Deconstructing modernism discourse in Indonesian history textbooks during the military regime (1975-1998)

Hieronymus Purwanta* | Musa Pelu* | Bramastia*

*Sebelas Maret University, Surakarta, Indonesia.

Abstract This study aimed to criticize modernism discourse in Indonesian high school history textbooks. It focused on (1) The history textbooks’ modernism discourse as a national identity and (2) The weaknesses of modernism as a national identity. A total of six history textbooks from 1975 to the 1994 curriculum were examined using the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) developed by Martin Reisigl. DHA combines theory, method, and methodology with empirical data-based study practice. The analysis used arguments as speech acts in statements to support the truth claims validity. The results showed that history textbooks discourse that the Dutch colonial government left economic exploitation and began cultural association to help Indonesia become a modern nation. However, the narrative lacks supportive arguments and empirical shreds of evidence. The modernism discourse is accurately described as an orientalist works, supporting that the Indonesian culture is static and developed with Western influence.

Keywords: deconstruction of modernism, ethical politics, high school history textbooks, modern professional historian, national identity

1. Introduction

Indonesian history lessons are challenged by developing nationalism for students. History lessons ineffectively install and develop national integration and identity in the younger generation. The Jakarta Post report showed a fragile emotional bond between the young generation and the state (Wulandari 2002). The young generation considers the country geographical, indicating their birthplace and citizenship identity. Wallach (2002) found that Xenocentrism affects the young generation in urban areas. They prefer the Western culture over their ancestral. Moreover, a State Intelligence Agency survey found that 39% of students are radicalized and prefer a caliphate state (Akbar 2018).

Ineffective history lessons in instilling nationalism trigger inter-ethnic conflicts and separatism movements. History lessons have failed to narrate that national integration has been a political and historical process for centuries, resulting in various ethnic and religious adherents viewing different ethnicities and religions as “the others” portrayed as wolves (homo homini lupus) (Alwino 2018).

The Poso, Maluku, and Sampit conflicts show fragile historical narratives supporting national integration. Religious issues easily break the integration between Muslims and Protestants in Poso, South Sulawesi (Ariwibowo 2021). However, local political interests, specifically power-sharing in Poso Regency’s strategic positions, colored and developed the conflict (Alganih 2016). Maluku experienced a similar conflict pattern involving Ambonese citizens with different religions in 1999/2000. The initial conflict involved two thug groups, namely Batumerah (Muslims) and Mardika (Protestants), on 19 January 1999. It became a religious conflict with violence and the burning of worship places and houses (Margawati 2000). The Maluku political interest conflicts were from Jakarta, segregating the community based on religion (Roos 2021).

In contrast, the Sampit conflict involved two ethnic groups with different values, norms, and customs. The conflicts occurred between ethnic Dayak as indigenous communities and Madurese as immigrants. Both ethnic youths fought at a musical performance on 29 December 1996, developing into an inter-ethnic conflict when the Madurese failed to adhere to Dayak ethnic group’s prescribed traditional settlement (Coppel 2006). Therefore, different customs and ethnic sentiments trigger conflicts (Arkanudin 2006; Schulze 2017).

Disintegration involves not only inter-ethnic and religious conflicts. Various areas desire to break from the Indonesian nation-state. The Maluku separatism established the Republik Maluku Selatan (RMS/Republic of South Maluku), emerging the Liberation Movement in Aceh and Papua. The RMS separatist movement responded to Indonesia changing from a federation to a unitary state on 25 April 1950 (Leirissa et al 1993). Chris Soumokil, the RMS leader, was arrested and executed, resolving the issue in 1966. However, the surviving RMS soldiers escaped and joined the Netherlands’ former KNIL soldiers (Fatgehipon...

Muhammad Hasan Tiro formed the Aceh Liberation Movement (ALM), called the Aceh Sumatra National Liberation Front (ASNLF), proclaiming Aceh’s independence on 4 December 1976 (Jayanti 2013). The ALM political movement was against the New Order government, which centralized and exploited regional natural resources disregarding people’s welfare. The Acehnese vertical conflicts were unresolved due to the central government’s military approach until the New Order regime collapsed (Abubakar 2015). President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono implemented a new settlement through negotiations. As a result, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed, granting Aceh’s autonomy on 15 August 2005 (Pratiwi 2019).

The Papua Liberation Organization (PLO) is a separatism that has not been resolved. The movement emerged from the New York Agreement in 1962 without the Papuan people’s involvement, and the referendum under the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA) was viewed as unfair (Febrianti et al 2019). The central government’s military approach during the New Order government affected the civilians and failed to resolve the PLO vertical conflict. Despite various international groups’ involvement, the state and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) strengthened the PLO’s position. PLO left the country after the Second Congress in 2000 (Elisabeth 2006).

The various conflicts showed that history textbooks’ narratives fail to instill nationalism in students. Borrowing Smith’s (1991) view on nationalism, the textbooks failed to infuse national integration and identity. The textbooks prioritize political history by narrating the vertical integration process (Drake 2019), explaining Indonesian integration as a gentlemen’s agreement among national leaders. History textbooks need more space for further exploration of horizontal integration in economic, social, and cultural interactions among Indonesian ethnicities (Akob et al 2021). Many primary and secondary sources can be used to reconstruct inter-ethnic relationships through inter-island trade and cultural interactions, including Pires (1944), Barbosa (1921), van Leur (1955), Vlekke (1961), Meilink-Roelfsz (1962), Reid (1988), and Hall (2019). The narrative of horizontal integration can give students a historical consciousness that the Indonesian nation-state is a culmination of inter-ethnic economic and socio-cultural interactions (Hamdiyah et al 2017).

Another problem is the national identity narrative. Birch (1989) argues that a nation-building system must support national identity. The nation-building programs in Indonesia are implemented by exploiting the history of the national movement against Dutch colonialism (1900-1945) (Poesponegoro and Notoatmodjo, 1990). The New Order used history textbooks to promote modernism as the Indonesian national identity. During the New Order administration, the national movement was viewed as an impact of the Dutch Ethical Politics that spread modernism among Indonesian elites. The problem is that modernism as a Western culture needs to have historical roots in people’s collective memory. Consequently, the discourse of modernism as Indonesia’s national identity cannot create students’ pride as nation-state members because people are positioned as colonial culture followers, namely the West (Purwanta 2018).

Following the complexity of history textbooks problems, this study posed the following questions: (1) how do history textbooks discourse modernism as an Indonesian national identity? and what are the weaknesses of the discourse of modernism as Indonesia’s national identity?

2. Methodology

This study examined six history textbooks used in history lessons from the New Order era (1967-1998) to the current. Indonesia has had three history curriculum renewals in 54 years, namely 1975, 1984, and 1994. The six history textbooks’ data are shown in Table 1.

The Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) by Martin Reisigl analyzed the history textbooks’ content. DHA combines theory, methods, methodologies, and empirical study practices for social applications, emphasizing on-time interrelation from an internal and discourse analyst perspective and continuity or discontinuity difference (Reisigl 2018). It allows the study of the history textbook content to find inconsistencies, self-contradictions, paradoxes, and text structure dilemmas, interpret discursive events through various disciplines, and improve the book’s communication and learning quality (Reisigl and Wodak 2015).

The discourse analysis focused on modernism discourse arguments as the national identity. The arguments were obtained from the history textbooks’ narrative and the supporters’ thoughts. Arguments include speech acts through statements, validating the truth (Reisigl 2014). They convince and influence the audience, specifically high school students, to accept modernism as a historical and academically legitimate national identity.

3. Results

Modernism discourse on national identity was propagated through national movements during the New Order government (1966–1998). Modernism is a Western culture promoted by the industrial revolution. The official textbooks for the 1975 curriculum reprinted for the 1984 curriculum described that the Dutch colonial government’s ethical politics in 1900 was a significant milestone. Based on the colonial government’s perspective, ethical politics changed from exploitative to emancipatory. Indonesia’s land and population exploitation through a liberal economic system since 1870 did not change
people’s fate. Large foreign companies from Britain, America, Belgium, China, Japan, and the Dutch, pursued profits disregarding people’s welfare (Notosusanto and Basri 1981).

Table 1 The six history textbooks’ data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Curriculum</th>
<th>Textbooks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Ethical Politics promoted people’s backwardness awareness and Western advancement. Textbooks explain that teaching expansion in knowledge, level, and school distribution attracts people’s attention. Schools offer a new environment for the lower classes, namely government employees, teachers, or bureaucrats, and legitimize the upper class (Notosusanto and Basri 1981). Textbooks state that Ethical Politics caused national consciousness. Introducing various knowledge in schools and new ideas increased educated natives, understanding of backwardness, poverty due to Dutch colonialism, and mutual improvement determination (Notosusanto and Basri 1981).

Textbooks describe backwardness awareness and progress enthusiasm as national awareness. Therefore, the Budi Utomo organization movement was the modernism icon. The national organization movement was founded by STOVIA students (School tot Opleiding van Inlandsche Arten/School for the native physicians training), adapting a Western culture in the Dutch East Indies people. The government abolished official textbooks and facilitated private authors and publishers to create textbooks in the 1994 curriculum renewal in 1984 referenced private publishers’ textbooks. Official textbooks contain the original content of the national awakening narrative. On the other hand, private publishers’ textbooks provide an in-depth narration of Ethical Politics and Western-educated indigenous elites. For example, Moedjanto et al. (1992) discuss Ethical Politics background and explain the Dutch figures who sympathized with the poor and oppressed, namely van Dedem, van Kol, Pieter Brooschoof, and C. Th. Van Deventer. These figures voiced the Netherlands’ prosperity as colonizers and the people’s misery. In the 1899 magazine <em>de Gids</em> edition, van Deventer stated that the Netherlands had a “Debt of Honor” to the Dutch East Indies people. This criticism created ethical politics marked by Queen Wilhelmina’s speech in 1901, stating that “the Netherlands was obligated to seek prosperity, social development, and autonomy for the Indies people (Notosusanto and Basri, 1992).”

Ethical Politics involve a paternalistic relationship with the Netherlands as the “father” of the Dutch East Indies (Notosusanto and Basri 1992). The Dutch guided the Indies people to adopt Western culture. Ethical politics is also called association politics because it idealized harmonious cooperation between colonizers and the colonized to advance them (Moedjanto et al. 1992).

The textbooks propagate ethical politics virtue by contrasting the educated indigenous elite with the traditional. Educated indigenous elites are the creative minority with broad views and high social sensitivity, enforcing modern organizations and influencing the nation. In contrast, the traditional elites were the ruling class that built self-pity, influenced the power realm, expanded colonial politics, and were the “architect” of people’s misery (Moedjanto et al. 1992).

The government abolished official textbooks and facilitated private authors and publishers to create textbooks in the 1994 curriculum. Modernism discourse is stronger in history textbooks, broadly explaining Ethical Politics and the educated elite as pioneers of the national movement. For example, a history textbook discussed the ethical politics implementation figures, such as Idenburg, van Heutz, and Snouch Hurgronye (Sardiman and Kusriyantinah). Textbooks explain that nationalism was caused by various European ideologies, such as Liberalism, Socialism, and democracy (Badrika 1997) and various Asian and African national movements (Waridah et al. 2000).

3.1. Supporters of Modernism

Modernism discourse as the national identity has two supporters: the government and historians. President Sukarno’s government collapsed in 1966 and replaced a military government led by Lieutenant General Suharto, changing the political policy (Bhakti 2001). President Suharto’s New Order government changed politics from anti-Western and pro-Communist to pro-Western and anti-Communist (Heryanto 2018; Vatikiotis 1998). The economic field changed through developmentalism, theoretically changing Indonesia from an agrarian to an industrial society (Hüsken et al. 1997). In addition, President Suharto

https://www.malque.pub/ojs/index.php/mr
received the title Father of Development. Based on the Cold War perspective, the New Order changed Indonesia from Socialism to Capitalism.

The ideological change restructured the textbooks’ historical narrative (Klooster 1985). The restructuring was conducted by Nugroho Notosusanto, a military historian who heads the Army History Center and curriculum renewal (McGregor 2008). This resulted in a historical narrative change from previously anti-Western and discoursed Western countries as evil colonialists-imperialists to pro-Western, placing Western countries as the nation’s progressors (Soedjatmoko 1973). The pro-Western narrative was through official history textbooks for Junior and Senior High schools. The history textbooks helped students understand that colonialism should not be viewed negatively but positively, such as establishing plantation crops and schools.

The second proponents are college graduate professional historians. Professionalism distinguishes amateur historians without formal studies of historical methods and social theories (Kartodirdjo 1982). Sutherland named this group Modern Professional Historians (MPH) to distinguish them from professional historians not supporting modernism (Sutherland 2008). MPH characteristics include: constructing historical narratives as progress forming modern nation-states, such as Western industrialized countries (Sutherland 2008).

Sartono Kartodirdjo was a historian who supported and legitimized modernism as a national identity. He showed the Western culture’s superiority as a perfect blend of intellectual asceticism, individualism, and rationalism, creating industrialization based on science and technology and a high work ethic (Kartodirdjo 2005). The Indonesian culture is considered underdevelopment because people’s lives are based on collectivity, communal solidarity, and primordial and feudal ties, creating a subsistence economic system. The socio-economic system promotes poverty, including pacifism, fatalism, familism, and indolence, lazy rural people (Kartodirdjo 2005).

Supporting modernism as a national identity is through explaining that ethical politics changed colonial politics from seeking economic gain to a cultural mission, adapting the Dutch culture (Kartodirdjo 2014). The goal is for the people to adopt Western culture. Ethical politics parallels the association theory, uniting people from various cultural groups. Despite the hyperbole style, Kartodirdjo (2014) explains that ethical politics improves the colonizer and colonized relationship as friends, though there were no equal rights.

4. Discussion

The production and reproduction of modernism discourse as a national identity have developed among historians and history textbooks, specifically the narratives by Robert van Niel in The Emergence of the Modern Indonesian Elite (1960). The book was translated into Indonesian and titled Munculnya Elite Modern Indonesia (1984) and became the ‘holy book’ for history students to understand the national movement (Niel 2009). It discussed the Snouck Hurgronje assimilation project, including Achmad, Hossein, and Hasan Djadiningrat, at a school for Dutch children in Batavia (now Jakarta). Achmad Djadiningrat graduated in 1898 from Hogere Burger School (HBS). He was appointed regent of Serang, aged 24, in 1901 (Imaduddin 2015). Hossein Djadiningrat graduated from the University of Leiden in 1913 and became a lecturer in Jakarta (Pijper 1961). Hasan preferred being the national movement activist as the Sarekat Islam Banten chairman.

The success of three children of the Djadiningrat family in attending Dutch school shows the assimilation of the indigenous population into Western culture. Assimilation involves becoming socio-culturally similar, and naming the Snouck Hurgronje project is inappropriate. It names the integration process between the minority and the majority group, using the melting pot, salad bowl, or multicultural models (Berray 2019). The Snouck Hurgronje project described assimilation differently: the majority group adopts a foreign minority culture. Snouck Hurgronje’s assimilation was an illusion and impossible.

Van Niel placed ethical politics, the Netherlands government policy for the Dutch East Indies, in line with Snouck Hurgronje’s interests. Van Niel’s thought is difficult to understand as truth because Snouck Hurgronje was not a political activist in the Netherlands who helped generate ideas and formulate Ethical Politics (Borgesius 2015). Van Niel’s arguments are manipulative in equating individual interests with state policies (Reisigl 2014).

The New Order applied van Niel’s view to producing a modernist discourse as a national identity with the political goal of controlling the government (Wood 2005). The narrative that the colonizers had a positive influence will make the young generation forget the negative views of the nation’s founders. Additionally, as discoursed through history textbooks, modernism prevents the young generation’s resistance to economic investment by Western entrepreneurs. History is a powerful ideological weapon separating the young generation from their nation’s past (White 2008).

Modernism discoursed Western education as association politics by the Dutch colonial government and propagated as the cause of national awakening. The association discourse characterized by harmonious cooperation between colonizers and colonized needs more historical evidence. Budi Utomo was founded by STOVIA students to develop education for the Dutch East Indies indigenous people on 20 May 1908 but was suspected and blocked by the colonial government. The student movement to develop education in remote villages was eliminated (Surjomihardjo 1973). The colonial government suspected their ‘wild reading’ caused the STOVIA student movement. Therefore, the Dutch colonial government established the Commissie Voor de Inlandsche School en Volkslectuur (CIVL/Commission for Reading in Schools and People’s Education) to control and regulate students’ textbooks on 14 September 1908 (Doris 1992). Building harmonious cooperation was an illusion due to the practical level, requiring people to submit and obey the colonial government (Dijk 2010).
Besides using CIVL, the colonial government eliminated the Budi Utomo movement by controlling its management. 13 figures were nominated for chairmanship at the first congress in Yogyakarta on 3-5 October 1908, including five regents and non-STOVIA students. The five regents’ nomination showed that the Dutch colonial government forced Budi Utomo into a subordinate. Tirtokusumo, the regent of Karanganyar, was elected chairman without attending the first congress (Surjomihardjo 1973).

The Modern Professional Historical discourse that the Dutch colonial government abandoned the politics of profit-making lacks historical facts. An Indonesian economic history study found that the ethical politics period (1900-1926) increased financial surplus (Gordon 2018). The colonial government surplus reached 2.097 million guilders in 1900-1909, rising from 1.314 million in 1890-1899. The increase continued in the following two decades: 6.292 million guilders in 1910-1919 and 11.278 million in 1920-1929. The colonial surplus increase shows the continued colony exploitation to benefit the Netherlands.

Modernism discourse as a national identity shows the Western prejudice against the Southeast Asian Nation, owned by Orientalists, Indologists, and supporters. They believed that Indonesia and Southeast Asia could only develop with the influence of foreign civilizations. As a result, they raised speculative theories about India, China, and the Netherlands as mentor figures (Coedès 1975; compare to Michael 2003). Modern Professional Historians Support Orientalism and Indologists and dominate universities to produce historical research. Therefore, historiographical studies in this period found that history lacked an Indonesia-centric perspective (Purwanto 2006). The historical narrative does not represent the people’s past (Nordholt 2004) but Dutch colonialism and imperialism.

5. Final considerations

Modernism discourse as the national identity has academic and social weaknesses. Academically, the discourse contradicts history as an unbroken chain from the past, present, and future. Socially, it disconnects the younger generation from their anchors, seeking an identity in radical ideologies.

Rewriting history textbooks should be immediate for the young generation to have a solid national identity and maintain national integration. Remote past exploration is necessary to display the network of inter-tribal relations in history textbooks as the initial phase of national integration. A comparative study of textbooks is required on various colonized nations in Asia and Africa to help select a proper national identity culturally, socially, economically, and politically.

Ethical Considerations

Not Applicable.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding

This research was funded by the Institute for Research and Community Service Sebelas Maret University with contract number 254/UN27.22/PT.01.03/2022 in 2022 and continued with contract number 228/UN27.22/PT.01.03/2023 in 2023.

References


https://www.malque.pub/ojs/index.php/mr


