
Tracing American Spirit in Indonesia's Independence: A Historical-comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

The US and Indonesia, two countries that fought for freedom, are fascinating subjects to delve more into, despite their great distance from one another and their distant times of conflict. This research used a Transnational American Studies perspective and comparative-historical analysis. By using comparative historical analysis, this research aimed to explore the similarities and differences that exist in the journey of American independence and Indonesian independence. The results of this research showed that even though the independence movements in the US and Indonesia occurred several centuries apart, they had the same goal, namely opposing colonialism. Both showed the same enthusiasm to fight colonial power and the desire to determine the fate of their nation without interference from other parties. Thomas Paine and Bung Tomo through their writings and speeches led the spirit of independence in the US and Indonesia. Even though they use different communication styles, both have an impact in forming the spirit of resistance and unity of their nation. Additionally, by looking at the history of the struggle of the Indonesian people, it can be seen the spirit of freedom that the US promoted.

Keywords: *Bung Tomo; comparative historical analysis; Thomas Paine; transnational*

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INTRODUCTION

Looking at the history of the US and Indonesian independence struggles shows the similarity of the struggle in expelling colonialists and winning based on the spirit of nationalism. Even though they are several centuries apart, the independence of the US and Indonesia shows the same spirit in fighting colonialism.

The spirit of the Indonesian people in their fight for independence from colonialists, particularly the Dutch, and Japanese, shows a similar track record to the American people's struggle to achieve their independence from British colonies, despite the enormous geographical distance and stark differences in cultural diversity that separate Indonesia and the US (Rotter, 2003). Both promoted the values of freedom and the enthusiasm to determine the fate of their nation, issued proclamations of independence, and experienced diplomatic struggles and physical war to achieve independence (McMahon, 2020).

Tracing back to World War II, which reached its peak in 1945, the fact that the Allied bloc won this war had a major global impact on both the countries involved directly and

indirectly (Alviyani, 2020). This war had a profound effect on Indonesia in several areas. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Indonesia was taken over by the Japanese troops on March 8, 1942 (Syabriya, 2022). The Japanese population led to economic exploitation and the use of Indonesian labor for the war effort (Beck, 2015). Indonesian civilians were used as forced laborers to build defense structures and other war-related facilities. Additionally, from a political perspective, this war also triggered the process of decolonization in Asia and Africa, which led to many countries becoming independent from European colonialism (Gouda & Zaalberg, 2002).

At first, the US tried to remain neutral and did not want to abandon the Netherlands, an important European ally (Triyono, 2020). However, the US began to show sympathy and involve itself more seriously when the Dutch launched the Second Military Aggression in Yogyakarta, which began in December 1948, and in the process of an agreement negotiated with the United Nations Committee of Good Offices (McMahon, 1978). The US played a decisive role in the final stages of Indonesia's independence struggle, in early 1949, which forced the Dutch to

decide to start a Dutch-Indonesian with Republican leaders and ultimately led to the formal recognition of Indonesia's independence on December 27, 1949.

Furthermore, through economic pressure on the Netherlands to renounce its colonial power over the Dutch East Indies, the US played a significant role in Indonesia's rise to independence (Hancock, 1973a). Regarding Cold War strategy and colonial policy in Southeast Asia, Indonesia emerged as a critical test of US diplomatic power. The struggle in the Dutch East Indies between Dutch nationalist and colonial forces was not directly resolved by American military force, but American actions there were significantly different from the restricted war methods used in later Asia.

Apart from that, the US also gave its support to Indonesia through a pamphlet released by the US entitled *It's 1776 in Indonesia* in 1949 which posited a connection between the Indonesian Revolution and the American Revolution (Gouda & Zaalberg, 2002). Gouda and Zaalberg specifically explain this pamphlet in their book entitled *American Visions of the Netherlands East Indies/Indonesia: US Foreign Policy and Indonesian*

Nationalism. In the second chapter of this book, they explain that there was an article in the Free Trade Union News written by Andrew Woll that mentioned the support and sympathy of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) for Indonesia's struggle and their distrust of what the Dutch were doing to Indonesia.

Inspired by the discussion of *It's 1776 in Indonesia*, Susilo & Pratamasari (2018a) conducted research to explore how America inspired the Indonesian revolution by analyzing the founding fathers of Indonesia. This research used the symbolic-interactionism perspective to examine the speech and writings of Indonesian founding fathers, Achmad Soekarno, Mohamad Hatta, and Soetan Sjahrir. The result of this study showed that Sukarno, Hatta, and Sjahrir drew inspiration from the US in different ways. Soekarno referred to and mentioned the United States more often than Hatta and Sjahrir. Compared to inspiration from other countries, the influence of the US on the third figure is not so dominant. This is due to the view that the liberal democratic system and capitalist system practiced by the US are not the best choices in the view of Soekarno, Hatta,

and Sjahrir (Susilo & Pratamasari, 2018b).

The researcher recognized a research gap in this topic due to the scarcity of reports about this issue, so the researcher was triggered to delve deeper into the American trace in Indonesia's independence. Hence, this study aimed to explore the spirit of the US on Indonesia's independence through comparing the historical context of both these countries.

METHODOLOGY

By conducting research within the framework of American studies, which is interdisciplinary and involves various theories and scientific disciplines. This research was conducted within the framework of Transnational American Studies using comparative-historical analysis.

The transnational perspective provides the crossroads results in the process from historical roots of multidirectional flows of people, ideas, goods, community, politics, and cultures. This crossroad could occur in areas outside the geographic and political boundaries of the US as well as within it (Fishkin, 2005).

Furthermore, by using comparative historical

analysis, the researcher can examine historical events to create valid explanations outside a specific time and place, either by direct comparison with other historical events, theory building, or contemporary references (Neuman, 2014). According to Neuman, comparative-historical data is qualitative research in which the researcher examines data on events and conditions in the historical past and/or in different societies.

As previously mentioned, comparative-historical analysis was performed in this study to understand the data. Thus, this study used a variety of data sources. Firstly, the primary data was historical manuscripts related to America and Indonesia's independence such as the pamphlet of *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine, and the manuscript of Bung Tomo's speech. The manuscript of the pamphlet *Common Sense* was downloaded through the official website of the Library of Congress. Then, the manuscript of Tomo's speech was downloaded through trusted online news platforms due to limited access to the official archival institution of the Republic of Indonesia. Secondly, books, article journals, and related articles were the secondary data in this research.

DISCUSSION

The researcher has examined the data sources, both primary and secondary data. By using comparative historical analysis, the results of this research analysis are discussed in several sections.

The Journey of American Independence

The US has a long story about the British colonization of it. As a result of the British and French Seven Years' War (1756-1763), although victory was in the hands of the British, the US had to pay for the losses suffered by the British in this war. England began to implement policies that were detrimental to the colonies in the US (Nelson, 1978). One of the triggers for the thirteen colonies' resistance to England could be seen when the Stamp Act policy, a policy where every colony in the US had to pay taxes on every trade transaction using stamps, was implemented in March 1765. This colonial resistance began to occur when the Boston Massacre occurred in 1765. The protest incident carried out by the colonies against the British army killed one colonist and two people were seriously injured.

However, the British soldiers who were guilty in

this case did not receive appropriate sanctions from the British government for this mistake. It didn't stop there. The British kingdom again passed the Tea Act policy (1773) which imposed high taxes on tea imported from England. The separatist group, the Sons of Liberty from the American colonies, protested by throwing approximately 92,000 tons of tea loaded by British ships into the sea. This event became known as the Boston Tea Party.

Britain once again responded to the Boston Tea Party protests by passing coercive or intolerable laws. The major events that culminated in the road to American independence began with British repressive actions known as the Coercive Acts or Intolerable Acts. The British implemented several repressive measures, including closing Boston Harbor and limiting Massachusetts' autonomy. Tensions between the British and the American colonies reached a peak in April 1775 when brief battles occurred at Lexington and Concord (Cogliano, 2010). In this case, British troops attempted to seize and confiscate colonial weapons. Although the fighting was short-lived, tensions rose and sparked further conflict. British troops then moved to Concord and managed to find and

destroy weapons supplied by the colonial militia. However, news of the attack spread, and the increasingly powerful American militia launched a counterattack. The Battle of Concord's North Bridge forced British forces to retreat, and the return trip to Boston became a continuing conflict with increasingly powerful American militia attacks. The Battles of Lexington and Concord greatly increased the mobility of colonial militias and marked the beginning of the American Revolutionary War, which lasted eight years and led to American independence.

First called in September 1774, the Continental Congress tried to organize a reaction to British operations. The purpose of this Congress was to organize colonial protests British policies and denounce the British government's oppressive activities. The second Continental Congress was then called in May 1775, and it was during this assembly that George Washington was named supreme commander of the Continental Army.

Many writings in favor of American independence were published during this intense period. A notable literary work that had a substantial impact on the American people's decision to reject the British monarchy and embrace

independence. Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense*, which he wrote in January 1776, gained widespread influence and was read by all. The idea of independence was supported, and the spirit of battle was sparked by this pamphlet.

When the Continental Congress published the American Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, the process of gaining independence achieved its zenith. Written by Thomas Jefferson, this proclamation outlined the fundamental rights that every person is believed to have and officially separated America from the British colonies. The Declaration of Independence's acceptance served as a foundation for the future of the US and represented a significant step toward the formation of an independent nation.

The US had a difficult time building a stable system of governance after gaining independence. The Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787, which resulted in a new constitution the following year, was one way that this process was expressed. A new chapter in the history of the newly established nation began in 1789 with the inauguration of George Washington as the nation's first president.

The Journey of Indonesian Independence

The Dutch first arrived at Banten Harbor on 23 June 1596 led by Captain Pieter Keyzer and Cornelis de Houtman. The initial purpose of his arrival here was none other than purely to trade in spices by selling them back to Europe at high prices. However, as time went by, the Dutch began to monopolize trade and colonize Indonesia (Rotter, 2003).

In 1602, the Dutch formed a Dutch trade association called Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie (VOC) to minimize trade competition between fellow Dutch traders and reap maximum profits as well as strengthen the Dutch position against the Portuguese and Spanish (Hancock, 1973b). However, the Dutch government took over the VOC in 1799 because of the large amount of corruption that occurred. After controlling and occupying Indonesia for a long time, the Dutch also began to interfere with royal affairs. This received a response from the kingdom, especially Prince Diponegoro, who killed many native victims. This Dutch victory made their position stronger and more arbitrary in Indonesia.

The occurrence of World Wars I and II had a significant

impact on political dynamics in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), bringing changes in the direction of the journey towards independence. When World War II ended Japan accepted its defeat after Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed on August 6 and 9. This allows Indonesia to become independent. This was used by Indonesian figures, such as Sukarno, and Mohamad Hatta. to proclaim Indonesia's independence. On August 16, 1945, the *Rengasdengklok* incident occurred in which Sukarno and Hatta were kidnapped by young people and forced to proclaim Indonesia's independence immediately. In this event, two groups were divided, namely young and old, who finally agreed that the proclamation of independence would be held on August 17, 1945 (McMahon, 1978).

After Japan surrendered at the end of World War II, Indonesia welcomed the moment with a proclamation of independence on August 17, 1945, which was announced by Soekarno and Hatta. However, the Netherlands attempted to restore its colonial control in Indonesia. It sparked the Indonesian War of Independence against the Dutch, which lasted from 1945 to 1949. After that, they held a meeting at Admiral Maeda's house to formulate the

text of the proclamation. This manuscript was then signed by Soekarno and Hatta on behalf of the Indonesian people (De Graaf, 1959). On 17 August 1945, Indonesia finally announced its independence and on 18 August the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution was passed (A, 2019; Siburian, 2022).

However, the proclamation of Indonesian independence did not immediately eliminate the colonialists from Indonesia. Japan's defeat made the Dutch and their allies want to control Indonesia again. This received fierce resistance from the Indonesian people which caused many clashes to occur throughout Indonesia, including the Battle of Bojong Kokosan, the people of Sukabumi against the British and NICA which became the forerunner to the Bandung Sea of Fire incident, the Five Day Battle of Semarang, the 10 November Surabaya incident, the Battle of Medan Area, Ambarawa Battle in Semarang, Battle of Lengkong; The Battle of the Bali Strait, the Battle of Margarana, the Battle in Palembang, the Battle of the Cirebon Sea, the Battle of the Sibolga Sea, Military Aggression I and II, the March 1, 1949, General Attack in Yogyakarta and the Surakarta General Attack.

The struggle to maintain independence was not only carried out through war but also diplomatic struggle. After receiving support from various countries such as Palestine, Meris, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and the US. Then, on December 27, 1949 in Den Hagh, Netherlands, the Netherlands officially recognized Indonesia's sovereignty at the Round Table Conference. This event marked the end of the colonial era and the beginning of a new phase in the history of independent Indonesia. Even though it has achieved independence, Indonesia still must face various challenges in the future, including building a new country and establishing the foundations for national development.

The Spirit of Independence Through Pamphlet and Speech

From the independence journey of the US and Indonesia, it can be seen that both fought for their independence from colonialists with a series of battles and diplomatic struggles. the US's spirit in fighting for independence cannot be separated from the *Common Sense* pamphlet written by Paine. *Common Sense* (full title *Common Sense; Addressed to the Inhabitants of America, on the Following Interesting Subjects*) inspired the US

independence movement. Early on, Paine wrote in a series of letters that would be published in various Philadelphia papers (Paine, 1776).

However, because the writing turned out to be too long and unwieldy to publish as a letter, Paine chose the pamphlet form. In simple, clear, and persuasive language, this pamphlet explained the situation at that time, why the American people had to fight for their independence, and why independence itself needed to be achieved. This pamphlet was published anonymously on January 10, 1776, at the beginning of the American Revolution. Paine's writing has become a topic of discussion for many people in various circles (Hogan & Williams, 2000).

Paine began his writing by explaining what society is and what government should be. Paine mentioned,

Society in every state is a blessing, but government even in its best state is but a necessary evil in its worst state an intolerable one; (Paine, 1776).

He emphasized the natural rights that every citizen has, one of which is independence. He expressed his thoughts that the government run by the US under the British monarchy was

undemocratic and very far from the people. The government, which should serve as a listener to the aspirations of the people, cannot carry out its role well because there are too many intermediaries that must be passed through to get to the King.

Paine even makes readers think about how it is possible for a king who is confined to the palace to solve the problems experienced by his people. The government should be elected directly by the people and come from the people themselves to be able to know well what problems the people are experiencing and provide the best solutions.

Paine then emphasized that the monarchy system currently being implemented in England has no religious basis because in the Bible there is nothing that regulates whether humans are divided into groups of kings or ordinary people.

MANKIND being originally equals in the order of creation, the equality could only be destroyed by some subsequent circumstance; ... (Paine, 1776).

The occurrence of conflicts and wars in various parts of the world is none other than the result of the king's arrogance to rule the world. Paine also mentioned that there

were 8 civil wars and 19 rebellions that occurred because of this hereditary power struggle.

Paine emphasizes his criticism of monarchy which is considered a degradation of humanity, so succession of heredity here is also considered very bad because it imposes power on the king's descendants whose qualifications are not necessarily guaranteed. Then this is considered unfair to the next generation. If power is continued by successors who are not credible enough to rule, it will make them unable to lead and increasingly distant from the interests of their people. He stressed that all society needed was honest people. As he mentioned,

... Of more worth is one honest man to society, and in the sight of God, than all the crowned ruffians that ever lived (Paine, 1776).

Then he closed by encouraging American society to think logically and rationally so as not to be haunted by feelings of discomfort because of delaying the fight for independence. He assured that even though the number of American soldiers was not comparable to that of the British, they would win because of the spirit they had.

The value of the struggle to be free from colonialism is also seen in Indonesia's struggle. In contrast to the US which only fought one enemy, Indonesia was faced with many opponents who tried to control Indonesia and colonize Indonesia over a long period. Apart from that, after declaring independence, Indonesia was still faced with colonialists who were still trying to take over Indonesia's sovereignty.

While defending this sovereignty, the Indonesian people faced a series of wars in various regions of Indonesia. One of the greatest battles was the Battle of November 10 in Surabaya. Just like Paine, one of the heroes of Indonesian independence, Soetomo, known as Bung Tomo, ignited the spirit of the Indonesian people to fight the invaders through his thoughts. The difference lies in the medium. Paine channeled his thoughts through pamphlets, while Tomo ignited the enthusiasm of the Indonesian people through radio broadcasts in Surabaya.

Tomo started his speech in a loud voice saying "Merdeka!!!" [Freedom!!!] (Wibawana, 2023). He explained that the British had arrived in Surabaya and distributed pamphlets threatening them to hand over

all the weapons they had. Tomo reminded them that they were able to fight the invaders and push them to the limit. In his speech, Tomo called on all Indonesian youth to remember that previously they had been able to repel the invaders. The presence of the colonialists again at that time should not shake their enthusiasm and courage and confirmed that the people of Surabaya would accept the challenge of the British soldiers. Tomo declares

Tuntutan itu, walaupun kita [kami] tahu bahwa kau sekali lagi akan mengancam kita untuk menggempur kita [kami] dengan kekuatan yang ada, tetapi inilah jawaban kita [kami]. Selama banteng-banteng Indonesia masih mempunyai darah merah yang dapat membikin secarik kain putih merah dan putih. Maka selama itu tidak akan kita [kami] mau menyerah kepada siapapun juga.

[That demand, even though we know that you will once again threaten us to attack us with the existing powers, this is our answer. As long as Indonesian bulls still have red blood, they can make a piece of white cloth red and white. So, during that time we will not surrender to anyone.] (Wibawana, 2023).

Tomo emphasized that the People of Surabaya would not just back down and give up.

However, he also emphasized maintaining peace and respecting his enemies even though they were being colonized.

Tetapi saya peringatkan sekali lagi. Jangan mulai menembak. Baru kalau kita ditembak, maka kita akan ganti menyerang mereka. Itulah, kita tunjukkan bahwa kita ini adalah benar-benar orang yang ingin merdeka.

[But I warn you once again. Don't start shooting. Only if we are shot, then we will attack them instead. That is, we show that we are truly people who want to be independent.] (Wibawana, 2023)

In the end, he emphasized again the motto of the Indonesian people in facing the colonialists, namely that it is better to be destroyed than not to be independent, to be independent or to die! This slogan, which was voiced loudly and passionately, was able to raise the nationalist spirit of the people of Surabaya to fight against the invaders. He then assured again that as Muslims who believe in Allah as God, they must believe that God will accompany their steps to uphold justice and truth.

Here are some differences and similarities between Paine and Tomo in fueling the spirit of their nation. First, it can be seen from the choice of

diction and sentence structure used. Paine tended to present untrue British data and facts regarding the thirteen American colonies. He conveys his thoughts using implicit persuasive language. Meanwhile, Tomo sparked the enthusiasm of the people of Surabaya to dare to fight the invaders by using explicit sentences.

This is understandable considering that Paine published this pamphlet initially in letter form and was published several times. Paine awakened American society with a structured approach. It is different from Tomo, who gave a speech via radio that was direct. So, choosing words that are easy to understand by all groups is necessary. Choosing diction that is straight to the point and can be immediately accepted by listeners is necessary in urgent situations where they are faced with British troops who are ready to go to war.

Second, the two ideas of Paine and Bung Tomo both had a very influential influence on the independence of their respective countries. However, Paine's pamphlet also played a role in the formation of the Declaration of Independence, while Tomo's speech became a symbol of the fighting spirit

and courage of the Indonesian nation.

Apart from that, another difference lies in the purpose. *Common Sense* aimed to motivate the American people they make themselves aware of the injustices committed by England and to support the US to separate from England and gain its independence. Meanwhile, Tomo's speech was more focused on mobilizing and fueling the spirit of the Indonesian people to repel the colonialists who wanted to control their country. He moved the people to unite and dare to fight the invaders.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, from the analysis that has been carried out on the historical manuscripts, Paine's *Common Sense* and Tomo's speech using comparative historical analysis, there are general similarities which show that these two manuscripts are both used to ignite the spirit of their people to be aware of their rights, namely independence. Even though there is no direct relationship between the US and Indonesia in this case, especially Paine and Tomo, the spirit of American independence, which became independent in 1776, has the same spirit as Indonesia which proclaimed its independence in

1945 and received full recognition from various the country as a sovereign state in 1949. Paine and Tomo, even though they used different communication approaches, both had a big impact in raising the spirit of nationalism and the struggle for American and Indonesian independence. They both succeeded in forming an identity of resistance and a spirit of independence in the history of each country. Through the significance of this study, the researcher intends to shed light on how revolutionary rhetoric may be an effective catalyst for national movements and the development of a resilient spirit of independence, even in the face of cultural and chronological disparities.

COMPETING INTEREST STATEMENT

Herewith the author declares that this article is totally free from any conflict of interest regarding the assessment, review and revision, and publication process in general.

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