

## Exploration of Everyday Life History as an Alternative Historiography in Indonesia

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### Abstract:

**Background:** The rapid development of historiography at the global level has not been fully matched by the development of historiography in Indonesia. In the context of social history, the significant developments that have occurred since the integration of the social science approach have not been able to pave the way for the emergence of new categories of autonomous historical writing as elsewhere. This paper aims to describe the context and challenges of developing everyday life history writing in Indonesian historiography. It draws upon historical writings that have been published in Indonesia in the last four decades or so and employed a historical method. The failure of Indonesian social historiography in pushing the development of the history of everyday life is due to the epistemological and methodological weaknesses suffered by Indonesian historians and the tendency to narrow the meaning and scope of social history in the process of its development. This is also inseparable from the strong positivistic social science tradition that has influenced the development of social history in Indonesia so that it does not provide a broad space to explore the daily experience.

**Key Word:** Social History; Everyday life; Indonesian historiography; Challenges; Prospects.

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Date of Submission: 17-07-2021

Date of Acceptance: 02-08-2021

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The term history of everyday life (*alltagsgeschichte*) emerged in the mid-1970s and grew rapidly in popularity in West German historiography in the 1980s. With its growing popularity, the history of everyday life has even been called as the most interesting new field of study in West German historiography. Its popularity not only circulated among social historians, but was also received enthusiastically among public historians, museums, local governments, local media and publishers, semi-professional and amateur groups. Its popularity growth was driven not only by professional historians, but also thanks to strong support from amateurs and semi-professionals or what is commonly called "barefoot historians". Through a series of competitions organized to win the Presidential Prize for German History for schools with the theme "Daily Life Under National Socialism" in 1980-1981, as a continuation of the previous year's theme "History of Everyday Social Life (1978-1979)", thousands of writings appeared Publications flooded in various forms such as memoirs, diaries, photographs, oral histories, local histories, exhibition catalogs, illustrated coffee table books (Eley, 1989:297-298)

Its popularity declined briefly in the 1990s and was even described by the eminent German social historian Hans Ulrich Wehler as a failure. Wehler's pessimism about the prospect of the history of everyday life emerged when a new cultural history took a special place from social history and attracted a lot of attention and some historians who were originally passionate about the study of the history of everyday life began to lose their passion. By his critics, historians, who have championed an apology for Germany's recent past, concern for people's everyday lives has been viewed as underestimating the crimes of the regime. They wanted historical studies to remain focused on structure and keep away the subjective experiences of historical actors as the best way to build an objective and honest explanatory power of historical science (Steege and Bergerson et al, 2008:358-359). However, some of its proponents still believe that the history of everyday life offers opportunities for the development of historiography.

The term "everyday life" (*alltag*) is far more complex than many imagine. Unlike what is often assumed to be associated with this term as a concrete reality that is out there ready to be collected and described, everyday life turns out to be a problematic term, blurry, unprepared, and contested for its meanings (Highmore, 2002:1). There is a variety of meanings contained in this term from personal life to the world of the ordinary person. Apart from the variety of meanings attached to it, according to Eckert and Jones, there are similarities in the approach to everyday life in contemporary historical writing, namely the attention to ordinary experience as a starting point for departure and the view that everyday life is problematic. What is included in the term everyday life includes actions that can be defined as the realm of routine, mental habits, and daily rituals (Eckert

and Jones, 2002:5). Meanwhile, for Lefebvre daily life is defined as what remains of all the structured, specific, and distinct activities that have been isolated by analysis. For him daily life is what lies beyond the disciplines of knowledge, which is deeply related to all activities and includes them in all their differences and conflicts (Highmore, 2002: 3).

The boundaries of daily life are still blurry because they cover almost everything. The problems that become the center of attention in the history of everyday life intersect with what has become the concern of micro-history that developed in France and Italy, namely the life experiences of most people which include "actions, practices, habits, values, beliefs, mentality", and the feelings of the poor who are oppressed, excluded, impoverished, and neglected" (Port, 2015: 108). Among social historians, the use of the term everyday life is associated with the desire to reveal practices and people's lives that have traditionally not received attention in historical records, as a result of being swept away by the flow of events driven by elites, and everyday life becomes a shortcut to amplify voices from below that are often not heard (Highmore, 2002:1).

This paper tries to describe the context and efforts to develop the writing of the history of everyday life in Indonesian historiography. The discussion begins with the presentation of an overview of the writing of social history which is the habitat and departure point of the history of everyday life. The description is followed by an explanation of the development of the study of the history of everyday life including the reasons for the development, the field of work and problems, as well as the challenges for its development as a new historical category. This paper is still exploratory because it only presents fragments that deserve attention in writing the everyday history of most people in Indonesia.

## **II. MATERIAL AND METHODS**

This article is a qualitative in nature and used the available historical writings at hand as its source materials for the discussion. The used materials covered exclusively publications in the forms of books and articles collected from various places, and mostly from the library of the University of Jember. The article employed a historical method that consists mainly of four major stages, source collection (heuristics), source criticisms, interpretation, and historiography (Storey, 2011). After the relevant data were collected, they were analyzed with documentary analysis techniques as a means of extracting information from relevant documents. The results of the analysis in the form of historical facts were then presented as a synthesis.

## **III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **From Social History to History of Everyday Life**

The term social history does not yet have a clear definition of its boundaries. By its advocates and users, social history is often used in general terms with at least three things that often intersect and overlap. First, the term social is used to refer to the history of the poor or the lower class. In this connection, more specifically social history is used to refer to the history of the social movements of the poor, especially the social movements of the workers. In this sense, social history and social movements have a very strong relationship. Second, the term history is also used to refer to works about various human activities that are difficult to classify except with the term "actions, habits, daily life". This understanding is part of the substance covered in social history in Trevelyan's sense, as "history with the politics left out". Third, social history is often used together with economic history so that it is popular as a socio-economic history (Hobsbawm, 2004:94-95).

The writing of social history has developed with diverse roots. Its oldest roots can be traced to the tradition of historical writing that describes various aspects of people's lives. This kind of writing has been done since Herodotus in his classic work on the history of the Persian War which comprehensively describes the economic, social and cultural aspects of the life of the Athenian people (Kartodirdjo, 1992:157). Other roots are often associated with the tradition of historical writing that developed in the European continent. In England the development of social history got one of its foundations through the work of Trevelyan (1944), English Social History (quoted in Hobsbawm, 2004:95). Meanwhile, in France the tradition of writing social history got a strong impetus for its development from the Annales historian group with figures such as Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre and Ferdinand Braudel. The Annales school had a major influence on the development of social history studies outside mainland Europe, even including in America (Kuntowijoyo, 2013; Nawiyanto, 2018). The development of social history is an expression of dissatisfaction and response to the domination of political history (Kartodirdjo, 1992:157; Hobsbawm, 2004). :96). The writing of social history can thus be seen as a historiographical renewal. As a field of academic study, social history began to gain a special position since the late 1950s, marked by the publication of the journal *Comparative Studies in Society and History* in 1958 (Hobsbawm, 2004:97).

The emancipation of social history as a field of study with its own place and methodology was influenced by both technical and institutional changes that occurred in the social sciences. On the one hand, economic history is increasingly developing towards a special field in the new economic history forum to adapt to the need for analysis and economic theories that are growing rapidly with a lot of reliance on statistical data

and mathematical models. This makes those who do not master sophisticated statistical-mathematical skills feel less comfortable being called economic historians, but they are also less satisfied being called general historians. Faced with this situation, some historians welcome the area of study they are involved in as social history. On the other hand, on the other hand, among economists themselves, there is also a growing awareness of the importance of non-economic aspects as factors that determine/influence economic development. Similarly, the rapid developments in the discipline of sociology have led to the need for supporting branches of science that are more historical in nature. These processes, both the specialization of socio-economic history towards a new economic history, the historicization that occurred in the social sciences, the inclusion of the social aspect in economics, became the factors that defined the development of social history as a special category in its own place (Hobsbawm, 2004:97-99).

The development of social history opens up many opportunities for research and production of historical knowledge. Especially if following Traveyan's view which loosely defines social history as a study of the history of society as a whole without mentioning aspects that are the subject of political history. As stated by Kuntowijoyo, the material for studying social history covers very broad and varied themes, ranging from studies of society as a whole, studies of social classes and their roles, historical events, social institutions, and social facts (Kuntowijoyo, 2013: 11-14).

The methodological tools for the development of the study of social history in Indonesia have been provided with guidance by Sartono Kartodirdjo (1992) through his work, *Social Sciences Approaches in Historical Methodology*. Kartodirdjo has laid the cornerstone of the social history in Indonesia with his work on the Peasant's Revolt of Banten in 1888. It formed a reaction to Indonesian historiography which was dominated by political history centered on kings and kingdoms or the elite as the focus of attention. Since his pioneering work, the writing of social history in Indonesia has continued to develop. A number of works with the theme of social history followed, especially a study by Djoko Suryo (1989) on Rural Social History of the Semarang Residency, Kuntowijoyo's study of Social Change in Madura agrarian society, and social history of rural Surakarta written by Suhartono. These works made important contributions to the popularization of social history as a new category with peasants and the countryside at the center of attention.

The progress in the writing of social history in Indonesia in terms of quantity and the theme of working on was not necessarily followed by real achievements in placing the history of the everyday life of most people as a separate category in social history. This is different from the development of social historiography elsewhere. In Europe the development of social history has presented what Hobsbawm calls "grassroots history" or "the history of the common people" (the history of the common people) or "history seen from below" (history seen from below). Hobsbawm, 2004:266). Meanwhile, in India the development of social history in the hands of Ramacandra Guha and Spivak and their supporters has encouraged the emergence of subaltern historical studies that stage the weak and excluded groups. The failure of Indonesian social historiography in presenting the history of people's everyday lives is due to the epistemological and methodological weaknesses suffered by Indonesian historians, as a professional group that bears the greatest responsibility in the development and production of historical knowledge (Purwanto, 2013:162).

### **Nurturing the Everylife History**

The history of everyday life has not been considered important and deserves to be studied historiographically among Indonesian historians. Such a view cannot be separated from the criteria generally used by Indonesian historians that historical events deserve to be brought up in writing if they have social significance or have a major impact on people's lives. Based on these criteria, it becomes difficult to make the reality of everyday life the focus of historical studies, even though most historical realities are composed of everyday activities, not spectacular or heroic events that have a large and wide impact. More specifically, everyday life is mostly related to the world of life of the common people, rather than the middle and elite groups which are proportionally much smaller in number. Therefore, the history of the everyday life of most people deserves attention in historical studies.

The most appropriate starting point for starting and developing the history of everyday life is from social history. In Germany, as the birthplace and popularity of the history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*) began and spread widely both in academic circles and non-academic circles, the history of everyday life is also based on social history. Its presence is even described as a reaction to social history which is built on the tradition of positivistic social science which emphasizes the structure and process of change, rather than everyday subjective experience. The themes studied in the history of everyday life in Germany have indeed become an important part of the social history agenda in the previous decade. In England through the social history, E.P. Thomson tries to present the daily experiences of the workers who lived in the era of the industrial revolution, while in Germany the history of everyday life tries to present everyday realities, both related to the inner workings of the government as well as the sentiments and feelings that developed in the society during Nazi rule (Joshi, 1998: 137). Many historians who are interested in the history of everyday life admit that an

important source of influence in their involvement in the development of the *Alltagsgeschichte* is social history (Bucur, 2008:208).

Alf Ludtke was honored and regarded as a leading proponent of the development of the history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*) in Germany. Ludtke's important contribution does not only appear in the dissemination of alternative ideas and perspectives on the orthodoxy of German social historiography which tends to emphasize structure and process, and ignores the importance of the agency dimension revealed through experiences. In addition to actively communicating the historiographical and pedagogical values of the history of everyday life, Ludtke also contributed greatly to directing the agenda of German social history. There are a number of important agendas of *Alltagsgeschichte* promoted by Ludtke, including: 1) the call to realize history from below with empirical aspects both concerning the world of work and non-work; 2) great attention to experience and subjectivity in social production and construction of meaning through turning toward ethnological and anthropological means of achieving goals; 3) the need for decentralization of analysis and interpretation through the construction of miniature history to capture more ambiguities and contradictions in people's subjective perceptions as encountered in reality (Eley, 1989:321-323).

In his works on the working class, Ludtke pays special attention to the personal, local, and everyday context (quotidian) that accommodates the possibilities of both conformity and the main resistance being carried out. According to Ludtke, in social history the issue of class awareness is not enough to just discuss the number of workers who are members of workers' organizations, but it is also necessary to examine the culture of the working class. Thus, Ludtke pushes the cultural approach further by entering the more difficult areas of workers' everyday lives, locating the opportunity to describe solidarity in countless small ways so that it can be described how workers create and maintain a sense of self and autonomous space in the harsh and restrictive world. The key concept in Ludtke's argument is *Eigensinn*, which is a term that combines self-reliance, self-will, and self-esteem or the act of retrieving isolated social relations in the world of work, roads, schools and other contexts that are externally determined by structures and processes that are far or away, beyond the direct reach of the workers (Eley, 1989:323).

The study of the history of everyday life by its proponents is believed to promise the presence of a "third space". This third space lies between the history of institutional labor and the structural approach of industrialization and working class formation that social historians prefer to stage their investigations into, among other things, households, streets, neighborhoods, bars, recreational spaces. For historians of everyday life, space or location is primarily social as a product of human work, cues, and interactions. Interest is more directed at acquiring places in the context of how humans touch, experience, shape and adapt to these places (Steege and Bergerson et al, 2008:363).

Public stopping places in the routine life of residents such as markets, terminals, halls have various meanings. Stations, for example, can be places for social gatherings, neighborhood boundaries, economic nodes, gateways to the outside world, or entrances for commuters. Understanding how and why certain meanings are attached to local locations makes it possible to understand how communities work. The study of physical places opens the door to understanding how the concept of community is conceived and functions. Observations of market events during times of food shortage, for example, can reveal how actors construct abstract concepts about the state's obligations to the people, religious concepts of ownership in worldly practices, imaginations about suffering, and stigmatization of profit-takers as enemies of the community. The physical space of the market offers a framework and opportunity to examine the fluid claims of everyday life, opening up opportunities to understand everyday locations as places where imagined communities are created or dismantled (Steege and Bergerson et al, 2008:364).

For researchers of the history of everyday life, location is never only local, but involves many supra-local powers at the national or even global level. However, the main focus remains on how to take and apply these strengths in daily practice. Place is positioned not in the context of spatial proximity, but rather the unique ability of historical actors to access and present various symbolic and material frames of reference within and across certain locations of a historical event. By focusing attention on the locations of everyday life, the history of everyday life exposes historians to the limits of being able to explain the true intentions of individuals, but also enables historians to pay attention to what they did and how they did it in their own practice (Steege and Bergerson et al, 2008:366).

The development of historical studies of people's everyday lives mostly presents its own challenges in terms of heuristics and methodologies. Conventional historical sources are generally poor in information about the everyday lives of most people. These aspects are rarely the center of attention for archivists who generally view the details of people's everyday lives as not important things that deserve to be recorded and made into a report. To overcome this obstacle, writing the history of everyday life requires a means to access and utilize non-conventional historical sources that have so far been neglected and have not been widely used in historical writing. Various historical sources such as photo albums, cookbooks, jokes, letters, and diaries, have proven to be very valuable materials for presenting narratives about everyday life (Eckert and Jones, 2002: 7). Literary

works including poetry also provide opportunities as valuable information material to present narratives about everyday life (Purwanto, 2013:133-134).

In addition, historians also need to develop other supporting abilities/skills. First, the ability to read and interrogate conventional sources that are commonly used for historical writing but with historical insights and perspectives of everyday life. Second, mastery of the technique of extracting historical sources through oral history interviews also increases the opportunity for enrichment of the sources needed in presenting the history of everyday life. The development of the historiography of everyday life in Germany in the late 1980s illustrates how the adoption of oral history techniques made a major contribution (Rosenhaft, 1987: 100). In Indonesian historiography, the use of the oral history method allows Anton Lucas to present a very slick and rich micro picture of the social revolution that took place in the areas of Brebes, Tegal and Pemalang around the time of independence as outlined in his work, *Events Three Regions: Revolution and Revolution* (1989).

Oral history has great potential to contribute to the writing of the history of everyday life, as well as to other categories of history, especially to the contemporary historical period. As stated by Kuntowijoyo (1994:25), oral history opens a very wide opportunity to explore historical information stored in the memory of the perpetrators and their witnesses by interviewing them directly. This is especially true for those who are little or even not mentioned in written documents, which are generally often found, especially for historical actors and eye witnesses who come from the general public. In such circumstances, oral history has proven to be a very useful supporting heuristic technique. By relying on non-conventional sources, rereading conventional sources, and integrating new heuristic techniques, the history of everyday life can be an instrumental tool in order to build a better qualitative understanding of the lives and conditions of ordinary people (Eley, 1989: 321- 323).

Purwanto initiated the effort to describe the history of everyday life in the context of Indonesian historiography through his writing entitled "Writing the Everyday Life of Jakarta". This paper presents a description of the everyday life of most people in the city of Jakarta using various sources such as photos, paintings, poetry, advertisements and literary works, in addition to conventional sources in the form of publications commonly used in historical writing. His historiography shows, for example, how river water has become an important part of the everyday life of the people of Jakarta and the changes since the 1970s that have led to the strengthening of rivers between the rich as a dumping ground for garbage and the poor who continue to use it. In addition, it also describes the problems faced by children in Jakarta who do not have a place to play and are malnourished, as well as the difficulties of life experienced by various poor groups (pedicabs, scavengers, beggars, and the homeless, as well as social problems in the form of prostitution and crime (Purwanto, 2013:139-159). In Purwanto's view, the absence of these aspects in the discussion makes the historiography of the city of Jakarta which has been produced a lot to become "History of Jakarta Without People".

The essence of such concerns actually applies to the historiography of other regions in Indonesia. In the context of the historiography of the East Saliient of Java, for example, discussions about rivers are always placed in the context of the colonial economy by highlighting narratives about the construction of irrigation networks and their impact on commodity production systems, both large plantations and smallholder agriculture (Marjono, 2001; Aprianto, 2005; Nawiyanto 2007). Whereas in reality, rivers in this area also present other subjective experiences that are diverse and in touch with people's everyday lives. Some residents use the river every day for bathing and washing, a practice that is still encountered even today (Badriyanto, et al, 2013). Photos from the colonial era show some of the residents of Jember crossing the Bedadung River by boat to go to Lanasan Market (Jupriono, 2018:390). This shows that there are other things that have not been represented in historiography, and with the perspective of everyday life history, there will be more aspects of the river that can be explored and presented in historical narratives. It is also interesting to know since when did the role of the river as a transportation route decrease and disappear? Is this related to the improvement of urban infrastructure in the form of bridges and roads by the colonial government?

The development of the city of Jember which is represented in historiography often only highlights the narrative about the change in the administrative status of the government from a district under Bondowoso to an autonomous region and the acquisition of district status in 1928, spatial planning, the formation of new districts, construction of government offices, European settlements, infrastructure transportation, rapid population growth due to migration (Aprianto, 2005; Trijono, 2010, Nawiyanto, 2003). This spatial picture that impresses with an optimistic nuance does not yet present the dimensions of the daily experiences of the residents of Jember. Journalist Tiong Gwan's report published in 1920 described the troubled streets around the city of Jember:

"...while the conditions of the families are changing for the better... it is the streets of Djember that always make people complaining. If there is small rain, the streets easily change into muddy tracts. But if there is no rain, then the muddy tracts becomes dust plain, so if there is only a little wind, then the dusts goes everywhere to all directions. This is certainly harmful for health" (quoted in Hakim, 2013).

Another problem that was present in the city of Jember was the practice of prostitution found in Undak-Undak Selikur (now, Tembaan) east of the local government office or southeast of the Jember town square. The square was the location for transactions. Even though there were efforts to control it through the issuance of regulations and fostering the problem of prostitution, it was difficult to solve during the colonial period and only during the independence period was relocated out of town.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The history of everyday life has the potential to be an alternative in historical studies, including in Indonesia. By focusing on the daily subjective experiences of historical actors in their complexity, the history of everyday life opens up space to present a more complete and human historical picture of the reality of people's lives in the past. The richness of this kind of narrative diversity has not been successfully represented in the existing social historiography because of the tendency to narrow the meaning and scope of social history in the process of its development. This is also inseparable from the strong positivistic social science tradition that complements and colors the development of social history in Indonesia so that it does not provide a broad space to explore the everyday experiences of historical actors as important elements of everyday life that need to be presented in historiographical narrative.

Realization of the potential of everyday history as an alternative historiography and a new category in social history in Indonesia requires researchers to continue to develop their methodological abilities and epistemological insights. Historians who are interested in it are required to be open and constantly develop heuristic abilities to utilize historical sources that are not yet commonly used in historical writing, and last but not least, develop the ability to interrogate conventional sources in new ways and perspectives. Making everyday history as an alternative historiography confronts historians with many challenges, but at the same time promises new territories to be involved in that are useful both in the context of enrichment and emancipation of Indonesian social historiography from stagnation in order to suit the latest developments and challenges, as well as the need to reconcile the study of social history with actual problem dynamics.

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Nawiyanto. "Exploration of Everyday Life History as an Alternative Historiography in Indonesia." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 26(07), 2021, pp. 46-52.