WHEN MEMORY CHALLENGES HISTORY

Public Contestation of the Past in post-Suharto Indonesia

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Abstract

As a legitimacy for a ruling regime, official history is usually radically questioned, as the regime falls down. So is the case in Indonesia after Suharto stepped down in May 1998. However, unlike most countries having experienced the transition from authoritarian/totalitarian rule to democracy, post-Suharto Indonesia is witnessing an ambivalent critique of the official history, especially concerning the “September 30, 1965 affair”, i.e., the killings of six top Army officers by a regiment of Presidential guards, which brought about Suharto’s rise to power. On one side, there is a public query over who was really the ‘puppet player’ of the killings; on the other side, there are reactionary responses towards the claims of victimisation among ex-political prisoners associated with the “September 30, 1965 movement”, as they publicly express their memories of the past tragedy. This paper attempts to explore the current controversy over the official history of the “September 30, 1965 affair” through a discussion of the paradox of memory, and the relationship between memory and history.

Introduction

After Suharto stepped down, a lot of issues which were previously taboo or risky to discuss publicly have turned to be open debates in Indonesia. One of them is the official history concerning the “September 30, 1965 affair”, i.e. the kidnapping and the killings of six top Army officers by a regiment of Presidential guards (Cakrabilirawa), which brought about Suharto’s rise to power. It is the history – in the sense of the narrative of the past – which has significantly legitimised Suharto’s power. Therefore, questioning the official history is a form of removing Suharto’s historical legitimacy.

That history, however, persists, regardless of the degree of its social credibility. It is not because Suharto has a large number of loyalists who insist on sustaining that history; nor is it the hegemonic power of that history. This is, among other things, due to the fact that there is no single author of that past narrative. Parts of society who took a part in generating the wave of “Reformasi” – reforms of the
whole aspects of the life of the state and nation, which pushed Suharto to step down -- share the history. No wonder that they are ambivalent towards the query over the official narrative of the “September 30, 1965 affair” (in the ensuing discussion, I will call it the “1965 affair”). In one side, being a part of the wave of “Reformasi”, they support, or at least tolerate, the public discussions questioning the historical truth of the official narrative. On the other side, being one of the ‘authors’ of the history, they refute the implication of such a question: were the historical truth of the “1965 affair” not like what it has been officially and dominantly narrated, ex-political prisoners associated with the “1965 affair” – or eks-tapols in the popular term, although the term literally refers to any ex-political prisoners – would deserve to claim to be the victims, instead of the perpetrators of the past tragedy. They reject such an implication.

Due to such an ambivalence, there is then a contestation of the past. This seems to be inseparable from (or even a form of) the contestation of how to make sense of the present and the future. Central to this contestation is the relation between history and memory, between the past as narrated institutionally and the past as experienced personally; and this is not only heterogeneous. It is quite often mutually opposing as well. Therefore, exploring this issue can be a way of understanding how the social relations within the society and the state-society relation are reorganised, restructured, and redefined. That is the concern of this paper.

This paper is organized as follows. First, featuring how the public contestation of the “1965 affair” is going on. Second, a close reading of the contestation, in which I will asses the ambivalent critique of the history of the “1965 affair”, and what it means to the “Reformasi”. Third, framing those discussions within the concepts of and the relationship between memory and history, which both are basically
understood – in the light of poststructuralist perspective – as constructed narratives of the past. Finally, the closing remark, which will note the new possible relationship between memory and history.

“Reformasi” and debating the official history of the “1965 affair”

The official history of Suharto’s “New Order” regime describes that what really happened on September 30, 1965 was an abortive Communist coup. The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) is narrated as the mastermind of the putsch of the Cakrabirawa to kidnap and kill six top Army officers, as a way of controlling the military before eventually controlling the state. This relies on “the evidences from the trials of the top PKI leaders and those who were involved in the September 30, 1965, Movement”. However, finding that the editorial of Harian Rakjat, PKI’s daily newspaper, on October 2, 1965 edition declared its support for the formation of Dewan Revolusi (Council of Revolution) announced by Let. Colonel Untung, the commander of the putsch, in the Radio of the Republic of Indonesia (RRI) the day before, Suharto and the Army started the campaign to crush and exterminate PKI and its mass organizations a few days afterwards, while the “trials” alone were carried out months later.

For Suharto’s “New Order” regime, the “1965 affair” is the climax of PKI’s efforts along its history to turn the state ideology Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution into Communism. The history of PKI is thus the story of a never-ending treason to the state and nation. However, as it is officially narrated, due to the close co-operation of the military – under the leadership of Major Gen. Suharto, by then the strategic commander of the Army (Pangkostrad), who was out of the target of the
“September, 30, 1965 movement” – and the people, PKI’s last attempt could be crushed. *Pancasila* and the 1945 Constitution were saved, so was the existence of the state and nation.4

Such a narrative was omnipresent: from school textbooks to popular novels, from films to folk stories, from government officers’ statements to religious preaches, and, of course, in state ideology indoctrination. It even became “a master narrative”, as Ariel Heryanto (1993:13) calls it, adopting from James Clifford’s concept of “master script”, which “functions as a canon, on the basis of which ‘a potentially endless exegetical discourse can be generated’”. Suharto’s “New Order” regime ran the state power among other things by reproducing such a narrative. However, it was not without any counter – or at least subverting – histories.

Various versions have countered and/or subverted the predominantly official narrative. Works of foreign scholars, such as the “Cornell paper” of Benedict Anderson and Ruth McVey, the ones by Dutch historian W.F. Wertheim, and the likes, are doubtful that “the 1965 affair” was a communist coup.5 Instead, each argues that it was just one of the following possibilities: (a) an internal conflict within the Army, (b) CIA’s effort to topple down Sukarno, (c) the plan of the British intelligence service to oust Sukarno, (d) Suharto’s own scenario to take over Sukarno’s power, and (e) the combination of some probabilities. However, during Suharto’s era, only a small circle of Indonesian scholars learned and discussed these versions, silently.

Suharto’s forced resignation in May 1998 has enabled these alternative/counter histories to resurface. They are no longer exclusive knowledge of a limited circle of academia. Various mass media bluntly quote them.6 Newly founded small publishers issue the Indonesian translation of several alternative histories.7 Therefore, people can access such a knowledge easily. These histories push an open
and enthusiastic discussion on the historical truth of the official history. Even not a few people suspect that Suharto himself was likely the very mastermind of the killings. So that rewriting history textbooks becomes a public issue. However, hardly any commentator has explicitly talked about the logical implication of such a suspicion: suppose Suharto himself was the “puppet player” of the “1965 affair”, eks-tapols would deserve to define their own pasts, that they were the victims – instead of the perpetrators – due to being victimised.

Suharto’s successor, B.J. Habibie, seemed to tolerate the mass hysteria of “de-Suhartoization”. He even claimed that questioning things which were previously taboo to talk publicly as a part of “Reformasi”, as a part of democratisation, which he was concerned in. When almost everybody competed to be acknowledged as a “true reformer”, or the “most reformer”, it seems that Habibie did not want to take a risk of being charged against the “Reformasi”. No wonder he looked tolerant on such issues. He even politicised them.

Partly due to such a motif, in addition to the pressure both from within and outside through the rising tone of the discourse of human rights, by the end of March 1999 Habibie gave a pardon to several political prisoners, including the remaining ten associated with the “1965 affair”. He released them. Regarding the release of these political prisoners – having been imprisoned for more than thirty years, and were supposed to be in life-imprisonment – government officers and other public figures used the rhetoric of humanitarian concern. These ex-prisoners were featured as “aged, suffering from various degenerative diseases, expected to be no longer threatening ‘the unity and the stability of the nation’”. Such typical statements as “we forgive, but not forget their guilt in the past”, and “the release indicates that ‘we are a forgiving
nation, willing to forgive those who betrayed, threatened, and even almost demolished the existence of the state and nation’’ appear in mass media.10

The story changed as those ex-political prisoners publicly represented themselves as the victims, instead of the perpetrators, of the past tragedy. They told that they were ignorant of what really happened on September 30, 1965; and they articulated their memories11 of agony, of the – in the words of an Indonesian political diasporic M.R. Siregar12 – “Indonesian Holocaust”. They even planned to “rectify the history”, as a call for some historical rehabilitation, or a call for the rights to redefine their own pasts.

Three weeks later, 15 April 1999, a group of eks-tapols – including well-noted author and Noble laureate nominee Pramudya Ananta Toer, who were imprisoned without trial from 1965 to 1979 – declared Yayasan Penelitian Korban Pembunuhan 1965-66 (YPKP 1965-66, Indonesian Institute for the Study of 1965-66 Massacre), a foundation which aims at “investigating the accurate number of the victims of the 1965-66 massacre”.13 They define this activity as an effort to “brighten the life of the nation” – in line with the preamble of the 1945 Constitution – assuming that in looking at the past – i.e. the “1965 affair” – “the life of the nation has been fooled by Suharto’s regime”.14

Following months were witnessing the publication of: (a) literary works representing the life of eks-tapols during their detainment, such as a novel, Merajut Harkat (Knitting the Human Dignity), an anthology of poems, Perjalanan Penyair: Sajak-sajak Kegelisahan Hidup (The Journey of a Poet: Verses of Life Restlessness), both by Putu Oka Sukanta,15 (b) autobiographies, such as Perempuan-Kebenaran dan Penjara (Women-Truth and Prison) by Sulami,16 and the Indonesian version of Carmel Budiardjo’s Surviving Indonesia’s Gulag: A western woman tells her story
testimonies, such as Menyingkap Kabut Halim (Uncovering the Mist of Halim), interviews [by a team of journalists and former corps members of the Indonesian Air Force] with former Air Marshals Omar Dhani and Sri Mulyono Herlambang, and a lot of interviews with eks-tapols in various mass media, including private TV stations. In addition, approaching the June 1999 General Election, several well-noted eks-tapols, such as Pramudya Ananta Toer and Ribka Tjiptaning, declared to be the sympathisers or supporters of certain political parties, especially PRD (Democratic People’s Party) and PDI-P (Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle) – one thing which was impossible in Suharto’s era.

Those actions invited public tempered reactions. Just a couple of weeks after the declaration of YPKP 1965-66, two mass gatherings co-ordinated by “Forum Indonesia Baru” (New Indonesia Forum) and other ad-hoc committees adopting Islamic names were held in Jakarta and Bekasi. They all yelled the rhetoric of “waspadai bahaya laten komunis” (beware of the latent threat of communism). They pointed out some indicators, such as the establishment of YPKP 1965-66 and public statements of eks-tapols aimed at “cleaning their hands from the dirt of the past”, “the decision of some eks-tapols to join certain political parties”; in short, “they take opportunities of the democratization movement for their own interests”.

In early May 1999, CIDES (Centre for Information and Development Studies) – the think tank of ICMI (Association of Indonesian Moslem Intellectuals), which is closely linked to B.J. Habibie – organized a meeting attended by Moslem public figures who once had bitter experiences against the communists. It was also attended by General (Ret.) A.H. Nasution, who was the very target of the “September 30, 1965 movement” (but he slipped off, yet his six-year old daughter was killed). This was a forum to articulate what they claim as their bitter memories when PKI was “above the
“wind” during the heyday of Sukarno’s Demokrasi Terpimpin (Guided Democracy) era. They shared the memories on the brutalities of the communists. In short, the forum reaffirmed that the possible revival of communism is completely intolerable. Any effort to reawaken communism must be crushed, at any cost.

Then they published their talks shared in the forum in a book entitled Membuka Lipatan Sejarah: Menyingkap Fakta Gerakan PKI (Unfolding the history: Revealing the facts of PKI’s movements). In its foreword, the editors say that “anti-Communist mobilisation is urgently needed, as there are strong indications of the (possible) reawakening of communism, taking an opportunity in the democratization process”. As for the past cruelties and immoral political actions of PKI, such a phenomenon cannot be tolerated, absolutely. The editors thus end the foreword that “the book is important as an historical reference”; and “young generation need to read it in order to know exactly what the Communists did, in order not to get fascinated with the present articulations of ex-communist political prisoners”.

In addition, street banners on “beware of the communist threat”, “beware of the revival of communism”, “don’t let communists take a chance in the democratization process” are displayed in many strategic places of several major cities (such as Yogyakarta, Surakarta, Surabaya, Semarang, Jakarta), amidst the banners and billboards advertising various commercial products and political slogans on national unity and harmony, etc.

Less than two months after being elected the President, Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) decided to open the door for Indonesians living abroad and being afraid of going home during Suharto’s era due to some political reason. Most of them used to be graduate students and/or diplomats – with various political affiliations – basing in the countries of socialist bloc such as Cuba, China, Soviet Union, and East European
states, when the “1965 affair” happened; and they were unwilling to curse the “1965 affair” as a communist coup. Because of such a political attitude, their Indonesian citizenship was abrogated, and would be prosecuted or imprisoned if going home. Now, Gus Dur’s administration permits them to go home and to regain their Indonesian citizenship, if they wish to.

That decision makes a public controversy. Human rights activists contend that it is a necessary part of national reconciliation, which is inseparable from the process of democratization. On the other side, not a few Moslem politicians – such as three members of parliament: Hartono Mardjono of the Crescent Party (Partai Bulan Bintang), Aisyah Aimini of the United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan), and Ma’ruf Amin, an ulema from Cirebon, West Java – seriously protest that decision. These figures argue that allowing the political diasporic individuals to go home without bringing them to the court could produce an image that they were not guilty.

Several weekly newsmagazines in reporting the arrival of A.M. Hanafi – a former Indonesian ambassador for Cuba, whose Indonesian citizenship was revoked due to his political attitude towards the “1965 affair” – reproduce the political rhetoric of Suharto’s regime, such as “beware of communist threat”, “communism never dies”, etc. There is no choice but welcoming him back, Forum Keadilan, for instance, comments that “beware of communist threat is a must, since communism never dies”. Even some intimidating tone came from several Moslem leaders, regarding A.M Hanafi’s call for a rehabilitation of his civil rights. “Beggars can’t choose”, said Ahmad Syafii Ma’arif, the head of Muhammadiyah – the second largest mass Moslem organization in Indonesia – commenting the aspiration of eks-tapols and an individual like A.M. Hanafi for regaining their rights to define their past, for rehabilitating their
civil rights, even for revoking the legal acts on banning Communism/Marxism/Leninism. “If they do all sort of things, ‘unmat’ – (read: the Moslems) – will be up against them”, Ahmad continued.30

The debate on the policy continued until a few months later. Meanwhile history class concerning the “1965 affair” in primary and secondary schools was in “status quo”. Teachers explained just as what it had been written in the textbooks, but they gave a footnote: “it is subject to revise, and the revision is in progress”.31 A team of historians discussed how to revise the narrative of this affair.

The result of the debate is not a revised version of the textbooks, but only a supplementary reader containing clarification – instead of new interpretation – on the hard facts of the historical events which used to be “manipulated”. Regarding the “1965 affair”, the supplementary reader – in the words of a senior historian, Taufik Abdullah – “only describes the historical facts happening on the upper level”. “The undercurrents of the event, such as regarding its motif, mastermind, and so on”, Abdullah continues, “are not written because of two reasons. First, these issues are still debatable. Therefore, second, they need further studies to make us sure of them”.32

Meanwhile alternative histories are publicly discussed; and eks-tapols articulate their memories, and have an ambition to transform their memories to history.33 This means that the contestation of the past is running. Obviously that this is all enabled by the process of democratisation. But, what does it mean to the democratisation itself? What does it mean to the redefinition of the present and the future? What makes it ambiguous?
Contesting the past: contestation on redefining the present and the future

One thing is clear in post-Suharto Indonesia: that people are suspicious of all things positively associated with Suharto. The constructions of social realities by Suharto’s regime are (or tend to be) turned upside down. There comes a mass hysteria of “de-Suhartoization”; and questioning the official history of Suharto’s regime is just a part of it.

However, parts of society, c. q., several Moslem groups (as among others represented in the voices of some public figures as mentioned before), who also take a part in – or at least tolerate – the questioning of the official history, reject the implication of such a query. If they doubt the official history, which means doubting the role of PKI as the mastermind of the “1965 affair”, how could they not tolerate the public articulation of the victimisation of eks-tapols? How could they then reproduce Suharto’s political rhetoric on “beware of communist threat” in one side, and actively take a part in the euphoria of “de-Suhartoization” in other side?

As it has been likely a truism, questioning the narrative of the past is surely not for the past as such, not for the dead past, but for redefining the present and the future. So long as the narrative of the past is in hand, so is the narrative of the present and the future. As the opposite direction of what Milan Kundera (1982:22) says that “the only reason people want to be masters of the future is to change the past”, redefining/mastering the past is none other than redefining/mastering the present and the future. The refusal of the Moslem groups on the implication of questioning the official history of the “1965 affair” is likely to lie on this matter: how and by whom the present and the future should be redefined. Such a question is determined and in turn determining the social relations within the society and the state – society relation.
Suharto’s “New Order” regime indeed ran the state power by reproducing the ideology of anti-Communism. Despite the dynamics of the practices of this ideology, as Rob Goodfellow (1995) observes, the intensity of the reproduction was usually closely related to the degree of rivalries within the political elite around Suharto, regardless of its effectiveness. Thus, the accusation that a political rival – even anybody disliked -- is a ”communist”, for instance, has nothing (or little thing) to do with the reality of being communist. “Communism” has become a self-referential term, or simulacrum, as Ariel Heryanto (1999) argues. Paraphrasing Achille Mbembe, that “the postcolony is the simulacral regime par excellence”, Heryanto contends that “New Order” state is a simulacral regime. However, he remarks, the practices of such a regime are only possible in particular time and in particular circumstances; thus the presence of a signified object, which is historically real, is, however, needed.

Departing from such a conceptual assertion, and considering that “New Order” state is not the only author of the discourse of “Communist threat”, reactionary responses of some Moslem groups towards the public articulation of victimisation of eks-tapols can be grasped not in contesting the dead past, but in maintaining the existence of the other who is “threatening”, “betraying”, “disordering”, in short, nefarious. It is the other who can be (and is) objectified not merely to differentiate and distance from the self, but also as a scapegoat of all troubles and as a curse, without any protest and resistance. Borrowing the words of Zygmunt Bauman (1996:72), it is the other who can be (and is) “incarcerated in a territory from which there is no exit for them, but which the others may enter at will”. Yet “Reformasi” has made an exit for eks-tapols – the other who used to be “silent, but not always inarticulate”, due to being silenced.
Since *eks-tapols* have exited from their “incarcerated territory” and are now representing themselves as the victims of the past tragedy, and consequently it is reversing the “New Order”’s official history of the “1965 affair”, won’t it be destabilising the evil images of “communists”, and thus are no longer the passive *other*? Won’t it be disrupting the simulacrum of “Communism”? These are likely the questions of those who raise reactionary responses towards the public articulation of *eks-tapols*. Should it be the heart of the matter, the ambiguity in questioning the past also reflects the ambiguity towards “Reformasi” itself. The reactionary responses thus sound like: “‘Reformasi’, yes!, except for the ‘communists’“.

Considering that democratisation is a denial of all kinds of discrimination and social exclusion – not saying the negation of *self-other* relation -- the course of “Reformasi” thus looks half-hearted. It is only the state – society relation which is redefined and restructured, to make it more egalitarian, but not the social relations within the society itself. Parts of society seem to sustain the social exclusion of others. The insistence on maintaining such a social exclusion is a serious obstacle to the materialization of the idea of national reconciliation, which requires a will to dissolve the burden past.

Apparently that the public contestation of the past is enabled by “Reformasi”; but it can also be a constraint to the “Reformasi” itself. This paradox, to some degree, lies on the paradox of memory, the relationship between memory and history, and, in the case of Suharto’s Indonesia – just like in totalitarian, or having ambition to be a totalitarian state – the massive “ideologization” of history, as it is seen in the official narrative of the past. The following section is discussing these issues, to frame the discussion on the public contestation of the past in post-Suharto Indonesia.
Paradox of memory, the relationship between memory and history, and the “ideologization” of history

As it has already been featured, the contestation of the past in post-Suharto Indonesia appears to be problematic, not when alternative or counter histories resurface to challenge or to destabilise the official history of the “1965 affair”, but as those who claim themselves to be the very victims of the “1965 affair” publicly articulate their unknowing on *what did really happen* and their memories of their miseries, and of their sense of having been socially mis(and dis)-identified. In other words, it becomes problematic as memories challenge the official history. Why? Isn’t memory traditionally assumed to be “subjective”, so that subordinated to history – which is assumed to be “objective” due to its methods of inquiring the past -- thus it can be ignored? What makes such memories a trouble to such a history? What makes such a history resistant to such memories?

Those questions assume that the problem only lies on the relational gap between memory and history. Whereas each is problematic in itself. Memory is not just remembering; but it is remembering at the expense of forgetting. It is remembering something by forgetting other thing(s); or, forgetting one thing in order to remember something. As Paula Hamilton (1994:23) argues, to sustain the life of a nation, where things constructed as “national” are needed, “forgetting is one of the most powerful forces that shape national remembering”. Forgetting is thus mandatory, since it is “a part larger project of remembering” (Lowenthal, 1999:xii). Here lies the paradox of memory: the opposing and complementary relationship between, in the words of Michel de Certeau (as cited in Fabri, 1995:156), “an action against the past” (forgetting) and “an action by a past which returns to the present” (remembering).

In post-Suharto Indonesia, such a paradox of memory is seen both in the articulation of memories of *eks-tapols* and in the counter-memories of the Moslems.
To say that they are the victims – instead of the perpetrators -- of the “1965 affair”, eks-tapols express their unknowing of what did really happen; they articulate their experiences of being tortured, imprisoned without trials for years, underfed and exploited during the detainment, set aside from their families, socially stigmatizised and discriminated after the detainment, and made a pariah social group, including their off springs. They articulate the bitter sides of their past experiences: one thing which was silenced under Suharto’s rule. Now they break their silence, in order to be acknowledged as they identify to be: the very victims, not only of the “1965 affair” alone, but also of the whole epoch of Suharto’s “New Order” state, since upon the victimization of them, the “New Order” state was established.36

To eks-tapols, identifying themselves as displaced people, such textualization of memory is thus like what Nathan Wachtel (1990:123) says, “a quest for a world that has been destroyed and the attempt somehow to bring it to life once more”; and, borrowing the words of Michel de Certeau (as cited in Fabri, 1995:156), such a world “represents home, that is, a tangible place of belonging”.

Yet, in order to (re-)gain such “a tangible place of belonging”, eks-tapols locate the “1965 affair” as the beginning of the narratives of their miseries. As if the past began as the “1965 affair” happened. As if previously there were no stories to narrate. It was the temporal fragment of forgetting. It was the past which they act against. But, it does not mean that they are completely silent on their (political) activities prior to the “1965 affair”. They indeed narrate what they did before the “1965 affair” occurred, but it is a narrative through selectivity; they select things which they can socially, politically, legally justify.37

Precisely on such a temporal fragment of forgetting, counter-memories of the Moslems keep remembering. It is what the eks-tapols forget that the Moslems
remember. Bloody local incidents such as the ones happening in Kanigoro, Banyuwangi, and Jember (East Java), and Klaten and Surakarta (Central Java) – where PKI’s supporters used violent ways, besides discrediting religious men, c. q., the *ulemas*, in running their unilateral actions (*aksi-aksi sepihak*) concerning the issues of land-reform and agrarian reform in 1964-65 -- are always reproduced to construct an image that “Communism and violence are mutually identical”, “being a Communist and being an atheist are mutually identical”, and thus it is “logical” if PKI was “the mastermind of the bloody 1965 affair”.³⁸

On the other hand, the narratives of such memories are silent on what happened in months and years after the “1965 affair”. They do not say anything about the mass imprisonment without trials and the mass killings of those being charged of “Communists” or sympathisers of PKI and its mass organisations. They are silent too on the tortures and famines experienced by the *tapols*.³⁹ In short, for them the “1965 affair” is the very climax of the cruelties of Communists along their presence in the Indonesian history; and the following historical phase is “the victory of the ‘religious Indonesian nation’ over the ‘atheist Communists’”.⁴⁰

Perhaps it is not by accident that such a narrative is exactly the same as the official history;⁴¹ since in the past, historically speaking, the major political rivals of PKI were not only the military, particularly the Army – which turned to be the political backbone of Suharto’s “New Order” state – but also the Islamic political parties. Thus, it would be a denial of their own identity construction if the Moslem groups – in the euphoria of “Reformasi” – tolerate the *eks-tapols* to redefine their own past. In other words, when the memories of *eks-tapols* challenge the official history, it is also a challenge to the memories of those Moslem groups.
Interestingly that in articulating their memories of what happened to them after the “1965 affair”, eks-tapols hardly say anything about what the Moslems did on them. They do not say that the Moslems took an active part in the mass slaughtering of the “communists”. They say that Suharto, as the personification of the military, was the most responsible for the past tragedy. Yet, even if eks-tapols construct such a narrative of the past, still this can make a trouble for the Moslem groups. Since to the latter, “communists” have been objectified as a nefarious other, without any trouble.

If the problem lies on the paradox of memory as it is related to the contestation of the “self” – “other” construction, (i.e., who should be included and excluded?, and why?), how should the relation between memory and history be understood? In what ways are they problematic to each other?

In post-Suharto Indonesia, apparently that the memories of eks-tapols are, to a large extent, congruent with the alternative/counter histories; while the memories of the Moslem groups are in accordance with the official history. The problem arises as the eks-tapols textualize their memories to challenge the official history, and it is not the state apparatuses of the new regime which counter such a challenge, but several Moslem groups, instead. Why those Moslem groups give such reactionary responses, as it has been already mentioned, is among other things closely related to their worry of having no longer an objectified other. But, why did not such responses emerge when the alternative/counter histories challenged the official history? Why are such responses not directed to those histories?

Those questions problematise the relation between memory and history. As it has been mentioned, in the light of poststructuralist perspective both are understood as “constructed narratives of the past”. What makes them different is the existence of the
institutional regulation (Davis and Starn, 1989:2). In other words, history is codified,
while memory is embodied.

In addition, as French historian Pierre Nora (1992/1996:3) contends, memory
and history are in many respects opposed. The “list of the oppositions” is, among
other things, as follows:

(i) Memory is always a phenomenon of the present, a bond tying us to the eternal present;
history is a representation of the past. (ii) Memory, being a phenomenon of emotion and
magic, accommodates only those facts that suit it. .... History, being an intellectual, non-
religious activity, calls for analysis and critical discourse. .... (iii) Memory wells up from
groups that it welds together,....... By contrast, history belongs to everyone and to no one and
therefore has a universal vocation. (iv) Memory is rooted in the concrete: in space, gesture,
image, and object. History dwells exclusively on temporal continuities, on changes in things
and in the relations among things (Nora, 1992/1996:3) (numberings and italics – mine).

By such oppositions, one can presume that memory is subordinate to history, that
memory can impossibly displace history, that memory cannot be more powerful than
history. It is because its construction of the past narrative is “subjective”, “personal”,
and “presently-centred”, not through certain procedures which have been
“objectively” examined. It is a narrative which is “self-centred”, which only wants to
say “who we are” víz a víz the “non-us”. It is a narrative which has neither instrument
nor institution to justify itself, and thus it has no authority to impose it to others. So,
what is worried about such kind of narrative?

Ironically, just because of such conditions, so long as memory is socially
accepted, it is accepted spontaneously and emotionally. This could be more affective,
and more difficult to control; and when it belongs to everyone, it is socially embodied.
On the other hand, history, since it is a codified narrative of the past, it is consciously
constructed, and it can be thus de-codified, and less difficult to control. The hands of
legal institution can reach it. Besides, since history is “a representation of the past”,
while representation always presumes a power which supports it and in turn a power
which is produced by, so long as the power is in question, so is the representation, so is history.

Perhaps, in such point of the matter that the reactionary responses of the Moslem groups emerge and are directed to the public articulation of the memories of eks-tapols, instead of to the alternative/counter histories. As it has been featured, the responses of the Moslem groups are obviously intended to blockade the dissemination of the memories of eks-tapols, at any way and at any cost, without attempting to construct more convincing narratives, nor debating what the eks-tapols express. They only speak what the eks-tapols do not. Thus, it is not a contestation of the past at the same point of arena, nor contesting the past as what, how, why, and who did matter. It is a contestation on how to signify the past from different points of time, interest, and identity construction – things which they attempt to make un-negotiateable.

Such kind of contestation happens among other things because of the massive “ideologization” of history in Suharto’s era. The official narrative of the “1965 affair” has essentialized the “communists” in such a way that “they” have been and will be not more than just evils, forever. Thus, it is “a history” which is a-historical, having an ambition to “transcend” the course of time, or timeless, like an ideology. It is a symbolic code of meaning that shapes the individual’s and a particular community’s sense of what is “real”, and thus constitutes an “unarguable truth”: one thing which is common in a regime which always wants to completely control the consciousness of its subjects.

The Moslem groups who raise reactionary responses towards the public articulation of memories of eks-tapols, in addition to their own past experiences, seem to keep themselves within such a-historical “history”, which has provided them a comfortable zone for constructing their sense of self, viz a viz the other, the passive
other. It has a little thing to do with the “hegemony” of the ideology of the “New Order” state. What is happening here is that those Moslem groups and the “New Order” state, to a large extent, share the common other, i.e., the “communists”; but those Moslem groups themselves were, to some extent, also constructed as the other by the “New Order” state, and the reverse.

Due to such a conservative position (or lack of language for constructing the “otherness”?), the idea of negotiating with the past, as it is prevalent in the transition of authoritarian-totalitarian rule to democracy – as best exemplified in South Africa and several Latin American countries like Argentine and Chile -- does not have a sufficient public resonance in post-Suharto Indonesia, particularly when it touches upon the “1965 affair” and its various effects. It is not the new state – as it is represented in the personae of Gus Dur -- which makes it problematic, but parts of society, instead.

Closing remark

In post-Suharto Indonesia, as there is a rising demand for redefining the past, the past has become what Arjun Appadurai (as cited in Schudson, 1992:207) calls “a scarce resource”. Since memory is fluid and vulnerable to the course of time, no wonder that eks-tapols have an ambition to transform their memories into histories, or even the history. Since it is memories of how the “1965 affair” has affected them and their families, rather than what had made it happen, should the transformation matter, this will likely mean a transformation of the notion of history itself. This would be probably as what Pierre Nora calls history in the possible sense of rememoration. It is history which is “less interested in causes than in effects; less interested in actions remembered or even commemorated than in the traces left by those actions; less interested in ‘what actually happened’ than in its perpetual reuse and misuse, its
influence on successive presents” (Nora, 1992/1996:xiii). Perhaps, in such notions memory and history are identical to each other, as it is traditionally presumed, but in a new sense.

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**Endnotes:**

1 A slightly different version – with the same title – of this paper is issued in *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* (a journal published by the Dept. of Sociology, National University of Singapore) (September, 2000). This paper was formerly presented in the NUS – UNSW Joint Workshop: “Southeast Asia: Ways of Seeing”, Sydney, February 10-11, 2000.

2 *Gerakan 30 September Pemberontakan Partai Komunis Indonesia: Latar Belakang, Aksi, dan Penumpasannya* (Jakarta: Sekretariat Negara Republik Indonesia, 1994). As the State Secretary Minister Moerdiono wrote in the “Foreword”, the writing of this book took a long time, both in collecting the complete data and in deepening the analysis, as well as in taking enough temporal distance, “in order to achieve the optimal degree of objectivity”. Such a phrase is aimed at convincing the public that what had been established in the official history was “factually-objectively true”. This book seemed to react the publication of a Sukarnoist Manai Sophian’s *Kehormatan Bagi yang Berhak: Bung Karno tidak Terlibat G30S/PKI* (Jakarta: Yayasan Mencerdaskan Kehidupan Bangsa, 1994), which argues that Sukarno was not involved in the “1965 movement”, a counter to the official version – which states that Sukarno protected PKI. Although *Kehormatan* was banned just a few weeks after the date of its publication (August 1994), it seems that the government was worried of its influence, which could subvert or shake the historical legitimacy of Suharto.

3 *Pancasila* = Five principles: (1) belief in One God; (2) humanitarianism; (3) nationalism; (4) democracy; and (5) social justice.

4 To commemorate the success of “saving Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution” (and thus “the triumph of Pancasila over Communism”), October 1 is officially declared as the “Sanctity Day of Pancasila”. For the last fifteen years of Suharto’s rule, the night before the “Sanctity Day of Pancasila”, a state-sponsored film *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* (The Treason of G30S/PKI) was broadcast on all TV channels nation-wide. Just in 1998, four months after Suharto resigned, the film was no longer on the air. Yet, in 1998 and 1999, President Habibie and his ministerial cabinet staffs and other high government officers still ran the official ceremony commemorating the “Sanctity Day of Pancasila”.
Other scholarly works share the doubt are such as Harold Crouch’s *The Army and Politics in Indonesia* (1975); Peter Dale Scott’s “The United States and the Overthrow of Sukarno” (1985); Kathy Kadane’s “US officials list aided Indonesians blood bath in 1965” (1990); etc. TAPOL bulletin has published a list of bibliography on the “1965 affair”. There are sixty-six works in the list. (see, http://www.gn.apc.org/tapol).


Such as CV Adipura (Yogyakarta) has published the Indonesian version of Ben Anderson’s ‘How did the generals die?’, Michael van Langenberg’s ‘GESTAPU and the state power in Indonesia’, and Peter Dale Scott’s ‘The role of CIA in the overthrow of Sukarno’; while Garba Budaya (Jakarta) has published the translation of Saskia Eleonora Wierenga’s *The politization of gender relations in Indonesia: Women’s movement and Gerwani in the New Order State*, in which the last chapter argues that what was happening in 1965 – 66 was Suharto’s creeping coup.

*TAPOL* Bulletin (No. 80, April 1987) reports that in the months and years during the campaign of crushing and exterminating PKI, 1.375,320 people were detained for several years (those who were categorised as group C), 34,587 were imprisoned without trials for around ten years (group B), and 426 were tried – partly sentenced to death, and the rest life-imprisonment (group A).

They – some approaching 70 and the rest in their seventies -- are those who were directly involved in the “September 30, 1965, Movement”: the corps members of Cakrabirawa.

The-then Minister of Justice, Muladi, for instance, said that the release of these political prisoners was merely due to humanitarian concern. See *Detikcom*, March 24, 1999; *Kompas*, March 24 and 25, 1999.

Both history and memory are understood as constructed narratives of the past. Yet, following the distinction of both by French historian Pierre Nora (1996), the former is codified, while the latter is embodied; the former is constructed from the result of certain methodological inquiries, while the latter is based on experiences.


Roughly estimated between five hundred thousand to one million people being accused as “communists” were killed during the campaign of crushing and exterminating PKI from mid October 1965 to the mid-1966. Bertrand Russell’s words (as cited in Malcolm Caldwell [ed.], *Ten Years’ Military Terror in Indonesia* [Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1975]), that “…in four months five times as many people died in Indonesia as in Vietnam in twelve years”, perhaps sound better in featuring the scale of this human tragedy than in statistical speech. On the mass killings in 1965-66, see among others Robert Cribb (ed.), *The Indonesian Killings of 1965 – 1966: Studies from Java and Bali* (Clayton: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1991); Pipit Rochijat, “Am I PKI or Non-PKI?”; *Indonesia*, No. 40, October 1985; Geoffrey Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali, 1965-66* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1995).


He used to be a member of “Lekra” (*Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat* = the Institute of People’s Culture) – a social organization of artists which had an affiliation with PKI. (Pramudya Ananta Toer was the honorary president of this organization). Putu was imprisoned without trial for ten years.

She was the second vice-general secretary of “Gerwani” (*Gerakan Wanita Indonesia* = the Movement of Indonesian Women) – a social organization of women having an affiliation with PKI. She was imprisoned for twenty years.
Carmel Budiardjo, British, married an Indonesian man, who used to be a high officer in the Indonesian foreign ministry. She became an Indonesian citizen then. Yet, as she was close to PKI’s elites, just like her husband, she was accused of being a sympathiser of PKI, and was detained from 1968 to 1971. Due to the pressure of the British government, the “New Order” Indonesian regime released her, but she had to leave Indonesia and to give up her Indonesian citizenship. Since then she was concerned in the human rights violations in Indonesia, regardless of the class, ethnic, religious and political bonds of the victims. She articulates her concern in the monthly bulletin called “TAPOL Bulletin”.

The short name for Halim Perdana Kusuma, the Indonesian Air Force base located in East Jakarta, whereabouts -- in the official history -- “the orgiastic killings of the generals by members of Gerwani and Pemuda Rakyat” (People’s Youth, a youth organisation affiliated with PKI) were carried out, “strongly indicating the support of the commanders of the Indonesian Air Force”. Both were prosecuted, and imprisoned for thirty years.

Both were the chief and the deputy chief of the Indonesian Air Force (AURI = Angkatan Udara Republik Indonesia) respectively.

Many interviews with Pramudya Ananta Toer appear in various mass media (see, for instance, Kompas, April 4, 1999; Tempo, April 5, and May 10, 1999; etc.) especially approaching his two-month (April – June 1999) tour in the United States and some European countries, promoting the English version of his diary during his detainment in Buru Island, The Mute Soliloquy. (The Indonesian version, Nyanyi Sunyi Seorang Bisu, was published in 1995, and banned just a few weeks after the date of its publication). Interviews with a well-noted painter – who was a member of Lekra – Djoko Pekik also appear in some newspapers and weekly newsmagazine. So do interviews with Sulami and others. In these interviews, they never forget to tell their bitter past experiences as ex-political detainees, and their ignorance on what did really happen on September 30, 1965. Even, Djoko Pekik said that since there was “a robber yelling a robbery”, he was imprisoned without trial for twelve years (see, Kompas, December 14, 1999; D & R, 8-14 November, 1999).

Gatra (15 May, 1999) reported that around six thousand Moslems held a mass gathering in Bekasi – east of Jakarta -- while the other mass gathering was in the compound of “Lobang Buaya” monument, East Jakarta. (A monument for commemorating the “Martyrs of Revolution”, i.e. the top Army officers who were killed in the “1965 affair”). These two gatherings were a response to the widely spread out rumour that ex-political prisoners had planned to do a long march from the office of the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation – a major NGO advocating human rights issues – where they declared the “YPKP 1965/66” to the “Lobang Buaya” monument. Sulami, the chief of “YPKP 1965/66” denied the rumour, saying that it was impossible for them to run such a long march, since they were all in their seventies and suffering from various diseases.

Suara Hidayatullah – a Moslem biweekly newsmagazine – (second week of September 1999 edition), issued a special report on “the efforts of ex-communists to wash up their hands from the guilt of the past”.

It was the era from when Sukarno issued the decree (July 5, 1959) marking the end of parliamentary democracy and returning to the 1945 Constitution, until when the “September 30, 1965 affair” occurred.

Anton Tabah, “Bahaya Laten Komunisme” (in Membuka Lipatan Sejarah), for instance, writes that “there is no reason to be afraid of violating the basic principles of human rights in treating the figures of Gestapu/PKI” (p. 12).


The estimated number is around one thousand persons, mostly live in France and the Netherlands (see Forum Keadilan, December 5, 1999).
A younger brother of Pramudya Ananta Toer was directly detained and imprisoned without trials just when he landed in Jakarta after completing his PhD in civil engineering in the University of Patrice Lumumba, Moscow, in 1973. (See, Pramudya Ananta Toer, *Nyanyi Sunyi Seorang Bisa*, Jakarta: Lentera, 1995, pp. 92-93).


*Kompas*, May 1, & June 24, 1999.


Referring to the Basic Consideration of “YPKP 1965/66”, this foundation – or “institute of study” as in its English version circulated among international human rights advocates – has a goal to write history, based on historical facts, inquired by certain methods scientifically acceptable. In my personal interview with Sulami (74), the first initiator and the chief of “YPKP 1965/66”, such an idea is strongly confirmed, as she said, “We do not want to bequeath wrong history to our offspring, history which has stigmatised us and them; and we do not want to tell the whole nation to stop stigmatising people like us and our offspring, as the real and truthful history is not like what they have learned from the official history of Suharto’s regime”. (Interview with Sulami, Sragen, Central Java, January 7, 2000).

By “several Moslem groups”, due to the problem in describing more detail who they are, I just want not to generalize the whole Indonesian Moslems. Quite often Moslem public figures speak “in the name of “umat”, or the Moslems”. Certainly not every Moslem accepts what they say. But how many who support and how many who reject is beyond my concern. As the term ‘umat’ is quite often politicised, no wonder that there is a sharp contestation within the Moslems themselves. This means that there is no single voice, as there is no single kind of Moslem in Indonesia.


Pramudya Ananta Toer in various interviews in mass media has repeatedly said that uncovering (and prosecuting) Suharto’s practices on “corruption, collusion, and nepotism” (KKN) – one of the main rhetoric in the mass hysteria of “Reformasi” – is trivial compared to his crimes against humanity in 1965/66. (see, endnote no. 19; see also his essay in *Time*, 10 May 1999). Of eks-tapols I have interviewed, mostly share such an opinion. This strongly indicates that the identification of being the very victims of Suharto’s regime is prevalent among them. Yet, how they signify the victimisation is surely not homogenous. Partly identify themselves as the victims of a defamation of those who disliked them, or of those who wanted to take over their belongings or their official positions. Such eks-tapols therefore signify their victimisation not as a part or cost of political struggle, but “merely” as “a bad luck”; yet “a long and bitter bad luck”. It is such eks-tapols who are now very keen to call for the rehabilitation of their civil rights. (Interviews with BU, Yogyakarta, December 1, 1999; Is and Sur, Surakarta, November, 1999; BI, Sn, Sp, Sum, Klaten, October – November, 1999). While the rest signify their victimization as “the losers of the war which they did not take a part in”, since, in their eyes, the “1965 affair” was a conflict of elite, nothing to do with PKI-as-a-political organisation. In addition, PKI never issued a decision that the party’s struggle would take a bloody revolution. To their knowledge, PKI was consistent with the result of its 1952 congress, that the party’s struggle was through parliament, or taking democratic pathways. Thus, they are not regretful that they used to be communists; and they are very keen to rectify the history of the “1965 affair”, and less concerned in the rehabilitation of civil rights. More than that, they are also very keen to call for revoking all legal acts banning Communism and restricting the mobility of the ex-“communist” political prisoners, not because they want to revive Communism – as the rise of Communism is determined by various historical circumstances, not by free will of human agency, being consistent as Marxists – but because such legal acts could enable the state to discriminate/marginalize anybody/social group being easily accused “to subvert the state power”: a political practice which is not in line with the spirit of

37 In her autobiography, Perempuan-Kebeoran dan Penjara (Jakarta, 1999), Sulami, for instance, writes about the social activities of Gerwani, such as organizing mass education for the illiterates in rural areas, vocational training for house-wives, organisational education for women of peasant families, etc. Yet, she does not write about, say, mass mobilization of women in supporting the unilateral actions (aksi-aksi sepihak) of BTI (Barisan Tani Indonesia = Indonesian Peasant Front, a mass organisation of PKI) in 1964-65 – one thing which is socially not (so) acceptable. In my interviews with eks-tapols who used to be politically well-trained, before the interviews began mostly asked me carefully if the interviews would include their past political activities. As I told them that I just wanted to document their personal experiences from the point of their arrests, “interrogation”, detainment, up to their releases and after, they looked enthusiastic to share those experiences. This indicates that there are things which they cannot share with those beyond their community of memory.

38 Most chapter contributors in Membuka Lipatan Sejarah write about such bloody local incidents. Yet, they do not tell why such incidents broke out. They just want to expose that in struggling for their aspirations, communists keep the principle that “ends justify the means”, and that the Moslems, who keep the moral principles of Islam, be the victims of such “machiavellian Communists”.

39 Hardly any chapter contributors in Membuka Lipatan Sejarah writes about what happened to the members and sympathisers of PKI and its mass organisations after the “1965 affair”.

40 Such a narrative implies an idea that “communism is an alien thing, which has disordered the life of the Indonesian society” – assuming that “social order/harmony has already been there” – so that even if the fact of the extermination of PKI has to be admitted, it is justified as the attempt of “re-ordering” or “re-harmonizing” the society. This popular narrative is found in various forms, such as literary works – even the works which show deep sympathy on ‘the victimised communists’, yet they are perceived as being “keblinger” (on the wrong track). (see, for instance, an anthology of short stories on “Gestapu”, as translated and edited by Harry Aveling, Gestapu: Indonesian Short Stories on the Abortive Communist Coup of 30th September 1965 [SEAS Program, University of Hawaii, 1975]. Some of the short stories in this anthology are well-analyzed in Paul Tickell’s “Writing the Past: The Limits of Realism in Contemporary Indonesian Literature”, in D.M. Roskies (ed.), Text/Politics in Island Southeast Asia: Essays in Interpretation (Center for International Studies, Ohio University, 1993). In the scholarly works, such a narrative is found in the ones applying ‘cultural approach’ in featuring and explaining the 1965/66 mass killings, such as John Hughes’ Indonesian Upheaval (1967), and Guy J. Pauker’s “Political Consequences of Rural Development Programs in Indonesia” (1968).

41 History textbooks for primary and secondary schools are also silent on what happened to the “communists” after the “1965 affair”. The books describe in detail the smooth success of Suharto – as the personification of the military -- supported by various mass non-communist organisations, in crushing the so-called “G-30-S/PKI” by easily arresting the top leaders of PKI and finally – based on the ‘mandate’ from President Sukarno through the so-called “Super Semar” (Surat Perintah Sebelas Maret = mandatory letter of March 11, 1966) – outlawing PKI and its mass organisations. The books do not say anything about the mass killings and the mass imprisonment of the “communists”, or those being charged or defamed of “communists”.

42 The basic consideration of “YPKP 1965/66” explicitly states that Suharto and his cliques in the military were the most responsible for the mass killings and the mass imprisonment without trials. In my interviews with eks-tapols, mostly say that the Moslem groups – despite their participation in the mass killings and the mass imprisonment – “were just victims like us, the victims of Suharto’s defamation. So, we were all the victims”.

43 History textbooks for primary and secondary schools describe the history of PKI from the advent of PKI’s top leader, Musso (from Moscow) in early 1948, who led the “Medium insurgency” (September 1948): that is “the insurgency of PKI to the state and nation who were then struggling against the Dutch who came to re-colonize Indonesia”. The “insurgency” is described as “to stab the state and nation from behind”. The textbooks are silent about the pre-1945 history of PKI, where it initiated a
mass resistance to the Dutch colonial government in 1926/27 – one thing which should be perceived as “heroic” and “patriotic” in the canon of national history.

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