



The purpose of this article is fourfold. Firstly, it expands upon the previous anthropological discussion of the Museum Istiqlal in Indonesia. Secondly, it reflects on the national importance of the intended role of the Museum Istiqlal in promoting this identity. Thirdly, this article considers problematic aspects of the collection itself, the state of the museum and above all—the unfulfilled potential the Museum Istiqlal offers for Islamic education in Indonesia. Fourthly, it provides a relatively extensive bibliography so as to introduce some of the substantial academic literature which is relevant to the collection and thus of potential use to scholars and museum specialists potentially interested in this under-utilized museum.

Key words: Museum Istiqlal, museum, identity, anthropology.

An Anthropological Account of a Visit to the Museum Istiqlal

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Introduction—Enter the Museum: A Personal Encounter by Way of Aceh

In 2005, I become interested in the Aceh Provincial Museum (Museum Negeri Aceh) in Banda Aceh and what could be done to support it considering that it had survived the tsunami entirely intact. I had heard of the government's plans to build a tsunami museum and my position as a museum ethnographer was that it was a very poor idea. I argued that if any money was to be spent on a museum in Banda Aceh (Zilberg 2008, 2009), it should have gone to supporting the provincial museum in terms of maintenance, salaries, training, exhibitions, educational outreach and bilateral international support programs. I was thus extremely gratified to see an exhibition of historical documents at the Provincial Museum organized by Asian Research Institute at the National University of Singapore on the occasion of the First International Conference of Aceh and the Indian Ocean. More importantly there was the exhibition held in front of the Masjid Baiturrahman accompanied by

two fine fold out pamphlets, namely, *Tradisi Penyalinan Mushaf Al-Qur'an di Aceh* (Akbar, n.d.) and *Pameran Mushaf Al-Qur'an* (Akbar 2008). I was particularly pleased with the beautifully designed and informative fold outs produced for those exhibitions as it left us with a historical record of the events. Nevertheless in both cases of the exhibition at the Provincial Museum and the other in front of the Masjid Baiturrahman, there were no long term results in terms of significantly improving the Provincial Museum. Though some important materials were added to one small room the permanent collection, the museum is in essentially the same position as it was before the tsunami. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that despite the problems at both the provincial and the Tsunami Museum, the Rumoh Aceh at the Provincial Museum is an exceptionally well designed and very well visited and appreciated space.

Nevertheless, my concern was that simply mounting exhibitions without using them to enhance the museum's capacity and its interaction with Acehnese communities, schools and universities rendered the projects wholly ineffective. Such exhibitions merely serve the transient purpose of providing a high profile institutional media event for governments, donor agencies and international partners funding and supporting such projects. They achieve little or no sustainable improvement for the museum and thus ultimately make mere symbolic contributions to the province and the state. Accordingly, the lasting contribution of these two exhibitions are not the memories for visiting academics attending the International Conferences on Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies nor the minor augmentation of the provincial museum's collection but merely these two fold out brochures which are not even available to the public. Effectively then nothing was achieved institutionally and of the US \$ 7.5 million dollars lavished on the nearby Tsunami Museum, outside of the remarkable structure itself, that project has proven to this date a predictable failure (see Tjandraningsih 2010, Zilberg 2009). In all this, as I explore below and in more historical detail elsewhere (Zilberg 2010a and b, forthcoming 2011), the Tsunami Museum is fatedly associated with the problematic history and unfulfilled mission of the Museum Istiqlal fourteen years after its inauguration.

It was in this context that I came to meet with Professor Pirous and Kamal Arif as they were on the committee for overseeing the

competition for choosing the Tsunami Museum's architectural design as well as overseeing the planning of the contents and exhibits for the Tsunami Museum. As of then, I still had not heard of the Museum Istiqlal though I had been in Indonesia intermittently since 1996. The first I heard of it was during this interview. There Professor Pirous explained that in the first meeting with the Bureau for Reconstruction and Rehabilitation (BRR), he had emphatically stated a condition to Kuntoro Mangkusubroto, the head of the agency. The condition for his and the engagement of the others at the prestigious Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) and elsewhere was that the creation of a collection and its management thereafter would be given equal attention as to the construction of the building. On no account was he, nor any of the others on the committee, prepared to be involved in another project that had worked out like the Museum Istiqlal. Sadly history has repeated itself as the saying goes, the first time as tragedy and the second time as farce.

As it was a marginal issue to that which I was studying at the time, the apparent lack of community participation in the planning for the Tsunami Museum except for the choice of the design, I did not pursue what those problems with the Museum Istiqlal might have been (Zilberg 2008, 2009). But nevertheless, intrigued, I did soon thereafter visit the museum in question. First however, I asked all the Indonesians I was acquainted with, and related to, if they knew about whether such a museum existed. No one had ever heard of it except for Lies Marcoes, an Islamic specialist and anthropologist working at The Asia Foundation. Indeed, Marcoes mentioned that some members of the Muslim scholarly community were upset about the state of the collection, specifically the condition of the old Islamic manuscripts. It was with all this in mind that I first visited Taman Mini Indonesia Indah, specifically the Museum Istiqlal (Zilberg 2010a, b, and c, forthcoming 2011).

What Would James Boon Say?

Often, when I stroll around Indonesian museums, two classic articles by anthropologists come to mind, "Resonance and Wonder" by Stephen Greenblatt (1991) and "Why Museums Make Me Sad" by James Boon (1991), both of which were published in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Karp and

Lavine, 1991). Greenblatt's work is relevant for the obvious. There are remarkably fine objects, or photographic reproductions of objects, to be seen particularly in the National Museum and at the Museum Istiqlal. As objects with powerful historical and religious auras, they provoke wonder in the sensitive or informed viewer.

Indeed, the more you know about these objects, replicas and photographs, the more powerful the resonance and the wonder. As for the sadness, anyone familiar with the state of Indonesian museums specifically the problem of the limited educational use made of the facilities and manifest lack of interest in museums by Indonesians themselves will know what I mean. As one Indonesian museum lover, Thomas Haryonagoro, Chairman of the Museum Consultative Board (Barahamus) in Yogyakarta recently puts it pithily in the article "Museums Matter" in *The Jakarta Post* (Sudiarno 2010): "Our society doesn't appreciate museums". But for all the problems facing Indonesian museums in general and the Museum Istiqlal in particular there are also very positive aspects to dwell upon.

When I first went to the Museum Istiqlal, I was amazed. It was a large four story building attached to a more modern looking and even larger four story facility filled with Qur'ans. That, as it turned out, was the Bayt Al-Qur'an (House of Koran). On entering the Museum Istiqlal, I was even more surprised. Why? Because I had thought from the discussion with Professor Pirous that the problem was about the collection, that is the nature and extent of the contents, this having been and still being a major problem with the Tsunami Museum. But instantly I realized that was not the problem.

The collection was substantial. The professional lay out and soft lighting, the color, richness and depth of it all drew me in then and still does. It was a surprisingly powerful experience and each time I visit this museum, or the Textile Museum, the National Museum and the Puppet Museum for that matter, I appreciate them and their contents more and more deeply. The resonance and wonder grows and sometimes the sadness too. But on occasion I come away elated at something new I have learnt about the collection or with the events and exhibitions held in these museums. Occasionally there are even positive changes evident in the management of these museums and the presentations of their

collections. Most unexpected of all, as I relate further below, the Museum Istiqlal excelled in one dimension no other museum or university in Indonesia is matching, as far as I am aware, intellectual production. But before discussing that vital issue, let us enter the museum.

It was the rainy season. To the immediate left upon entering the museum, along the front wall, following after the wide red textile with embroidered sentences from the Qur'an shimmering in silver, were a series of well framed photographs of fine pages selected from the illuminated Qur'ans kept in the National Library. They were beautiful. And while they might not all match the quality of the finest specimens one would see for instance in the Walters Gallery in Boston or the specimens in The British Library or The Art Gallery of South Australia (see Bennett 2005, Gallop 1991, Kumar and McGlynn 1996 and Piotrovsky 1997), many of them are aesthetically highly refined and historically of great interest—though we are only privileged here to see single pages. They, and the other specimens across the hall to the left of the entrance as one exits, are important as they serve to draw attention to the collections nearby in the Bayt al-Qur'an and those in the National Library and thus to the national patrimony more broadly. They thus should have been stimulating connection and research within the Indonesian intellectual community.

Instead, water stains run down the walls between them and across some of the reproduced pages themselves. Their existence is barely known. On my first visit, pools of water spread across the floor and buckets were strategically placed below the larger leaks, a problem now ingeniously solved at no expense but without addressing the source of the problem and thus the long term threat to the buildings structural integrity. It was almost hard to believe. Perhaps this was what Professor Pirous had been so upset about. Perhaps not. We will return to that later.

It got worse. Following after the illuminated manuscripts, the aged photographs of mosques in different cities across Indonesia and their labels were in various states of neglect or degradation, or even absence. The architectural plans were similarly stained and decrepit. An air of listlessness and disrepair hung all around in the semi-darkness. It was a feeling that will descend upon any foreigner on visiting most Indonesian museums or public institutions for that

matter. Most of all, as noted above, the experience reminded me of James Boon's article "Why Museums Make Me Sad". It did not do so in the same way though. It made me sad because of the decrepit state of the museum and the objects therein, of the whole experience as a failure of governmental, individual and institutional capacity and will. Nevertheless, I was captivated. And as I explore below, it is not that decrepit at all if one keeps in mind the context of maintenance in public institutions and public space in Indonesia in general.

Despite the dated and degraded nature of the photographs of mosques, they drew me in. The fine photographs of and detailed information on the mosque of Kampung Naga in West Java were especially fascinating of all because of how the architectural structures spoke to community traditions and Indonesia's history and its megalithic roots. In fact, the most degraded photographs of all, of Masjid Bayan in West Lombok, remain wondrous to me despite their condition. One of them however even remains after all these years in surprisingly good condition, frangipani flowers scattered on the sunlit dry ground still almost alive.

Every time I see these I am returned to Lombok. I can physically feel the place. I recall the literature on the long violent history of colonialism and the prior Balinese conquest of the indigenous Sasak, the history of class struggle, poverty and Islam there, these all being particularly fascinating anthropological chapters in the dark side of Indonesian history (Cederoth 1981, Gerdin 1982 and Van der Kraan 1980). In addition, I had been told by the Director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Culture at Universitas Islam Negara Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta (State Islamic University of Indonesia) that he had seen a large pile of Islamic manuscripts abandoned and lying on the floor of the new Ford Foundation funded storage facility at the museum in the Palace in Mataram. It made me wonder why Indonesians often seem to care so little for their heritage and what had happened to the missing specimens of the old Islamic manuscripts nearby in the back corner of the museum and what could be done to protect this endangered heritage for prosperity as addressed further below.

As for the photographs of the Great Mosque of Banda Aceh, Masjid Baiturrahman, built in 1614, destroyed during the Dutch conquest in 1874 and rebuilt in 1897, I stood there too for a while. I

was taken back to Aceh and into the mosque itself, to memories of photographs of prayers there after the tsunami and to the peacefulness of predawn and sunset moments I had spent there. Watching how slowly and carefully another lone visitor studied the photographs of these mosques, after having poured intently over each framed illuminated manuscript page, it made me wonder about how students and people from all over Indonesia might have similar experiences when they stand in front of these photos. While these photographs are all old and in some cases severely damaged, they still serve their function. Yet sadly, the most culturally and symbolically valuable objects of all around the corner, the endangered Islamic manuscripts on bark cloth paper yellowed with age and worn by time and worm, far more degraded, do not serve their assumedly intended function at all. Or have they?

The Backmost Least Visited Corner of the Museum Istiqlal

Moving on and leaving aside the many other very interesting materials, whether it be the architectural plans, the replicas of tombstones, the calligraphy, ceramics, textiles and contemporary art, it was the back left corner exhibit of Qur'ans and endangered manuscripts that really disturbed me.¹ While it is superficially the most uninteresting part of the museum, it is in fact an all important part of the museum. In there is a collection of Qur'ans which are not of any great interest being widely available if now out of date modern books but significant in having been from the personal collections of the late President Soeharto and the vice-president Try Sutrisno. They speak to the more substantial collection in the adjacent Bayt Al-Qur'an (BQ) and to the well known Mushafs Istiqlal, Wonosobo and others. But what is fascinating, at least for myself as an anthropologist, were the very old Islamic manuscripts as well as a few specimens of Qur'anic writing on wood in Javanese script in the traditional form of connected wooden slates.

At first glance, despite the talismanic value of these otherwise unremarkable specimens which are merely of national importance because of who they had belonged to, the dingy room does not attract attention. This is not only because it is necessarily dimly lit

¹ For relevant information on each of these categories see the extended bibliography.

and is essentially an uninteresting display of books in glass cases but because the many photographs of pages of illuminated manuscripts from the National Library in the other corners of the museum are incomparably more beautiful and interesting. Visitors are naturally drawn to those illuminated manuscripts and tend to spend most time looking at them and at the photographs and models of Indonesian mosques. The most common activity however seems to be to ignore most of the collection and especially this back section and simply to have one's photographs taken in front of the silver mosque minarets. And yet, here in the most remote and least visited corner of the museum, there is treasure to be found. If you are interested in endangered manuscripts and the history of the intellectual life of the Indonesian *pesantren* tradition, you will be entranced by the old worm eaten books yellowed with age and filled with amazingly detailed notes in the margins, now protected for posterity through partially being digitally photographed as part of this research.

While the Qur'ans owned by the late President Soeharto and Vice-President did not interest to me, what did immediately attract my attention on that first visit was the fact that several display cases were empty. A number of questions immediately came to mind. What had been there before? If they had been important manuscripts or books, had they been in particularly compromised condition and if so had they been the reason for the current controversy about the museum? Keeping Mataram in mind and the leak from upstairs at the MI, I wondered where were these specimens now and what condition were they in? And finally, what was being done about this if anything? Fortunately, today, the displays are no longer empty.

As for the displays along the back wall and on the other side of that corner exhibition space, the very old manuscripts in the dimmest of lighting called to my anthropological sensibilities. Lying there open, radiating age, meticulous notes filled the margins and ran all around the pages such that the commentary sometimes exceeded the actual Arabic texts with the Javanese and Madurese translations immediately below each line. All in various states of decay, they called to me as no other specimens in the museum. I wanted to know what was written on those pages, particularly in the margins. I wanted to know who had written them and in what

contexts, where. Has the museum not then served its most basic function in terms of stimulating my own intellectual interests in the history and anthropology of Indonesian Islam?

Whither the Museum Istiqlal?

As a museum ethnographer, the experience of studying the Museum Istiqlal has been surprising. First, expecting far worse, I was amazed to see the extent and quality of the collection.² Second, to my surprise my reactions to the museum changed significantly during the research and these changes were completely counter-intuitive. Initially, I was overcome by a James Boon-like feeling of sadness of the general sort conveyed by the title of his article “Why Museums Make Me Sad” (1985). However, for Boon “Any ... museum, any museum at all, makes me sad” (*ibid.* 255). In contrast, for myself, museums generally do not make me sad.

For Boon, museums make him sad for deeply intellectualized, political and emotional reasons. These range from the act of representation itself to the history of their creation through pillage and conquest and the evocation of childhood experiences in museums. Even the adult experience of wonder and resonance, the compositeness of motives for visiting and engaging museums, and the automatic tendency we have as anthropologists to conduct instant ethnographies of museum going whenever we visit museums make him sad. Finally, Boon is even saddened by his power to curate which he brings to bear on any collection he encounters. Perhaps he was depressed when he wrote this article, in a maudlin state of mind quite unlike the wild man as otherwise known. While I fully appreciate these points and see their logic, for myself, these issues do not necessarily evoke sadness but varying degrees of wonder and heightened engagement. In fact, in thinking about Boon’s museum melancholia, I have come to realize just how much museums make me happy and not sad. They remind me of

² Excellent catalogs were produced for the Festival Istiqlal 1991. They pertain to each category of objects in the collection today and to a vast record of Islamic Indonesian culture more broadly. They are as follows: *Arsitektur*, *Busana Muslimah*, *Naskah & Buku*, *Pameran Kebudayaan Indonesia Yang Bernafaskan Islam*, *Seni Pertunjukan*, *Seni Rupa Modern*, *Tata Boga*. For the 1995 Festival Istiqlal and the exhibition of contemporary Islamic art held at the National Gallery, September 23-November 18, see *Seni Rupa Kontemporer Istiqlal*.

the grand sweep of history and time, they connect me to other museums and to other times and places. They automatically stimulate me intellectually no matter their contents and condition. It is a rare museum that does not have some contents that I find spiritually and aesthetically inspirational. What does make me sad is how few Indonesians (even members of the elite who are sure to visit museums when abroad) share these type of feelings about their own museums and the remarkable specimens to be found therein.

Moreover, in even greater contrast to Boon's melancholia, in time I have even come to realize that my own initial sadness was contextually inappropriate. Why? It is simply a matter of standards. One should approach an Indonesian museum as an ordinary Indonesian visitor would. One simply cannot approach such museums with the expected standards held by international cosmopolitan experience or as mandated by the International Council of the Museum (ICOM). Judging from the state of almost all Indonesian public institutions, facilities and any regular non-elite context, there is nothing out of the ordinary about this museum, its management or the state of its contents. In fact, in that context, it is rather fine.

All that being said however, during the research I was to discover the most unexpected and surprising situation as regards the Government recognition of the problem and its willingness to share these concerns. Even more importantly, I found that the state of the physical and organizational nature of the museum and its problematic history belied the fundamental strengths that no other museum in the country has and which is generally understood to be sorely lacking virtually throughout the Indonesian knowledge sector (see Nielsen 2010, Sherlock 2010, MacArthur 2010). The journals *Suhuf* and *Lektur* are enormously positive success stories in an otherwise highly compromised intellectual and museum environment though it is also arguable that the state of Indonesian local knowledge production is not as moribund or compromised as is often assumed.

Thus towards the tasks of enticing future researchers and highlighting current exhibition problems while noting the potentials at hand, I next comment on three of the mosques depicted in the museum. I do so as the section on mosques includes photographs, architectural drawings and models, constitutes a significant part of the collection and is one of the strongest features of the collection,

certainly with the best accompanying information.³ The displays discussed are nonetheless representative of both the problems and of potential opportunities that exist for future improvement of the museum.

From Banda Aceh to Demak and Mataram: Beyond the Faded Photographs

Consider the materials in the Museum Istiqlal on the mosque of Demak. Unless one understands the enormous historical importance of the mosque of Demak as described in Nancy Florida's remarkable study *Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future: History as Public Display in Java* (1995), one will have little or no reaction to the material provided on this mosque. But imagine if there was accompanying audio-visual material which provided the historical account of the politics, construction and mystical alignment of the mosque with Mecca (*ibid.*: 167).

Imagine how interesting it could be if such details were provided, if one could hear the historical account sung as it was composed in the original Javanese and translated and read poetically in Indonesian, Arabic and English. This is one particularly powerful instance of what we are missing in the current experience. With adequate funding and training and support, Indonesian curators could fundamentally enhance the MI experience by drawing on such published anthropological, historical and philological research. As it is today, there is no use made of multi-media technology in the museum though it has been proposed in the 2011 budget. Indeed, the MI is full of examples of similar materials which present excellent opportunities for replacement and multi-media augmentation. To briefly take three other significant examples in the architecture section, consider the photographs of the Great Mosque of Banda Aceh, the mosque of Kampung Naga in West Java and Mesjid Bayan near Mataram in West Lombok.

In the case of Masjid Baiturrahman, what many viewers probably do not realize is that the use of the classical onion dome was introduced by the Dutch in the reconstruction phase after the conquest of Aceh in the late 19th Century. One can learn this from

³ For a few of the many articles by Indonesian authors particularly relevant to the study of the Museum Istiqlal collection, see Ambary (2003, 2004), Hadi (2004), Nurtawwab (2009) and Tjardrasmita (2009).

the captions below the display of photographs of the range and evolution of Acehnese mosques in the Provincial Museum. The point is that most viewers probably imagine the domes as a classical element in Ottoman and pre-Ottoman Islamic history. To the contrary, they were actually a Dutch sponsored colonial architectural innovation. Keeping this in mind, and the potential value of this museum to architecture students, some of these and other examples of Indonesian mosques exhibited in the MI illustrate the previous tradition of religious architectural syncretism the tiered roofs typical to the Hindu-Buddhist palaces and the contemporary royal palaces or *kratons*. Outside of Aceh and West Sumatra, this continuity remains stronger in Java and particularly so eastwards as the museum's photographs and the Festival Istiqlal 1991 architecture catalog show. The displays also seem to indicate the possibility of even earlier megalithic continuities such as the last two mosques mentioned above in West Java and Lombok and considered below in which generations upon generations continue to congregate and pray at sites deemed sacred across time.

I find the photograph of the old mosque in Lombok despite being almost completely ruined, its colors run from water damage, powerfully prescient. Why? The architecture of the mosque speaks to the antiquity of contemporary traditions. Above all, the photograph itself makes me sad at its condition and how obvious the decrepitude is. And it leads one to ask: How many years will it be before it is replaced? Why is the museum in this condition in the first place? And does it even matter even if anyone does care?

Does this photograph of an old mosque in Lombok not symbolize the by and large decrepit state of museums in Indonesia in general? Does it not highlight the problems of management and state funding of museums, libraries, archives and universities across the board? Does it also not support the argument that Indonesians are fundamentally disinterested in museums? Here lies the crux of the problem, so much so that we have to ask the question: Are museums in Indonesia merely irrelevant colonial relics? Has in this case the state not simply created an irrelevant post-colonial institution and utterly failed in its original mission? What can be done in spite of these problems? Is the situation at the museum comparatively any worse off in terms of human capacity than many

other institutions including universities and even the parliament? And finally, is the situation really so dark?

Contrary to the perception one gains on a superficial occasional visit to the museum, the visitor numbers are surprisingly high. Take for instance the statistics for 2009 which by month range widely as follows: January 2,499, February 4,596, March 5,013, April 3,440, May 6,538, June 7,342, July 2,929, August 1,302, September 892, October 2,399, November 6,136 and finally December, 8,970 totaling 52,056 visitors for the year. Above all, if one keeps these number in mind despite the other occasions when the museum is largely empty and has a tomb like quality all such museum exhibition spaces exude, one should keep in mind the significant intellectual activity promoted by the managing body through the journals *Suhuf* and *Lektur*. Moreover, in terms of the Indonesian study of Islamic philology in particular, we are presented with an unusually dynamic instance of local academic research. This is interesting as it is occurring at a time in which scholarship of Malay manuscripts is attracting less and less interest (see Jones 1999, Riddell 2004:139). Yet it is an area of centuries of established and expanding interest amongst Indonesians themselves as embodied in the endangered manuscripts with their detailed marginalia. Moreover, the late Uka Tjandrasmita has written an introductory text on the subject, *Kajian Naskah-Naskah Klasik dan Penerapannya bagi Kajian Sejarah Islam di Indonesia* (2006) and there are the two edited volumes *Naskah Klasik Keagamaan Nusantara Cermin Budaya Bangsa* (Bafadal and Saefullah 2005) amongst a significant local literature only accessible to those scholars who have access to these materials and who can read Indonesian. Lastly, the Universitas Islam Negeri has created a philology program and the University of Indonesia has created a museum studies program within the Department of Archaeology.

All of these developments bode well for the potential future of this museum and the analysis of the collection but only if a culture emerges of willing support and mutual engagement without any demands from participating individuals and institutions for conditional funding for assistance. Indeed, this lack of interest in participation in supporting museums or in research and publication for its own sake as part of the intellectual duty of professionals without financial incentive is a major reason for the problematic

status of museums and the knowledge sector in Indonesia. It would however be naïve to expect the situation to change. Nevertheless, as the bibliography in this paper points to, there is no shortage of materials available for museum education programs at the Museum Istiqlal or for those in Indonesian universities and schools willing to engage the collection on their own volition.

Islamic Politics and the Museum's Future

The problems with the Museum Istiqlal raised in this article leads to a slew of larger and more difficult questions. What are the consequences for not taking care of such problems, if any? At the largest level, what does all this tell us about Indonesia in light of the fact of what this museum was supposed to represent and serve? In pondering such questions one should consider above all that this is the national Islamic museum and that in the last decade Islam has achieved an unprecedented dominance of the national political landscape. This is especially important symbolically when one compares identity debates in Indonesia as we know them today to the situation as it was almost two decades ago in 1991 during the first Festival Istiqlal when the plans for the museum were first announced to the public (Abdullah 1997, Tjandrasasmita 2008, Zilberg 2010). It was at that all important first festival that President Soeharto heralded the new policy of fully accepting and embracing the power of Indonesian Islam as central to national identity. It was in this context that the museum was planned and built, as a monument to and symbolic driver for a state sponsored Islamic renaissance. It is thus against this larger background and the current tensions in Indonesian Islam and society today that any discussion of the museum might best be considered in future debate.

The anthropological literature on Taman Mini Indonesia Indah, where Museum Istiqlal is located, has focused exclusively on the expression and experience of Indonesian identity at the complex in terms of ethnicity and the politics of nationalism (See Adams 1998, Bruner 2005, Errington 1998, Hitchcock 1998, Pemberton 1994, Picard 1993, Wood 1997 and Zilberg 2010c, forthcoming 2011).⁴ It

⁴ This is largely due to the fact that these two museums were only built in 1997, after the above-cited ethnographic research on TMII had been conducted and

is therefore significant that while there is a substantial anthropological discussion of Indonesia's national theme park, there is as of yet no single ethnographic study available of the Museum Istiqlal. Accordingly, this anthropological reflection on the contents and state of the Museum Istiqlal represents the first attempt to begin such work and above all to encourage future use of and research on the museum by Indonesians themselves. Towards that aim, this article has sought to open such a debate through the lens of a personal anthropological reflection. It has also considered some of the challenges at hand and has made a few minor suggestions as to how to possibly improve visitor experience and better achieve the museum's mission.

Despite the problems facing the museum, the Ministry of Religious Affairs is being extremely successful in stimulating the advancement of a long established tradition of local Islamic scholarship through the journals *Suhuf* and *Lektur*. In terms of ultimately being able to achieve the museum's original goals of providing a repository for and study of Indonesian Islamic history, culture and art, the contents of those journal and the depth of future research they point to and bode well for the museum's enduring potential. The greatest problem remains in the extremely limited educational use of the museum, its restricted human capacity and the scale of the state budget allocations.

It is significant in all this that 2010 is The Year of the Museum in Indonesia and that beginning in 2009, the Government of Indonesia has officially recognized that the countries museums are in a dire state of mismanagement and repair so much so as to require an action plan. These are presented in *Tahun Kujung Museum 2010* dan *Gerakan Nasional Cinta Museum (GNCM) 2010-2004* and produced by the Direktorat Museum, Direktorat Jenderal Sejarah dan Purbakala, Kementerian Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata. They are augmented by the more specific proposals in *Rencana Pengembangan Bayt Al-Qur'an & Museum Istiqlal* (2010) produced by the same departments. These follow upon the inter-

published. There is however still a significant lag in the museum anthropology literature at this point and with the rising importance and interest in political Islam, this absence of research on what constitutes the national Islamic museum is a critical research gap that this paper works towards addressing.

mittent and in cases far more detailed unfulfilled government proposals prepared for these museums over the years since 1997.

It is unfortunately arguable that until the state institutes a policy of choosing directors and curators with the appropriate experience and training rather than appointing state functionaries to these positions, the situation in Indonesian museums will remain deeply problematic. Indeed, this was precisely the reason for the initial conflict at the Museum Istiqlal which has led to the current situation (George 2008, Zilberg 2010a). Perhaps with the recent creation of three departments of museology at the University of Indonesia in Jakarta, the University of Padjadjaran in Bandung, and the University of Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta, the recently late Dr. Uka Tjandrasmita's elephantine patience expressed in his article "Peran Bayt Al-Qur'an & Museum Istiqlal bagi Pembangunan Bangsa Indonesia" in *Suhuf* (Vol. 1, No.1, 2008) will eventually bear fruit. But the fact of the matter is that in 1997 when the Museum Istiqlal was opened, Indonesia already had the qualified professionals it needed for the task and it is they who should perhaps be best re-engaged at the cost of not having to reinvent the wheel.

Conclusion

Regardless of its problems and checkered history, the Museum Istiqlal has a special relevance to Indonesia today in an era in which a pronounced sense of competing Islamic national identities and affective hegemony have emerged so much so as to overshadow the former doctrine of *Pancasila* (see Fealey and White 2008, Pakpahan 2010, Sijabat 2010). It is interesting to emphasize this difference between the situation in Indonesia today to the situation at the time of the Festival Istiqlal in 1991, the second Festival Istiqlal in 1995 and the museum's inauguration in 1997. In the late 1980's and early 1990's there was a political need for the state to embrace and project a national Islamic identity and this agenda is what eventually led to the creation of this museum. Yet in contrast to the larger success of that identity project, the museum is today by and large forgotten, neglected, and arguably even an irrelevance. Nevertheless, in this context and remembering that the Museum Istiqlal and the Bayt al-Qur'an were originally specifically built to promote a peaceful and diverse sense of Islam, these conjoined

museums offer the state today an exceptional political and cultural stage for reaffirming its declared original ideological principles.

The problem is that any such interpretation and politics misjudges the depth of division within the Indonesian Islamic communities in the assumption of a pan-Islamic consensus. Managing such a museum and department is thus potentially an extremely difficult and delicate operation. Perhaps it is even this political danger that has compromised and limited the fruition of the museum's original idealistic intention. Yet for all that, whatever the constraints and potential problems, the Museum Istiqlal arguably presents the ultimate national context for celebrating Islam's diversity and its peaceful and tolerant nature as President Soeharto described it in 1991 when he opened the Festival Istiqlal (see Yustiono 1991: 32). It remains then to be seen whether the Government of Indonesia and Indonesian citizens themselves can show sufficient institutional, political and intellectual will to manifest the original dream embodied in this museum.

Finally, to end I must return to James' Boon's melancholic muse. When you visit the Museum Istiqlal, whether it be for the first time or for the first time in a long time, will you be overcome by sadness for reasons of conquest and pillage? Probably not. Will you be saddened for the child within in which you are taken back to your past or your parent's and grandparent's past? Perhaps. Will you be made melancholy by observing the other visitors and your own intellectual powers to critique the displays and re-curate the exhibition? I think not. In fact, I think in all you will be gladdened. But if you had been to the Festival Istiqlal in 1991 and 1995 and had been one of the original team who had dreamed of and planned the museum, you would be more than saddened. You would be heartbroken and enraged all over again. I think. Having opened up thus an old wound, perhaps this simple sad question has to be posed to our esteemed elders and their legacy. Do you stay away in sadness and anger, despair and disgust—or do you forgive and try again—futile as it well may be? []

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The Kiswah of Ka'bah.



The red cloth and illuminated manuscripts.



The architecture photographic section.



The mushaf and manuscript room.