



The Role of Provincial Museums in Shaping Collective Memory during Indonesia's New Order Era, 1990-1998

Atika Kurnia Putri*, Department of History, Universitas Diponegoro, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This article examines the New Order's efforts to shape the identity, character, and collective memory of society through Monas and the Ranggawarsita Museum, which serve as examples for provincial museums. The initiative to establish provincial museums in Indonesia began during the New Order era, reflecting the spirit of national development and stability. These museums were built in the capital of each province, with collections consisting of objects from their respective regions, including fossils, temple ruins, and cultural artefacts from local communities. The main objective of these provincial museums was to foster national identity, character, and collective memory, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of the New Order regime through narratives and displays organised according to museum guidelines. The analysis employs a historical method that encompasses four stages, incorporating heuristics that involve examining archival data, newspapers, literature studies, and observations of museum displays. Criticism is expressed by comparing the collected data with contemporary information. Interpretation and writing are the final stages of the historical method. Provincial museums were a tool for institutionalising the official history compiled by the New Order government. This had implications for the persistence of narratives and displays in provincial museums until the end of the New Order era. Additionally, provincial museums also struggle to innovate in their narratives and displays, leading to limited visits from primary school students.

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*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

✉ atikakurnia@live.undip.ac.id

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INTRODUCTION

Museums, national archives, the national library, and the national gallery are state institutions that play a crucial role in storing, preserving, and safeguarding cultural heritage, which can be represented through various types of media. The national archives store multiple documents related to the journey of the Indonesian nation, from the colonial era to the present day. The data stored are associated with various institutions that have existed and continue to exist in Indonesia. The national library is the next institution, storing a wide range of publications, including newspapers, magazines, and books found in Indonesia. The museum and the national gallery are two institutions that house a diverse collection of cultural artefacts and artworks by Indonesian artists, spanning from the pre-independence era to the present day. It can be concluded that museums, national archives, national libraries, and national galleries are institutions that safeguard a nation's collective memory through the collections they preserve.

Memory is closely related to identity, where the two influence each other. This was conveyed by Budiawan, quoting Maurice Halbwachs, who stated that what is remembered and forgotten by a collective entity is not only shaped, but also helps shape the way that entity defines its collective identity (Budiawan, 2015, p. vii). In this case, memory is not merely a mechanical record of the past, but is social, contextual, and specific in nature (Budiawan, 2015, p. ix). Individual memory is part of collective memory. Meanwhile, collective memory is formed through events experienced by individuals who are part of a social entity. The role of the government is vital in shaping collective memory, building historical awareness, and fostering nationalism within a nation.

Indonesia, comprising many islands and diverse ethnic groups, naturally has distinct collective memories in each region. In the period after Indonesia's independence, collective memory was shaped through the direction of historical writing that sought to break free from the shackles of colonialism, and continued to develop to form a national identity. Museums, as state-owned cultural institutions, play a crucial role in shaping collective memory at both the local and national levels. Individual memories stored in the form of private collections donated to museums, as well as community memories formed through cultural activities, also contribute to shaping collective memory. The formation of collective



memory is closely tied to the processes of remembering and forgetting within a society. This is also conveyed by Concerton, who states that one way to erase public memory of a former regime is through subtle and non-violent means, namely through museum displays (Concerton, [2008](#), p. 61). Visitors who come to museums are presented with exhibitions whose collections and narratives are determined by museum curators. The arrangement of exhibitions in government-managed museums is tailored to museum management guidelines that align with the official historical narrative compiled by the government, which is referred to as national history. The construction and reproduction of national history is often ideological and laden with the political interests of the ruling regime. The purpose of constructing national history is to support the ruling regime.

The New Order, which ruled Indonesia for 32 years, implemented several programmes to build collective memory through the development of national identity. Provincial museums were established in every province in Indonesia to strengthen national identity and create the New Order era. In a speech, Amir Sutaarga, an Indonesian museum figure, stated that museums not only protect culture from extinction, but also build civilisation (McGregor, [2003](#), p. 93). The culture that was protected and the civilisation that was built during the New Order era culminated in a national identity based on the storylines and narratives in provincial museums. The narratives, storylines, and exhibition layouts were arranged by curators trained by the government, specifically the Ministry of Education and Culture. This article will examine the role of the National History Museum, Monas, and provincial museums, represented by the Ranggawarsita Museum, in shaping the collective memory of the New Order period. There are similarities in the dioramas and layout of the collections on display at Monas and the Ranggawarsita Museum. Both Monas, which is national in scale, and the Ranggawarsita Museum, which is local in scale, had the same political objective in their establishment: to shape national identity and character, legitimising the New Order's power. The formation of collective memory from the New Order era, as reflected in the Monas and Ranggawarsita Museum exhibitions, is evident through the design, collections on display, and historical narratives presented. Additionally, the collective memory constructed through the national identity displayed in these museums is also an interesting topic for further discussion.

METHOD

This study employs the historical method, a set of systematic rules and principles used to effectively collect historical sources, critically evaluate them, and present the synthesised results in the form of a written narrative (Garraghan, [1975](#)). The historical method can be understood as the process of examining and analysing past events based on authentic and reliable historical sources (Gottschalk, [1981](#), p. 18). There are four steps in the historical method: heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Heuristics, or the search for primary and secondary sources in this study, were conducted in several institutions, including museums, regional archives, and online sources. Newspaper sources and literature studies were also necessary in this research, for example, by visiting the Suara Merdeka newspaper archive depot. Newspaper sources were also searched online through Sidak, Monumen Pers. In addition, this paper also looks at the display of collections and dioramas as shapers of national identity during the New Order era. The dioramas at the National Monument and the Ranggawarsita Museum serve as historical sources in this study. Dioramas, like photographs, were chosen and selected in accordance with the New Order's goal of shaping national identity and providing a definitive and authoritative interpretation of historical facts (McGregor, [2003](#), p. 94). The next step is source criticism, which involves selecting sources found to be historical facts for use in interpretation. The final stage is the writing of history, also known as historiography.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After independence, discussions about national culture and history began to flourish. National culture and history were considered essential for strengthening nationalism and building the collective memory of Indonesian society. However, in its efforts to realise nationalism and build collective memory, Indonesian society faced challenges due to the diversity of ethnic groups and unique cultural characteristics, as well as several historical events that had traumatised the community. The understanding of nationalism remains a topic of debate to this day, and one of the requirements for building nationalism is the sovereignty of a group. Members of a nation or national group do not need to know each other personally, which is why Anderson refers to this group as an imagined political community (Anderson, [2008](#), p. 8).

In an effort to strengthen nationalism, the state manifests itself through policies aimed at uniting society. One of the policies implemented by the state is in the cultural sector, which includes the formation of national historical and cultural narratives. The state plays a vital role in shaping national culture and history, as well as in forming the collective memory of society. However, the development of national culture and history is no longer organic and dynamic, but

tends to be dogmatic and static. The historical narrative and concept of national culture were realised in the layout of the provincial museum and Monas exhibitions as a means of building collective memory and national identity during the New Order era.

The Idea of Establishing a Provincial Museum in Indonesia

Regional museums fall under the category of general museums established in specific regions, also known as regional museums or public museums. The classification of museums according to their geographic location was conveyed by Amir Sutaarga in *Persoalan Museum di Indonesia*, written in 1956. Sutaarga explained that regional or local museums house collections that represent their respective areas. Regional or public museums represent the central areas of their respective regions, in each province (Sutaarga, 1971, p. 32). National museums and regional museums in Indonesia are organizationally under the Directorate of Museums, part of the Department of Education and Culture.

The establishment of a museum service was mentioned by Sutaarga in 1956. Sutaarga believed that there was a need for a museum service (*Museumwezen*) in Indonesia. He expressed this opinion after receiving a letter from the management of the Sonobudoyo Museum in 1956 regarding problems faced by museums in Indonesia. The Museum Service was intended to address issues in museums, one of which was the shortage of experts. Museums in Indonesia were established by the colonial government, leaving behind only a handful of people trained in the field of museology (Sutaarga, 1971). These museum experts were the ones who spread out to every province to pioneer the development of local museums. Regional museums play a crucial role in education, particularly in disseminating the local knowledge unique to each area. Local knowledge encompasses traditional methods of farming, fishing, and crafting household tools used in daily life. The collections on display are not unique and historical objects, but also include items such as agricultural tools, fishing equipment, and household goods-making tools.

The New Order government viewed regional museums not merely as a means to disseminate local knowledge, but also as a way to instil national identity and build the collective memory of the nation. "Development" was chosen as the name of the cabinet during the New Order period. In his autobiography, Soeharto explained that the development undertaken relied on the country's own strength, even though aid from capitalist countries was still accepted (Kartahadimaja & Dwipayana, 1989, p. 238). In the First Development Cabinet, culture had not yet become a priority, as attention was focused on political and security stability, the economy, general elections, and purifying the state apparatus. Ali Moertopo, one of the key figures during the New Order's consolidation, believed that development could only be achieved if national stability was already in place. Development became synonymous with modernisation carried out by the New Order in various fields, including economics, politics, and socio-culture. This modernisation aimed to ensure the future welfare of the people (Moertopo, 1973, p. 52).

The construction of regional museums in each provincial capital took place during Repelita II (1975-1980). The process of building regional museums was carried out in stages, starting with the selection of the location and procurement of collections, and culminating in their preparation for public opening. Regional museums in each province fall under the category of general museums. In general, museums display regional collections that usually revolve around a single theme, which can foster nationalism. Specialised museums have more thematic collections and focus on specific topics. Subsequently, regional provincial museums, referred to as state provincial general museums, were built in each provincial capital in Indonesia (Direktorat Permuseuman, 1980, p. 23). A total of 21 state provincial general museums were constructed in each provincial capital throughout Indonesia during Repelita II. The construction of museums continued during Repelita III with the addition of one more museum, namely the State Provincial General Museum of Irian Jaya (Direktorat Permuseuman, 1980, p. 23). Museum development continued through Repelita IV and Repelita V with the construction and rehabilitation of 26 museums across Indonesia. During Repelita VI (1995-1999), a state provincial general museum was built in East Timor.

The development of regional museums in each province aims to preserve both cultural and natural heritage. The process of constructing provincial museums in Indonesia faced obstacles during the Repelita I-III periods. The solution to these challenges was the establishment of standardised guidelines for three main aspects: firstly, the arrangement of exhibition spaces, the micro-macro conditions of the exhibition environment, and the utilisation of collections. The establishment of these standards was outlined in several books and technical museum guidelines published during that period. In addition, guidance was provided to these museums. This guidance covered areas such

as human resources, regulations, collections, buildings, supporting facilities, sources of funding, and public appreciation (Tjahjopurnomo et al., [2011](#)).

The development of public provincial museums tends to be centralised under the Directorate of Museums, aligning with the cultural direction of the New Order era. The narratives in provincial state museums in Indonesia also exhibit uniformity, promoting government programs, namely development. Additionally, the themes presented in provincial museums are essentially identical, dividing Indonesian history into four distinct periods. The storyline begins with the prehistoric era, followed by the Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic periods, then the colonial era, and concludes with the struggle to achieve Indonesian independence. This reflects how exhibition arrangements and the narrative flow were politically inclined towards the cultural aspects of Indonesia during the New Order period.

From Monas to the Provincial Museum: How the New Order Built Collective Memory?

Stability and development are two concepts closely related to the New Order era. The New Order government implemented stabilisation in various fields, particularly in the realms of politics, economics, and security. These three areas became priorities for the New Order government as a response to the crisis that occurred in 1965. Guided Democracy and Sukarno's leadership officially ended in 1959, when Suharto was replaced by Suharto as Indonesia's second president. The government under Suharto became known as the New Order, which brought a spirit of change and stabilisation in various aspects. The economy and security became the two main aspects that were focused on for improvement until stability was achieved.

Stabilisation in the fields of politics and security was carried out throughout Indonesia, especially in areas suspected of being bases of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), which was considered the mastermind behind the G30S incident. As a large and growing communist party in Indonesia, the PKI exerted significant influence during the Guided Democracy period. One such influence was the spread of communist ideology rooted in the thoughts of Karl Marx and Lenin. The New Order government regarded the PKI as the organisation responsible for the G30S event and officially banned it in 1966. Through the military, the New Order eradicated the PKI and related organisations down to their roots (McVey, [2008](#)). The purge of PKI members and sympathisers, as well as related organisations, was conducted throughout Indonesia, particularly in areas that served as PKI bases. The New Order also sought to eliminate the influence of the PKI in various fields, including culture. The PKI, through its cultural organisation, Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (Lekra), significantly influenced cultural dynamics during the Guided Democracy period. During the New Order period, the cleansing of PKI elements was also intensified by positioning communism as a threat that had to be eliminated.

In terms of culture, the New Order sought to eliminate the influence of the PKI by implementing a cultural strategy. Culture, which during the Guided Democracy era supported the revolution, was redirected in the New Order era to support development. Ali Moertopo was a key figure who formulated culture as a strategy to support growth. This cultural strategy was then implemented in the Second Five-Year Development Plan (Repelita) in 1975. Through cultural policies, the New Order government also reconstructed collective memory and reproduced historical narratives. During the Guided Democracy era, Sukarno took a similar approach by constructing the National Monument (Monas). Guided Democracy, through Monas, sought to build national character by reviving the spirit of independence and liberating the nation from colonialism. Sukarno proposed the idea of building dioramas at Monas to make it easier for Indonesians to understand their history. Sukarno also relied on historical records as a means of uniting the Indonesian nation and fostering national pride. Sukarno planned for the scenes in the museum to reflect clear developments in Indonesia's history; most importantly, the museum would tell a story of progress toward a brighter future (McGregor, [2003](#), p. 97). After the regime transitioned to the New Order, the Monas dioramas also changed, with some dioramas being altered to legitimise the New Order's political power.

Like Sukarno, Suharto also viewed Monas as an essential place to cultivate collective memory and national identity. Suharto made several changes to the Monas dioramas, focusing on instilling the values of Pancasila, the glory of Indonesia, and anti-communism. One of the dioramas that was altered was related to religion, which aimed to discredit the Indonesian Communist Party by portraying it as a religion-based political force (Kanumoyoso, [2016](#), p. 10). The changes to the Monas diorama also began with the periodisation of the diorama scenes, starting from the prehistoric era and progressing through the development period, which became the lifeblood of the New Order. Suharto's role was featured in three dioramas: the Liberation of West Irian, Pancasila Day, and the March 11th Order.

The second phase of development also emphasised the dangers of communism and efforts to eradicate it. This historical narrative is depicted in scenes of Pancasila, the Tritura Action, and the March 11th Order. These diorama scenes represent the power and legitimacy of the New Order regime (Raharjo & Kanumoyoso, [2013](#), p. 131).

The New Order's cultural policies were further elaborated in the Second Five-Year Development Plan (Repelita II), which included the rehabilitation and construction of museums throughout Indonesia's provinces. Furthermore, one of the significant cultural developments during the New Order era was Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (TMII). TMII's construction began on 30 June 1972, and was spearheaded by Siti Hartinah, also known as Tien Soeharto, Soeharto's wife, who served as chairwoman of the Harapan Kita Foundation (Yayasan Harapan Kita, [1975](#), p. 250). TMII was planned to be built in villages spanning various urban areas, including Ceger, Bambu Apus, Dukuh, and Lubang Buaya, as well as the Pasar Rebo area in East Jakarta. TMII consisted of regional pavilions representing each of Indonesia's 27 provinces. TMII was designed to reflect the diversity of Indonesia's population and serve as an example of the state philosophy of Pancasila (five principles established by the state for political and social governance). This project aimed to raise awareness of Indonesia among tourists and to strengthen national consciousness (Hitchcock, [2005](#), p. 46). The construction of TMII drew numerous protests from students who were increasingly critical of Soeharto's leadership style and sought to return the New Order to its original ideals. Students criticised the enormous funds required for TMII's construction. This student protest became known as the January 15th Disaster (Malari), which occurred on 15 January 1974. This demonstrated the New Order's attention to the cultural sector through the construction of monuments, museums, and cultural assets.

The development of the New Order as a system of governance increasingly imposed strict regulations on society under the pretext of creating national stability. The New Order subsequently achieved stability by striving to stabilise all elements of society. During the New Order era, the state's role grew stronger in dominating the discourse of socio-political thought within society. This dominance over discourse was carried out by controlling public spaces, imagination, public creativity, and the discourse on culture (Yudi & Ibrahim, [1996](#), p. 28). The control over cultural discourse was related to the power of society's collective memory. Control over the mastery of discourse and collective memory during the New Order period began with the replacement of terms used during the Guided Democracy era. Terms such as "revolution," "anti-imperialism," and "socialism" were no longer used under the New Order. For example, Guided Democracy was replaced with Pancasila Democracy. The New Order also emphasised that all political parties, mass organisations, and societal groups must return to Pancasila values.

The New Order took a stance opposite to Guided Democracy in various areas, especially in terms of cultural discourse aimed at building collective memory in accordance with the regime's interests. The New Order had a different perspective on the concepts of culture and history, viewing them not as political tools. Culture was understood as a measure of intellectuality, unrelated to politics. Culture was not allowed to be political, yet cultural activities were restricted by a series of political regulations (Sen & Hill, [2007](#), p. 11). The concept of culture, which the New Order had reconstructed, was conveyed to the public through mass and electronic media. This was done to build collective understanding and memory within society. The media became an essential instrument during the New Order era for communicating concepts of culture and national history to the public. The New Order government then issued a series of regulations and guidelines to the media regarding what could and could not be said.

All institutions, including cultural institutions, must return to the values of Pancasila that have been re-constructed, and the spirit of national stability. Several museums built during the New Order era that feature anti-communist narratives include the Monumen Pancasila Sakti Museum. This museum was built to commemorate the G30S, featuring three large dioramas and six miniature dioramas depicting the scenarios of transition and order during the planning and attempted coup. In addition to the Museum and Monumen Pancasila Sakti, commemorations are also held at the site where the bodies of the six generals were found, namely at Lubang Buaya.

Provincial museums, Monas, TMII, and the Pancasila Sakti Monument are evidence that the New Order sought to construct collective memory to legitimise its power. National identity and character were also built through historical narratives presented in the exhibits and storylines of these museums. The dissemination of New Order-style collective memory throughout Indonesia was carried out in provincial museums, including in Central Java, a region close to the centre of power, namely Jakarta. Moreover, numerous purges of the Indonesian Communist Party occurred in Central Java, which is why it received special attention.

Museum Ranggawarsita: Forgetting Sukarno, Remembering Soeharto

One of the provincial museums in Indonesia is the Ranggawarsita Museum. The construction of the Ranggawarsita Museum was prompted by the region's need for a museum and the preservation of cultural heritage objects. The government also operates the Ranggawarsita Museum as a place to remember past events. The process of remembering would not exist without the process of forgetting a historical event. In society, the process of forgetting often accompanies the process of recalling events that shape national identity and collective memory (Doolan, [2021](#), p. 18). Sukarno is overlooked due to the absence of events representing him in the Ranggawarsita Museum. In contrast, Suharto is remembered through the exhibition layout, dioramas, and collections that represent the favourable policies of the New Order. The process of remembering and forgetting, as exhibited through historical narratives and arrangements at the Ranggawarsita Museum, becomes an intriguing subject for further observation.

The discovery of cultural heritage objects in Central Java further encouraged the construction of the Ranggawarsita Museum during the Second Development Phase (Pelita II). One of the areas where many cultural heritage objects have been found is Grobogan. The Regional Government of Grobogan Regency had planned to establish a local museum to store the cultural heritage objects discovered in the area. The cultural heritage items frequently found in Purwodadi include fossils, ceramics, and statues ("Grobogan Kaya Benda Kuno," [1975](#), p. II). The plan to build this museum was not realised in line with the development of the Ranggawarsita Museum, and the collection owned by the Purwodadi Regency was transferred to the Ranggawarsita Museum. The arrangement of collections at the Ranggawarsita Museum is carried out by museum staff who have received training or courses organised by the Department of Education and Culture. The organisation of collections at the Ranggawarsita Museum during the Repelita III period still referred to written guidelines published by the Museum Development Project in Jakarta. These guidelines did not clearly regulate the flow and narrative of exhibitions at the Ranggawarsita Museum, but only described the types of collections found in the museum. Information about the museum's collections indicates that provincial museums, especially the Ranggawarsita Museum, have general collections that range from natural collections, such as rocks, to historical collections, including statues, and archipelagic collections that reflect the characteristics of each province. The historical narrative and arrangement of collections at the Ranggawarsita Museum follow the New Order's version of history and the storyline found in the National History Museum at Monas.

The collection arrangement pattern at the Ranggawarsita Museum, which adopts the diorama concept from the National History Museum, is classified into five types of collections: (1) Natural Collections; (2) Prehistoric Period Collections; (3) Islamic Period Collections; (4) Struggle Period Collections; and (5) Ethnographic Collections. The building that houses the struggle collections has drawn attention because it tells the story of the greatness of the New Order and Suharto. The arrangement of collections at the provincial museum and the Ranggawarsita Museum uses a chronological approach. Building C, on the first floor, displays the collections from the struggle period. The struggle period collection showcases the cultural products of Indonesian society under the influence of colonial countries, from the early 17th century until Indonesia's independence in 1945. The struggle period collections at the Ranggawarsita Museum are located on the first floor of Building C. The exhibits comprise equipment used during the colonial era, up to the struggle for independence, including weapons, eating utensils, and regimental flags.

Other collections of the struggle prominently highlight the New Order as the ruling government. The chosen symbols are those related to military power and warfare. The arrangement of the collections on the physical resistance movement features paintings by Nyi Ageng Serang, R.A. Kartini, Cipto Mangunkusumo, and Diponegoro in succession. Additionally, traditional weapons and those from the Diponegoro IV Military Command are displayed in this building. Photographs of the diplomatic struggle to achieve Indonesia's independence are also shown in this building, including images of the Linggarjati, Renville, and Roem-Royen agreements. Other collections exhibited here concern the New Order's struggle, including photos of Cosmas Batubara, demonstrations in Bogor on 15 January 1966, and photos of KAMI members with Sukarno in Bogor. National-scale events such as the proclamation of independence are not featured in the dioramas or photographs at the Ranggawarsita Museum. Likewise, there are no photos or statues representing Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta as the proclaimers of independence. This demonstrates that the New Order sought to reinforce its political legitimacy through the Ranggawarsita Museum. The museum's exhibition layout has also remained unchanged from its establishment until the completion of the reform era in 1998.

CONCLUSION

The museum, as one of Indonesia's cultural institutions, plays a crucial role in shaping the nation's collective memory, identity, and character. The existence of museums, which not only store and preserve cultural heritage objects, makes their position significant. The idea of establishing museums throughout Indonesia emerged in 1970 and was realised through the Pelita I-V programs during the New Order government. Furthermore, these provincial museums serve to showcase the nation's cultural heritage, representing their respective regions and contributing to the development of national identity and character. The political role of provincial museums then lies in building society's collective memory of the New Order. Museum Ranggawarsita is one such representation of the New Order's influence on shaping collective memory at the provincial level, specifically in Central Java. On a national scale, the collective memory of the New Order is reflected in the dioramas of the National History Museum at the National Monument. The collective memory of the New Order period is reflected in the layout of the exhibitions and the narrative flow, which convey the spirit of stability and development characteristic of the New Order era.

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