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## Locked Out: Literature of the Indonesian Exiles Post-1965<sup>2</sup>

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### **Borderlines**

There are many kinds of exile. People can be exiled or exile themselves. Abroad or in their own country. As a result mainly of political or economic causes, but for many different reasons too. One can even exile oneself metaphorically from one's family, one's milieu or one's own self. The word covers all kinds of diasporas, migrations, expatriations, alienations.

What has however been coined Indonesian "exile literature" (*sastra eksil*) refers specifically to the writings of Indonesian authors constrained to live in foreign countries for political reasons after the putsch<sup>3</sup> of September 30, 1965. During the night of the 30<sup>th</sup> of September (actually the early morning of the 1<sup>st</sup> of October), six senior Army generals and one lieutenant were abducted and killed by an army team that proclaimed a revolution, but it was so badly organised that it was overpowered in one day. Under the command

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3. The so-called "movement of the 30<sup>th</sup> of September" (Gerakan 30 September, abbreviated as G30S), albeit 'revolutionary', was not a coup, as its aim was not to topple the government but to protect it against a coup supposed to be in the making. The word "putsch" sometimes refers to military actions aimed at imposing a will on the government rather than toppling it. Moreover, the G30S "movement" was referred to as a "putsch" by President Soekarno himself on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October.

of General Soeharto, who was about to seize power and become president for the following 32 years, more than half a million people were slaughtered, about one and a half million were arrested, hundreds of thousands were jailed and tortured, about 12,000 were sent to a labour camp on Buru Island in the Moluccas, and hundreds were stranded in foreign countries. The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI, Partai Komunis Indonesia) was banned, together with the teaching or dissemination of Marxism-Leninism, while any kind of relationship with communism or with “leftist” thinking became a reason for being jailed or sent to a prison camp.

Among the various victims of those tragic events, the “exiles” are the ones who happened to be in foreign countries at the time of the putsch and were condemned to remain abroad for decades. Therefore, ex-prisoners who chose to live abroad after their release, like Sitor Situmorang, Siauw Giok Tjhan and Hersri Setiawan, who spent many years in the Netherlands by their own choice after years in jail or in Buru, are not part of the “exiles” from the point of view of *sastra eksil*<sup>4</sup>.

This definition of *sastra eksil* is arbitrary. Other definitions could be considered, e.g. to regard as one literary category the works of both the authors exiled abroad and those “exiled” to Buru Island, or to broaden the definition to include exiles from the past, inside or outside the Indonesian archipelago, like for instance Prince Diponegoro in Sulawesi and Tan Malaka in the Netherlands. The present definition, however, is perfectly appropriate because the literary production so defined does represent a particular chapter of Indonesian literature, which differs from various other anterior or contemporary “exilic” works and also differs from the literature produced by ex-political prisoners, who are designated as “*tapol*” (an abbreviation of “*tahanan politik*”). This exile literature (*sastra eksil*) is not supposed to be a literary genre. This article will show that indeed it is not a genre, but rather a collection of works (more than a hundred) that share several characteristics precisely due to the condition of their authors as exiles.

### The Fracture

Almost all of these authors, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September or immediately after, were in socialist countries, mainly in China and the USSR, but some in Albania, Vietnam, Cuba, Rumania, and others. They were prevented from going back home, either because their passports were automatically invalidated by the local Indonesian embassy or because they chose not to go back, knowing that they would certainly be jailed, tortured or even murdered. Most were members of the PKI or mass organisations close to it. Some “nationalists” or ‘Soekarnoists’ had

4. It may be useful to note that Hersri Setiawan agrees with this definition. About himself he writes: “as a non exile” (“*sebagai bukan seorang eksil*,” in Setiawan, “Some Thoughts on Indonesian Exilic Literature”).

no link with it but were labelled 'leftist' all the same. The PKI was extremely powerful in Indonesia at that time (it claimed to have 3,5 million members and 23,5 million sympathisers) and highly regarded abroad: as numerically the third communist party in the world, it was courted by the two great socialist countries, the USSR and China. Moreover, President Soekarno's foreign policy favoured cooperation with socialist countries. As a consequence, on the eve of the putsch, there were more than 2,000 Indonesians in the USSR, half students and half military personnel in training.<sup>5</sup> Several hundred of them didn't go home. Residents in China were fewer, but about 500 Indonesians happened to be in Beijing, in anticipation of the celebration of the sixteenth anniversary of the People's Republic, on the 1st of October 1965.

The number of people who were, in the course of 1966, deprived of their nationality in that way and reduced to the status of political refugees is around 500.<sup>6</sup> Considering their origin (mostly students, journalists, intellectuals and Party cadres) they belonged to the educated fringe of society, which explains the propensity of some of them to write. Those who belonged to the Party's network quickly got organised: as soon as February 1966, a "Delegation of the Central Committee of the PKI," located in Beijing and claiming to act in the name of the Party, summoned all communists to gather in China, and most complied. Concurrently, the Soviet Communist Party encouraged the creation of a "Foreign Committee of the PKI," sitting in Moscow and charged to handle the community that stayed behind in the USSR, including the very few who made the reverse trip, from Beijing to Moscow, as was the case of two writers mentioned below, Utuy Tatang Sontani and Agam Wispi, in 1971.

With the passing years, the antagonism between China and the USSR only grew stronger. The refugees in the USSR, under the leadership of the Foreign Committee and the Soviet CP, limited themselves to a political campaign against the new Indonesian government (the "New Order," Orde Baru). They were well treated, as long as they abided to the directives of the Committee. Otherwise, they were ostracised (like Ali Chanafiah) or sent to a remote city with difficult material conditions (like Waruno Mahdi). Refugees in China had a totally different life: on the one hand, they were subjected to the heavy demands of the Cultural Revolution, including a perpetual indoctrination of the thought of the Great Helmsman, self-criticism, and "rehabilitation" in the countryside; on the other hand, they were preparing themselves to bring revolution to Indonesia in order to restore the PKI and to set up a socialist regime. This implied a heavy political education and military training performed in China and in Vietnam.

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5. Hill, "Indonesian political exiles in the USSR." Literature on the putsch, its background and its consequences is immense. That on the exiles, on the contrary, is extremely limited. The two above-mentioned articles by Hill are among the main sources of information of this introduction.

6. See Hill, "Indonesia's exiled Left as the Cold War thaws."

The refugees were not prepared for this confrontation with the reality of socialist regimes and most of them suffered from the conditions they were living in, mainly the psychological conditions caused by the political propaganda and the excesses of the Cultural Revolution. Many chose to emigrate in the 1980s, in order to flee from those circumstances. The Cold War was coming to an end; international socialist solidarity was crumbling away; the refugees were becoming a burden for the USSR as well as China, while the eventuality of a communist revolution in Indonesia was obviously becoming more and more utopian. Then it is the authorities (the Delegation and the Chinese government on one side, the Foreign Committee and the Soviet CP on the other) that encouraged the process of emigration to other countries.

### Europe

A very few refugees chose to seek asylum in socialist countries (one example is the interesting case of Cuba)<sup>7</sup>. Most chose to move to capitalist countries in Western Europe, especially the Netherlands, France and Sweden. A majority chose the Netherlands because of the historical relations between the two countries (the Netherlands had subjugated the Indonesian territory little by little, from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century until the colonisation of the entire archipelago, completed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century). Thus an ambiguous relationship, which was felt by some as conflictual (“the one country in the world I hated the most until then,” wrote one of the immigrants)<sup>8</sup>, but a relationship of familiarity for those who were born in the 1920s and 1930s as Dutch subjects of the Netherlands Indies, and who had learned Dutch at school.

In all known cases, this immigration wave in Europe was an easy process. The new refugees certainly experienced material difficulties: none of them found employment corresponding to their education and competence, but all found a political asylum in the country of their choice, were supported by the local government, and after a variable period (mainly from five to fifteen years) obtained the nationality of the host country. This doesn't mean that they considered themselves as Dutch or French. “And now that I have this French passport, do I feel French?” asks Ibarruri Putri Alam. “Honestly, like most of my comrades in fate, I don't feel flesh-and-blood French. I am merely an adopted child.”<sup>9</sup> In addition to their visceral belonging to the Indonesian nation, they were too old to adapt easily to a new society, a new culture, and a new language. Whatever the case, the dream of an armed return to Indonesia was definitely abandoned. If there was a possibility to go back, it would be through a legal way.

7. See Hearman, “The last men in Havana.”

8. Siregar, *Tragedi Manusia dan Kemanusiaan*, p. vi.

9. *Anak Sulung D.N. Aidit*, pp. 377-8. Waloejo Sedjati, who was naturalised in 1994, writes in 2010: “until now I have never felt like being French” (*Bumi Tuhan*, p. 327).

The discovery of Western democracies, after the experiment of applied socialism, was for many a revelation. Waruno Mahdi, the only one among exiles who lends himself to an ideological self-analysis, states:

Even though I had been aware earlier that dialectical materialism, as the philosophical basis of Marxist-Leninist teaching, was applied in a very inconsistent way in concrete communist teaching and the many varieties of its political practice, the conclusion I reached in the West was most unpredictable. Gradually it became more and more obvious to me that the most consequent political manifestation of dialectical materialism was none other than liberal democracy!<sup>10</sup>

Having arrived in Europe by successive waves in the 1970s and 80s, the refugees found themselves gathered in the same cities, confronted with the same problems, and in contact with the same social agents. They more or less knew each other, they recognized each other, but a certain distrust existed. Asahan Aidit, who arrived in the Netherlands in 1984 from Vietnam, was surprised to see that the many exiles he met by chance showed themselves cold, distant and indifferent.<sup>11</sup> Syarkawi Manap, who arrived in Sweden in 1986 from China, was surprised to discover in Ali Chanafiah, who had been there for three years, a “honest and open” man, whereas he had the reputation of being a *remo*, a “modern revisionist.”<sup>12</sup>

In fact, the exiles do not a priori constitute an homogeneous group. They formerly belonged to various organisations that had their discords before 1965, and their way of thinking was further modelled on their experience in the two big socialist countries, which were at the peak of antagonism. Seen from the opposite camp, the pro-China were ‘adventurers’ and the pro-USSR “revisionists.” Ancient and new friendships and ideological dissensions divided them into small groups in distrust of one another. However, they shared the label “communist,” imposed from outside, and the status of refugees. Networks took shape, meetings were organised, journals were published (notably *Kreasi* and *Arena*, run by Abdul Kohar Ibrahim from Brussels). Sobron Aidit has depicted several times these meetings and this solidarity. As years passed though, individuals disappeared one by one, and the “comrades” met most often in a cemetery to bid one of them farewell.

Tragically, the place where most Indonesians often meet, in the Netherlands, is the cemetery. A comrade cynically remarked that the abbreviation PKI [Partai Komunis Indonesia] actually means Perkumpulan Kematian Indonesia [Indonesian Death Association]. Because we always gather, all of us, coming from various places, in order to pay respect to the dead who needs to be accompanied to his last abode. There is indeed some sense in these sarcastic words, which express bitterness, anger and sadness, but addressed to whom? All of us feel the loss. This didn’t happen two or three times, but a dozen times or more. We get older, weaker, more and more unhealthy, and well, yes, where is this going to end?”<sup>13</sup>

10. “Melancong ke Dunia Marxisme-Leninisme,” p. 65.

11. Asahan Alham, *Alhamdulillah*, pp. 353-4.

12. *Kisah Perjalanan*, p. 187.

13. Sobron Aidit, *Cerita dari Tanah Pengasingan*, chap. 5.

The cynical pun about the Indonesian Communist Party's acronym having come to mean the Indonesian Death Association, is also inscribed on a painting by the famous painter exiled in the Netherlands Basuki Resobowo (see a description in Setiawan, "Situasi dan Kondisi Sastra Eksil Indonesia") and is found again in a poem by Soepriadi Tomodihardjo: "We only meet before a grave, taking leave of a friend who has passed away".<sup>14</sup> The pun has a long range because it is not only the community of exiles who familiarises itself with death; it is the PKI itself and Indonesian communism with it that are dead and buried.

### Visiting Home

Thanks to their new passports and the protection of their host country, the exiles could go back to Indonesia as visitors, starting in the 1990s, when Soeharto's government was still in place and anti-communist propaganda was still active. Sobron Aidit has remarked in several of his books that the exiles "only have the right to pay a visit, not to go home and stay."<sup>15</sup> He also relates how, at the time of his first visit, in 1992, one of his brothers advised him against going to the village of his birth-place in order to visit relatives and pray on the grave of his father, because he would endanger his family and friends: people mixing with an ex-communist incurred major problems with the regime. He renounced. The following year, he visited his home village on Belitung Island, in the south-east of Sumatra, but he stayed in a hotel: none of his parents and friends could take the risk to have him visit their homes.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, going back was everyone's obsession. *Sastra eksil* texts express in countless ways the fascination for the home country, the fatherland of "land and water" (*tanah air*), the "land of spilled blood" (*tanah tumpah darah*). Contacts with the families were practically impossible from China and the USSR; now they could take the risk to call from Europe. Communications were established. Relatives and friends living in Indonesia came to Europe on visits. Many exiles took part in social and political activities for the benefit of various victims of the Indonesian New Order, particularly the political prisoners (*tapol*). Umar Said, who was among the first immigrants in Europe, in 1974 (he was already 46 years old), and who was apparently gifted with uncommon energy and power of conviction, spent a considerable amount of time and effort to set up structures designed to help *tapol*, by collecting funds and political support for them and creating the Tapol Committee, as well as an East Timor Committee.<sup>17</sup>

14. "Si anak hilang," in *Di Negeri Orang*, p. 183.

15. *Catatan Spiritual*, p. 11.

16. *Razzia Agustus*, chap. 15.

17. See his *Perjalanan Hidup Saya*, pp. 155-160.

After 32 years of dictatorship, the Soeharto regime came to an end: confronted with an economic crisis and popular wrath, Soeharto climbed down from his throne in May 1998. The exiles' situation changed rapidly. The president in charge at the end of 1999, Abdurrahman Wahid, familiarly known as Gus Dur, a man eminently liberal and democratic, stated that New Order's opponents residing abroad were welcome to come back to Indonesia. Further on, in January 2000 he sent the Minister of Justice to Europe in order to discuss the modalities of their return. These initiatives, however, remained without effect. Gus Dur also declared publicly his desire that the 1966 decree of the Parliament pronouncing the banning of the PKI and the interdiction of the diffusion of Marxism-Leninism be revoked. The only result of these declarations was to provoke a violent reaction from various anti-communist movements, particularly Moslem organisations, and to prove that the hatred of communism had not abated with the end of Soeharto's regime. Various incidents have occurred since then, coming from the authorities as well as the masses, proving that the anti-communist feeling is still very much alive, always more emotional than rationalised, and that Indonesian society is not yet ready for a process of reconciliation, not even for an examination of the facts that led to the slaughters of 1965-1966.

In these conditions, most exiles in Europe remained in their host countries, thus becoming definite exiles. As they came from the generation who was already of adult age (many were born in the 1920s and 30s), or on the verge of becoming adult in 1965, that is fifty years ago, they were becoming old in their situation as exiles. Half of them passed away before having the possibility of settling back home, and most of the others decided not to do so. They had acquired a foreign nationality, together with social advantages (pension and welfare). All or most of them still felt Indonesians in their heart, but the hatred roused by their past didn't lure them to settle back in an Indonesia that was cruelly different from the country they had left half a century before.

In short, the exiles' community, which is less and less numerous and less and less a community, has not overcome the fate designed for it by the New Order. Among the victims of that regime, the exiles are those who have not been reintegrated. It is necessary to note, however, that they reject the appellation of "victims" (*korban*) because of the negative connotations of the word implying a state of weakness, defeat and culpability. They don't like the term "refugees" (*pelarian*) either; they prefer to use the word "exile" (*eksil*) and above all the two terms generally attributed to Gus Dur (President Abdurrahman Wahid): "*orang kelayaban*," "the wanderers," and "*yang terhalang pulang*," "those prevented from going home."

### Sastra Eksil

"Exile literature" (*sastra eksil*) is regarded (here) as everything written by those "wanderers," not only the works of a "literary" nature. There is no



bibliography and no survey of it, only a very few articles on specific works or authors.<sup>18</sup> A bibliography is difficult to compile because the relevant works are poorly distributed and difficult to trace, also because the very notion of publication has become blurred nowadays. Exiled authors first published, in the years 1980s and 90s, articles, poems and short stories in journals (*Kreasi, Arah, Arena, Tanahair, Kancah, Mimbar, Pembaruan*, and others), blogs and other kinds of private distribution. Those various “publications” are ephemeral and difficult to trace systematically. After the change of regime in Indonesia, exiles’ works started to appear in Indonesia as books, but distribution over the Net (e.g. on Facebook) still has an important role. At the same time a considerable amount of books on the history of the New Order and the 1965 putsch, as well as testimonies of victims of the regime, especially memoirs by political prisoners (*tapol*), were published. From that point of view, exiles’ works are part of a bigger historical phenomenon, which is the sudden multiplication of works challenging the picture of 20<sup>th</sup> century Indonesian history imposed during three decades by the New Order.

*Sastra eksil* is exclusively in Indonesian. If we take into account printed books only, it represents about 120 volumes. Exiles thus have acquired access to a forum. Their books are printed, distributed, read, reviewed. Some small publishers are famously dedicated to this domain, particularly Ultimus in Bandung, Ombak in Yogya and Hasta Mitra in Jakarta, but some books have been distributed by well-established publishing houses like Gramedia and Pustaka Jaya in Jakarta. And yet they remain rather marginal, if one considers the great difficulty to find them on the Indonesian market.

According to a provisional bibliography, exile authors have produced some 133 books, eleven of them still unpublished, namely 37 essays or collections of essays, 30 collections of poetry, 3 dramas, 6 collections of fiction short stories, 15 novels and 42 autobiographical texts (16 memoirs and 26 collections of autobiographical short stories). The proportion of autobiographical texts (a third of the total) is striking. Considering that the number of exiles is infinitely inferior to that of the *ex-tapol* (political prisoners), it is clear that the number of autobiographical texts they have produced is exceptionally high (there seems to be less than 25 *ex-tapol*’s memoirs). This has to do with the fact that exiles were educated persons, and this incidentally corroborates the idea that by slaying its ‘left’, Indonesia deprived itself of a great part of its intelligentsia.<sup>19</sup>

18. Namely the articles of Alex Supartono (2001) and C.W. Watson (2006) on the works of Utuy Tatang Sontani and D.T. Hill (2012) on Ibarruri Putri Alam’s and Asahan Aidit’s memoirs. See a tentative bibliography in the same volume.

19. Hersri Setiawan was taken to Buru Island on a ship, in August 1971, amid 850 prisoners, 500 of whom, on arrival, were settled in Unit XIV Bantalareja. Among those 500 men, seven only had had a tertiary education, while most had been to elementary or junior high school (SD or SMP) only, and “not a few could barely read” (Setiawan, *Memoar Pulau Buru*, p. 97).



Still, the very high number of those autobiographical texts is evidence that the exiles felt an urgent need to speak out.

Among the *sastra eksil* authors, a few had acquired a modicum of fame before 1965, like the three poets Sobron Aidit, Agam Wispi and Kusni Sulang. Most, however, started writing once in exile. The authors of the 133 books above are 36 in number. It is striking that among them, and among the most prominent of them, are three members of the family of D.N. Aidit, the general secretary of the PKI, namely his two younger brothers Sobron Aidit and Asahan Aidit, and his eldest daughter, Ibarruri Putri Alam. The three of them have published memoirs, in which they talk about him in moderate terms (there is no panegyric), but with great esteem and affection. There are only three women among the 36 authors (two and a half actually, as one of them only gives a very limited contribution to the memoirs of her husband). It is true that women are a minority among the exiles; another reason is that, before 1998, women were not used to write and didn't have an important place in Indonesian literature (this changed spectacularly after the end of the New Order regime).

The essays (the first category above) are historical, political and sociological. Most aim at presenting a version of history and a historical attitude different from those of the New Order: notably the monumental works by A.R. Siregar, Imam Soedjono and Suar Suroso on the history of the PKI, but also more modest essays like those of Sobron Aidit on his brother D.N. Aidit, of A.M. Hanafi on the seizing of power by general Soeharto, and of Tatiana Lukman on her father, M.H. Lukman. From this point of view, essays share with the literary works of *sastra eksil* the will to make heard a voice different and until then muzzled.

There are no less than thirteen poets. Most are newcomers in literature, at a mature age and without experience, because poetry is the favourite medium of emotion. Poetry is a haven: "Poetry, to you only I can go home"<sup>20</sup>. The collection of about 150 poems published in Jakarta in 2002, under the title *Di Negeri Orang* ('Abroad'), is representative of this poetic production. Themes are very diverse, of two major types: first, those common to the whole of Indonesian, or even universal, poetry, that is, mourning, absence, faith, everyday joys and sorrows, mother's image, remembrance of past love, departures, dreams, age, friends, solitude...; in that register there is little amorous passion, probably because the authors were already too old and few of them experienced a new passion in their host country. Second, themes peculiar to exile: denunciation of the New Order (cruelty, dictatorship, greed, dishonesty, corruption, with a particular obloquy against Soeharto), nostalgia, alienation, fear for relatives.

This second category is more combative than autobiographical texts. Referring to the hornbill as a symbol of majesty of his birth island, Borneo, the poet Magusig O. Bungai states his readiness to fight until his last breath:

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20. Agam Wispi, *Di Negeri Orang*, p. 32.

We are the young hornbills chased away from their forest, flying from one jungle to another, from one land to another, the wounds on our breasts and wings redden heaven and earth, but don't you cry o fellow villagers, our tribes and our nation never bow their head, the song of your young hornbills still sounds deafening and will not be silenced (p. 118).

The New Order regime is the target of criticism and abuse: "When the principle of One Omnipotent God, and that of humanism, have become gum, chewed by the agents of the State" (Z. Alif, *Di Negeri Orang*, p. 226). But the prime target is always Soeharto: "In Bali and Yogyakarta, people kill mad dogs. Dogs in uniform covered with decorations, hunt and attack in Aceh, Papua and East Timor, they hunt and attack, for Cendana's supreme dog" (Z. Alif, p. 220-221. Cendana is the name of the Jakarta street where Soeharto had his house, and it has become a kind of substitute name for the President and his family). The poet Chalik Hamid addresses a prayer to the President: "Pak Harto, I pray with all my heart, that you don't die too fast, because the masses still need you, in order to judge you for your crimes" (from another collection).

There is no joy, no passion, no exaltation. This is a poetry sad but courageous, pessimistic but never tearful. Poems relating to the time spent in socialist countries are rare. A favourite theme is exile itself; exiles have led a life of unceasing wandering: "I am always on the road, I am the man away from home who always forget when to go back" (Asahan Alham, p. 65). Authors express the pain of exile: "I never thought I would live abroad, so long, so tiresome" (Mawie Ananta Jonie, p. 135), but also their gratitude towards asylum lands: "Paris, I never gave you a thought, and now I flow in the blood of your veins, I have made my nest in your heart" (Sobron Aidit, p. 174). Is life a perpetual failure, asks Satyadharma about the death of another exile's son:

O friend, what are we, what is man, if the secret of life remains closed, without the slightest gap, old age mercilessly makes fun of us, as the path we went through bravely, with ardor and faith, transpires to be a failure (pp. 213-214).

There are seven published novels only, most of them very short—and impossible to find. Five unpublished novels by Utuy Tatang Sontani are briefly commented upon by Alex Supartono (2001). The sole long novel, *War and Flowers (Perang dan Kembang)* by Asahan Alham (the new name of Asahan Aidit), written in Vietnam in 1983 and published in Jakarta almost twenty years later, in 2001, draws upon the reality of the author's experience in Vietnam during the years 1966-1983, so that it actually has the same documentary value as the volumes published by the same author with the appellation of "novels-memoirs" (*roman memoar*) or "short stories-memoirs" (*cerpen memoar*).

Collections of fiction short stories are equally very few.

## Selfwriting

The most important and most significant category of *sastra eksil* is thus that of selfwriting. Memoirs have a relatively recent history in the Malay

World, starting in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Those of Abdullah bin Abdulkadir Munsyi (1849), P.A. Achmad Djajadiningrat (1936), Tan Malaka (1948), Hamka (1951-1952), or Soekarno (1965) are a few among the main landmarks of this history. But this history does not really constitute a tradition, of which our authors would be the heirs, because there is no real continuity or filiation in it: authors of memoirs never quote their predecessors and most of them have not read them. Indonesian memoirs show a certain coherence, some common features (among others, a reserve about private life, sex, and religion, and the absence of introspection) because they are conditioned by common social features, not because authors take example from their elders. Pramoedya Ananta Toer's and Hersri Setiawan's narratives about their years in the labour camp of Buru Island owe nothing to the prison memoirs of Tan Malaka and Mochtar Lubis.<sup>21</sup> Even exiles' memoirs do not constitute a tradition of its own in the sense of a legacy relayed from one author to the next, as each of them seems to reinvent the genre without consideration for previous writings: it is clear for instance that Ibarruri Putri Alam did not model her narrative on those of her uncles Sobron Aidit and Asahan Aidit, neither on those of Ali Chanafiah or any other exile who had written before her.

Autobiographical writings were not numerous in Indonesia until the 1960s. They became a real fashion with the New Order, as one of the products of the glaring narcissism generated by the regime: narcissism of the ruling class, proud of the development (*pembangunan*) and order (*ketertiban*) it had succeeded to establish in replacement of the poverty and the instability of Soekarno's era, and convinced of acting on the basis of a superior culture (a kind of Neo-Javanism) and ideology (Pancasila).

The New Order's memoirs, often written by ghost-writers, are success stories: success of the regime and of individuals who pride themselves on having played a significant role in the life of the nation. Paradoxically, the New Order also provoked the writing of numerous memoirs (almost seventy) that relate the experience of two categories of victims of the regime: the political prisoners (*tapol*) and the exiles. The exiles' memoirs are in no way success stories, in no fashion narratives of lives useful to the nation. They are stories of repeated failures, narratives of a radical separation from the nation. "As a powerless micro-creature, I have been crippled and shattered in this cruel battle of life. [...] May some profit be taken out of my stories, especially of my failures," writes Waloejo Sedjati.<sup>22</sup> Many memoirs, and this is true of those written by *tapols* too, were explicitly written as a kind of admonition:

21. Ibrahim Isa (*Kabar dari Negeri Seberang*, p. 50) states that his first awakening to political consciousness was caused by reading Tan Malaka's memoirs (*Dari Penjara ke Penjara*), but his own memoirs (*Kabar dari Negeri Seberang*, 2013) have obviously been in no way influenced by them.

22. *Bumi Tuhan*, p. xxvi.

this is what should never happen again. Some were written for the sake of the authors' families, as some sort of justification. As a rule, the exiles' memoirs appear as an endeavour to find a coherence, a rationale in lives shattered by the events of 1965-1966 and that consequently went through rare turbulence independently of the individuals' control.

Nineteen exiles (or more, or less, according to the definition one uses) have produced autobiographical writings. These belong to two main different genres: more or less systematic autobiographies (Ibarruri Putri Alam, Ali Chanafiah, Francisca Fanggidaej, Syarkawi Manap, Umar Said, Waloejo Sedjati) and short narratives relating to particular periods (Asahan Aidit, Sobron Aidit—Sobron has written more than 250 stories of this kind—, A.M. Hanafi, Ibrahim Isa, Mawie Ananta Jonie, JJ. Kusni, Tatiana Lukman, Waruno Mahdi, Utuy Tatang Sontani, Soeprijadi Tomodihardjo). These two categories, however, are far from defining precise types of texts. The six authors of autobiographies above have produced texts extremely different from one another, while the "short narratives" are alternatively presented as authentic memories, or short stories, or "fictionalised memories," that is, semi-fictions. All these texts unquestionably belong to the category of self-writing, but Sobron Aidit's, Ali Chanafiah's and Utuy Tatang Sontani's texts (for instance) display so many differences that they can hardly be regarded as belonging to the same genre.

The term "*cerpen memoar*" ("short stories-memoirs") is used by Sobron Aidit and Asahan Aidit.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, these texts are designated as short stories inspired by the lives of their authors, that is, autobiographical stories. The term "*cerpen memoar*" is new in Indonesian literature, but the genre is not. A great number of Indonesian short stories are in fact autobiographical stories, more or less elaborated and fictionalised in order to make them literary works. Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Mochtar Lubis, Sitor Situmorang, Ajip Rosidi, A.A. Navis and many others have contributed to this genre. For that reason, the term "*cerpen memoar*" does not underscore the fictitious aspect of the stories, but on the contrary their realism: they are short stories ("*cerpen*"), that is, literary works, but they are also "*memoar*," autobiographical texts. Sobron has called his other collections: "short stories" (*cerpen*), "stories" (*cerita*) or "narratives" (*kisah*),<sup>24</sup> but he has given the subtitle "*memoar*" to the three collections of stories published in 2002-2005: *Gajah di Pelupuk Mata*, *Surat kepada Tuhan*, and *Penalti tanpa Wasit*, respectively subtitled *Memoar Sobron Aidit 1, 2, 3*, even though all of those "stories" are as realistic as one another.

Things are different with the designation "*roman memoar*" and "*roman biografis*" respectively used by Asahan Aidit (*Alhamdulillah: Roman Memoar*)

23. Respectively: *Romantika Orang Buangan: Kumpulan Cerpen Memoar*, and *Cinta, Perang dan Ilusi: Kumpulan Cerpen Memoar*.

24. See the titles *Razzia Agustus*, *Selukur Cerita Seputar Resto*, *Kesempatan Kesekian*, *Cerita dari Tanah Pengasingan*, *Kisah Intel*.

and Ibarruri Putri Alam (*Anak Sulung D.N. Aidit: Roman Biografis*). In these two cases the designated literary genre is the novel, that is, a form defined as fiction, but a fiction inspired by the biography of both authors. The insistence here is thus on fiction, but fiction is not at all the same for the two authors. Both are conscious that “no autobiography will ever be totally free from fiction and fantasy.”<sup>25</sup> Ibarruri is conscious that a written description, in the same way as for instance a painting, is not an exact reproduction of reality, and she called her narrative a “biographical novel” in order to prevent the accusation of invention that readers could be tempted to make.<sup>26</sup> Her aim is to narrate what really happened, but she invokes fiction out of fear of involuntarily deviating from it. On the contrary, Asahan Aidit revendicates his right to invent:

Every human life is a film shot according to two scenarii: one by himself, one by others. Two thirds of my life have followed the scenario of others, while my collaboration varied between voluntary, semi-voluntary, forced, semi-forced, unconscious, stupid, naïve, ignorant, and a mix of adventurism and conviction. At an age approaching half a century, I want to complete this alien story with a scenario of my own, with new adventures at my own cost, not that of the government or the party.<sup>27</sup>

And further: “I don’t want to be dictated by anybody, even by life itself”.<sup>28</sup>

Compared to the stories by Sobron Aidit, Ibarruri or Syarkawi Manap, who only express extremely moderated criticism towards the ideological instruction they received in China or the excess of the Cultural Revolution, Asahan’s fiction is eminently subversive: during eighteen years he suffered from his submission to a more or less vague and distant authority, that of the Delegation of the PKI, of the Chinese and Vietnamese communist parties, of socialism in general; he now frees himself from that submission by inventing adventures, most often amorous ones, that he finally may allow himself on paper. This doesn’t mean that his narratives (novels and short stories) have less historical value than those of his colleagues. Asahan does not provide more precise information than others on the conditions of his stay in China and Vietnam, but he utters loud and clear what none other dares to say: his disappointment with communism after he experienced it in the USSR, China and Vietnam: “The Dictatorship of the Proletariat is indeed an exact political term in the real sense: a dictatorship aimed at oppressing the proletariat and also the non-proletariat in the name of the proletariat.”<sup>29</sup> And further:

25. Asahan Aidit, *Alhamdulillah*, p. 12.

26. Personal communication, September 2014. It is significant that Ibarruri accepted the suggestion of the publisher of the second edition (Penerbit Ledalero in Maumere) to change “roman biografis” in the title with “Kisah Pengembaraan” (“Account of the Wanderings”; pers. comm. March 2015).

27. *Alhamdulillah*, pp. 10-11.

28. *Alhamdulillah*, p. 162.

29. *Alhamdulillah*, p. 198.

The Party educated me with the means of emotion, because without emotion it would be impossible to admire Lenin or Mao Tse Tung. Marxism-Leninism or Mao Tse Tung's thought are also emotional, this is why people can get fanatical about them, can become dogmatic and faithful without limit. Anybody who would endeavour to use their brain in studying those three mega-isms would undoubtedly switch to opposing them, they would become reactionary, counter-revolutionary or at least revisionists.<sup>30</sup>

### To Write Back

Asahan (in the Netherlands) writes for himself, or so does at least the narrator of his “fictional” writing:

I want to see myself in what I think, what I fantasise about, what I immortalise; and so I write about what I may not find quickly in one go, I may have to write again and again, all my life perhaps, until I do or do not find it. This is important for me, as I am running against time, before my fragile self simply disappears. I still wish to see myself, who I am, not only what it feels to become myself.<sup>31</sup>

Other writers have a different purpose. Ali Chanafiah and his wife Salmiah Pane (in Sweden) write (together) for their grand-children, and they use pronouns that signify respectively “grandpa” and “grandma.” He writes for instance: “Grandpa was convinced that fate had decided we would live together and found a family.”<sup>32</sup> They clearly explain their intention:

We have not written these memoirs for the general public, but for our grand-children and their own grand-children after them. These memoirs are in some way our justification to them of the reasons why we did what we did, why we spent dozens of years away from our relatives and from our homeland, why is it that from our teen age we took part in the struggle for independence and later on we took part in defending it and giving it a content.<sup>33</sup>

Umar Said (in France) writes for his family too:

These notes, or this text, are a “report” to them, a complement to what they have known until now. [...] May these stories about my childhood, my youth and my life in exile help my wife, my children and my closest relatives (my younger brothers and sisters, and others) better understand my personality, what I did, and why the path of my life has turned into what it is.<sup>34</sup>

However, these three authors ultimately had their text published like the other authors of autobiographies, with the consequence that all have been addressing the Indonesian public at large.

All memoirs, as well as the whole of *sastra eksil*, are written in Indonesian. Writing during the reign of Soeharto, the exiles have not written (or infinitely little) in a foreign language (English, French, Dutch), in order to inform

30. *Alhamdulillah*, p. 364.

31. *Alhamdulillah*, p. 163.

32. *Perjalanan Jauh*, p. 86.

33. *Perjalanan Jauh*, p. 426.

34. *Perjalanan Hidup Saya*, pp. xvi-xvii.



international opinion about what was happening in Indonesia. Their writings go against the general common ideas about political refugees in the world and thus raise questions. One would expect a political action of denunciation and resistance, intending to alert the local opinion of the host country or international opinion about the abuses of power in the country of origin. It is for instance what Argentinian exiles in France did in the 1970s and 80s, at the time the Indonesian refugees were getting settled in France. This tendency of the Indonesian exiles is not accepted by all of them; Tatiana Lukman for instance writes angrily:

Until today, all organisations created abroad in order to defend the interests of the victims of the 1965 national tragedy in which I happened to be involved have refused to accept as their main objective the disclosure and condemnation of the crimes of Suharto's military regime and United States' imperialism, and the publicizing of the victims' claims to the international world, by creating a network of progressive international organisations. Like frogs under a half-coconut! (*Panta Rhei*, p. 109).

Besides the fact that their number is considerably lower than that of the Argentinians, the aim of the Indonesian exiles is different. All write in Indonesian because they consciously and deliberately address their fellow-citizens, to whom they have decided to present a "report," a kind of "justification" of their lives. A text of that nature is supposed to answer implicit questions, a template tacitly shared. C.W. Watson has insisted upon the way political prisoners' autobiographies are "framed" or even "dictated" by the demands and expectations they ascribe to their readers, to the point of presenting some sort of "worrying uniformity" in the construction of the narratives: "There seems to be an almost dictated version of events which writers are required to observe."<sup>35</sup>

In the case of the exiles, one may ask what questions they think they are answering, as their narratives avoid most of the major questions the reader asks herself. The paradox of all these narratives is that the authors are confronted with constraints that forbid them to relate a major part of their experiences. A single author (Francisca Fanggalaej) only speaks about her life prior to the 1965 putsch. Others, as we have seen, write a more or less complete autobiography until the time when they write, once settled in Europe: Umar Said, Ali Chanafiah and Ibarruri starting from childhood, Syarkawi Manap and Waloejo Sedjati from the time they are about to go abroad, but in no way do their narratives follow a linear structure. Ali Chanafiah and Ibarruri for instance describe in great detail their lives before 1965, but are far more vague about the following periods when they lose control over their destinies as they are submitted to a foreign authority. Other writers limit themselves to memories of specific periods. Many of them have gone through the same experiences, sometimes together. They write about their lives in Cuba, the USSR, China, North Korea, Burma, Macao, the Netherlands, France and Sweden.

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35. *On Self and Injustice*, pp. 6-7, see also p. 76.



Most talk with a moving tone of sincerity and humility. There is an evident literary effort with two authors only: Utuy Tatang Sontani and Asahan Aidit. In a narrative the size of a short story, Utuy Tatang Sontani relates his first years in China. It is clear that he doesn't seek to recount the facts in their continuity and their logic, and not even to give precise information about dates, places, events and persons. The narrative is focused on his relation to a woman, on the background of the atmosphere that filled the milieu of the refugees and that induced him to, more and more, stand aside; but it is difficult to say what is the true object of the tale: the background or the woman. As for Asahan Aidit, he relates in three novels and one collection of short stories his experience in Jakarta, Vietnam, China and the Netherlands, while constantly mixing fiction with reality and using a narrative logic that substitutes itself to the historical one.

This doesn't mean that the other texts have no literary quality or are not the result of a literary effort (there are poignant pages in Waloejo Sedjati's memoirs), but the primary impression they give is that of spontaneity, sometimes even a certain ingenuousness. The autobiography of the couple Ali Chanafiah and Salmiah Pane presents the particularity of a twin authorship (unfortunately unbalanced as Salmiah only wrote three chapters out of twenty-one), in which can be seen a difference of sensibility (he is more factual, she more emotional) if not of style. Moreover, the book has a slight novelistic twist because of the angelic character of the two protagonists: they are perfect, entirely devoted to a cause, without the slightest trace of selfishness or personal ambition and without the faintest feeling of animosity towards anyone, even the Dutch and their stooges. They ignore doubt. At the age of twenty they appear as the guides of the population of Bengkulu, to whom they show the way to progress and they advise on everything including private life. This is not the effect of excessive pride: the authors are not the least boastful, but they recreate for themselves and for the sake of their grand children the idealised image of a pre-disaster period, at a time when political ideals and conflicts could be lived in some kind of human, reasonable and logical order.

Sobron Aidit, who writes very fast, sometimes two stories a day, gives the impression of never worrying himself with literary intent. He writes stories as he would write letters to a friend, to tell an anecdote and share an emotion. The writing of these memories in the form of short stories has the effect of giving a large place to the emotional and the picturesque, little place to reflexion and analysis, and no place at all to a systematic and rational description. These stories have the freshness of spontaneity, sincerity and humour. There is little art and grand thoughts, but there is the pleasure to share the joys and sorrows of a man of an extreme simplicity and a rare modesty, who has lived uncommon things. But beyond this candour, there are rules and limits: Sobron is very reserved on his private life and says nearly nothing about his political life. He talks about France, China and his childhood in a disorder that cannot be but deliberate.

The narratives are never plaintive or doleful; they never try to arouse pity; coming from people who have gone through so many sufferings and disappointments, they even show a striking energy and optimism. However, compared to the success stories of the New Order's parvenus, they appear as failure stories, or at least stories of successive failures: failure of the PKI in 1965, of the training in socialist countries, of the adaptation in Europe,<sup>36</sup> and finally of the return home. However, Umar Said's narrative reminds us that those stories are precisely meant to show that the various failures have been in some way overcome. Umar Said's memoirs end on an appreciation of the whole course of his life, the continuity and coherence of which, from childhood to old age, he perceives clearly, in spite of the accidents of history. This allows him to draw a positive conclusion because, in spite of all vicissitudes, he has realised the ambition of his parents, that of "becoming someone," not somebody wealthy and powerful, but someone good and respectable.<sup>37</sup> All authors are not so optimistic, some insist more on bitterness and disappointment, but as a whole the moral of their stories is still that life goes on and, for some, the struggle goes on too.

### The Art of Secrecy

All texts are the consequence of exile: exile is at the centre of all narratives. Whether they address their family, their friends or the Indonesian audience in general, the authors relate the story of their exile.<sup>38</sup> They were separated from their homeland in 1965-66 because they were accused of being communists, then they lived the more or less twenty following years as communists in communist countries. This is why they write and why people read them: people want to know how and why they became communist, what did it mean in their life, in Indonesia before the putsch and further on in foreign countries, what was their experience of communism in the two socialist countries par excellence, the USSR and China, what remains of their convictions after those dozens of years of tribulations outside their country. Answers to these questions are numerous and varied; they are also most vague and uncertain.

As most Indonesian autobiographies, these are much reserved about the intimate and family life of the authors. Ali Chanafiah and Salmiah Pane's reader is much surprised to learn on page 128 that the couple has three children, the eldest one being eleven years old, while their birth was not even mentioned, whereas the authors have been quite open about the blossoming of their love

36. The non-adaptation in Europe is a kind of failure, but a deliberate one: they do not wish to adapt, they wish their stay in Europe to be provisory and quickly forgotten, they want to go home.

37. *Perjalanan Hidup Saya*, p. 260.

38. With the exception of F. Fanggidaj. Her book (*Memoirs of a Revolutionary Woman*) is the only one among the texts discussed here which has been written by somebody else (no else than Hersri Setiawan) on the basis of interviews, and it is not known who decided to limit it to the period prior to 1965.

and their marriage. The same reserve applies to religious life: it is impossible to guess the religious feelings of both authors, perhaps very strong, perhaps non-existent. When Syarkawi Manap relates, near the end of his narrative<sup>39</sup> that he has been on the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1997, at the age of 57, once settled in Sweden, about which he insists on the religious tradition of his family, the reader realises that Islam has had practically no place previously. Wherever he was during twenty years of tribulations, religion was not invoked either as a practice or a guide of conduct. The sole author who talks about his religious life in some detail is Sobron Aidit (he wrote a 77-page booklet about it: “Spiritual notes behind the man Sobron Aidit”) and he happens to be the one who converted (from Islam to Protestantism). No intimate life, no religion, no introspection either: Waruno Mahdi is the unique example of an exile who writes an intellectual autobiography (“On a tour to the world of Marxism-Leninism”).

Moreover, the exiles’ autobiographies avoid talking about politics: people like Francisca Fanggalaj and Ali Chanafiah, who were both members of the parliament and had functions in the Party, don’t say a word about their joining the Party or their communist convictions. F. Fanggalaj presents a very interesting testimony about the meaning of independence to her. Because of her peculiar family situation, she had no place in the colonial society of the Netherlands Indies, and the revolution offered her that identity she was lacking: “With the revolution I was going home. A home of identity within a setting. There was my place, where I could ‘become somebody’.”<sup>40</sup> But about the PKI, she gives the impression she joined by chance, as a consequence of the evolution of groups and parties she was mixing with at the time.

The unique author who talks about his joining the Party is Utuy Tatang Sontani, precisely, it seems, because he is among the ones disappointed with socialism, and his explanation (addressed to the woman who haunts these memories) is surprising:

So, if you ask me why I joined the party, the answer is clearly that what attracted me was not the party. What attracted me was its communism, because I saw communism as something beautiful. That is one thing; secondly, the person who introduced me to communism as something beautiful was himself a beautiful being. [...] Njoto. He was beautiful to my heart and to my eyes because he was the only one at the PKI leadership who tried to show his existence as a politician and a man of culture at the same time.<sup>41</sup>

Before or after 1965, the other writers tend to avoid political matters. The experience of living in socialist countries is described in some detail. If one took the trouble to collect and organise the information scattered over the few thousand pages written by the exiles, one would probably obtain a relatively dense image

39. *Kisah Perjalanan*. p. 205.

40. *Memoar Perempuan Revolusioner*, p. 57.

41. *Di Bawah Langit Tak Berbintang*, p. 81.

of what they lived: moving from place to place; military, political and ideological instruction; conditions of private and collective life; experience of the Cultural Revolution... , but none of them draws the picture, none allows himself an account of the system that govern them, a criticism of their condition or an analysis of practical socialism. A few authors justify this lack of systematic description and analysis by the fact that they do not pretend to write history: "But this is a matter of past history, which I cannot expose in detail here. I'm going straight to my own story;"<sup>42</sup> "Once again, I am not a journalist, even less a war journalist. I have my own story, which has not much to do with war and peace;"<sup>43</sup> "It needs to be stated here that this text is not a historical dissertation about specific periods."<sup>44</sup>

For most of them the years in socialist countries were very hard, even more so because they coincided with the Cultural Revolution. Many make cautious hints at the excess of the Cultural Revolution, the political indoctrination and the cult of the Great Helmsman. But part of them have the greatest esteem for the Cultural Revolution.<sup>45</sup> And they are also grateful to have been accepted and taken care of during all these years. Sobron Aidit, who is among the most cautious and civil writers, expresses this gratitude:

Our life was supported by our host, who provided food, clothing, recreation, summer visits to other provinces, and pocket money too. For all our material needs, our host was most responsible and attentive. Verily, and I am talking for myself only, my opinion is, how well and thoroughly our host took care of us, and how much we owe him.<sup>46</sup>

Writers are led to this paradox of "saying without saying" because of two censorship filters: that of the Party and that of the audience. The first is the duty of secrecy regarding all their "revolutionary" activities and everything related to the Party. This is a strict and general rule dictated by the Party; it is also a rule of solidarity towards comrades. It is out of the question to disown the past or to challenge the political line of the PKI before 1965, even though, in actual life, this is precisely the subject of unending discussions, disputes and frictions, even after having moved to Europe. Refugees in socialist countries between 1965 and 1985 are "at war." Secrecy is so important that it seems without limits. Writing memoirs and describing this period of "war" equals the risk of betraying at every moment, or at least the risk of being accused of betraying.

To live with the obligation of keeping secrets has almost become an instinct, besides being one major teaching. Among the many secrets we have to keep are everything we learn apart from language, everything else we do, where we stay and how long we will be in Vietnam. Will all these remain secret all our life? Only time will answer.

42. Asahan Alham Aidit, *Cinta, Perang dan Ilusi*, p. 130.

43. *Idem*, p. 215.

44. Umar Said, *Perjalanan Hidup Saya*, p. xvi.

45. See for instance the three books by Tatiana Lukman: *Panta Rhei*, pp. 130-1, *Pelangi*, pp. 81-82, and above all *Alternatif*, pp. 128-62.

46. Sobron Aidit, *Cerita dari Tanah Pengasingan*, p. 9.

This comes from Asahan,<sup>47</sup> who is precisely the one who decided to take the highest risks with the spirit of secrecy under the mask of fiction. Secrecy produces hazy narratives where characters are designated by initials, places are unclear and actions are described (such is the aim of autobiography) as much as they are concealed (such is the law of secrecy).

The second self-censorship is caused by caution. Exiles write for the general Indonesian public, that is, for the average Indonesian, who has undergone thirty years of New Order's indoctrination, with all the prejudices, the common places and the myths that this implies. Communism is still demonised. It is impossible to talk about it without creating misunderstanding or even violent reactions, to the point of putting relatives and friends in danger and to arouse new hatred. It is necessary to temporize, to progress cautiously, to keep secrets.

There are other conspicuous silences. One regards cultural life. There are mentions of reading books, for instance, back in Indonesia before 1965 (Ali Chanafiah trades books with Soekarno in Bengkulu in the late 1930s: he gets Lenin's collected works in Dutch and H.G. Wells' *History of the World* in exchange for the original edition of *Das Kapital*)<sup>48</sup> and after the move to Europe (Ibarruri reads Russian books at the Pompidou Library in Paris in the 1980s),<sup>49</sup> but in the long period of wandering in socialist countries, Asahan may be the only one to mention any reading at all, viz. spending whole days reading in a public library in Hanoi. He is also the only one to talk, lengthily and eloquently, about music, and again about songs and dances.<sup>50</sup>

Narratives are also surprisingly poor in descriptions of foreign countries. Except for a few pages by Syarkawi Manap on Cuba (before 1965) and various passages by Asahan Aidit on Vietnam (in *Alhamdulillah* and *Cinta*) and the USSR (in *Cinta*), most writers say nothing about foreign countries that goes beyond their personal experience, so that there is little to learn in all that literature about the USSR, China, Vietnam, Burma, North Korea or European countries. Sobron Aidit may have written almost a thousand pages about his experience in France without really talking about France ever.

In other words, the narratives are characterised by silences, what is absent from them, as much as what is in them. The most remarkable silence is that of any indictment. The narratives avoid talking about 1965-66 and only allude mildly to the slaughters, jailings and all other tragic consequences of the "events." The sole character personally incriminated is General Soeharto.

47. Asahan Alham Aidit, *Cinta, Perang dan Ilusi*, pp. 148-9.

48. *Perjalanan Jauh*, p. 436.

49. *Anak Sulung*, p. 317.

50. See for instance *Perang dan Kembang*, pp. 218-221 and 440-443, for his experience as a violonist, and pp. 83-86, 137-140, 216, for Malay songs and dances performed in Vietnamese military camps.

How could I forgive the man who killed my family, my friends and my comrades? He killed my brother, and we don't even know where his grave is. How could I be able and willing to forgive him? God knows what I feel.<sup>51</sup>

Putting the blame solely on Soeharto allows forgiveness for everyone else. The major message of the narratives is a message of peace and reconciliation. Ibarruri is the one who expresses this in the most spectacular terms. In one of the many musings that occupy the last part of her memoirs, she argues that political prisoners and other victims of the New Order turn away from grudge, hatred and revenge because they refuse cruelty: to hate and to take vengeance would mean to be as fiendish as their torturers. Victims are thus reduced to, or voluntarily led to, a silent resistance:

In everyday life, at every moment, they oppose a mute resistance. [...] That is how humanism defeats barbarity and life defeats death. That is how nature, in its own way, restores the balance broken by man and revivifies the values that have been trampled upon by man.<sup>52</sup>

For her, people responsible for the slaughter are the generals and the government, while the masses are victims of an immense brain washing that created fictitious hatred. The masses (*rakyat*) have to reconcile:

Only if we go to the roots of the matter shall we be able to achieve peace with ourselves, with our conscience, and from there a genuine peace will be born on this beautiful earth. We will have the opportunity and the freedom to build the world of our own choice. We, together, will be able to bury the remains of the bodies of the fathers and mothers, the brothers and sisters, the friends whom we have slaughtered ourselves.<sup>53</sup>

Ibarruri is the daughter of the general secretary of the PKI, who was among the first victims (he was assassinated in November 1965) and who is the symbol of the physical destruction of the PKI and the massacre of hundreds of thousands of people. That she is able to write “[those] we have slaughtered ourselves” is quite phenomenal.

## Reception

Going back to the “silences” in exiles’ autobiographies, they are a cause of misunderstanding, both from people prejudiced against the exiles and people close to them. The publisher of Umar Said’s text had the unfortunate idea to request a foreword from Rosihan Anwar, a famous journalist and polygraph well known for his anti-communist stance, who has no sympathy and no esteem for Umar Said, who invokes the past with irony and condescension, and who allows himself to call Umar Said a “petit-bourgeois”:

51. Sobron Aidit, *Catatan Spiritual*, p. 28.

52. *Anak Sulung*, p. 333.

53. *Anak Sulung*, p. 371.



“The values he displays look more like the beliefs of a petty noble, they disclose a *kleinburgerlijk*, a petit-bourgeois world, far away from the ‘*vive le principe, perisse le monde*’ (live the principles perish the world) philosophy that the communist fighters liked to shout out in the past.”<sup>54</sup>

This judgement is unfair and biased because Umar Said’s numerous political actions, in France, in favour of the East Timorese, the *tapol* (political prisoners) and other categories of victims of the New Order are in no way “petit-bourgeois,” but Rosihan Anwar’s sarcasm is made possible because the text and the very life of Umar Said lose a great part of their meaning when deprived of any ideology.

Hersri Setiawan, who has personally known the political refugees in Europe one by one and who has interviewed a number of them in the frame of a politically oriented oral history project,<sup>55</sup> has remarked on their shyness, their tendency to keep a low profile and their reluctance to present themselves as a group of political opponents. He regards this attitude as a flaw and quotes the word of the ever provocative Pramoedya Ananta Toer: “Our comrades are still lying flat!”. For Hersri, *sastra eksil* should be a literature of opposition:

According to their nature and origin, the works born of political exile [...] should have opposition as inspiration and contents. Thus exile literature too should be a literature of opposition. But it is not the case of the Indonesian *sastra eksil*.<sup>56</sup>

This is actually only true of the works considered here, that is, the books and mainly the autobiographical ones, published in Indonesia after 1998, while the many articles published in journals, in Europe, in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as essays (like e.g. Tatiana Lukman’s *Alternatif*, 2013, and the seven volumes published by Suar Suroso during the last fifteen years) certainly belong to a “literature of opposition.” In any case, the exiles never lost interest in the political situation in Indonesia. Many of them take part in social and political action in favour of New Order’s victims and human rights, many participate in the movement for the establishment of a more equitable society. They have not abandoned their hopes for the future of Indonesia. But this is not to be found in their autobiographical writings. Those have a different purpose, which has to be read between the lines.

The central motive of these writings is the exiles’ identity. Rejected by their government, deprived of their citizenship, they have spent fifteen to twenty years of their life as stateless individuals locked up in a utopian bubble without a way out. Throughout that period, while their identity was buried under a

54. *Perjalanan Hidup Saya*, foreword, p. xiii.

55. The archives of the program, called “In Search of Silenced Voices: Indonesian Exiles of the Left,” are kept at Amsterdam’s International Institute of Social History (IISH). A second oral history program was conducted by the Yayasan Lontar in Jakarta. Those two extremely valuable documentations have been virtually unexploited until now.

56. Setiawan (2011).



succession of pseudonyms,<sup>57</sup> they have been trained, educated, indoctrinated, in the uncertain aim, constantly postponed and finally abandoned, to go back to their country as revolutionaries. During all that period they have been treated like interchangeable matriculant numbers. Talking about the way he is handled by the authorities (the unnamed Delegation), Asahan remarks bitterly:

Actually, I have long been regarded as street garbage that awaits the garbage collector to pick it up and throw it onto the garbage dump. This is part of the scenario written by someone else. It means that all pieces of scattered garbage have to wait submissively in specific dumps belonging to one garbage collector, they may not move freely. Political garbage if one cannot say political victims.<sup>58</sup>

Then they have been naturalised Europeans (Dutch, French, Swedish and others), often under new names again. During thirty years (when they started writing) or fifty (until now), their identity has been constantly denied. They have been identified as “communists” and thus undesirable, pariahs, disposable. Alluding to the “smiling General” (President Soeharto), the poet Satyadharma writes:

Underneath his smile, dogs are trained to bite, and bark more loudly than their master. Underneath his smile, lie my comrades’ bodies, dead for an unknown fault. Underneath his smile, my people have been cast to the level of pariahs.<sup>59</sup>

Whatever their political convictions at the twilight of their lives they want to get rid of that label ‘communist’ which has become an icon of evil and has nothing more to do with their past ideology, and above all they want to recover their Indonesian identity. They want to be accepted as the individuals they are, one by one, to be recognized as Indonesian citizens, to be authorised to go home, to be accepted without reproach and rancour. Ibarruri has a revealing sentence about this: “There, in France, we were truly anonymous and free. Anonymous, that is, people didn’t know who we really were. In that country, only a few people knew.”<sup>60</sup> ‘Anonymous’ here is not a matter of name but of labelling. Ibarruri is the last person to hide her origins. She called her autobiography “The eldest child of D.N. Aidit,” a most provocative title, even eight years after the demise of Soeharto’s regime. But for her, freedom comes with the liberation from labels, being “anonymous.”

During all the years of wandering (they are the “*orang kelayaban*,” the wanderers), the political refugees have always believed that the day would come when they would be able to go back to Indonesia. The idea of going back home, of being accepted back into Indonesian society, of living as

57. Sobron Aidit and Kusni Sulang have both been using dozens of different pennames during the New Order years.

58. *Alhamdulillah*, p. 11.

59. “Senyum,” in *Di Negeri Orang*, p. 204.

60. *Anak Sulung*, p. 316.

Indonesian citizens, of taking part in Indonesian social and political life, has been a life obsession and it is the fundamental reason why they write their life-stories. This idea is so common, so unanimous, that it obliterates the possibility of a different attitude. This is why the case of the exiles in Cuba is, by contrast, interesting: those few individuals (five families only) didn't ask for naturalisation, more or less assimilated into local society, and deliberately chose not to go back and settle in Indonesia.<sup>61</sup>

Ibarruri, who likes to use comparisons with the *Mahabharata*<sup>62</sup> compares the period of her exile in France with the end of the exile of the Pandawa brothers, the epic's heroes condemned to a twelve-year exile and one more year of anonymity after the eldest had lost his goods, his family, his wife and himself in a game of dice. Hersri Setiawan has used the same comparison a few times (a.o. 2001, 2010). For Ibarruri, the period of wandering ends once she is in France:

The time of wandering was used by the Pandawas to get more powerful and stronger. Here in France I started being a human being again, the period of wandering in the forest had come to an end. I could bear my original name again and live in the open, without having to hide, under the protection of the state here. We could take steps to get in touch with friends and comrades in the homeland. In France, for the first time, I was able to make contact with my mother and my younger brothers, later on to meet my family, and to undertake various activities in order to directly help friends in the homeland.<sup>63</sup>

To compare oneself with the Pandawa brothers is quite romantic. It means that the period of exile is closed. Moreover the end of the story is well known: the Pandawas will be the victors of the great war. While in reality, for the Indonesian exiles, exile never ended; for most of them, exile became a permanent status, many already died in exile, and they certainly didn't come out as victors.

## Conclusion

Exile status is not transmitted to the second generation. The latter, having chosen Indonesia or the host country, has its own status, which often is of a mestizo nature. *Sastra eksil* is thus limited in time to one generation and an odd half-century. Only a few more works will be published; the corpus is almost complete already. This corpus, however, is part of a larger category,

61. see Hearman, "The last men in Havana."

62. The Indian epic *Mahabharata* has had a life of its own in Java, where it became one of the main sources of the shadow theatre (*wayang kulit*) stories and gave birth to a quantity of new episodes. Ibarruri was nourished with *wayang* stories in her childhood, first by the family maid, then by reading, as she started reading very early and soon knew the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* stories by heart, especially through comics very popular at the time (*Anak Sulung*, p. 25, 34). Ibarruri gives a summary of the Pandawa brothers' exile twice (pp. 109, 312-3) and alludes to it twice more (pp. 151, 272-3).

63. *Anak Sulung*, p. 313.

that of the testimonies produced by all the victims of the 1965-1966 tragedy: exiles, people jailed and those sent to the labour camp on Buru Island, and it is in that context that it will have to be studied, both as a literary category and as a documentation in order to write this tragic episode in the history of contemporary Indonesia.

The books of the exiles are published, the testimony is audible, but is it heard? Not really, because the problem of the exiles, as well as that of the *tapol* is far from being solved; it is a social and historical problem that lies beyond literature: how does a nation absorb a trauma like that of the 1965-1966 slaughter?

Contrary to what could be expected, there is not much to glean in the exiles' memoirs about the September 30 putsch, PKI's history, the ideological debates inside the Indonesian left, the links between the exiles' community in Europe and the political activists in Indonesia before and after 1998, and other topics one would think exiles should be likely to talk about, but on the other side, this literature is a unique documentary source on the military and ideological training camps in China and in Vietnam, on the presence of Indonesian refugees in the USSR and Burma, or again on international socialist solidarity during the last decade of the Cold War. This documentary aspect is also to be found in academic writings (e.g. the articles by D. Hill and A. Supartono quoted above contain a wealth of information on the life of the refugees in the USSR), but the exiles' memoirs are irreplaceable because they are personal and emotional testimonies on the way the events of 1965-1966 and their sequels were lived and perceived.

One of the peculiarities of this literature, for the reasons mentioned above, is its relation to history. The rationale of memoirs world wide, their very essence, is to explicate the relationship between an individual destiny and that of the nation, to reveal the logical link between the life of a man or a woman and the course of history. In the case of *sastra eksil* memoirs, that relationship is never clearly established: it is always outside the text, in a historical limbo, while the events that led the exiles to wander from one country to another are dictated by obscure forces. *Sastra eksil* needs to be studied from a political point of view (is it a literature of opposition?) and a literary one (what is its place inside Indonesian literature, what is its specificity compared to the works of the *tapols*?), but it also deserves to be studied in a larger scope, together with the diverse literatures of diasporas and by comparison with the works that tell us about human beings living through one of history's tragedies.

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