Retorik • Vol. 13(1), 2025
DOI: 10.24071/ret.v13i1.12062
p-ISSN: 1412-6932
e-ISSN: 2549-2225

Reversal: The Colonial Afterlife and Nostalgia

Timoteus Anggawan Kusno
Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
e-mail: t.a.kusno@uva.nl

Abstract

This experimental essay unfolds as a journey through memory, ruins, and rituals, tracing the lingering presence of a colonial past in contemporary Indonesia. It explores the layered relationship between colonialism, postcolonial nation-building, and the enduring structures of imperial power that continue to shape cultural and political life. At its centre is a paradox: in pursuing national unity, the newly independent state often reproduced the very systems of control it aimed to dismantle. Colonial nostalgia, expressed through aesthetic revivals, architectural restoration, and performative rituals, emerges not only as a sentiment but as a structural force within collective memory. Through a weaving of critical reflection and poetic interludes, the essay invites readers to reflect on the shifting boundary between history and feeling. It lingers in what is remembered but also in what is imagined, suppressed, and restaged.

Keywords: coloniality, nostalgia, memory, melancholia, postcolonial Indonesia

Penjungkirbalikan: Pascakolonialitas dan Hantu-hantu Nostalgia

Abstrak

Tulisan eksperimental ini mengungkapkan perjalanan melalui memori, reruntuhan, dan ritual-ritual; menelusuri kehadiran masa kolonial di Indonesia saat ini. Pun tulisan ini menggali hubungan yang berlapis-lapis antara kolonialisme, berdirinya bangsa pascakolonial, dan berlanjutnya struktur kekuasaan penjajahan yang terus membentuk kehidupan budaya dan politik. Pada pusatnya adalah sebuah paradoks: dalam rangka membangun persatuan nasional, negara yang baru merdeka ini kerap mereproduksi sistem-sistem kontrol yang justru semestinya dibongkar. Nostalgia kolonial terungkap melalui kebangkitan estetika, restorasi arsitektural, dan ritual-ritual performatif, yang muncul bukan hanya sebagai sebuah sentimen, tetapi justru menjadi kekuatan strutural di dalam memori kolektif. Melalui jalinan refleksi kritis dan selingan liris, tulisan ini mengajak pembaca merefleksikan terus bergesernya batas antara sejarah dan perasaan. Melekat bukan hanya pada apa yang diingat, melainkan juga apa yang dibayangkan, ditekan, dan dipentaskan ulang.

Kata kunci: *kolonialitas, nostalgia, memori, melankolia, Indonesia pascakolonial*

© 2025 Timoteus Anggawan Kusno
This article is distributed under Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Timoteus Anggawan Kusno
(Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, the Netherlands)

Through the Pores of Time

ships wandering through the sea,
across the oceans

the sail is set, the helm turned, heading to the land:
terra incognita!

the anchor buried beneath the hell
colossus docked at the coastline
we exchange awkward glances

have we met before?

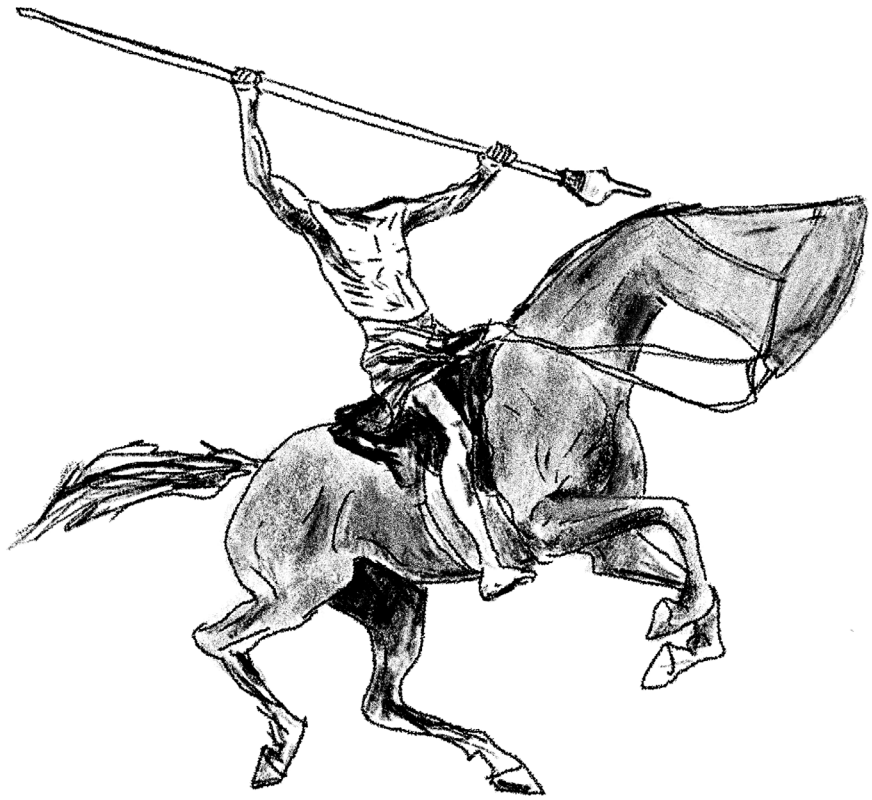
i think i know you well
are you the ghost of my nightmare?
or is it me? the pus in your wound that never heals

no, clearly not!

you barely share the same species with me
come, kiss my feet, dance in my feast!
on your knees, pray for me sinner
forgive me my trespasses as i never forgive yours

the trigger is tippler, captain!

the rifle fires a volley, blasting random chests
here come the hellish days:
spices, i collected them from my kitchen, from my yard
(from the sacred jungle of my ancestors), you trade those
for dance and logic, numbers and words, glasses, spoons,
and forks, handkerchiefs and leather shoes, and also
names, names, names, names, names and more words, and re-
ligion, another longer list of names, categories, names
that get out of my reach, and the bronze statues of your
great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather



This imagined confrontation between the ghost of the coloniser and the possessed body of the colonised echoes far beyond metaphor. It points to the mechanisms by which postcolonial states rewrite memory, often by masking the wound rather than healing it. In this process, the remnants of colonial rule are not simply historical residues but active agents of governance. As Ann Laura Stoler argues, what is left behind by empire is not only physical ruins but 'imperial debris'—the 'durable conditions of duress' that persist in both bodies and institutions long after formal colonialism ends.[1] Ruination, in this sense, is not an aftermath but an ongoing condition, structuring the present through its material, affective, and political traces. These remnants do not merely reflect the past but continue to shape national imaginaries, cultural memory, and the lived experience of power.

This strategic forgetting is not accidental, as postcolonial scholars have

[1] Ann Laura Stoler, 'Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination', *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 2 (2008): 191–219, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2008.00007.x.

long argued that anti-colonial and 'independent' nation-states have a propensity to forget about the unpleasant memories of colonialism and subjection by creating a historical self-invention, which can be founded on a variety of cultural and political causes.[2] This idea resonated with Indonesia's postcolonial experience. The celebration of Indonesia's independence from colonialism was quickly followed by a wave of nationalisation and the eradication of the Dutch language from schools, the media, and institutional use, which continued a trend that began under the Japanese occupation (1942–1945).

According to Henk Schulte Nordholt, the fledgling nation-state needs to welcome and ensure its subjects as new citizens of the infant country.[3] To deal with the nation's varied past, national historiography is formed as a central narrative, deleting conflicting perspectives and local histories (e.g., regional rebellions in Sulawesi and Maluku, the erased presence of Chinese-Indonesian anti-colonial thinkers, or the multiple indigenous cosmologies that resist a single national timeline). Unlike the folklore that forms local historiographies, Nordholt maintained that this colonial concept also elevates the (colonial) state archives as a source of 'reliable facts'.

Such epistemological frameworks are not sustained by content alone but through their form: the ritual, spectacle, and stylistic grammar that make authority feel inevitable. As Kusno argues, state power often constructs historical legitimacy by mimicking the aesthetics of objectivity: archival precision, ceremonial language, and museological display all contribute to the performance of historical truth.[4]

This strategy silently reproduces the colonial system of thinking, in which 'the centre' is viewed as the protector. The centre, as an active agent, is expected to enhance the region, which is considered stagnant. In today's Indonesia, this centralised thinking holds sway. All power is centralised in Java, which is still regarded as the Indonesian archipelago's epicentre.

---

[2] Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2019).

[3] Henk Schulte Nordholt, *De-Colonising Indonesian Historiography*, Focus Asia 6 (Lund: Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund University, 2004).

[4] Timoteus Anggawan Kusno, 'History as a Battleground: The Centre for Tanah Runcuk Studies as a Method of Artistic Intervention', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 2025, Advance online publication, https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2025.2489887.

Cartographies of Longing: Nostalgia as Structure and Symptom

Before examining the present-day stylisations of colonial aesthetics, it is essential to reconsider nostalgia not as mere sentimentality but as an affective force deeply entangled with history and power. From its earliest conception in the seventeenth century—as a clinical diagnosis for homesick Swiss soldiers—nostalgia has evolved into a complex cultural phenomenon, one that exposes the fault lines within modern identity. Johannes Hofer, a Swiss physician, initially classified it as a neurological illness affecting mercenaries longing for their homeland.[5] Centuries later, Svetlana Boym reconceptualised nostalgia as a form of 'associationist magic', a state where ordinary life is overlaid with obsessive longing. She cautioned against its deceptive charm, positioning nostalgia as a disruptive force that exposes the inconsistencies of modern life and unsettles national narratives.[6] It is often rooted in dissatisfaction with the present and a romanticised vision of a past that no longer aligns with contemporary conditions.[7] Bobby Benedicto, reflecting on the legacy of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, underscores this distortion by asserting that nostalgia 'has never operated on the register of truth'[8]; it fabricates emotional truths that can obscure historical reality.

Boym's delineation between restorative and reflective modes of nostalgia offers a critical lens for analysis. Restorative nostalgia seeks to reconstruct an idealised version of the past, often in alignment with nationalist sentiments, presenting memory as stable, whole, and authoritative.[9] Reflective nostalgia, in contrast, dwells in the uncertainties of remembrance. It does not aspire to recover the past in its entirety, but rather meditates on its fragmentation, its irretrievability. This form of nostalgia is self-aware and layered, allowing for

---

5 Clay Routledge et al., 'Nostalgia as a Resource for Psychological Health and Well-Being', *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 7, no. 11 (2013): 808, https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12070.

6 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 4–10.

7 Patricia M. E. Lorcin, 'Imperial Nostalgia; Colonial Nostalgia', 1 December 2013, 97–98, https://doi.org/10.3167/hrrh.2013.390308.

8 Bobby Benedicto, 'The Place of the Dead, the Time of Dictatorship: Nostalgia, Sovereignty, and the Corpse of Ferdinand Marcos', *Environment and Planning D* 39, no. 4 (2021): 724, https://doi.org/10.1177/02637758211013038.

9 Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 41–48.

ambivalence and critical engagement with historical memory.[10] Within this reflective approach lies the potential for both creative and ethical inquiry, an opening to confront the past without succumbing to its illusions. Such a framework proves vital when approaching manifestations of colonial nostalgia in Indonesia; not merely as visual or performative gestures, but as affective and ideological responses to the unresolved contradictions of modernity.

Within the broader terrain of postcolonial memory, the lines between former coloniser and colonised are often blurred by mutual longing and strategic forgetting. In Indonesia, this entanglement is evident in the shared amnesia that underpins expressions of colonial desire. Yogyakarta, for instance, has become a site of embodied nostalgia, where festivals and cultural events increasingly feature reenactments of the colonial period. Events such as the old vintage bicycle parade attract participants dressed in white *Meneer* colonial-style suits, KNIL (*Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger*) military uniforms, or vintage batik and kebaya outfits styled after early 20th-century elites. Riders mount restored Gazelle bicycles, originally manufactured in the Netherlands and once symbols of Dutch-Indonesian upper-class mobility, and parade through historical quarters like Kota Gede or around Tugu Jogja. This phenomenon is not just performative; it reflects a broader cultural appetite for aestheticised, sanitised versions of the colonial past.

Parallel to these reenactments, many colonial-era buildings (*loji*) across Yogyakarta have been restored and repurposed as cafés, boutiques, or creative hubs. These spaces often preserve Dutch architectural features with high ceilings, teak woodwork, and Art Deco tiles, as well as decorate their interiors with black-and-white colonial photographs, Dutch furniture replicas, or memorabilia evoking *tempo doeloe* ('the good old days'). In doing so, these places curate a selective memory that frames the colonial period as a time of elegance, order, and refinement.[11]

---

[10] Boym, 49–55.

[11] The term *loji* (sometimes spelled *lodji*) is believed to be derived from the Dutch or French word *loge*, or the English *lodge*. Originally referring to colonial administrative or military lodges, *loji* in Indonesia came to signify European-style colonial buildings. Its adaptation reflects both linguistic and spatial colonial influence. Reading *loji* through this etymology helps situate such structures within a global colonial economy that depended on the industrialisation and spatial reorganisation of colonised societies. It also clarifies how the commercial reuse of these buildings today, through cafés, galleries, or boutiques, extends a legacy of class segregation and aestheticised colonial memory into present-day cultural consumption.

Ironically, this romanticisation revives a lifestyle that was never accessible to the majority of indigenous Indonesians (*rakjat priboemi*). The colonial comforts now being aestheticised were privileges reserved for Dutch officials, Indo-Europeans, and a handful of co-opted Javanese aristocrats or bureaucrats (*prijaji*). The ordinary population (especially rural Javanese labourers and urban workers) remained excluded from these elite spaces, subjected instead to systemic exploitation, racial segregation, and economic hardship. By celebrating these aesthetics without acknowledging their embedded hierarchies, contemporary forms of colonial nostalgia risk depoliticising historical memory, transforming symbols of domination into objects of cultural consumption.

As Svetlana Boym has argued, nostalgia is not merely a personal sentiment but an epistemological condition shaped by the fracture of historical continuity.[12] Within the Indonesian postcolonial context, this crack manifests not only in longing for the colonial past but also in the selective restoration of its symbols, often stylised and depoliticised. Yet, as Walter Mignolo and Aníbal Quijano remind us, modernity is inseparable from coloniality; the reproduction of colonial aesthetics is not a passive residue but an active structure of knowledge and power.[13] This condition implicates the postcolonial subject in what Julia Kristeva describes as a *sujet en procès*,[14] a fragmented, self-questioning figure navigating between memory and its erasure. If this subject is haunted, it is not by ghosts alone but also by inherited grammars of domination. In this light, nostalgia may be read as a strategic affect. As Rei Terada proposes,[15] it is an aesthetic expression of political ambivalence unfolding within the logics of repression and revival. Rather than merely restoring a lost past, nostalgia here becomes a contested site of postcolonial anamnesis, a form of remembering that is at once self-critical and structurally constrained.

---

[12] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*.

[13] Walter D. Mignolo, 'Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of de-Coloniality', *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007): 449–514, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162647; Aníbal Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America', *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 215–32, https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005.

[14] Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora and Alice Jardine (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

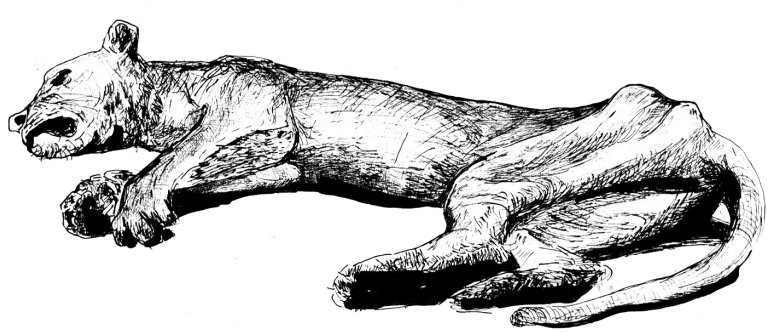
[15] Rei Terada, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the 'Death of the Subject'* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

Patricia Lorcin outlined that colonial nostalgia relates to the longing for the lost colonial lifestyle as the sociocultural standing.[16] Colonial nostalgia refers to the memory of colonial lifestyle and romanticised image of intercultural relations within the colony that existed during the past. Not to be mistaken with colonial myth, colonial nostalgia is enhanced by the lived experience. In contrast, the colonial myth is formed by a fiction or distortion of the colonised territory and experience.

The Colonial Leftovers

in the meantime, a pile of grudge and the ghosts of hungry traders haunting the darkest dark, drowned under the time, rusted away around barbed wire, at the end row of concrete blocks, inside the abandoned mining well, with powder and lipstick on our face, the smell of coffee and sweet ice cream in the afternoon, and also of the sea, and a knapsack, on wobbly luggage wheels going across the rocky sidewalk

(silently, sharp gravel slips into the shoes; venomous snakes burrow inside chests of wine and gold; moulting, with the sound of psalms and the smell of gunpowder)



we roared with laughter on the dining table; the oil is spilled on the tablecloth, one drop after another, tainting the agonising love songs, my soul is suddenly choked

words, be gone!

[16] Lorcin, 'Imperial Nostalgia; Colonial Nostalgia'.

What lingers as affect—desire, decay, and nostalgia—finds its architecture in global systems of power. These feelings are not simply individual; they are inscribed into the very structure of modernity itself. As Aníbal Quijano theorised, colonialism created Europe as the core in accumulating capitalism while also establishing the stately universality of bodily politics and geopolitics. Quijano pointed out:

> the new pattern of world power that was based on the idea or 'race', and in the 'racial' distribution of work, in the imposition of new 'racial' geocultural identities, in the concentration of the control of productive resources and capital, as social relations, including salary, as a privilege of 'Whiteness'—is what basically is referred to in the category of coloniality of power.[17]

This mode of remembering, shaped through nostalgia, reflects the coloniality of knowledge: a way of seeing the world inherited from imperial structures that privileges linear progress, centre-periphery hierarchies, and selective erasure. When the past is aestheticised without acknowledging violence, nostalgia reproduces colonial epistemes under the guise of sentiment, as the framing of such residues remains structurally bound to colonial epistemes. As Kusno argues, exhibitionary forms often aestheticise these remnants through modes of museological care that displace their histories of domination.[18] The act of displaying ruins and objects is not neutral; it risks reproducing the very logics it intends to critique.

Coloniality is inextricably linked to modernity because of its logic of oppression and exploitation. Mignolo assumed: 'there is no modernity without coloniality, that coloniality is constitutive of modernity.'[19] He continued: 'Modernity, capitalism, and coloniality are aspects of the same package of control of economy and authority, gender and sexuality of knowledge and subjectivity.'[20]

---

[17] Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America', 216–18.

[18] Timoteus Anggawan Kusno, 'Dismantling the Monuments: Artistic Approaches in the Making of "Luka Dan Bisa Kubawa Berlari"', *Third Text Online*, 28 September 2024, http://www.thirdtext.org/kusno-dismantlingmonuments.

[19] Walter D. Mignolo, 'Introduction: Coloniality of Power and de-Colonial Thinking', *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007): 162, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162498.

[20] Mignolo, 162.

Colonialism (as a part of history) might appear to be consigned to the past, as many previously colonised regions attained independence and sovereignty following World War II. Most of the ex-colonies were evolving and transforming into the modern nation-state, including Indonesia. However, coloniality as a system of thinking that regenerated in the colonial structure and hegemony has been thriving and reproducing in today's world. Quijano specified:

> although 'race' and 'racist' social relation in the everyday life of the world population have been the most visible expression of the coloniality of power during the last 500 years, the most significant historical implication is the emergence of a Eurocentered capitalist/colonial/modern world power that is still with us.[21]

In the context of Indonesia, the reproduction of colonial ideas is evident across multiple levels—structural, bureaucratic, and socio-cultural. One striking continuity lies in the racialised hierarchy of governance. Under Dutch colonial rule, society was explicitly stratified into racial categories: Europeans (Dutch and Indo-Europeans) sat at the top, followed by 'Foreign Orientals' (mainly Chinese, Arabs, and Indians), with *pribumi* (indigenous) Indonesians relegated to the bottom. These distinctions were not merely social but institutional, codified into legal systems, administrative privileges, and access to education and employment.

After independence, these colonial frameworks were not dismantled but reabsorbed—particularly under Suharto's New Order regime (1966–1998), which adopted and adapted many of the inherited structures. The regime revived a culture of bureaucratic elitism, often aligning with Javanese aristocratic values while excluding dissenting or marginalised voices. Its apparatus of control mirrored Dutch strategies of maintaining 'order and stability' (*rust en orde*), primarily through the suppression of political dissent and the regulation of minority groups. For instance, the systematic discrimination against Chinese Indonesians, including the banning of Chinese language and cultural expressions, echoed colonial practices of 'othering' foreign minorities to fragment solidarity among the colonised. This continuity reveals how colonial racial logic was not abolished but retooled, enabling the authoritarian regime to legitimise its power while appearing nationalist. By preserving colonial modes of categorisation and control, the New Order maintained a postcolonial state that was, paradoxically, still possessed by the structures of its former colonisers.

[21] Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America', 218.

According to Benedict Anderson,[22] the Indonesian fight for freedom in 1945 took over a state with its apparatus, instead of establishing a new state from the bottom up, let alone from the revolutionary ideas. This claim refers to the power relation mainly constituted in the colonial period. The colonial government used local authority to operate the policies.[23] In the context of Java, the Dutch Colonial regime couldn't operate effectively without the involvement of Javanese feudal structures and authority, which also applies to other territories in the Dutch Indies.

If colonial logic structured the foundations of the Indonesian state, it also possessed its cultural machinery. The mechanisms of control did not end with the departure of the Dutch. Instead, they were reconfigured, disguised in nationalist clothing. To a certain extent, Ong Hok Ham observed that post-colonial Indonesia still reflects colonial practice,[24] which can be traced to how the regime instrumented and performed control and power.

We may investigate how power functions throughout the history of the Indonesian political and cultural environment after independence to learn more about the coloniality that regenerated post-colonial Indonesia. Even since the Indonesia post-independence era, under the Guided Democracy period (1957) under President Sukarno's presidency, the media and artists had become the object of censorship. This situation worsened after Suharto succeeded in replacing Sukarno's government in 1965.[25] After coming to power,

---

[22] Benedict Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution: Occupation and Resistance, 1944–1946* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972).

[23] This statement is underlined by Ong Hok Ham on his review on Heather Suntherland's book *The Making of Bureaucratic Elite: The Colonial Transformation of the Javanese Priyayi* (1979).

[24] Hok Ham Ong, *Dari soal priyayi sampai Nyi Blorong: refleksi historis nusantara* (Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2002).

[25] At the end of September 1965, just a few years following the Non-Alignment Movement, the killing of the military generals believed as the alleged coup attempt triggered political turbulence in Indonesia. The escalated situation and uncertainties cleared the pathway for General Suharto to step in and operate the violent force to establish "stability" under the military government. See: Geoffrey B. Robinson, *The Killing Season: A History of the Indonesian Massacres, 1965-66* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018). This operation resulted in the death of approximately 500.000 lives of accused communists under military command. See: Richard Robison, *Soeharto & Bangkitnya Kapitalisme Indonesia* (Depok: Komunitas Bambu, 2012). However, this number, including how many real and accused communist were killed in this bloody, nation-wide, and Western-supported campaign of extermination, is still unclear and debatable. Heryanto and Hadiz

Suharto's regime shut down nearly one-third of all newspapers.[26] The militaristic government focused highly on the economic agenda and took control of any intellectual debates. During the authoritarian era of Suharto, artists could not freely express their ideas and had to find a way to disguise their social or political critique in their artistic work. The New Order regime had set severe and complex security restrictions on controlling information and ideas. Under the strict authoritarian rule and military control of Suharto's dictatorship, many intellectuals, including artists, writers, thinkers, activists, and anyone considered leftish and subversive, were banished extrajudicially. This gesture is reminiscent of the Dutch East colonial strategy of '*rust en orde*', or 'order and stability'.

Moreover, after the obscure succession of President Sukarno in 1965-1966, under the New Order regime ruled by Suharto, the colonial system of thought found its way to regenerate in Indonesia's post-colonial realities. By putting Jakarta (former Batavia) as the state's centre, the regime reproduced the colonial logic in maintaining control and power. In the economic sector, the authority takes complete control and lubricates capitalism to bloom with its support for investors and developmental economic growth. Consequently, the massive and corruptive exploitation of labour and natural resources (including indigenous land appropriation) is unavoidable. Furthermore, the New Order regime blatantly granted privileges to the capitalists in their circle of power to sustain Suharto's agenda,[27] while suppressing and silencing any potential threat using whatever means at its disposal. This situation shaped extreme social inequality and strengthened the regime's political dynasty.

Although Suharto's dictatorship fell two and a half decades ago, the fall of the regimes still leaves the former established power in certain circumstances. The system of thoughts (such as the adoration of the military) that had been built during the New Order is accommodated in the new faces. Nev-

estimated the number to be no less than 800,000, with several hundred thousand more of the suspected communist and sympathisers detained in extrajudicial manner for many years. See: Ariel Heryanto and Vedi R. Hadiz, 'Post-Authoritarian Indonesia: A Comparative Southeast Asian Perspective', *Critical Asian Studies* 37, no. 2 (2005): 251–75, https://doi.org/10.1080/14672710500106341.

[26] David T. Hill, *The Press in New Order Indonesia* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press in association with Asia Research Centre on Social Political and Economic Change, Murdoch University, 1994).

[27] Agus Sudibyo and Nezar and Patria, 'The Television Industry in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia', *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 43, no. 2 (1 May 2013): 257–75, https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2012.757434.

ertheless, the regime's legacy is still embedded and influential in the post-authoritarian era.[28] In today's post-Reformasi Indonesia, traces of colonial logic persist in more subtle but no less potent forms. The centralised developmental agenda continues to prioritise Java over its outer islands, while militarised responses to resistance movements evoke colonial-era suppression under the guise of national unity. Simultaneously, the aestheticisation of colonial lifestyles flourishes on social media, where platforms like *Instagram* turn colonial nostalgia into consumable vintage; sepia-toned cafés, filtered images of Dutch architecture, curated '*Indisch*' fashion shoots, reframing a once-exclusive elite heritage as an accessible cultural fantasy. This transformation signals not only a rebranding of memory but its commodification, where history becomes a style, and the violence of its origins fades beneath the soft haze of nostalgia. Longing is not a passive ache but a political mood, shaped by the state's management of memory and time. When independence narratives simplify the past into heroism and unity, personal grief and regional loss become dislocated. Nostalgia, in this sense, emerges as a quiet refusal to forget what the state has chosen not to remember.

Perhaps we are still anchored in yesterday's tides, awaiting liberation not from colonisers alone but from the seductive pull of the myths we perpetuate. The names we inherited, the spices once traded, and the shadows that bled from one generation to the next remain embedded in our collective skin.

Coda

```
it grows wearier:
my memory, a glance on worms creeping at kokytos river-
side;
death moves inland, crawling from the coast, leaving the
shipwreck, rising where the sun sets

i traced years of longing on a nameless tomb,
at the corner of bamboo clumps,
on the deserted spoor when times grew brittle

i hear a murmur, folded into spells and chants

hymns scatter; soft on concrete and asphalt,
and unfinished feelings of mine
```

[28] Heryanto and Hadiz, 'Post-Authoritarian Indonesia'.

mother,
did i smell you near the bamboo clumps?

look at the grey sky at the dock's edge
in no time, i will be gone therein, like pus with petrichor:
slow and steady, you breathed in just before the rain
and so i seep through the pores of time
where your steps once passed
i stream as a song
becoming tears
on weary lands

my shadow could not flee the abandoned station;
stretched long, very long, it disappeared
in the damp tunnel



Postscript

This essay is an expanded and revised version of a text first released in conjunction with the exhibition *Phantoms* (2023–2025), where it accompanied the artist's film project *Phantoms Trilogy* by Timoteus Anggawan Kusno.

All images and poetic fragments interwoven throughout this essay are drawn from the artist's own body of work, excerpted and adapted from *Terra Incognita* (2022), *Fever Dream* (2024), *Dismantling the Nostalgia* (2025), and three interconnected projects exploring the spectral residues of colonialism in form, feeling, and fiction. The text has since been significantly recontextualised, deepened, and enriched with experimental elements for this publication, commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Graduate Program in Cultural Studies at Santa Dharma University.

References

Anderson, Benedict. Java in a Time of Revolution: Occupation and Resistance, 1944–1946. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972.

Benedicto, Bobby. 'The Place of the Dead, the Time of Dictatorship: Nostalgia, Sovereignty, and the Corpse of Ferdinand Marcos'. *Environment and Planning D* 39, no. 4 (2021): 722–39. https://doi.org/10.1177/02637758211013038.

Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2008.

Gandhi, Leela. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2019.

Heryanto, Ariel, and Vedi R. Hadiz. 'Post-Authoritarian Indonesia: A Comparative Southeast Asian Perspective'. *Critical Asian Studies* 37, no. 2 (2005): 251–75. https://doi.org/10.1080/14672710500106341.

Hill, David T. *The Press in New Order Indonesia*. Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press in association with Asia Research Centre on Social Political and Economic Change, Murdoch University, 1994.

Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Edited by Leon Roudiez. Translated by Thomas Gora and Alice Jardine. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.

Kusno, Timoteus Anggawan. 'Dismantling the Monuments: Artistic Approaches in the Making of "Luka Dan Bisa Kubawa Berlari"'. *Third Text Online*, 28 September 2024. http://www.thirdtext.org/kusno-dismantlingmonuments.

———. 'History as a Battleground: The Centre for Tanah Runcuk Studies as a Method of Artistic Intervention'. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 2025, Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2025.2489887.

Lorcin, Patricia M. E. 'Imperial Nostalgia; Colonial Nostalgia', 1 December 2013. https://doi.org/10.3167/hrrh.2013.390308.

Mignolo, Walter D. 'Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of de-Coloniality'. *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007): 449–514. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162647.

———. 'Introduction: Coloniality of Power and de-Colonial Thinking'. *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007): 155–67. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162498.

Nordholt, Henk Schulte. *De-Colonising Indonesian Historiography*. Focus Asia 6. Lund: Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund University, 2004.

Ong, Hok Ham. *Dari soal priyayi sampai Nyi Blorong: refleksi historis nusantara*. Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2002.

Quijano, Aníbal. 'Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America'. *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 215–32. https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005.

Robinson, Geoffrey B. *The Killing Season: A History of the Indonesian Massacres, 1965-66*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.

Robison, Richard. *Soeharto & Bangkitnya Kapitalisme Indonesia*. Depok: Komunitas Bambu, 2012.

Routledge, Clay, Tim Wildschut, Constantine Sedikides, and Jacob Juhl. 'Nostalgia as a Resource for Psychological Health and Well-Being'. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 7, no. 11 (2013): 808–18. https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12070.

Stoler, Ann Laura. 'Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination'. *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 2 (2008): 191–219. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2008.00007.x.

Sudibyo, Agus, and Nezar and Patria. 'The Television Industry in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia'. *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 43, no. 2 (1 May 2013): 257–75. https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2012.757434.

Terada, Rei. *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the 'Death of the Subject'*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009.

Timoteus Anggawan Kusno is a visual artist, filmmaker, and researcher whose interdisciplinary practice encompasses installation, moving images, and critical institutional engagement. His work explores the shifting boundaries between historical narrative and fictional memory, examining the enduring legacies of colonial power and its residual presence. Kusno's projects have been presented globally, including at TATE Modern in London, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona, MMCA in Seoul, MoCA in Taipei, and Kunstmuseum Bonn, among others. His films have been programmed at major film festivals such as Berlinale, Locarno, the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR), DokLeipzig, and CPH:-DOX. In 2025, IFFR featured his work through a dedicated Focus Program. His essays have appeared in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, Third Text*, *Inside Indonesia, Retorik*. He lives and works between Amsterdam and Yogyakarta and is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Amsterdam.