejarah di Indonesia,” *Santhet: Jurnal Sejarah, Pendidikan dan Humaniora* 8, no. 1 (2024): 358–367.

⁹ Fatiyah, “Historiografi Pesantren di Indonesia,” *Historia Madania: Jurnal Ilmu Sejarah* 5, no. 1 (2021): 65–80, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15575/hm.v5i1.12369>

¹⁰ Bayu Ananto Wibowo and Djono.,

¹¹ Yusa Akmal, “Post-Modernism and the Emergence of Alternate History,” *Tarikhuna: Journal of History and History Education* 6, no. 1 (2024), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15548/thje.v6i1.9101>

¹² Wildan Sena Utama.; Fatiah,

method helps the author reread and compare historical writings across periods, then explain the meaning of the shift in a clear and critical way.¹³¹⁴

The sources include academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, research reports, official documents (such as curriculum guidelines), and other written materials relevant to Indonesian historiography, the New Order, Reformasi, and Islamic historiography in Indonesia. Sources are selected using three criteria: (1) relevance to the topic (state-centered historiography, alternative narratives after 1998, and Islamic civilization history writing), (2) credibility (scholarly publications, reputable publishers, or official documents), and (3) usefulness for comparison between New Order and post-Reformasi discourse. Library research is used because it allows the author to systematically map debates and trace long-term changes in narratives and knowledge production without being limited to one site or one group of informants.¹⁵¹⁶

Data analysis is carried out through document analysis and qualitative content analysis. First, the sources are read closely and coded into themes such as: (a) state control and “official truths,” (b) the rise of non-state actors and alternative narratives after 1998, (c) changes in themes and objects in Islamic history writing (pesantren, local ulama, women, everyday Muslim life), and (d) methodological and ethical issues (use of testimony, archives, and source transparency). Second, the study compares how each period builds arguments, uses sources, and defines what counts as “valid” history. What is analyzed is not only *what* the texts say, but also *how* they construct historical truth: the actors behind the narratives, the media used (textbooks, academic works, community publications), and the standards of evidence implied in the writing.¹⁷

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Legacy of New Order Historiography and Post-Reformasi Shifts

During the New Order period, historical writing was built as *state-sponsored history* that served the major projects of the regime: political stability, national security, anti-communism, and economic development.¹⁸ Within an Indonesia-

¹³ Snyder, H. (2019). *Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines* (Journal of Business Research, 104, 333–339). https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Hannah-Snyder-7/publication/334848557_Literature_review_as_a_research_methodology_An_overview_and_guidelines/links/5d482ec9a6fdcc370a7ccb34/Literature-review-as-a-research-methodology-An-overview-and-guidelines.pdf (accessed 20 December 2025).

¹⁴ Bowen, G. A. (2009). *Document analysis as a qualitative research method* (Qualitative Research Journal, 9(2), 27–40). https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Glenn-Bowen/publication/240807798_Document_Analysis_as_a_Qualitative_Research_Method/links/59d807d0a6fdcc2aad065377/Document-Analysis-as-a-Qualitative-Research-Method.pdf (accessed 20 December 2025).

¹⁵ Snyder, H. Loc.cit.

¹⁶ Bowen, G. A. Loc.cit.

¹⁷ Mayring, P. (2014). *Qualitative content analysis: Theoretical foundation, basic procedures and software solution*. https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/39517/ssoar-2014-mayring-Qualitative_content_analysis_theoretical_foundation.pdf (accessed 20 December 2025).

¹⁸ Wildan Sena Utama, “Ke Mana Arah Historiografi Indonesia Hari Ini?” [Where Is Indonesian Historiography Heading Today?], *Lembaran Sejarah* 20, no. 1 (2024): 1–5, doi:10.22146/lembaran-sejarah.97590, URL: <https://doi.org/10.22146/lembaran-sejarah.97590>

centred framework that had originally emerged as an effort at decolonisation, history was then “compressed” into a heroic narrative of a state that always succeeded in overcoming threats of disintegration and backwardness, with Soeharto and the armed forces (ABRI) at the centre.¹⁹ The state acted as the main producer of historical knowledge through school curricula, official textbooks, films such as *Penumpasan Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI*, museums and monuments (for example Lubang Buaya), as well as special institutions like the Pusat Sejarah ABRI that managed archives, museums, and military history publications.²⁰ National history was compiled through the *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia* project and a series of history seminars that fixed a broad storyline: colonialism → revolution → New Order stability, with little space for conflict and differing perspectives. Through these mechanisms, the state created a single narrative pattern that positioned itself as a rational and modern actor, while other groups appeared only as background or as threats that had to be disciplined. This single narrative was maintained through tight control mechanisms. Themes considered sensitive communism, ethnic conflict, state violence were filtered through censorship, curriculum design, and ideological requirements in textbook writing.²¹ Research that touched on criticism of the regime, development inequalities, or the violence of 1965 was pushed beyond the “safe” boundary and therefore struggled to be published by mainstream presses.²² The state also monopolised many important archives, especially those related to military operations and political events, so that only the official version was accessible to the public and to schools.²³ This situation produced a hegemonic historiography: a state-centred version of history that foregrounded the experiences of central elites and the military while marginalising the voices of women, regions, ethnic minorities, 1965 survivors, and certain Islamic groups considered disruptive to stability.²⁴ The representation of G30S/PKI in senior high school history textbooks, for example, from the 1994–2006 curricula consistently depicted the PKI as an evil and barbaric force in line with New Order anti-communist ideology, and only began to soften slightly after 2013.²⁵ Likewise, “development history” highlighted the success of physical projects and economic growth, while ignoring inequality and social impacts, and portraying the regions mainly as beneficiaries of policies made in Jakarta. The fall of Soeharto in 1998 opened space for alternative historical writing that

¹⁹ Sri Margana, “Historiografi Indonesia dari Nasional-sentris ke Global-sentris” [Indonesian Historiography from Nation-Centred to Global-Centred], *Prisma: Jurnal Pemikiran Sosial Ekonomi* 39, no. 2 (2020): 74–85, URL: <https://prismajurnal.com>

²⁰ Katherine E. McGregor, *History in Uniform: Military Ideology and the Construction of Indonesia's Past* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2007), pp. 55–90, URL: <https://nuspress.nus.edu.sg>

²¹ Ahmad Nurhuda and Anggeni Syaputri, “Perkembangan Historiografi Indonesia” [The Development of Indonesian Historiography], *Tarikhuna: Journal of History and History Education* 4, no. 2 (2022): 192–199, URL: <https://e-journal.uinib.ac.id>

²² John Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder: The September 30th Movement and Suharto's Coup d'État in Indonesia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), pp. 1–20, 261–273, URL: <https://uwpress.wisc.edu>

²³ Katherine E. McGregor, *History in Uniform: Military Ideology and the Construction of Indonesia's Past*

²⁴ Ahmad Nurhuda and Anggeni Syaputri, “Perkembangan Historiografi Indonesia” [The Development of Indonesian Historiography]

²⁵ Sariyatun et al., “Critical Discourse Analysis of G30S Representations in Grade XII Indonesian History Textbooks: A Comparative Study Across Different Curricula (1994–2013),” *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 14, no. 6 (2024): 1927–1936, <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1406.34>

had previously been difficult or even dangerous to publish.²⁶ Reformasi, born out of political, economic, and social crises, forced the state to relax its control, even though this did not disappear completely.²⁷ Access to archives began to open up slightly, both in the National Archives and in digitised colonial collections, even if many documents on 1965 and military operations remained hard to obtain.²⁸ Outside the state, independent publishers and *indie presses* emerged that dared to publish victim memoirs, local histories, and critical studies of G30S, development, and military operations in the regions. History communities, human rights NGOs, independent academics, and investigative journalists appeared as new actors producing historical knowledge.²⁹ They brought back into discussion the experiences of 1965 survivors, ethnic Chinese, Islamic groups previously suspected by the regime, and other victims of political violence; they also re-examined the roles of *pesantren*, *ulama*, and Muslim communities in national history, which had previously been almost untouched in the official narrative.³⁰ This process marked an initial step towards the democratisation of historiography: history was no longer a state monopoly, but became a field of bargaining and public debate. This political changes went hand in hand with an epistemological shift: from history produced mainly by the state to history also written by civil society, communities, and independent researchers. In the academic sphere, historians began to develop the idea of *plural voices* by giving more room to local history, minority history, and micro-histories for example histories of *pesantren*, village communities, women, or particular religious groups that had previously been pushed to the margins. Studies of Islamic historiography and *pesantren* show how themes that used to be absent from national textbooks are now positioned as important parts of the Indonesian historical mosaic.³¹ At the same time, *global history* discussions encouraged a writing of Indonesian history that is more open to regional and global networks, so that the highly nation-centric New Order narrative began to be questioned. This pluralisation has changed how academics understand historical truth: no longer as a single dominant narrative that appears final, but as a set of perspectives that constantly test, criticise, and negotiate one another.³² The challenge is to ensure that this openness to many voices is still supported by rigorous methods and research ethics that are sensitive to victims and vulnerable groups, so that post-Reformasi historiography does not fall into relativism, but becomes a more democratic and inclusive scholarly practice.

²⁶ Ikhsan Sirot and Hamdan Tri Atmaja, "Reformasi Tahun 1998: Peranan dan Dampaknya bagi Kota Solo" [The 1998 Reformasi: Its Role and Impact on the City of Solo], *Journal of Indonesian History* 9, no. 2 (2020): 100–107, URL: <https://journal.unnes.ac.id/sju/index.php/jih>.

²⁷ Ariel Heryanto, "Rape, Race, and Reporting," in Arief Budiman, Barbara Hatley, and Damien Kingsbury (eds.), *Reformasi: Crisis and Change in Indonesia* (Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1999), pp. 299–316, URL: <https://arielheryanto.wordpress.com>

²⁸ Ahmad Nurhuda and Anggeni Syaputri, "Perkembangan Historiografi Indonesia" [The Development of Indonesian Historiography].

²⁹ Ariel Heryanto, "Rape, Race, and Reporting," in Arief Budiman, Barbara Hatley, and Damien Kingsbury (eds.), *Reformasi: Crisis and Change in Indonesia*.

³⁰ Endang Rochmiatun, *Historiografi Islam Indonesia* [Indonesian Islamic Historiography] (Palembang: NoerFikri, 2016), pp. 18–22, 145–151, publisher URL: <https://noerfikri.co.id>

³¹ Fatiyah, "Historiografi Pesantren di Indonesia" [Pesantren Historiography in Indonesia], *Historia Madania* 5, no. 1 (2021): 65–72, <https://doi.org/10.15575/hm.v5i1.12345>

³² Wildan Sena Utama, "Ke Mana Arah Historiografi Indonesia Hari Ini?" [Where Is Indonesian Historiography Heading Today?].

New Actors in the Writing of Indonesian History

After the 1998 Reform movement, the landscape of historical writing in Indonesia slowly began to change. The collapse of the New Order weakened the state's ideological control over universities and research institutes, so the academic climate became more open to criticism and new approaches. Wildan Sena Utama notes that the post–New Order generation of historians started to question the rigid Indonesiasentris framework, while drawing on postcolonial and post-structuralist theories and ideas of “emancipatory historiography” to address issues of injustice and state violence more directly.³³ At the same time, Nurhuda and Syaputri show that Indonesian historiography, once dominated by traditional, colonial, and national patterns, has moved towards a more reflective mode that is aware of the author's own positionality.³⁴ The greater openness of archives—both state archives and collections held by organisations and communities—has given researchers space to re-examine official narratives, for example regarding the 1965 events or violence during local conflicts. Many historians have become more aware that written archives are only one version of the story; oral testimonies, victims' memories, and community documents are also legitimate foundations for historical writing.³⁵ In this context, new actors emerged who are not always based in major state universities but nonetheless influence the direction of Indonesian historiography.

These new actors can be described as independent scholars: researchers who may have formal training in history, social sciences, or Islamic studies, but work outside the bureaucratic structures of universities and state institutions. They may be based in NGOs, small research communities, independent publishers, or even loose networks of intellectuals. Wildan shows how this new generation of historians tries to move beyond a narrow “methodological formalism” that reduces history to structural analysis without ethical commitment.³⁶ Meanwhile, the article by Nurhuda and Syaputri stresses that modern historiography in Indonesia is marked by a conscious effort to “decolonise” ways of seeing—that is, to write history from Indonesian viewpoints rather than simply repeating colonial narratives.³⁷ These independent scholars often bring research agendas that differ from the mainstream: they study contemporary Islamic history from the perspective of social movements rather than only great ulama; they write critical histories of development, state violence, and poverty; or they adopt the spirit of subaltern studies by highlighting groups rarely heard in textbooks, such as labourers, *santri*, or urban kampung residents. Works emerging from departments of History and Islamic Civilisation, such as Makkiyatur Rohmah's thesis on the dynamics of Pelalangan Village, show that Islamic higher education institutions also contribute to

³³ Wildan Sena Utama, “Ke Mana Arah Historiografi Indonesia Hari Ini,” 1–5.

³⁴ Ahmad Nurhuda and Anggeni Syaputri, “Perkembangan Historiografi Indonesia,” *Tarikhuna: Journal of History and History Education*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (November 2022): 186–196. Available at: <https://journal.uinsgd.ac.id/index.php/tarikhuna/article/view/14732>

³⁵ John Roosa, Ayu Ratih, and Hilmar Farid (eds.), *Tahun yang Tak Pernah Berakhir: Memahami Pengalaman Korban 65. Esai-esai Sejarah Lisan* (Jakarta: ELSAM, Institut Sejarah Sosial Indonesia, and Tim Relawan untuk Kemanusiaan, 2004), pp. xv–xx. Available at: https://sejarahsosial.org/issi_pdf/tahun-yang-tak-pernah-berakhir.pdf

³⁶ Wildan Sena Utama, Op.cit., pp. 2–3.

³⁷ Ahmad Nurhuda and Anggeni Syaputri, Op.cit., pp. 192–193.

this new direction in historiography by studying Muslim communities at the grassroots, not only elite political history.³⁸

Another striking change is the strengthening of village, *nagari*, pesantren, and customary community histories. Miftahuddin explains that local history is the writing of history within a specific locality—villages, small towns, agricultural communities—with a focus on ordinary people who shape the social world of that place.³⁹ The textbook *Sejarah Lokal Indonesia* (Indonesian Local History) emphasises that local studies are important to “correct the generalisations” of national history, which often overlooks the diversity of regional experiences.⁴⁰ The handbook *Penulisan Sejarah Lokal* (Writing Local History), published by the Directorate of Historical Values, was deliberately prepared so that local governments, school teachers, and community activists have a practical guide to write the history of their own regions, meaning history is no longer monopolised by professional historians alone.⁴¹ In practice, the thesis on Pelalangan Village shows how village leaders, local officials, and ordinary residents became the main sources for reconstructing the history of village expansion and the local conflicts that accompanied it.⁴² Similar patterns can be seen in the emergence of local archives, community museums, and oral history projects in pesantren or customary villages. Local spaces thus become alternative sources of history: they present the details of everyday life, small-scale conflicts, and religious practices that rarely appear in the grand narrative of “Indonesian History”.

Within these developments, women and religious minorities are no longer just objects of the story, but also producers of historical knowledge. Dias Pradadimara shows that the strengthening of gender studies has pushed Indonesian writings on women’s history into two main currents: descriptive works that highlight female figures and organisations, and more causal, analytical works that treat “women” and “femininity” as historical constructions supporting hierarchies of masculinity from the colonial era to the present.⁴³ Ruth Indiah Rahayu criticises Indonesian historiography as androcentric, because it has long made it seem as if only men occupy the historical stage; she proposes a distinction between *women in history* (women merely appearing inside men’s larger stories), *women’s history* (the history of women’s organisations and movements), and *the history of women* (the history of women’s everyday lived

³⁸ Makkiyatur Rohmah, “Dinamika Kehidupan Masyarakat Desa Pelalangan Kecamatan Wonosari Kabupaten Bondowoso Tahun 2000–2021” (Undergraduate Thesis, UIN Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember, 2023), pp. 45–110. Available at: https://digilib.uinkhas.ac.id/23809/1/MAKKIYATUR%20ROHMAH_U20194055.pdf

³⁹ Miftahuddin, *Metodologi Penelitian Sejarah Lokal* (Yogyakarta: UNY Press, 2020), pp. 3–17. Available at: <https://archive.org/download/kumpulan-berbagai-buku/Metodologi%20Penelitian%20Sejarah%20Lokal%20by%20Miftahuddin.pdf>

⁴⁰ Della Nur Fauziah Syahdiah et al., *Sejarah Lokal Indonesia: Konsep dan Ruang Lingkupnya* (Semarang: Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2022), pp. 1–10. Available at: <https://repositori.kemdikbud.go.id/id/eprint/5993>

⁴¹ David Dymond, *Penulisan Sejarah Lokal: Sebuah Pedoman Praktis*, trans. Nana Nurliana Soeyono (Jakarta: Direktorat Nilai Sejarah, 2006), Preface.

⁴² Makkiyatur Rohmah, “Dinamika Kehidupan Masyarakat Desa Pelalangan...”, Chapters III–IV

⁴³ Dias Pradadimara, “Perempuan dan Perspektif Gender dalam Penulisan Sejarah Indonesia”, *Lensa Budaya*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2019

experiences).⁴⁴ This framework opens up space for writing the history of Muslim women—for example, about female *santri*, Qur'an teachers, and leaders of women's religious circles—that sees them not only as supporters but as agents shaping Islamic culture at the local level. In many regions, activists and researchers have also begun to document the experiences of widows of conflict victims, indigenous women, and women in religious minority communities, so that their voices enter archives and historical literature.

Another important dimension is the presence of survivors of historical events as primary narrators. The book *Tahun yang Tak Pernah Berakhir* (The Year That Never Ended) collects hundreds of interviews with 1965 victims from various regions and uses them as the basis for a series of oral history essays; this project deliberately starts from the critique that official state archives are too biased and cannot adequately explain the experiences of those who were tortured, imprisoned, or exiled.⁴⁵ In the introduction, Roosa, Ratih, and Farid stress that oral history is specifically designed to bring out stories of marginalised communities and victims of violence, so that historical writing is no longer confined to presidents, generals, or government documents.⁴⁶ The testimonies of survivors remind us that human memory is indeed imperfect, but written archives are also full of distortions and “gaps”; both must be critically examined in comparable ways.⁴⁷ This practice of reconstructing collective memory through victims' accounts has influenced later studies of other episodes of violence, such as the May 1998 riots or regional conflicts, where eye-witnesses, victims' families, and local activists have become central storytellers. In this way, survivors emerge as key actors who revise state narratives about who is labelled a “criminal” and who in fact suffered as victims.

Taken together, the presence of independent scholars, local communities, writers of women's history, and survivors of conflict has driven a democratisation of historical knowledge in Indonesia. Miftahuddin reminds us that historical writers whether professional or amateur are “saviours” of the past, because without their writing, local experiences would simply disappear.⁴⁸ The handbook on local history also highlights the importance of bridging “the gap between specialists and ordinary people”, since local history is in fact most relevant to the residents of that place.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, the introduction to *Tahun yang Tak Pernah Berakhir* shows that oral history widens the scope of historical writing and makes it “more democratic”, because it gives room for multiple truths and viewpoints.⁵⁰ At the same time, the gender-focused works discussed by Dias and Ruth open the door to a kind of historical writing that no longer centres the story on a single type of subject—male, elite, and state—but recognises

⁴⁴ Ruth Indiah Rahayu, “Gerakan Perempuan Indonesia dalam Belenggu Historiografi Indonesia-Androsentris”, paper presented at Pelatihan Dasar Gender, Seksualitas dan Maskulinitas, Gadog, 20–23 March 2014

⁴⁵ John Roosa et al., *Tahun yang Tak Pernah Berakhir*, especially the oral history essays on 1965 victims in Java and Bali.

⁴⁶ Ibid., introduction on oral history and victims.

⁴⁷ Ibid., section on the limitations of written archives and the need to critically assess oral interviews.

⁴⁸ Miftahuddin, *Metodologi Penelitian Sejarah Lokal*, Introduction.

⁴⁹ Dymond, *Penulisan Sejarah Lokal*, Chapter I.

⁵⁰ Roosa et al., *Tahun yang Tak Pernah Berakhir*, introduction, section on oral history and the democratisation of history.

the diversity of women's and minority groups' experiences.⁵¹ In other words, the contribution of all these actors is to push Indonesian historiography towards polyphony: no longer one dominant state voice, but a dialogue of many voices that correct, contest, and complement one another in shaping our understanding of the past.

The Impact of Pluralization on Historical Studies in Indonesia

The pluralization of historiography after the Reform period can be understood as the weakening of the dominance of a single official state narrative and the emergence of many ways of seeing, many writers, and many media in telling the Indonesian past. Previously, the direction of historical writing was strongly determined by the state through projects such as *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia* and an Indonesia-centred paradigm that tended to produce "national myths" in the name of political stability.⁵² After 1998, that space became much more open. Freedom of association and expression allowed new actors to enter the field: local history communities, NGOs, journalists, digital archive activists, and even victim groups of state violence. They began to write, record, and debate history from their own standpoints. At the same time, access to colonial and national archives became more relaxed, and many documents were scanned and circulated digitally, so that the state's monopoly over historical sources weakened. The discourse of multiculturalism, which emphasizes recognition of the diversity of identities and experiences such as discussed by Bambang Purwanto provided a normative basis that Indonesian history can no longer be reduced to a single uniform story.⁵³ In this sense, the pluralization of historiography is not only about adding more book titles, but also about changing power structures in the production of historical knowledge.

This change goes hand in hand with methodological shifts. The multidimensional paradigm developed by Sartono Kartodirdjo, summarized by Bayu Ananto Wibowo, emphasizes the use of concepts and theories from various social sciences sociology, anthropology, economics, politics so that history does not stop at chronological narration, but becomes an analysis that pays attention to many aspects of life.⁵⁴ From here grew an interest in micro-history and local history that focuses on villages, communities, or small groups, as an effort to "widen the scope" and "place more emphasis on micro-histories" in order to revise old colonial-centric and nation-centric patterns.⁵⁵ In practice, historians and history teachers began to combine oral

⁵¹ Dias Pradadimara, "Perempuan dan Perspektif Gender...", and Ruth Indiah Rahayu, "Gerakan Perempuan Indonesia..."

⁵² Wildan Sena Utama, "Ke Mana Arah Historiografi Indonesia Hari Ini?", *Lembaran Sejarah* 20, no. 1 (2024): 1–5, doi:10.22146/lembaran-sejarah.97590, URL: <https://doi.org/10.22146/lembaran-sejarah.97590>

⁵³ Bambang Purwanto, "Multikulturalisme dan Inklusi Sosial di Indonesia dalam Perspektif Historiografi," *TALENTA Conference Series: Local Wisdom, Social, and Arts* 2, no. 3 (2019): page numbers not clearly indicated in the PDF file, doi:10.32734/lwsa.v2i2.721, URL: <https://talentaconfseries.usu.ac.id>

⁵⁴ Bayu Ananto Wibowo, "Paradigma Multidimensional Historiografi Indonesia dan Upaya Pengajarannya dalam Konteks Pembelajaran Sejarah di Indonesia," *Santhet: Jurnal Sejarah, Pendidikan dan Humaniora* 8, no. 1 (2024): 358–367, doi:10.36526/js.v3i2.3363, URL: <https://ejournal.unibabwi.ac.id/index.php/santhet>

⁵⁵ Sartono Kartodirdjo, *Pemikiran dan Perkembangan Historiografi Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2020), pp. 345–353; summarized in Wibowo, "Paradigma Multidimensional Historiografi Indonesia...", pp. 363–364.

sources, official archives, and visual records; students are invited to read interviews, photos, videos, and personal documents, so that approaches such as oral history, historical anthropology, and the sociology of knowledge gain more space.⁵⁶ Ajid Thohir, through his study of Sufi historiography, shows how a phenomenological method is used to understand the spiritual experiences of Sufi figures as historical facts, not merely myths, which makes the boundaries between history, anthropology, and religious studies more flexible.⁵⁷ At the same time, digital history has grown: family archives are scanned, testimonies are spread online, and historical maps are made interactive. The involvement of many actors in this new ecosystem makes historical sources far more diverse, but also demands stronger methodological skills to sort, critique, and contextualize all those materials.

In the study of Islamic history, this pluralization of historiography is very evident. Rika Inggit Asmawati and Arif Subekti remind us that Islam has long been one of the mainstream themes in Indonesian historiography, but classical writings often repeat three big questions: from where Islam came, who brought it, and when it arrived in the archipelago, with a strong focus on major sultanates and canonical figures such as the *Wali Songo*.⁵⁸ Today the themes have expanded: Islamic history is no longer limited to the state and great ulama, but also includes local ulama networks, Sufi orders, pesantren, da'wah organizations, and Muslim communities in specific regions. The edited volume *Historiografi dan Sejarah Islam Indonesia*, compiled by Moeflich Hasbullah, for instance, contains studies on the complexity of ulama networks in the archipelago, the letters exchanged between Haji Hasan Mustapa and Snouck Hurgronje, pesantren networks in Priangan, the role of ulama in anti-corruption efforts in Garut, and the Jama'ah Tabligh movement in Bandung; all of these clearly place ordinary people and local ulama as historical subjects, not merely as accessories to the state's story.⁵⁹ Asmawati also shows how *babad*, *hikayat*, and *serat*, which were once viewed with suspicion because of their mystical tone, are now seen as important sources for reconstructing the dynamics of classical Islam in the archipelago.⁶⁰ This wider space opens opportunities to raise themes that were previously considered "unimportant" or "unscientific", such as the daily lives of *santri*, the religious practices of Muslim women, local rituals that blend with custom, or struggles over Islamic identity in particular regions, so that the history of Islam in Indonesia appears much richer and multilayered.

The transition from a single narrative in the New Order period to multivocality is also visible in how historians reassess the *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia* project. Slamet Subekti explains how SNI was compiled by a state team, using a periodization that followed colonial patterns and a very centralistic focus, and how labels such as "rebels" in the Dutch version were simply flipped into "heroes" in the national version without

⁵⁶ Wibowo, "Paradigma Multidimensional Historiografi Indonesia...", pp. 361–362.

⁵⁷ Ajid Thohir, "Historiografi Sufi dalam Perspektif Fenomenologi," in *Historiografi dan Sejarah Islam Indonesia*, ed. Moeflich Hasbullah (Bandung: Pusat Penelitian dan Penerbitan LP2M UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, 2018), pp. 1–29.

⁵⁸ Rika Inggit Asmawati and Arif Subekti, "Historiografi Islam Nusantara: Sebuah Identifikasi Islam Masa Klasik hingga Masa Kolonial," *Al-Isnad: Journal of Islamic Civilization History and Humanities* 1, no. 1 (2020): 74–81.

⁵⁹ Moeflich Hasbullah (ed.), *Historiografi & Sejarah Islam Indonesia* (Bandung: Pusat Penelitian dan Penerbitan LP2M UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, 2018), especially the table of contents, pp. vii–xiv.

⁶⁰ Asmawati and Subekti, "Historiografi Islam Nusantara...", pp. 75–77.

truly changing the elite and Java-centric point of view.⁶¹ Wildan Sena Utama adds that the old Indonesia-centric model produced “new myths” filled with narrow nationalist sentiments and offered little space for everyday experiences or Indonesia’s relations with the wider world.⁶² Since Reformasi, such criticism has encouraged the emergence of various alternative historiographies: some emphasize the importance of writing the history of everyday life, others develop the idea of a “liberation historiography” that dares to address issues of injustice, poverty, and dependency, not only national identity.⁶³ In history education, a multidimensional paradigm and multiperspectival thinking skills are used to train students to see that history always consists of many viewpoints and “a series of diverse stories,” rather than one official story that cannot be questioned. The tradition of critique in historical studies thus grows stronger: historians are pushed to openly explain their position, their sources, and their interests, and to challenge categories such as “rebels”, “heroes”, or “radicals” that were previously taken for granted.

Yet this pluralization also brings serious challenges. On the one hand, collective memory of traumatic events such as 1965 or the riots around Reformasi is often polarized; each group has its own narrative that it considers most true, and these memory conflicts are now carried into digital spaces through videos, social media threads, and blogs that argue with and negate one another. A lot of popular historical content exploits this situation to spread misinformation or pseudo-history—stories that sound convincing but are weak in terms of sources and logic so that the public finds it hard to distinguish serious research from propaganda. Subekti has already warned of the danger when history becomes “merely a tool of justification” disconnected from real social problems; this warning is now relevant not only for academic writings that are too comfortable in an ivory tower, but also for digital narratives used to justify particular political positions.⁶⁴ On the other hand, historians themselves are not free from academic bias, whether because of class, religion, ethnicity, or institutional affiliation. This situation forces historical studies to strengthen their methodology and ethics: Wibowo’s call for history teaching to emphasize research skills, primary-source analysis, and historical consciousness, together with Ajid Thohir’s effort to develop a phenomenological approach to Sufi sources that are hard to verify positivistically, both show the need to sharpen source verification, methodological transparency, and sensitivity toward historical subjects. In this way, precisely through the pressure of polarized memories and narrative wars in the public sphere, the discipline of history is pushed to become more careful, more self-reflective, and more socially responsible.

CONCLUSION

The political changes following the 1998 Reformasi have significantly reshaped the landscape of Indonesian historiography: from a centralized and hegemonic mode

⁶¹ Slamet Subekti, “Tinjauan Kritis terhadap Kecenderungan Historiografi Indonesia Masa Kini,” literature-review paper, n.d., pp. 62–73.

⁶² Utama, “Ke Mana Arah Historiografi Indonesia Hari Ini?,” pp. 18–24.

⁶³ Singgih Tri Sulistiyono, “Historiografi Pembebasan untuk Indonesia Baru,” cited in Slamet Subekti, “Tinjauan Kritis terhadap Kecenderungan Historiografi Indonesia Masa Kini,” pp. 76–86.

⁶⁴ Subekti, “Tinjauan Kritis terhadap Kecenderungan Historiografi Indonesia Masa Kini,” pp. 79–81.

of writing history under the New Order to a more plural, open historiography that is attentive to the experiences of previously marginalized groups. Whereas during the New Order the state acted as the “sole producer” of historical truth through its control over curricula, archives, and sensitive themes, the post-Reformasi era has brought forth a range of new actors independent academics, local communities, pesantren, victims’ organizations, journalists, and activists who contribute to the emergence of alternative narratives.

In the context of writing the history of Islamic civilization in Indonesia, this transformation creates opportunities to shift the focus away from great figures, state institutions, and canonical ulama alone, toward studies that pay greater attention to local ulama networks, traditional Islamic educational institutions, socio-religious movements, and everyday Islamic practices in local settings. Islamic historiography is no longer understood merely as the community’s “official history,” but as a contested field of meaning in which various groups struggle over perspectives and collective memory. Thus, historiographical pluralization not only enriches themes and objects of study, but also challenges long-standing boundaries between center and periphery, elite and people, as well as normative and historical dimensions.

At the same time, this plurality presents methodological and ethical challenges. On the one hand, post-Reformasi openness risks fostering relativism and narrative fragmentation if it is not accompanied by rigorous scholarly standards, robust source criticism, and ethical reflection on the historian’s positionality. On the other hand, market logics and identity politics can shape the production and consumption of historical narratives including those on Islam so that historiography risks being reduced to mere commodity or instrument of legitimation. Accordingly, this article argues for the development of an Indonesian historiography including Islamic historiography that is democratic, reflective, and inclusive, yet methodologically robust.

Future research may be directed toward empirical studies of concrete practices of historical writing in local Muslim communities, comparative analyses across political periods, and examinations of the role of curricula and popular media in shaping collective memories of Islam in Indonesia. Efforts to revise and enrich Indonesian National History by incorporating local, gendered, and victim-centered perspectives also constitute an important agenda. In this way, the historiography of Islamic civilization in Indonesia is expected not only to mirror the past but also to serve as a critical resource for cultivating a more just and humane national and religious consciousness.

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