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COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF I.H. DOKO AND H.A. KOROH FROM NUSA TENGGARA TIMUR (1980S-2018)

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Abstract

East Nusa Tenggara (Nusa Tenggara Timur, NTT) remains comparatively underrepresented in accounts of Indonesian national history. This article examines how two political figures from the region—Izaak Huru Doko and Hendrik Arnold Koroh—were represented, commemorated, and intermittently neglected between 1980 and 2018. Drawing on published biographies, Doko's historical writing, newspaper reports, and records of official recognition, the article approaches collective memory as a selective process shaped by institutions, media, and individual custodians The analysis identifies four principal registers of remembrance: state and administrative recognition; historical writing produced by Doko; episodic national-media coverage; and preservation undertaken by families or other individuals outside formal state structures. The comparison suggests that Doko's public memory became more institutionally consolidated, notably through national-hero recognition in 2006, while Koroh's commemoration remained more fragmented. In Koroh's case, disagreements over basic biographical details during a 2010 proposal for national-hero status indicate that incomplete documentation can constrain recognition as much as limited public attention can. Reports that copies of a book on Doko were discarded also raise questions about the continuity of institutional responsibility after commemorative projects have been published. The article argues that regional historical memory depends not only on symbolic recognition but also on reliable documentation, sustained preservation, and ongoing circulation. Because the study relies primarily on documentary and media sources, it does not establish how younger generations currently understand these figures; that question requires further empirical research.

Keywords: collective memory, Izaak Huru Doko, Hendrik Arnold Koroh, East Nusa Tenggara, regional historiography, politics of remembrance

INTRODUCTION

In August 2019, reports circulated on social media that more than 200 copies of history books documenting I.H. Doko's struggle against Dutch colonialism were found dumped in a trash can behind Bank NTT's headquarters in Kupang, discovered by journalists rather than through any official audit (Liza 2014). Collective memory is not simply a store of facts about the past. It is produced and reproduced through texts, public rituals, media, monuments, and other social practices, and it can be contested or selectively emphasized (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Baden 2016) , the discarded books

mark a crack, not a follow-up. An artifact of memory that was once actively produced and institutionally sponsored, the book was published in collaboration with Bank NTT, whose logo is listed on the cover, but in 2019 it ceased to be reproduced or circulated through any active social practice. Collective memory, in this framework, exists only insofar as it is constantly reactivated through practice; the trash can is proof that the process of reactivation has stopped.

The concept of semantization is also useful here: complex historical experiences may be condensed into recognizable symbols, titles, or commemorative objects (Orianne et al. 2025) , the process by which a historical figure is condensed into a simple, easy-to-carry symbol. After Doko's memory was semantized into fixed forms, the title of national hero in 2006, the monument, "I.H. Doko Square", these symbolic markers seem to have absorbed the institutional obligation to remember him. Books, as a more demanding and less symbolically dense memory container because they require reading, rather other than mere passive recognition, become relatively easier to ignore once denser symbols are available. This suggests that semantization is not a neutral result but rather has a displacing effect. The same process that condenses memory into efficient collective symbols can, at the same time, render its more detailed, less dense forms unimportant.

Finally, this event illustrates the political contestation of memory (Bruyneel 2017) in a specific and traceable way. At the time of the discovery of the books, no institution, neither Bank NTT, the provincial government, nor the family, openly claimed responsibility for the preservation or disposal of the books. The absence of this responsible party is a form of contestation in itself, it reveals that the official recognition (the designation as a hero in 2006) was not accompanied by an equally formalized institutional custodianism, so that when the work of memory shifted from ceremony to maintenance, no party was in a position to question the abandonment, because from the beginning no party was clearly positioned to be responsible for it.

Scholarship has addressed East Nusa Tenggara’s political and social history, including the independence struggle, the political history of West Timor, local administration, Catholicism, and the formation of Kupang’s middle class ((I. H. Doko, 1981; P. J. A. Doko & Victor W. F. Doko, 2013; Farram, 2004;Steenbrink, 2006) The present article builds on this literature by focusing on the later public remembrance of two regional figures rather than attempting to provide a comprehensive history of NTT. It asks: How were I.H. Doko and H.A. Koroh remembered, commemorated, and marginalized between 1980 and 2018, as reflected in official recognition, historical writing, and media coverage? How do the two cases reveal different relationships between public recognition and the production and preservation of historical knowledge? The article makes two principal contributions. First, it compares two figures whose social and political positions differed: Doko, an educator and political figure who later served in government, and Koroh, a traditional ruler involved in local and national political negotiations. Second, it argues that marginalization should not be understood only as a lack of public attention. The available evidence also points to weaknesses in documentation and in the institutional arrangements that preserve and circulate historical

materials. The article's claims are limited to the documentary record examined here; it does not directly measure public awareness among contemporary residents or younger generations.

METHOD

This article uses a qualitative documentary approach informed by collective-memory studies. The materials described in the manuscript include published historical works and biographies, an unpublished biographical record held by the East Nusa Tenggara Provincial Social Service, and newspaper and online-news reports concerning official recognition, commemorative activity, historical documentation, and the preservation of regional collections. Doko's own historical writing is treated both as a source of information and as an intervention in the construction of a regional historical canon.

Collective memory refers not simply to knowledge about the past, but to socially constructed representations of history that are produced, circulated, and contested in the present through media, commemorations, texts, and public practices. Such memories are selective and oriented toward present needs, especially in the development of group identity and political meaning (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Baden 2016). In this process, historical experiences undergo what has been described as memory "semantization," whereby detailed previous events and characters are gradually transformed into simplified, symbolic, and widely public narratives at the intersection of individual, collective, and social memory (Orianne et al. 2025) . The public images of Doko and Koroh, as national heroes, local kings, street names, seminar topics, or neglected books, can thus be understood as products of this ongoing transformation.

The analysis draws on a comparative examination of archival documents, official records, newspaper reports, and other historical sources related to Doko and Koroh. Each source is critically assessed by considering its origin, institutional context, purpose, and the circumstances in which it was produced. Following Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Baden (2016), collective memory is understood as a socially constructed representation that is continuously reproduced through public practices. Therefore, this study examines not only the information contained in historical documents but also the institutional processes through which certain historical narratives are produced, preserved, and recognized. The analysis further considers Bruyneel's (2017) argument that public debates over monuments, recognition, and commemoration constitute arenas in which societies negotiate who deserves to be remembered and how the past should be narrated. By cross-checking different sources and identifying their consistencies, discrepancies, and silences, this study investigates how the different social and political positions of Doko and Koroh are reflected in historical documentation and contribute to their respective forms of public remembrance.

At last, collective memory also plays an essential role in sustaining group identity and social cohesion, as collective stories about the past transmit values, models of heroism, and a sense of historical connection across generations (Berntsen and Rubin

2025) . From this perspective, the weakening or fragmentation of memory of NTT's local heroes also poses a broader challenge to retaining regional historical identity within the national narrative.

DISCUSSION

Different historical positions: Doko and Koroh

I.H. Doko was born on Sabu Island on November 20, 1913. After completing his primary education in his hometown, he continued his education in Timor before getting a scholarship to MULO in Ambon, and then to Hollandsch Inlandsche Kweekschool (HIK) in Bandung. While in Bandung, Doko led a Timorese youth organization called De Timorsche Jongeren. After finishing his education in 1937, he returned to Kupang as a teacher and at the same time became increasingly active in nationalist politics by founding the Timorese National Union (Perserikatan Kebangsaan Timor/PKT). During the Japanese occupation, he continued his political activities through the Timor Syuho newspaper. After independence, Doko's career shifted from the political to the administrative realm: he served as the Deputy Minister of Information of the State of East Indonesia (NIT) in 1947–1948, Minister of Information in 1948–1949, and Minister of Teaching and Education of NIT in 1949–1950. From 1959 to 1971, he headed the representative office of the Ministry of Education and Culture in East Nusa Tenggara, and retired in 1971 (Dinas Sosial Propinsi Nusa Tenggara Timur, n.d.)

H.A. Koroh, born in Baun, Amarasi, on May 9, 1904, was a descendant of the Nai Nafi Rasi line of the Wahele Kingdom. After studying in Kupang, Batavia, and briefly in Yogyakarta, Koroh was called back to Amarasi to serve as king after his brother was dismissed for refusing to submit to Dutch authority. During the Japanese occupation, Koroh protected his people from direct military exploitation by acting as an intermediary between the occupiers and the population. After independence, he mobilized the Timorese kings to reject the establishment of the Eastern Indonesian State and to support unification with the Republic, a stance that put him directly at odds with Dutch colonial interests. He died on March 30, 1951, and was later reburied in Dharma Loka, Kupang, along with other figures of the independence struggle, Tom Pello and E.R. Herewila (I. H. Doko 1981b).

This biographical background is important not merely as descriptive information but also as a basis for understanding how the two figures occupied different structural positions within the colonial and postcolonial political order. Doko was an educator who later pursued a career in government, while Koroh was a traditional ruler involved in nationalist politics. These differences in their social and political positions provide an important context for examining how each figure was subsequently represented and remembered.

The comparison is analytically useful because the two men occupied different positions in the political order. Doko’s career in education and government generated records and opportunities for formal recognition, as reflected in administrative documents and official records of his service and achievements. By contrast, Koroh’s position as a

traditional ruler involved forms of authority and political action that may be less consistently represented in state archives. His historical trajectory therefore requires examination through different types of sources, including historical accounts and records of local political developments. To investigate these differences, this study compares the available biographical records, historical writings, and media reports, while considering their origins, institutional contexts, and limitations. This interpretation is based on the available documentary evidence and does not assume that occupational or social position alone determined how each figure was remembered.

If collective memory, as argued by Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Baden (2016), is a socially constructed representation that is continuously reproduced through public practices, then the formal apparatus of state recognition constitutes one of its most visible channels. Doko's official biographical record documents an accumulation of state and institutional awards, including recognition from the United Nations Appeal for Children (1945), an award from the Minister of Education and Culture (1971), gold rings from the Governor of NTT (1973 and 1985), and a ring from the Chancellor of Nusa Cendana University (1983) (East Nusa Tenggara Provincial Social Service, t.t.). His name was also given to a public space, I.H. Doko Square, in Kupang (East Nusa Tenggara Provincial Social Service, t.t.). Koroh, meanwhile, received a posthumous designation as a "regional hero" and was reburied at a special memorial site (I. H. Doko 1981b).

These awards are not just accidental biographical details. They are the main evidence for what in this study is referred to as official memory, that is, memory that is materially authorized by the state. Analyzed through the lens of semantization (Orianne et al. 2025) , each award acts as a condensation of decades of administrative service into a single ceremonial gesture, transforming Doko's long bureaucratic career into a portable symbol of loyalty and sacrifice in the field of education. A similar process, in a more concise form, is also seen in the case of Koroh: a period of reign defined by mediation and silent resistance under occupation became, in the form of commemorative compaction, a mere designation of "regional hero" (I. H. Doko 1981a) .

Doko as a producer of historical memory

Doko is not only the subject of collective memory, but also an active producer of that memory. His book, The Heroes of the Timorese Tribe, presents the biographies of three Timorese heroes, compiled on the basis of a distinction between "physical warriors" (exemplified by Sobe Sonbai III and Bill Nope) and "political warriors" (exemplified by Koroh himself) (I. H. Doko 1981a) . This categorising is important for two reasons. First, it shows that the comparative and typological work required in this study, in its still simple form, was actually done by contemporaries in Timorese historiography itself, long before the analytical vocabulary of memory studies emerged to name it. Second, and more importantly, this means that Doko's account of Koroh cannot be treated as a neutral external source: it is an act of canon-building that is self-reflective, produced by a political ally and contemporary of his subject, and therefore reflects Doko's own interest in cementing Koroh's position, and at the same time his generation's, in Timor's national

memory (Bruyneel, 2017; I. H. Doko, 1981a). The use of this passage as evidence must therefore be accompanied by explicit criticism of the source, not treated as a stand-alone biographical fact.

Media coverage and national-hero recognition in 2006

Another field of memory construction appears in the national print media coverage of Doko's official designation as a national hero in 2006. Doko's profile in Suara Pembaruan reconstructs his biography for general readers, spotlighting his resistance activities during the Japanese occupation and directly responding towards historical accusations that he once collaborated with the occupation (Suara Pembaruan 2006) . This defensive framework is conceptually important: it suggests that the memory of Doko, even at the highest point of official recognition, remains controversial, not controversial. Kompas' coverage of the same designation, on the other hand, places Doko in a wider national conversation about whether Indonesia's young generation still needs heroes, listing him as one of fourteen candidates for the title of hero that year and one of eight who were ultimately determined (Kompas, 2006b; Kompas, 2006a). If the Voice of Renewal article recounts Doko's individual merits, Kompas' coverage places him in a national bureaucratic process, showing how the new local memory grew understandable to the national public after being translated into standardized categories of state heroism.

Overall, this evidence suggests that Doko and Koroh are remembered across at least three domains: official administrative recognition (medals, titles, monuments), self-authored historiography (Doko's book), and national media coverage triggered by the state's official process. Each domain operates in a different temporality and performs different social functions: administrative recognition accumulates gradually throughout life and even after death (East Nusa Tenggara Provincial Social Service, t.t.); self-written historiography confirms a canon at a particular moment of writing (I. H. Doko 1981a) ; while media coverage appears episodicly, mainly triggered by official moments such as the determination of heroes in 2006 (Suara Pembaruan, 2006; Kompas, 2006b; Kompas, 2006a) . This layered structure implies that "remembered" in the cases of Doko and Koroh is not a continuous process, but rather a process that arises periodically as a result of institutional triggers, a finding that lends nuance to the main argument of this study regarding the marginalization of NTT figures in national memory (Bruyneel 2017): marginalization here appears not as total abandonment, but as a memory that comes to the surface only when activated by state rituals, and recedes in the intervening periods.

Contestation and Gaps in the Confession of H.A. Koroh

If the memory of Doko is relatively institutionalized through the title of national hero and a series of official awards, the memory of Koroh shows a much more intermittent pattern. Although Koroh has been buried in the Lokabinkra Heroes Cemetery in Kupang, and his name is enshrined as a street name in the city, some consider this form of recognition still inadequate compared to his historical contribution (Liza 2014). The attempt to propose Koroh as a national hero at a seminar at the Artha Wacana Christian

University (UKAW) on May 1, 2010 revealed a fundamental weakness in the available historical database: according to Ruben Funay, the supporting data on Koroh's life and struggle is still incomplete (Putra 2017). More methodologically significant, the forum also showed a real difference of opinion between historians, including between Munandjar Widiyatmika and Prof. M.A. Noach, regarding the surname, date of birth, wife's name, and the names of Koroh's children (Putra 2017).

This information are important to correct the impression that the collective memory of Koroh is singular and established. On the contrary, this kind of discrepancy in basic data shows that the process of archiving and writing the history of Koroh is incomplete, making it difficult to assert a solid heroic narrative for national recognition. In other words, the memory gap for Koroh is not only a matter of a lack of public attention, but also a problem at the level of production of historical knowledge itself; a dimension that is rarely discussed in the study of collective memory that generally focuses on public representation, rather than on disagreement among historical knowledge producers.

The circulation and preservation of Doko's book

The book History of Doko's struggle found in the trash can was written by the late Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Suara Pembaruan, Aco Manafe, and was published in collaboration with Bank NTT, as can be seen from the bank's logo and the image of the Bank NTT building which is also included in the book(Liza 2014). If read as a single event, the wasted book is easily interpreted as evidence of a lack of attention from the beginning. However, the involvement of Bank NTT as a supporter of the publishing fund actually shows the opposite, that at the point of publication, the Doko historical documentation project received considerable institutional support, even from regional financial institutions that structurally do not have a cultural mandate.

The real gap, therefore, is not in the absence of preservation intentions, but in the severability of the chain of responsibility after the moment of publication itself has passed. Reading through the framework of collective memory that has been defined before, that memory only survives to the extent that it is continuously reproduced through active social practices (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Baden 2016), this case shows that institutional support at the production stage does not in itself result in a sustainable reproduction mechanism. Bank NTT, as the funder, seems to view its responsibility as complete at the point of publication. There is no indication that any party, whether the bank, the local government, or the Doko family, took over responsibility for the circulation and storage of the book afterwards. In other words, the book experienced what can be called the failure of the memory relay, the institution that was able to produce memory artifacts turned out not always to be institutions that were able, or felt obligated, to maintain them in the long term.

Regional historiography and other memory custodians The claim that areas outside Java were marginalized in national historiography, which previously appeared more as a general statement in the initial draft of this article, can now be supported by more concrete discursive evidence. In a seminar at Satya Wacana Christian University

(UKSW), Salatiga, on August 8, 2008, Dr. Daniel Dhakidae explicitly discussed how Indonesian historical writing shifted from a European (Dutch) perspective during the colonial period to a perspective centered on Java after independence, so that the history and local wisdom of Eastern Indonesia did not get an adequate place (Kompas 2008). Dhakidae even pointed out Diponegoro as a national hero to question the connection between the Java War and the colonial context in Eastern Indonesia, which, according to him, was very different, given that NTT was only fully included in the Dutch colonial administration in 1918 (Kompas, 2008). At the same forum, Dr. Marthen Ndoen, Chairman of the Center for Eastern Indonesian Studies UKSW, stated that the opportunity to revive the local history of Eastern Indonesia became available only after the reform era (Kompas 2008).

The testimony at this academic forum provides a stronger argumentative basis than the mere claim that NTT is "less recognized" than Java and Sumatra. Dhakidae's argument shows that this marginalization has structural roots in the periodization of national historiography itself, not only due to administrative negligence.

Additional Memory Register: Forgotten Heroes and Non-State Memory Keepers

This data also exposes two additional memory registers that were not covered in the preceding discussion. First, the case of Riwu Ga, a resident of Sabu Island who was one of President Sukarno's loyal bodyguards for fourteen years and witnessed the reading of the proclamation and the raising of the heritage flag on August 17, 1945, shows a pattern of local heroism in NTT that is completely uninstitutionalized. Riwu Ga chose to become a farmer after completing his duties and never asked for anything in return, an example discussed in a literary journalism forum about the investigation of Peter Rohi on November 10, 2004 (Kompas 2004). This case shows that local heroism in NTT can be completely excluded from any institutional process, official memory, or media memory within the framework of this study, and survives only through oral accounts and independent biographical writings.

Second, figures such as Leopold Nisnoni, heir to the throne of the Kingdom of Kupang, and Soleman Bessie, curator of the NTT Regional Museum, represent the fourth register of memory, which can be called personal custodianism or kinship. Nisnoni independently keeps and maintains archives in the form of books, magazines in Dutch, and historical manuscripts of the kingdoms of Timor in the Bakunase Palace complex, and is writing a book on the history of the Kingdom of Kupang in honor of his father, the last king of Kupang, Alfons Nisnoni (Kompas, n.d.) . Soleman Bessie, on the other hand, devoted almost half of his life to saving the museum's collection from the target of dark collectors (Kompas 2012a). These two figures show that the preservation of collective memory in NTT depends not only on the state apparatus but also on the initiative of individuals who work outside and sometimes voice disappointment without the official recognition structure.

These outcomes enrich the framework of previously proposed memory registers (official-administrative, self-written historiography, media coverage) by adding two other

registers, the completely uninstitutionalized hero and the personal-kinship memory keeper who works independently of the state. The presence of these registers suggests that the marginalization of NTT in national memory is not only a matter of the lack of recognition of well-known figures such as Doko and Koroh, but also includes a deeper layer of local historical figures and guardians whose existence is barely touched by any institutional process.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined how I.H. Doko and H.A. Koroh were remembered, commemorated, and represented in East Nusa Tenggara between 1980 and 2018. The findings demonstrate that collective memory did not develop continuously or uniformly, but changed through different historical moments and institutional processes. During the early 1980s, the publication of Doko's historical writings, particularly Pahlawan-Pahlawan Suku Timor (1981), contributed to the documentation and circulation of regional historical narratives, including the representation of Koroh as a political figure in Timorese history (Doko 1981a). In 2006, Doko's designation as a national hero marked a significant moment in the institutional consolidation of his public memory, reinforced by national newspaper coverage and official recognition (Suara Pembaruan 2006; Kompas 2006a; Kompas 2006b). In contrast, the 2010 initiative to nominate Koroh as a national hero revealed unresolved disagreements over basic biographical information, indicating that his historical documentation remained incomplete (Putra 2017), Subsequent discussions on regional historiography and the preservation of historical collections further demonstrated that the remembrance of local figures in NTT remained dependent on periodic institutional attention and individual initiatives (Kompas 2008; Kompas 2012a).

Doko’s memory became more institutionally consolidated through official awards, public naming, historical writing, and his designation as a national hero in 2006. Yet the reported disposal of copies of a book about his struggle raises questions about whether symbolic recognition was matched by sustained preservation and circulation. Koroh’s case appears more fragmented: although he was commemorated locally, the 2010 discussion of a national-hero proposal reportedly exposed unresolved disagreements over basic biographical information. This suggests that marginalization may result not only from limited public attention but also from weaknesses in the production, verification, and preservation of historical knowledge.

The contextual cases of Riwu Ga, Leopold Nisnoni, and Soleman Bessie further indicate that some regional memories survive through oral accounts and the efforts of individual custodians outside formal state structures. The article therefore proposes three priorities for strengthening regional historical memory: establish and cross-check reliable biographical documentation; assign clear and continuing responsibility for preserving and circulating historical publications and archives; and connect local custodians with durable institutional support. These are implications drawn from the cases discussed, rather than interventions evaluated by this study.

The study is limited by its reliance on documentary and media sources. It does not include systematic interviews, oral-history collection, an analysis of school curricula, or direct measurement of public awareness. It therefore cannot determine what younger generations in NTT know or think about Doko and Koroh. Future research should combine archival work with oral histories, interviews with custodians and educators, and analysis of educational materials to examine how regional historical memory is transmitted and contested today.

AI Declaration

I hereby declare that this manuscript is entirely based on my own research, ideas, arguments, analysis, interpretations, and academic work. Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were used only minimally to make minor language and grammatical adjustments to a few translated passages to improve their linguistic accuracy and readability. The AI assistance was strictly limited to these minor translation-related corrections. It was not used to generate, develop, or formulate any research ideas, arguments, analyses, interpretations, findings, or conclusions. The intellectual content and academic contributions of this manuscript remain entirely my own. I have reviewed the suggested language corrections and take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the entire manuscript. This declaration is made truthfully in accordance with the principles of academic integrity and responsible research practice.

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