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Redefining precarity through knowledge production

The experience of the Indonesian 1965 exiles

Rika Theo & Maggi W.H. Leung

Kuslan Budiman (1935–2018) was an Indonesian theatre artist and writer who studied theatrical stage design in China and spent more than half his life living in exile. In 2018, he passed away at a hospice in the Netherlands, the last country he resided in after decades of living precariously as a stateless man in China and Russia. Because he was an office-bearer of a left-leaning organization, namely *Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat* (Lekra; Institute of People's Culture),¹ Kuslan's citizenship was revoked by Indonesia's anti-communist New Order government in 1966, and like many of his compatriots, he could not return home. Kuslan lived alone for 27 years in the Dutch city of Woerden, but his last days at the hospice were filled with visitors, mostly his exiled friends as well as Indonesian activists, scholars, and students. These were the people with whom Kuslan engaged as he continued his activism while living in exile. "Eksil² should realistically engage with the movement," he once said (K. Budiman, personal communication, February 11, 2017). The movement he was referring to was engaged in a long-term struggle to reveal injustice and violence in 1965, which is still presented ambiguously in Indonesian official history. As a survivor of this injustice, Kuslan wrote about his experiences in various articles and poems published in Indonesia and the Netherlands. Although he did not work formally as an academic, he was actively involved in scholarly and public discussions both offline and online, occasionally hosted Indonesian students, activists, and journalists at his home, and he was a

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- 1 A literary, art, and social organization associated with the Communist Party of Indonesia.
 - 2 The Indonesian term for people living in exile, especially referring to those exiled as a result of the 1965 communist extermination.

member of the art community group in his Woerden neighborhood. As such, we consider him an “academic intellectual in exile.”

Kuslan was one of the many Indonesian intellectuals in exile who, despite the hardship of living in precarity, stayed connected to their “home” – Indonesia – and the diaspora through sharing their thoughts and exilic experiences. He was one of the many hundreds of students, party cadres, and people with potential intellectual talents who were sent abroad to study by the Sukarno government in the 1960s as a part of a nationalistic state project and growing cooperation with socialist countries. There is no official record of the precise numbers of these exiles, but according to Lebang (2010), in the 1960s, there were 2,000 Indonesian students, the largest international student body, in the USSR. Others offered a rough estimate of 700–800 students overall (Hill, 2014). The figures given by five respondents in this research varied from 60 to 100 Indonesian students in China alone. In addition, small numbers of students were sent to several socialist countries in Eastern Europe.

Among the gradually increasing amount of research on Indonesian exiles in the last decade, several studies explored how the Indonesian 1965 exiles reclaimed their agency while living in exile. Chambert-Loir (2016) and Setiawan (2010) analyzed *sastra eksil* (the exile literature), namely, the Indonesian 1965 exiles’ collection of extensive writings on exile identity and experiences, their particular knowledge, and their multiple stances on the home country. Further, Nadzir (2018) examined the practices of agency in exiles’ interconnected offline and online activism. Gurning (2011) investigated the exiles from the gender perspective, while Hearman (2010) studied these exiles in Cuba, Hill (2014) focused on them in the Soviet Union, and Mudzakkir (2015) concerned himself with those in the Netherlands. Much of the research highlights the exiles’ active participation in long-distance nationalism.

Our chapter builds on this body of work. We examine how these scholars in exile navigated their lives that were diverted from privilege to precarity; map out their impact on knowledge transfer, exchange, and production even without an academic appointment; and analyze their lifelong efforts to share and connect with generations of Indonesian students and scholars as well as with non-Indonesians and others outside academic circles who crossed their paths. These scholars in exile have passed on to the younger cohorts “lost” collective memory, namely, an alternative narrative of Indonesian politics, history, and society that has hardly ever been mentioned in the official history of Indonesia, either during the authoritarian regime or after it.

This chapter draws on broader research on academic mobility between Indonesia and China over the past decades. Here, we draw on our data from fieldwork conducted in Indonesia, China, the Netherlands, and Sweden from 2016–2017. The first author (Rika, Indonesian) collected biographical narratives from five academics in exile³ (four males and one female in their seventies or eighties at the time of interview). All of them had studied in China in the 1960s. The interviews were conducted in different cities and usually lasted more than three hours. In Sweden, Rika stayed with one of the interviewees, followed him as he went about his daily activities, and attended a meeting with him and other exiles. We also consulted literature on and biographies of the exiles to supplement the interviews. In 2017, a semi-structured focus group interview was conducted with eight current Indonesian students in the Netherlands who had come into contact with the elder scholars in exile.

In the following, we present the life stories of our interviewees and reflect on their impact on knowledge transfer, exchange, and production. We show how these scholars in exile have lived with different forms of precarity and redefine them in creative and resilient ways. Our findings highlight the temporally and spatially unbound nature of knowledge mobilities and production. Finally, we conclude with the implications of our research in respect to reconceptualizing the core notions we are dealing with in this book, namely, academics, knowledge, and exile.

The ruptured lifepaths and precarity of Indonesian exiles

The majority of the Indonesian scholars in exile were taken by surprise when they ended up in exile during their studies abroad. As *mahid* (the abbreviation of *mahasiswa ikatan dinas*, which means “students with a government bond scholarship”), they were put on a prescribed path to gain new knowledge abroad and then return to Indonesia and use that knowledge to help develop their country. These privileged future elites were instructed to study seriously, which also meant not marrying local people (Sipayung, 2011), as marriage might have prevented their return. This promising path suddenly ruptured

3 Sarmadji, Kuslan Budiman, Tom Iljas, Melanie, and Arkan were interviewed separately. This chapter uses the real name only for Sarmadji, Kuslan Budiman, and Tom Iljas, who have openly published their identity and activities in the media.

in 1965 when the “September 30 Movement”, a secretive group of left-wing military officers kidnapped and killed several right-wing army generals (Eickhoff et al., 2017). This failed coup was blamed on the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI; Communist Party of Indonesia). Resulting from this, anti-communist mass violence, backed by the army, conducted in various forms took place (Robinson, 2017). About half a million Indonesians were killed and another million were imprisoned without trial. This destroyed the social base of Sukarno’s presidency (Eickhoff et al., 2017). At the height of the Cold War, the Indonesian army under General Suharto seized power and established the New Order regime. The army’s power under Suharto extended to Indonesia’s embassies: Indonesian students⁴ in China and other socialist countries were summoned to their local embassy and asked to sign a letter denouncing the previous government and submitting to the new one (see Hill, 2020 for the latest detailed research on the dilemma faced by the Indonesian exiles in China). Refusing to sign the letter meant they would have their citizenship revoked and thus be made stateless.

More than half of the Indonesian students in China chose not to return home, but then had to decide whether to stay in China with the support of their hosts or seek ways to move to other countries (Hill, 2020, p. 346). Either way, they were transformed from somebodies into nobodies. The upward social mobility promised to them became instead a trajectory of downward mobility. These students were forced into displacement from their home country, from the student mobility and academic achievements they had aspired to, and from their friends, families, and previous lives. They commonly experienced a feeling of defeat, loss, bitterness, resentment, and frustration due to a sudden disconnection from the personal and political projects they had built (Cornejo, 2008).

For the *mahid*, who were often dubbed Sukarno’s students (Dragojlovic, 2012), and PKI cadres, returning home was not an option due to their ideals and fears. Stories about the slaughter and imprisonment of leftist and PKI sympathizers at home increased their fears and uncertainty. Many students could not return home and entered a precarious phase in regard to their movement from one country to another. Some managed to escape with the

4 In addition to the students, others were stranded abroad following the 1965 putsch, for instance the 500 Indonesian cultural delegates who were in Beijing to attend the anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party (Hill, 2010).

help of friends, family, fellow exiles, and activists, but continued living in uncertainty.

Melanie, the daughter of a 1965 political prisoner who studied medicine in China, parted from her husband, Arkan, during the difficult situation in 1965. Arkan, an Indonesian student from West Sumatra, whom she had married while they were studying in China, went to Hong Kong to work. After losing touch with him, she decided to leave China and finally arrived in the Netherlands with the help of an old friend of her father. She recounted this to us:

First, I went to Germany using my Indonesian passport. At that time, Indonesians were able to live in Germany without a visa for three months. I was worried about my passport, but fortunately, I was safe. Then, a Jewish lawyer in Belgium, my father's friend, said he was willing to sponsor me. He was the one who helped me with my invalid passport to get a Benelux residence permit. (Melanie, personal communication, December 1, 2016)

Staying for a while in one or more countries before eventually settling down was the norm for most of the exiles. Some traveled to Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, or Myanmar to try to find a way to get home, but could not find one. Others went to the socialist countries that suited their ideology or to European countries that accepted political refugees.

However, they were not simply free to decide to leave or stay somewhere. In addition to needing an opportunity and the resources to enable them to move to a new place, they also had to change the route they took due to political changes in the place they thought would be their safe haven.

Kuslan experienced a series of unexpected changes along with the changing of places and situations. In the early 1970s, he was among those who were finally given a ticket to leave Beijing by the Chinese government:

I intended to go to the West, to Germany, but I stopped off in Moscow. I had a place to stay in Germany, but I did not know what I would do. I did not have much money, only 50 dollars. I could not exchange my money in China as I had defied the Delegation.⁵ Someone even said I was a traitor for wanting

5 Indonesians related to the PKI's network in Beijing and Moscow did not wait passively. In February 1966, the Delegation of the Central Committee of the PKI was established in Beijing. It claimed to be the authoritative representative of the party and called all Indonesian leftists who were stranded abroad to go to China. Those in Moscow also founded the Foreign Committee of PKI with the support of the Soviet Communist Party (Chambert-Loir, 2016). This division was rooted in the further separation of Communist

to leave. In Moscow, my friend assured me that I would be better off staying. I was able to continue my studies even though I was already 37 years old at the time.

Kuslan became quite a prominent painter in Moscow. However, he left everything behind again when the Soviet Union ceased to exist in 1991. He arrived in the Netherlands and lived on benefits from the Dutch government.⁶ Like Kuslan, many of the exiles, most of whom were born in the 1930s or 1940s, were middle-aged or older when they finally settled down. Age became one of the obstacles to finding jobs, especially those that called for academic qualifications. As they moved around without concrete ideas about their future, they had to take any opportunities that came along and improvise to make the best of things. In many cases, their previous skills and knowledge were not appreciated due to the limitations associated with the status of political refugees or migrants in general. Most of them ended up doing blue-collar, low-wage jobs, although some were able, after much effort, to further their careers in other areas of work.

For instance, Tom, who had an agricultural engineering degree from China, arrived in Sweden with his wife and children after spending three years in exile in Romania. Tom went to a Swedish automotive company to apply for a job. At the HR department, he was not asked about his previous education and skills, and was given a job as a factory worker whose main task was to turn screws.

It was mechanical work, which I did easily and quickly. As I often helped other divisions, I drew attention, and then they gave me further training and promoted me to supervise the production division. During the training, I happened to correct a mistake by the trainer. The trainer was amazed and asked me how I knew it. He said that I should not have been in that class, as it was only for those who did not finish high school. He reported me to my supervisor who then asked me about my previous education. I just knew that there were two kinds of HR for a job interview. I was brought to the HR for manual work because of my appearance. Even though at that time I wore

China and Soviet Russia, with the PKI in its final years inclining towards China. This was one of the polarizations that happened among the exiled scholars.

6 The exiles who were born prior to Indonesia's independence in 1945 can be considered by the Netherlands as citizens of the Dutch East Indies (the Netherlands colonial state).

a suit, I still had black hair. (T. Iljas, personal communication, September 18, 2016)

Although Tom might have lost his initial chance to get a job in line with his skills due to the different treatment given to migrants, his skills and knowledge eventually enabled him to get a better job. He then became a trainer for the other production workers and, after 10 years, was promoted to head of a logistics department.

Difficulty finding a suitable job is a common story among exiles. As mentioned by the interviewees, age was a crucial factor. For example, Sarmadji was 45 when he arrived in the Netherlands in 1976. He had studied child pedagogy in Beijing, and during the precarious days in China after 1965, he was active in the production of *Suara Rakyat Indonesia* (*The Voice of Indonesian People*), a student news bulletin about Indonesia and the leftist movement in the years following the events of 1965. As he initially did not read or speak Dutch, he was given a job as a glasscutter laborer, without being asked about his education or training. He learned Dutch by memorizing words while working and was helped by three co-workers, Dutch ex-soldiers who had served in Indonesia.

In addition to age, we found that another obstacle to finding suitable jobs was the exiles' academic degrees: they were issued in socialist countries and generally not recognized in Western Europe. Few exiles found work in their field of study. However, a small number eventually worked their way up to become prominent academics in their host country. But even for those who had adjusted well, the process of doing so was full of uncertainty and difficulty. They often had to hold down several precarious jobs, experience downward socioeconomic mobility, and reeducate themselves before they managed to get a decent job.

Precarity in an economic or material sense leads to precarity in other realms of life, for instance, in building personal relationships. For some, the insecurity of life, the uncertainty about the future, and the lack of a fixed place to settle down imposed constraints on their personal and family lives. Sarmadji reflected on his particular situation:

I am married to books [laughs]. Well, I am not a homosexual. I am a straight man who likes women. The situation was just impossible for me to have a family. And here the culture is different and for me, it is difficult, and more, with the kind of job and hobby I have. (Sarmadji, personal communication, April 20, 2016)

Nevertheless, Sarmadji tried to build a life that was optimistic, as reflected by his chosen pseudonym. It is common for Indonesian exiles to have other names, and Sarmadji chose the name Wardjo – an abbreviation of the Javanese words *waras* (sane) and *bedjo* (lucky). Wardjo is the reflection, hope, and reminder of his life.

Many exiles were also deprived of other relationships, but particularly painful for many was being cut off from their home country. During the 32 years of the Suharto regime, the exiles had almost no contact with the Indonesian state or its embassies. The state-imposed communist label and their stateless condition were used to legitimize the othering treatment by the state. The fervent desire among many of them to return home was difficult or impossible to fulfill until the 1980s. Not only was it very complicated for them to get a visa, but there was also a safety concern with regard to them and their families because the suspicion and stigma of being communists (and therefore being atheists and traitors to the nation) were still very strong. We heard stories of several exiles who were refused entry to Indonesia as well as stories of people who did manage to return. Tom recalled that he was among the first of the exiles to visit Indonesia because he had a relative in the military who guaranteed his safety (T. Iljas, personal communication, September 18, 2016).

This situation improved in the post-Suharto period. In 1999, the Indonesian president, Abdurrahman Wahid, personally apologized for the 1965 tragedy and publicly declared his desire to revoke the parliamentary decree banning the PKI and Marxism/Leninism in Indonesia. The parliament rejected his proposal and since then no other president has attempted to get the decree revoked (Chambert-Loir, 2016). Wahid also invited the exiles – whom he called “the wanderers” – to return. The Indonesian Minister of Justice was sent to the Netherlands to discuss matters with the exiles, including the possibility of reinstating their citizenship. At first, it was appreciated as a good initiative and created much expectation among the exiles, but then there were some critical reactions as they felt they had been positioned as guilty illegal migrants (Mudzakkir, 2015). Many exiles viewed the offer to return as mere rhetoric because the government ignored the core of the problem by not officially admitting the unjust policy and not proposing to rehabilitate the exiles. These core issues were not handled either by any follow-up from the minister or further discussion about exiles by any subsequent Indonesian president.

The exiles continue to this day to wait for their endeavors to bear fruit. For many, however, the wait persisted till they passed away while in exile. Even though the exiles are now free to visit Indonesia, they continue to be cautious. Tom, for instance, was deported by the Indonesian government when he visited his hometown in Sumatra in 2016. He was about to visit the mass grave of 1965 victims, among whom was his father, when he was arrested by the local police. Tom's story reveals that the anti-communist sentiment is still alive and that therefore the exiles may have to wait much longer to be rehabilitated. To return or not to return is not the only question, as their precarity extends to the uncertainty regarding when the state might publicly and officially affirm their innocence and guarantee their security if they return.

Redefining precarity by telling and sharing “lost” memories

Edward Said (2002) described being an exile as one of the saddest fates, continuously living in a marginal and anomalous life, with the stigma of being an outsider. An exile's life is precarious, as it is subject to instability and endangerment (George, 2016). The sudden turn of our interviewees' lives into uncertainty, vulnerability, insecurity, and disconnectedness is in stark contrast to their previously well-planned and privileged lifepaths. Not only do exiled scholars carry psychological baggage – a sense of defeat or guilt for having left dead, jailed, or disappeared comrades behind – they have also seen their dreams destroyed, families torn apart, careers ruined, and personal space restricted as they were forcefully displaced from their homes (Wright & Oñate Zúñiga, 2007).

Political precarity breeds further precarity within the lives and the existence of the exiles. They live in a new home but are haunted by questions, disappointment, and curiosity about their old home. Living in half involvement and half detachment, they exist in a median state (Said, 2002). The scholars in exile are displaced from their country of origin, but for the rest of their lives, they are unable to detach their minds and also to some extent their activities from that country. This ongoing connection with the place of origin is the crux of exiles (Roniger, 2017). Yet, this burden is often their source of creativity in engaging with precarity during their exilic journey. Since they cannot follow a prescribed path, what they do as intellectuals has to be invented (Said, 2002).

Various opportunities to engage with precarity present themselves during the exilic journey. Variation in place and time also contributes to the different kinds of responses to their precarity, and thus we need to realize that there is no singular exilic condition and experience. In several cases, exiles could be muted, passive, and politically immobile (e.g., see Hsiau, 2010 on post-war Chinese intellectuals in Taiwan). In other cases, they could remain agents of their own destiny and reclaim revoked national identity and citizenship, given that living in exile provides them with the opportunity to change statuses, upgrade skills, discover strengths, and develop new relationships (Roniger, 2017). This is what Roniger called the expanding effects of exile, the opposites of the constraining effects of exile. For example, Chinese intellectuals with the status of political exile in Western countries could obtain access to foreign knowledge, expand contacts with foreign governments and human rights organizations, and generate international publicity (Ma, 1993).

The five scholars in exile discussed in this chapter were disconnected from their home country. Yet, they chose not to detach themselves from it. After being displaced, they had to start over again many times and build new connections in these unfamiliar places where they may also have felt disconnected. We observed in this research that precarity among the exiles arises not only from the uncertainties in livelihood, but also from their identity and endeavors as exiles. Our conversations made it clear that they also perpetually experience precarity in their actual or desired connections while being disconnected from their homeland. While not agreeing with or despising the state regime, they realize that they can do little to directly change it. They live in tension between the yearning to connect and return (in some ways), on the one hand, and hesitation and attempting to detach, on the other hand. The feeling of connection in disconnection has become the basis for their engagement with precarity.

Sarmadji has found meanings in precarity and used it for knowledge creation work. He has focused on his passion for books and the silenced Indonesian history. In his small, state-subsidized apartment, he has built a library that is regarded as a complete library on Indonesian 1965 history. He is surrounded by thousands of books and is often visited by Indonesian students and researchers. He admits that it is also all he can do to continue to struggle for Indonesia as an exile.

Sarmadji's library symbolically reflects his ongoing connection to Indonesia despite his other life in the Netherlands. Although the majority of his books are on 1965 and left-wing ideology, he also collects books and

material on other significant events in post-1965 Indonesia. For instance, he offered the first author of this paper documents on the rape of Chinese-Indonesian women around 1998 during the mass riots in Jakarta. Furthermore, collecting the books and opening his library connect him to the other exiles and leftist activists, as well as to current Indonesian students and researchers.

Like many of the exiles, he joined the exile community and frequently participated in discussions related to Indonesia's present situation or history and the exiles themselves. In addition to collecting books, he carefully filed the names and mementos of his exile friends who had passed away. For the aging exiles, a funeral is not only an opportunity to let go of and mourn their comrades but also a meeting place for the Indonesian exile diaspora in Europe. Basuki Resobowo – an exile and prominent painter – once painted a picture of a funeral that included a sign saying *Perkumpulan Kematian Indonesia* (Indonesia Association of Death) (Setiawan, 2010), an ironic abbreviation of PKI and an obvious depiction of the exiles' condition.

The scholar-exiles have suffered increasing uncertainty and vulnerability throughout their post-1965 journeys, and the sudden change from student to exile changed what at first was regarded as political precarity into the precarity of their “overall existence” (Casas-Cortés, 2014). However, the precarity of the exiles is not limited to their uncertainty about life direction and their constrained work conditions: it is also about their existence and endeavors as exiles, their forever connection in disconnection with the homeland, the state regime that they despise but can do next to nothing to change, and in being trapped between the yearning and hesitancy to detach.

Through different activities, scholar-exiles live with and, one may say, make use of their precarity to achieve their activist goals. Many of them are involved in the exiles' solidarity collectives. Several social groups, organizations, study groups, and foundations have been set up by the exiles to connect with each other. The groups are diverse in nature; some are simple social groups based on geographical location, while others are used to mobilize their social and political agency. Many exiles joined or established socio-politico-human rights organizations, such as Tapol – which campaigns for the rights of 1965 ex-prisoners in Indonesia – and LPK65 or the 1965 Victim Defender Institution.

In addition, each exile has their personal way of creatively dealing with pain and precarity. Melanie started a free medical practice for undocumented Indonesian workers in the Netherlands. Tom became an advisor to a leftist

youth political party in Indonesia while frequently hosting Indonesian students at his home in Sweden and receiving personal visits from Indonesian activists/scholars. Kuslan wrote poems and essays, engaged in scholarly and public discussions both offline and online, occasionally hosted Indonesian students, and once joined the art community group in his neighborhood in Woerden.

The exiles also tried to turn their absence into a presence by connecting with the Indonesians at home. Since the early 2000s, the Internet has provided a useful platform for some exiles to share their ideas and knowledge via mailing lists and blogs.

These active engagements have gained more exposure and have intensified since the fall of the Suharto regime. Many more scholars in exile express what they think and feel, telling their life stories, channeling their psychological baggage, and writing about their sense of loss due to being exiles. The topics and forms of their writings, which are mostly in Indonesian, are diverse, ranging from poems to memoirs, from political opinions to love stories, and from historical accounts to contemporary commentaries. In these conscious efforts to reconnect themselves to the home country through their writings, they produce and share alternative knowledge derived from their ideas, knowledge, and experiences as scholars in exile.

Chambert-Loir (2016) listed all the works of the *eksil* people in *sastra eksil* (literature of the exiles), referring to it specifically as “the writings of Indonesian authors constrained to live in foreign countries for political reasons after the putsch of September 30, 1965” (p. 119). He compiled a list of 133 volumes, namely, 37 collections of essays, 30 books of poetry, 3 plays, 6 collections of short stories, 15 novels, and 42 autobiographies. The numbers are astounding compared with the 25 memoirs written by the group of 1965 political prisoners imprisoned on Buru Island, who were politically exiled inside the country until the end of the 1970s. It shows that Indonesia lost a large number of potential intellectuals as a result of 1965 politics (Chambert-Loir, 2016).

The precarity and the different responses of each exile are shown in *sastra eksil*. Their ambiguity and in-betweenness are also depicted. Their longing for and fascination with the home country are expressed, as are the pain and failure of being political exiles, which led to resentment and bitterness toward the regimes. They are caught between the nostalgic remembrance of friends, family, and past relationships, and the sense of alienation and fear

for relatives, of sufferings and disappointments, on the one hand, and hope and the energy to vocalize their existence, on the other.

Through these written works, specifically the life narratives, the exiles have materialized their personal engagement with precarity – which Chambert-Loir (2016) rightfully referred to as “a rationale in lives shattered by the events of 1965–1966 and that consequently went through rare turbulence independently of the individuals’ control.” The narratives, he argued, are stories of repeated failures but contain the moral stories that “life goes on, and for some, the struggle goes on too” (p. 216).

Dragojlovic (2012) argued that the exiles’ insistence on failure is not only intended to provide knowledge about themselves and the Indonesian left, but also to incite a discourse on the possibility of repeating the potential loss of the past in the future. By incorporating their narratives into mainstream narratives, they actively rework the absence, turning it into an active presence and initiating a dialogue between past and present. The narratives of the 1965 exiles have never been given a place in the official history book or in the state archives. Their experiences, knowledge, and ideas became “the imagined” history less known by many Indonesians, at least not until the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998. Their initiative to share their narratives is an effort to fill the gaps in Indonesian history about the 1965 period.

Yet, to realize those purposes, their narratives must reach the desired audiences, namely, the broader Indonesian people and especially the post-1965 generations. The difficulty in communicating to the desired audiences may cause the narratives to become more abstract and hollower to those in their home country (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1987). Moreover, with the continuing state censorship of “communism-related” books, their writings are not widely distributed in Indonesia.

Intersecting student mobility trajectories across time and space

The exiled Indonesian scholars have other ways of communicating their narratives. Informal and formal group discussions, personal meetings, scholarly discussions, and other activities with Indonesian students are frequently organized by several exiles in Europe. Through direct interactions with the young generations of Indonesian international students, elder scholars in exile disseminate their alternative, suppressed, and silenced version of Indonesian history. They do so because they feel obliged to fill the

students' knowledge gap. Today's Indonesian students are a generation whose memories and knowledge of 1965 are dominated by the national/political narratives of Indonesia's New Order regime. Hirsch (2008) used the term "post-memory" to describe the intergenerational and transgenerational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience that has such a deep effect that it feels as though it is the person's own memory. The Indonesian post-1965 generation resembles the post-memory generation, but their 1965 memory is instead filled with and shaped by the trauma and fear narratives of communism planted by the state regime.

The connection between the current students and the exiles is a result of the latter's mobility trajectory coincidentally crossing the mobility trajectory of the students who study near where the exiles live. The two generations come into contact in various ways, ranging from group activities, discussions, and informal meetings to personal contacts. In the Netherlands, in particular, where most of the 1965 exiles live and many young Indonesians study, there has been much interaction between the exiles and today's Indonesian students.

The connection between the exiles and the students is a process of getting to know each other and interacting. Tria, who completed a master's degree in development studies, recalled the live interaction she experienced during her first meeting with exiles. She was amazed by the stories shared by seven of them, but she was also made to reflect on her own motive and stance when they asked about her interest in the 1965 issue. The exiles generally ask questions about interest and purpose when they first meet the younger generations. It is an automatic curiosity, as the exiles know that they are depicted as communists in the historical narratives of the New Order regime. It also shows how careful and reserved they are before opening up to others. The detailed questions do, however, provide a clue as to how the young students recognize the exiles' trauma and precarity. As explained by Tori, a postgraduate student who regularly interacted with the exiles when he was studying in Leiden:

They usually asked: Who are you? Why do you want to know? What are you studying here? It took me some years to get to know them personally. I knew that, for example, Mr. Wardjo was afraid of meeting any Indonesians during his first years here. Fear of being persecuted still haunts them, and so those investigative questions are quite understandable.

As a leftist activist, prior to his study, Tori had heard about 1965 and the exiles. Even so, the direct interaction with the exiles gave him a greater understanding and more knowledge of his country's history. Having listened to their stories and observed their responses and reactions to various subjects, he was able to summarize the situation as follows:

Exiles are often not regarded as victims because they live abroad. I came across many issues that I had never imagined. They experienced such trauma that they are often paranoid, suspicious, and closed. Although they might tell stories about 1965 to students they don't know personally, they would not make any mention of themselves when doing so. . . . There are many aspects of the 1965 tragedy that we have to bear in mind. For me, the exiles are like a bridge to the past . . . a continuity between the present and the past.

The exiles' historical account of what happened in 1965 is just one way the young students learn about the exiles' precarious and traumatic experience caused by 1965 politics. For students who know very little about the exiles, listening to their stories is fascinating and causes them to reflect on their own situation as students. Tria admitted that she had a mix of contrasting emotions when meeting the exiles:

I was ashamed because, as a member of a younger generation, I was less eager to follow the social and political development of the country than the grandpas and grandmas that have been living in the foreign country for decades. Many of us, the younger generation, have not yet spent even one year in a foreign country, but we are already out of touch with the social and political changes back home. But I also feel proud to have the opportunity to get to know them more closely, to listen to their travel stories.

The similarity of their position as Indonesians studying abroad also prompted empathic reflection. Bima, who did conflict studies in The Hague, reflected on his interaction with the exiles from his positionality as a student:

The thing that affects me the most is that the exiles were students sent and prepared as agents of development in the Sukarno era, and how the dispute in Indonesia impacted the students abroad. As an international student, I could be in the same situation and face the same consequences as them, being an exile, if there is a fundamental change in Indonesia.

Another example of their reflection is based on racial positionality, as experienced by Tania, who works as a gender activist and is doing a master's

degree in gender studies in The Hague. She talked about the things she had learned from her personal visits to Melanie, a 1965 exiled student of Chinese descent:

I felt I had been fooled by the Suharto regime. I learned and was enlightened. I learned about the impact of 1965 on the Chinese-Indonesians. Also, the Chinese-Indonesian exiles' stories convinced me that the Chinese-Indonesians are also fighters and Indonesians.

As Tania realized, Melania's story of experiencing exile helped her learn about a fascinating nationalist struggle that she had not expected to learn about Chinese-Indonesians. This is in contrast to the dominant narratives inherited from the New Order regime, which frames Chinese-Indonesians as economic subjects whose loyalty to Indonesia is in question.

The nationalism of the exiles is a prominent aspect that was often mentioned by current students. Most of them admire the exiles' sense of belonging and their bond with Indonesia, even after displacement by the political regime. This is demonstrated not only by the stories shared by the exiles, but also by their actions and engagement in Indonesian issues. Soraya, who studied law and now works as a migrant worker activist, explained the experiences as follows:

I was involved with the exiles in fighting for the rights of Indonesian migrant workers. The exiles gave their support by providing a place for the meeting, participating in raising the issues of migrant workers et cetera. The exiles are the inspiration for continuing to fight for justice.

The exiles' views on Indonesia are critical in many ways. In addition to their subscribed ideology, their precarious experiences, series of disappointments, and unfulfilled expectations also contribute to their views. Furthermore, there is a spatial and temporal distance in viewing Indonesia. Despite following the country's development closely, the Indonesia they knew has changed dramatically and they are not as familiar with it as in the past. For some students, the spatial and temporal distance creates obvious differences in their views on Indonesia. As Bima put it, "The Indonesia the exiles lived in is a different Indonesia in time and locality."

The interaction with the exiles also creates an understanding that the memory of 1965 is viewed differently even among the victims. The young students learn that the exiled scholars are not a homogenous group and have different views. The differences that divide them are not limited to how they

view socialist and communist ideology, but include their diverse opinions about the role of the PKI delegation in handling its members (including students abroad) during the political crisis in Indonesia. Furthermore, there are also exiled scholars who do not wish to be associated with particular, dichotomous opinion groups such as pro- or contra-Sukarno, pro- or contra-delegation, etc. Tori normalized the division of exiles as just “various kinds of socialists.” Interaction with various kinds of exiles made him realize that they cannot be categorized simply as communist or leftist, but that they consist of various groups that are often in conflict. These encounters also help younger generations realize that the exiles are far from a harmonious single entity. The recognition of such diversity is important in unsettling the common and unquestioned perspective on 1965, which represents the victims as homogenous.

In sum, the new generation of students learn new memories and new knowledge when their path intersects that of the exiles. The memories and knowledge are not directly internalized but are processed through their own backgrounds, positionalities, and reflexivities. Many view the exiles’ precarity as a painful result of the 1965 tragedy, but it also encourages them to fight for and empathize with this marginalized group. However, some are still affected by the trauma narrative that lingers along with the fear of communism in the country.

Conclusion

The lived experiences of the exiled scholars in this chapter illustrate the uncertainty and vulnerability created by their sudden transformation in the 1960s from privileged students into precarious exiles. Although not all exiled scholars engage by being politically active, reaching out to students and revealing their life stories and opinions on issues in modern Indonesia are also acts of political stance and defiance. In doing so, they counter the single national narrative that is hegemonic in the minds of today’s Indonesian youth. This shows the expanding effect of the exiles (Roniger, 2016) that is driven by their precarity.

It is also important to note that this highlights the intersecting of student mobility trajectories. How the trajectories of today’s students cross those of the exiles and have an impact on the former’s trajectories illustrates the temporal dynamics of student mobility. This temporal stretch expands

the tendency to view the mobility trajectory as a single temporality of an individual. Beyond the exilic context and within the broader international student mobility discussion, the overlapping student trajectories underline the possibility of the cross-generational impact of exilic mobility.

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