

IDENTITIES IN EXILE

Re-membering Identities, Re-membering the Nation in Laksmi Pamuntjak's *Amba*¹

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Abstract

Laksmi Pamuntjak's first novel, *Amba* (2012) is one of several contemporary Indonesian novels by the post-1965 generation that breaks the silence on the violent suppression of the Indonesian left in the mid-1960s. Like other recent creative responses and initiatives by Indonesian artists and civil society, *Amba* represents the "postmemory" of the 1965-66 events. This paper examines the modes of internal exile triggered by 1965 as portrayed in three characters in *Amba* and how exile disrupts and delays identity formation across different generations of Indonesians—hence, exiled identities. The history of Moluccan exile post-1950 is also crucial to the novel's representation of people whose identities were displaced, ruptured, or in limbo as a result of political violence. The depiction of internal exile in *Amba* is examined based on work done by scholars on Indonesian exile narratives (Hill, Hearman) and concepts of transgenerational trauma (Schwab) and postmemory (Hirsch). This paper then discusses the various acts of "re-membering" to recover a coherent sense of self and of the nation depicted in *Amba*, such as through literal and figurative journeys, re-establishing kinship ties, narrating personal memories of the traumatic past, and the role of art in revealing suppressed memories of the 1965 event.

Keywords

contemporary Indonesian fiction; exile in fiction; Indonesia 1965-66; Laksmi Pamuntjak; literature and memory; literature and postmemory

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INTRODUCTION: CONFRONTING THE GHOSTS OF 1965 AND THE ROLE OF CONTEMPORARY INDONESIAN FICTION

Recent works of fiction by contemporary Indonesian writers have engaged with the purge of the Indonesian left in 1965, addressing issues such as historical amnesia, the impact on the post-1965 generation, and exile. These works include *Entrok* (2010) by Okky Madasari, *Blues Merbabu* (2011) and *65* (2012) by Gitanyali, *Pulang* (2012) by Leila Chudori, *Amba* (2012) by Laksmi Pamuntjak, and *Cerita Cinta Enrico* (2013) by Ayu Utami. The writers are of the post-1965 generation, whose knowledge of the events had been dominated by the Suharto regime's official version. The emergence of these works marks a new cycle in the ongoing project of interrogating official discourse on 1965 in the literary field; as Pamela Allen notes, there is a "broadening of the discourse on 1965" in new Indonesian fiction distinctive from works by earlier writers. This development occurs against a background of increased efforts by civil society in Indonesia in support of survivors of 1965 as well as increased opposition towards those efforts.

It is estimated that 500,000 Indonesians accused of being members of the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI, the Communist Party of Indonesia) were killed during this period (Cribb 219) after an attempted coup on 30 September 1965 blamed on the PKI. Tens of thousands more were imprisoned without trial (*Indonesia: An Amnesty International Report* 15); even after their release, their status as *eks-tapol* (ex-political detainees) were used to deny former detainees their basic rights such as freedom of movement and government jobs, a form of discrimination that was also extended to their children. Thousands of Indonesians who were studying abroad in 1965 as government scholars became stateless exiles when Suharto's New Order cancelled their passports. Fifty years after the catastrophic events of late 1965 and early 1966 in Indonesia, the desire to re-member, to seek answers and justice, and to make sense of the destruction of the Indonesian left remains alive. In the past years, there have been significant efforts to address the 1965-66 killings, such as the declaration by Indonesia's National Commission of Human Rights (*Komisi Nasional Hak Asasi Manusia*, KOMNAS HAM) in 2012 that the atrocities and abuses committed in 1965-66 constitute violations of human rights, and Joko Widodo's election campaign pledge to issue a formal apology and provide assistance to survivors of 1965.² The release of two documentary films, *Jagal* (*The Act of Killing*, 2012) and *Senyap* (*The Look of Silence*, 2014) by American filmmaker Joshua Oppenheimer have brought the events of 1965-66 to global audiences. In November 2015, an international people's tribunal on the 1965-66 massacres was convened at The Hague in the Netherlands.

Laksmi Pamuntjak is an award-winning Indonesian poet, novelist, food writer, and journalist whose writings have appeared in various media outlets in Indonesia,

Germany, and the United Kingdom. Her works of fiction, journalistic writings, and public engagements often address human rights issues in Indonesia, including the 1965-66 killings of PKI members and its affiliates, the censorship of public discussions or events to commemorate the 50-year anniversary of the killings in 2015, and Indonesia's use of the death penalty. *Amba* is her debut novel; it was shortlisted for the 2012 Khatulistiwa Literary Award in Indonesia and has been translated into German, Dutch, and English ("About Laksmi Pamuntjak"). The novel adapts a story from the epic poem *Mahabharata* about the rejection of Princess Amba by her betrothed, Salva, after her abduction by the warrior Bhishma, and later her rejection by Bhishma himself.³ *Amba* frames the story of two lovers within the context of the 1965 event, when political violence broke out in Indonesia after the PKI was accused of masterminding an "attempted coup." The novel explores the long shadow cast by 1965 on Indonesia's collective memory, including that of the post-1965 generation. Partially set on Buru Island and Ambon a few years after the deadly inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflict in Maluku (1999-2000), the novel also establishes a connecting thread between the Maluku conflict and the 1965 violence.

One of the after-effects of the 1965 purge of the Indonesian left as the New Order came into power is exile. As mentioned earlier, thousands of Indonesians who were abroad at the time suddenly found themselves stateless, while tens of thousands more were exiled to the penal island of Buru. In *Amba*, different modes of exile within Indonesia triggered by 1965 are explored in three characters: Amba, Bhishma, and Samuel. Pamuntjak's characters reveal how exile disrupts and delays identity formation across different generations of Indonesians, resulting in what I term exiled identities.

Besides the 1965 event, the history of Moluccan exile post-1950 is also crucial to the novel's representation of people whose identities were displaced, ruptured, or in limbo as a result of political violence. The Moluccan exiles are a reminder of the pattern of recurrent political violence in Indonesia (Pamuntjak, Interview) as well as of the suppressed histories of Indonesia's nation-building period. In *Amba*, the characters' efforts at re-membering their identities through journeys to Buru Island where new kinship ties transcend the trauma of exile, the transgenerational transmission of memories of 1965 and through art not only assist in their recovery of a coherent self but can also be read as acts of re-membering the nation. This examination of the depiction of internal exile and remembering/re-membering in *Amba* is informed by studies of Indonesian exile narratives (Hill; Hearman) and concepts of transgenerational trauma (Schwab) and postmemory (Hirsch).

1965 AND EXILE

Of the contemporary Indonesian novels mentioned in the introduction to this paper, Chudori's *Pulang* and Pamuntjak's *Amba*, deal specifically with those who were exiled from Indonesia, both externally and internally, as a result of the 1965 event. Thousands of Indonesians were unable to return to their homeland, exiled to Buru Island, or were forced to leave behind their homes because of their association (real or assumed) with the PKI or with leftist organizations.

In other forms of creative expression, the experiences of 1965 exiles have been explored. Autobiographical writings by exiles and/or former prisoners have been published as early as 1994 when the New Order was still in power.⁴ Throughout the nearly twenty years since the fall of Suharto in 1998, more of these autobiographies and memoirs have been published, such as *Memoar Pulau Buru (The Buru Memoirs*, 2004) by Hersri Setiawan, *Roman Biografis Ibarruri Putri Alam, Anak Sulung D.N. Aidit (Biographical Sketches of Ibarruri Putri Alam, Eldest Daughter of D.N. Aidit*, 2006) and *Bumi Tuhan: Orang Buangan di Pyongyang, Moskwa, dan Paris (God's Earth: An Exile in Pyongyang, Moscow, and Paris*, 2013) by Waloejo Sedjati. In 2016, two Indonesian films about 1965 exiles were released: *Pulau Buru – Tanah Air Beta (Pulau Buru – My Homeland)*, by Rahung Nasution and *Surat dari Praha (Letters from Prague)* directed by Angga Dwimas Sasongko. The former is a documentary on writer Hersri Setiawan's return to Buru Island where he was imprisoned, while the latter is a romantic story about a young woman who travels to Prague to find her mother's former flame who had been exiled from Indonesia since 1965.

Similar developments in the field of memory studies, oral history, and Indonesian studies also show the significance of the experiences of Indonesian political exiles. Research by Indonesian and Australian scholars focusing on the rich body of exile narratives produced by Indonesians abroad include the oral history project, *In Search of Silenced Voices: Indonesian Exiles of the Left*, at the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam to which the exiled writer Hersri Setiawan had significantly contributed (Hill, "Knowing Indonesia from Afar" 9), the work of David T. Hill on Indonesian exilic literature (see for example Hill, "Indonesia's Exiled Left," "Writing Lives in Exile," and "Indonesian Political Exiles in the USSR"), and Vanessa Hearman's study of Indonesian exiles in Cuba ("The Last Men in Havana").

The above works indicate the growing significance of exile narratives in the project of reclaiming history about 1965. In this paper, I choose to examine the experience of internal exile instead of external exile caused by the purge because the ostracization, stigma, and terror inflicted on the survivors and their families still living in Indonesia mean that many still do not feel at home in the nation.

Internal exiles speak of losing a sense of home even as they are physically at “home.” The experience of Chilean academic Helia Lopez Zarzosa after the military coup that toppled Salvador Allende’s government in 1973 illustrates this:

I became an instrument of the new regime. I felt alienated even though I ‘was part’ of the new social order. This was exile without moving. Almost all that I identified with was destroyed. Even space ceased to have the same meaning for me as it became *their* [the new regime’s] domain for their repressive practices.... Internal exile constituted a rift between past and present within myself and as a social actor in my own physical environment. Home was being destroyed. (190)

Similarly, in *Amba*, the three characters who will be discussed in the following section have lost their sense of home because of their association with political and/or nationalist movements deemed detrimental to the nation. Even though, they physically remain within the nation’s boundaries, it is as people whose real identities are hidden or as outcasts who are banished to the far edges of the country.

AMBA: SILENCE AND SELF-EXILE

The titular character of Pamuntjak’s novel, *Amba Kinanti*, is in her sixties at the start of the narrative. She is travelling in Buru Island in search of her former lover, Bhisma, after receiving a mysterious tip-off on his whereabouts after his disappearance in 1965. Through a series of narratives, recollections, and letters, readers learn of the circumstances leading up to the events on Buru in 2006. Amba’s 40-year silence about her experience in 1965 and her decision to begin a new life in Jakarta are the results of the fear and trauma that those accused of involvement with the PKI have been haunted by. Her experiences made her an internal exile, displaced from her family and home as well as from her past, a period which she describes as “a time before I felt any fear” (Pamuntjak, *Amba* 75).⁵

In 1965, Amba was an undergraduate at Gadjah Mada University, Jogjakarta. She was also engaged to a young lecturer, Salwa, whom her parents had chosen for her. Jogjakarta is a hotbed of political activity, with regular news of clashes between PKI affiliates and their opponents over land redistribution and of ordinary people polarized by opposing ideological views. Against this background, Amba meets Bhisma while volunteering as a translator at a small hospital in Kediri, a province in East Java. They begin an intense and short-lived affair the day after the September 30 incident in Jakarta.

After the attack on the Universitas Res Publica building in Oct. 1965, during which Bhisma disappeared, Amba married an American scholar and went into self-exile in Jakarta. In light of what may be perceived by the New Order as involvement in activities associated with the PKI—Bhisma's friends and acquaintances were members of leftist or left-leaning organizations, such as the *Consentrasi Gerakan Mahasiswa Indonesia* (Concentration of Indonesian Student Movements, CGMI) and the Bumi Tarung art community—Amba would have been at risk of being detained and imprisoned. In an echo of the *Mahabharata* episode which underlies the narrative, Amba also believed that Bhisma was not interested in a serious relationship and may have deliberately abandoned her.⁶

Amba's silence about her involvement with Bhisma can be understood in the context of the violent way that anyone suspected or accused of being involved with the September 30 Movement were eliminated, tortured, or imprisoned. Decades after 1965, the specter of communism could still be raised to silence political rivals (Heryanto 40), and Indonesians were subjected to background checks to ensure they were *bersih diri*, *bersih lingkungan* ("clean" or free from involvement with communist or leftist organizations). Between 1965 and 2006, Amba has kept her silence on her experience during her youth, revealing nothing about her past except to a few trusted people. Her situation is similar to that of the many survivors of the 1965 events, whether or not they had been detained; women and men concealed or denied their past political and social activities, changed their identities, and/or moved to large cities as a means of surviving such dark times (Hearman, "Under Duress" 13-14). Her marriage and move to Jakarta are part of her strategy to survive, but also removes her from her roots and her past in Central Java before the events of 1965 occurred.

The long-lasting impact of Amba's exile from home and the past is, among others, portrayed in the novel in tropes of haunting. For example, Amba reminds the locals in Buru of a *"nituro"*, a spirit that used to haunt the coastal areas. According to the locals, the *nituro* will not leave as long as she has not found her lost lover" (Pamuntjak, *Amba* 22). Similarly, she refers to Bhisma as a "ghost" whom she has loved and waited for 41 years (Pamuntjak, *Amba* 376). These tropes of haunting may indicate a fracturing of the psyche of the 1965 survivor which has interrupted the process of identity construction and consolidation for many years.⁷

Examining Amba's silence and self-exile from a gendered perspective also sheds light on women's experience of 1965 and its impact on women in particular ways. Women's experiences of exile are regulated by prescribed social roles and cultural norms. When Amba began her relationship with Bhisma, she did so while engaged to another man; the relationship with Bhisma resulted in her pregnancy with their daughter, Srikandi. Her unfaithfulness to Salwa and pregnancy out of wedlock

transgress the cultural norms of the Javanese, and would render her attempt to return to her family and community problematic. Her silence about her past, including concealing the identity of her daughter's biological father, can be ascribed to the role of the cultural context in women's decisions to repress their memories of 1965. In his study on the memories of wives of former political prisoners, Budiawan highlights some instances where wives who committed adultery while their husbands were in jail chose to repress their memories of the time because society judges them harshly for their transgression (282). Zarzosa narrates a similar experience for wives of political prisoners in Chile, who were subjected to high moral and religio-cultural standards according to which "a woman's sexual purity and self-denial is a cultural imperative" (190).

Therefore, Amba's internal exile includes displacement from her identity as a member of a community due to her transgression of cultural norms. In her case, marriage and family life also become a sanctuary from social disapproval of transgressive behavior besides providing protection from state persecution.

BHISMA: POLITICAL IMPRISONMENT AS EXILE

In Indonesia, exile as a tool to neutralize political rivals has existed since precolonial times. The period of European colonisation in Asia saw the introduction of transportation to penal colonies and forced labor as a form of punishment in the nineteenth century (Anderson 23). This colonial practice of exile by transportation was re-purposed by New Order Indonesia for political prisoners arrested after the September 30 incident. This section examines the depiction of the political prisoner as exile in *Amba* through the character of Bhisma.

When the novel begins on Buru Island in 2006, Bhisma is known as "Resi of Waeapo" by the locals, a semi-mythical figure who had travelled around the island healing the sick and wounded. Before his arrest and imprisonment, Bhisma Rashad was a doctor who had returned to Indonesia after over a decade of studying and working in the Netherlands and East Germany. In Europe, he had developed an interest in leftist thought and movements, which continued upon his return to Indonesia in the early 1960s.

He meets Amba while volunteering at the same Kediri hospital and embarks on a relationship with her. However, Bhisma is detained on the night of an attack on the Universitas Res Publica in October 1965 and disappears. Readers later learn through second-hand accounts by Bhisma's fellow political prisoners in Buru and through letters he had written to Amba (secret letters he had hidden inside

bamboo containers to prevent detection by the prison guards), that he had been arrested and imprisoned in October 1965, before being transported in 1971 to the penal colony of Buru.

From these sources, Amba learns that after the Buru prison camp was closed by the government in 1979, Bhisma chose to remain on the island instead of returning to Java to his family or to find her. He became an adopted son of Manalisa, a local tribal leader and a respected healer. The locals gave him the epithets “Resi of Waeapo” and “the Guru from Waeapo” for his work educating them on preventing diseases and providing free health treatment. Bhisma continued to live in Buru until the inter-religious conflict in Maluku erupted, between 1999 and 2000.

Before going into the Buru phase of Bhisma’s life, it should be noted that he had become an exile long before 1965, during the thirteen-year period he spent in the Netherlands and East Germany away from his family and country. Significantly, his early years there were spent living with several Moluccan families from Ambon. They themselves became migrants when their service to the Dutch East Indies government had ended, or had been exiled to the Netherlands upon their demobilization from KNIL and the defeat of the Republic of South Maluku in 1950 (Steijlen 143). It was also through his friendship with Gerard Manuhutu, a second-generation Moluccan living in Leiden, that Bhisma became interested in socialism and leftist thought.

Bhisma’s European phase narrates to contemporary readers the Ambonese exiles’ experience of racism and isolation in the Netherlands, enlightening readers of the double exile of the Ambonese for their involvement with the Dutch colonizers. It also sets up a link with another Moluccan exile, Samuel, who would later become an amanuensis of sorts in the story of Amba and Bhisma. Bhisma’s European phase and meeting the Moluccans in the Netherlands set up his later experience of exile as a political prisoner transported to Buru.

In the aftermath of the 1965 incident, about 14,000 political prisoners were transported by the Suharto regime to prison camps in Buru, an island in the eastern Indonesian region of Maluku (*Indonesia: An Amnesty International Report* 91). The harsh conditions on the island and its isolation from the rest of the country seem to have made it the ideal site for the re-education and rehabilitation of these “enemies of the state.” The state also justified the transportation of the prisoners as part of its transmigration scheme, where prisoners would populate the less-developed regions of Indonesia (*Indonesia: An Amnesty International Report* 90).

In the novel, government officials use the term *warga* (citizen) to refer to the political prisoners in Buru (Pamuntjak, *Amba* 46). At first glance, this euphemism

seems to take away the harshness of the official term, *tapol* (from *tahanan politik*, political prisoner). However, the use of the term in Buru is ironic. Locals are told to beware of these *warga*—"these outcasts, these communists" (Pamuntjak, *Amba* 27)—for fear that they would become influenced by the latter's communist sympathies.

The effect of exile in Buru is expressed in Bhisma's feeling of having been left out of the natural progress of time. The dates of his letters to Amba gradually become uncertain as the years pass. At first, the dates are specific, stating the day, month, and year; but later, only the year is stated, at times with a question mark in parentheses (e.g., "____, 1974," "____, 1976?" and "____ 19(?)"). Bhisma also writes about feeling old and outdated in Buru compared to the rest of Indonesia: "I am ancient; outdated" (Pamuntjak, *Amba* 410), he writes to Amba, in contrast to her and the world outside Buru. Ana Dragojlovic and David T. Hill and Vanessa Hearman ("The Last Men in Havana") have noted the effects of temporal separation on Indonesian exiles' notions of home, where "home" becomes a distant memory. In the context of identity construction, the temporal separation experienced by the exiles also displaces them from personal and social relationships that must continue without their presence at "home."

Buru is effectively a prison island from which there is to be no return; the Amnesty International Report on Indonesia further elaborated that all political detainees and their families who were transported to Buru were meant to remain there even after they were "released." This was supposed to be part of the government's transmigration scheme, but it also ensured that former detainees (and their families) remained in a state of permanent exile. In his earliest letter to Amba, Bhisma writes, quite accurately, that he might never be able to leave Buru. A return to Java to his family and Amba is out of the question; as he tells his adopted father Manalisa, in light of the ruptured relationships between detainees and their families after such a long period of imprisonment, return is fraught with uncertainty. Even after their release and return home, former political prisoners are still subject to persecution and harassment. Further marginalization of former political prisoners after release includes being required to report regularly to the local army unit or police, censorship and banning of their writings, and ostracization by family or community.

SAMUEL: A DOUBLE EXILE

“Yes, that’s how the Dutch repaid the centuries of loyalty of the Moluccans, *Door de Eeuwen Trouw*. The dream that my uncle and his friends at the camp share is the dream of a people who have been doubly rejected.” (Gerard Manuhutu to Bhisma, *Amba* 220)

To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. (Hirsch 5)

Amba includes the perspective of another internally exiled character, an Ambonese man named Samuel Lawerissa. This character represents two groups of exile: the Moluccan exiles and the post-1965 generation alienated from the history of the anti-communist purge. The above quotes, taken from the novel and from Marianne Hirsch’s study on trauma, memory, and literature, illustrate the ways that a character like Samuel is doubly exiled because of historical circumstances. By linking *Amba* and Bhisma with Samuel, the novel points at the recurrence of not only political violence, but also at the various routes of exile on which Indonesia is built. This section takes a closer look at the representation of exiled identities in *Amba* as a combination of Moluccan and post-1965 generation’s displacement from the narrative of the nation.

Recent efforts to revisit the events of 1965 have been led in no small way by members of the post-1965 generation. Laksmi Pamuntjak speaks of her discomfort with the one-sided official narrative on the period as being a reason for writing the novel (Interview). Another Indonesian writer, Leila Chudori, speaks of a collective ignorance about the events of 1965 that affected many who grew up under the New Order as a result of the erasure and suppression of alternative narratives. Chudori herself only became aware of Indonesian political exiles when she visited Paris in 1988 after studying abroad. The exiles she met in Paris became the basis of her novel, *Pulang* (*Home*, 2012).

In Pamuntjak’s novel, Samuel, who acts as *Amba*’s guide on Buru, is an exile in a double sense. He was born to parents who had supported the Republic of South Maluku (*Republik Maluku Selatan*, or RMS) and who had gone into exile in the Netherlands when the RMS was defeated in 1950. He is also a part of the post-1965 generation, but with unprecedented access to the prison island of Buru. Growing up on Buru in the late 1960s and the 1970s after being sent “home” to Indonesia by his parents, he witnesses the arrival of the political prisoners and is therefore not ignorant of this erased part of Indonesian history. Nonetheless, Samuel’s encounters with exiles, both within and outside Indonesia, remove him from a

coherent sense of self. This is manifested in his itinerant, in-between existence, which is also marked by violence.

Significantly, exile as a motif is reinforced in *Amba* through the Moluccan experience of exile. I have previously noted Bhisma's relationship with Moluccan families during his European phase, families like the one Samuel is born into. Loyal to the Dutch colonial administration, the establishment of an independent republic of Indonesia placed the Moluccans in a difficult bind, as they did not consider themselves Indonesians, but RMS citizens (143). Writing on Moluccans in the Netherlands, Fridus Steijlen further recounts how what was meant as a temporary move to the Netherlands in 1951 became permanent exile with the elimination of RMS guerrillas in the late 1960s (47). The Moluccan community in the Netherlands were also spatially and socially isolated from the Dutch population, living in camps, some of which, as depicted in the novel, were former Nazi concentration camps.

Samuel's foreign birth, his family's loyalty to the Dutch colonial government and support for the RMS, cast him out to the margins of the nation. These aspects of his identity make him invisible from the narrative of postcolonial Indonesia, just like the 1965 political prisoners whom the Suharto regime wanted to render invisible. When *Amba* asks him about his family, and discovers their history, Samuel wryly replies: "[i]n this country, we have never been familiar with the histories of our brethren" (*Amba* 311), indicating how historical amnesia in Indonesia is a recurrent condition.

Studies on literature, trauma, and memory have examined the ways in which traumatic experiences can become transgenerational by being transmitted consciously or unconsciously across generations.⁸ With *Amba*, it can be argued that the novel's concern is not only with transgenerational trauma, but also transgenerational violence. The violence that Samuel perpetrates, experiences, or witnesses may represent the ways that the violence of 1965 ruptures identity construction for the post-1965 generation.

Among his acts of violence are accidentally causing the death of his nephew during a drunken episode and committing manslaughter on at least two occasions.⁹ Although the novel does not provide details on what else he saw on Buru as a teenager, it can be assumed that he is also familiar with the violence that the political prisoners had to endure as part of their punishment such as beatings and summary executions.

Neither is it a coincidence that the novel is partially set in Buru in the years after the Maluku conflict of the early 2000s; as Pamuntjak herself affirms:

I only wish to draw attention to the similarities in the 1965 events and those occurring, for example, in Maluku in 1999-2004, which I set forth in my novel *Amba*. Both conflicts resulted in recurrent violence, and we must learn to restrain ourselves to be wise enough to acknowledge that violence never resolves any problem. (Interview)

Both the violence in Samuel's life and in Maluku after the end of the Suharto regime can be understood in light of the violent repression of the PKI and its affiliates in 1965. Heryanto does not think that the waves of violence in post-1965 Indonesia are directly inherited from the event itself; rather, he argues, the lived history of the 1965-1966 killings "helped provide the conditions for the more recent [post-1998] violence to take place to the extent and the fashion that it did" (26). In Samuel's case, growing up on Buru and with Buru (Pamuntjak, *Amba* 25) when it operated as a prison island is his lived history of 1965, which created the atmosphere for the violence of his adult years.

So far, the different ways in which individuals are exiled as a result of the 1965 event in Indonesia have been discussed. Exile is always understood as a forced, external, physical displacement, but the main characters in *Amba* experience exile within the nation. Despite being located within Indonesia, the three characters examined—Amba, Bhisma, and Samuel—suffer physical, temporal, social, and emotional dislocations because of their assumed guilt and association with forces deemed as rebelling against the state (the PKI, the RMS). In the next section, we turn towards the novel's depiction of acts of re-membering identities fractured and outcast by the 1965 event after the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998. It will also consider the limitations to such acts of re-membering in light of various developments and reactions during the 50-year mark of the 1965 event in 2015 up to the present.

RE-MEMBERING FRACTURED IDENTITIES

In this paper, "re-membering" is a deliberate play on the word "remembering" which is not limited to the cognitive process of recalling one's memory of past events but also takes in a wider range of actions and processes. In reading *Amba*, it is used to refer to acts of narrating the past, visiting and re-visiting places and memories linked to 1965-66, the recovery of suppressed memories and their re-interpretation, and gathering and re-assembling what has been dismembered (memory, narrative, history, identity) in order to arrive at a sense of autonomy, wholeness, and coherence. On the whole, *Amba* poses the possibility of reconstructing identities free from fear and terror through various acts of re-membering.

Re-membering fractured identities in *Amba* involves the following processes: (1) a physical journey to Buru to find a disappeared person and discovering an alternative mode of belonging; (2) recording and transmitting personal memories of 1965 to contemporaries, later generations, and those on the margins of Indonesia; and (3) art as a means of recovering and re-interpreting suppressed memories and histories of 1965-66. How these acts help to restore a sense of self to the protagonists will be examined in the following subsections.

JOURNEY TO AND KINSHIP IN BURU

In this novel, journeys to Buru are undertaken on a physical as well as on a metaphysical plane. The former is depicted as Amba's search for Bhisma in Buru, which takes her to various sites in a political prisoner's life there, such as Savanajaya and the rice fields that the prisoners had first cultivated on the island. The latter journey is represented by Bhisma's meetings with his daughter, Srikandi, in his dreams while still imprisoned in Buru. Both journeys restore ties cut off in 1965 and pose the possibility of finding an alternative mode of belonging for those cast out by the nation.

In the collective memory of Indonesia, Buru retains a negative connotation because of its status as a prison island for the tens of thousands of men arrested as part of the Suharto regime's anti-communist purge. Its location in far-flung eastern Indonesia adds to its undesirability. However, Pamuntjak's novel portrays Buru as a place where the exiles/prisoners and survivors of 1965 could find a sense of belonging that was previously denied to them. This is shown in how a local tribe accepts Bhisma as one of their own, when he chose to remain in Buru as a doctor-healer; he is incorporated into the tribe through adoption (by Manalisa, the tribal elder) and marriage. The tribe also regards Amba as part of Bhisma's family, acknowledging her as his widow (Pamuntjak, *Amba* 39). Their recognition of Amba and Bhisma as part of a family and of their community is an interesting twist on the intended outcomes of exile. It is relevant here to quote a similar observation on exile from eastern Indonesia in colonial times. Examining the ways that the Bandanese people of eastern Indonesia experienced exile during the rule of the Dutch East India Company up to the nineteenth century, Timo Kaartinen writes that for some of the Bandanese:

[t]he most profound, self-revealing encounters with kinsmen happen in a distant place, where one never expects strangers to show affection and kindness similar to what one receives from relatives. This case, as well as myths of exiled ancestral figures, shows

kinship in an expansive mode, as a source of personal identity and distinction. (154; my emphasis)

Kaartinen points out that rather than separating and alienating people from the sources of their identity—family, community, friends—exile opened the door to “other homes, or places in which one is recognized as a relative” (150), creating networks of kinship rather than destroying it. The depiction of Buru in *Amba* also reflects real-life experience where those affected by the 1965 event could find an expanded notion of kinship on the island.¹⁰

Bhisma’s meetings with his daughter, Srikandi, in his dreams are instances of the novel’s exploration of mystical and spiritual experience as a way of transcending exile. Knowledge of his daughter’s existence enables Bhisma to retain a connection with his family while imprisoned in Buru. Time and space—two elements that are taken away from an exile—are collapsed by the dreams as Bhisma gets to speak to his daughter despite their physical and temporal distance. The dreams become a means for two generations to communicate with each other and to transmit memory over and across physical and temporal limitations.

As for *Amba* herself, the journey to Buru is necessary to restore a sense of autonomy, since she had been living for forty years in a state of limbo. It provides a conclusion to her search for Bhisma, leads her to his letters about the years after his disappearance, and to a community that accepts her and Bhisma as husband and wife.

Narrating Personal Memories of 1965

In *Amba*, narrating and transmitting personal memories from survivors of 1965 to the latter generation provide the characters with the means to alleviate the impact of violence, trauma, and terror. Narratives of the past also fill in the gaps and silences in the post-1965 generation’s knowledge about themselves as well as about the events preceding the beginning of the New Order in Indonesia. The novel thus demonstrates an awareness of the ways that memoirs of imprisonment and/or exile and oral history have been important to provide the survivors’ version of what happened vis-a-vis the official version, to resist the stigmatization of former political prisoners/exiles, to warn against the repeat of such atrocities as they experienced, and to reclaim the role of the Indonesian left in nation-building (Hearman, “The Uses of Memoirs” 25).

In the novel, the narratives of the 1965 survivors appear in the form of letters: Amba's letter to Samuel explaining to him her past and how it is related to her search for Bhisma in Buru, and Bhisma's hidden letters to Amba written during his exile in Buru. Their narratives record their experiences in 1965 and how the event consequently shaped their lives. The letters become a chain linking one story (Amba's) with another (Bhisma's), and one generation (1965) with the next (post-1965). Her discovery of Bhisma's letters in Buru enable Amba to re-member her self; the letters act as a bridge with her past, filling in her four "silent" decades.

Amba's decision to narrate to Samuel the truth about herself constitutes another step in her re-membering of her fractured identity. Making Samuel a receptacle of Amba's narrative and participant in her efforts to find Bhisma emphasizes the significance of transmitting memories of 1965 to the next generation, whose own memory of the event had been forged by the New Order's narrative for over three decades. Knowledge of Amba and Bhisma's stories may set Samuel on the path to re-member his own fractured identity and enable attempts to construct a more coherent one, free from the stigma of exile and violence.

The transmission of suppressed memories from Amba to Samuel also highlights the importance of telling such narratives to the project of recovering lost histories of 1965 and before, for their repression renders those memories vulnerable to forgetting. As Hearman notes: "Individual memory is a part of group memory . . . memories 'under duress' that have had to be partially or wholly concealed for many years and little discussed with others, suffer by losing their sharpness by virtue of their lack of sociality" ("Under Duress" 7-8). Here, re-membering the nation must literally be done through the act of remembering.

In present-day Indonesia, stories about 1965 continue to be told across generations. Besides the production of literary works on 1965 by the post-1965 generation, efforts are also under way by children of the perpetrators of anti-communist violence to campaign for reconciliation with the victims (McGregor). With the advent of the Internet, younger members of the post-1965 generation have also discovered a new medium for transmitting their postmemory of 1965, going beyond intimidation and censorship; for example, *Ingat 65 (Remember 65)* has compiled narratives by children and grandchildren of the 1965 generation on the online publishing site *medium.com*.¹¹ All these participate in creating "a multiplicity of narratives" about 1965 and the pre-1965 years amid historical distortions and suppression of any alternative accounts of these periods (Hearman, "Under Duress" 18).

Re-membering 1965 through Art

The novel *Amba* portrays art as a medium for re-membering what the 1965 event has exiled from the nation's collective memory. It depicts how art becomes a means of recovering and re-interpreting suppressed memories and histories of 1965. The character Srikandi, who comes up with an exhibition of her works on the color red (in the past, a color associated with communism), was born in 1966 to Amba; thus, her art can be understood as a form of "postmemory."

Marianne Hirsch, who coined the term, defines postmemory as the following:

'Postmemory' describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. (5)

The post-1965 generation may have received memories of 1965 through stories and fragments transmitted to them from their elders, whether they were personally affected by the event or not. In contemporary Indonesian art, examples of works that can be regarded as postmemories of 1965 include: the work of Dadang Christanto¹² (b. 1957) whose art installations refer directly or indirectly to mass violence in Indonesia, including the 1965-66 killings (Ingham; Turner and Webb, 49-57); Dewi Candraningrum (b. 1975), who put up an online exhibition of her portraits of female survivors of 1965, titled *Portraits of 1965: Perempuan 65* (2016);¹³ and Dolorosa Sinaga (b. 1953).

Srikandi is depicted as a character who lacks the fear of the past that others of her generation had grown up with. Headstrong and independent, she is very much like the warrior in the *Mahabharata* on whom she is based. Her art, as she informs a friend, intentionally brings out into public space a color that society considers taboo. It asks viewers to reconsider their accepted notions of red as a symbol of evil/communism. The following passage from *Amba* is worth quoting at length:

...I was raised with the colour red. In the past, it was regarded as the colour of communists. Then, I realised that the stigma made us afraid of it. We even try not to dream in red, even though we can see the colour anytime, anywhere: in the spurting blood of a chicken being slaughtered, in the menstrual blood—pardon me—left behind in public restrooms, in the blood of an accident victim or of a person beaten to death just as he's about to leave for work. But none of that disturbs me. At home, I was raised with various shades of red—the red of pomegranates, of liver, blood-red, carmine, magenta,

maroon. I grew up with those colours without knowing their names. For that, I am grateful to my mother. She was the one who introduced me to everything that need not be feared, be it colour or anything else. (484)

Srikandi's art is a form of postmemory that sublimates a traumatic past, normalizing the color red, and neutralizing the fear and terror often ascribed to it in light of the 1965 event. It also represents the post-1965 generation's attempts to recover and re-interpret the period from their own lens, without the influence of the now-defunct New Order. The novel thus foregrounds the way that art has enabled conversations and reflections on this part of Indonesian history, although not without running into obstacles—some of which are presented below.

From 2015 onwards, various artistic events and activities have been held to commemorate and revisit the events of 1965 on its 50-year mark. Among them were special programs on 1965 at the 2015 Ubud Writers and Readers' Festival in Bali and screenings of documentaries such as American filmmaker Joshua Oppenheimer's *Senyap* (*The Look of Silence*) and Rahung Nasution's *Pulau Buru – Tanah Air Beta* (*Buru Island – My Homeland*). However, only days before the Ubud festival began, organizers received notice from the local police to cancel these programs or risk having the authorities shut the festival down (*Ubud Writers and Readers' Festival*; Topsfield). Public screenings of *Senyap* and *Pulau Buru – Tanah Air Beta* had to be cancelled or moved to another venue (Krismantari). The most recent incident is the forced cancellation of artist Andreas Iswinarto's art exhibition at a university in Bantul, Yogyakarta, by members of Pemuda Pancasila in May 2017. Iswinarto's paintings for the exhibition were meant to pay tribute to the poet Wiji Thukul, who disappeared in 1998; but the artist was accused of promoting communism through his works (Sukma Indah Permana). A number of his paintings and prints of Wiji Thukul's poems were subsequently seized by Pemuda Pancasila.

These incidents signal that despite the end of the New Order, contemporary Indonesian artists and arts and cultural communities still face censorship and intimidation if they wish to bring the discourse on 1965 into public space.

CONCLUSION

This paper has outlined how Laksmi Pamuntjak's novel, *Amba*, presents several modes of internal exile caused by political violence in 1965 and how fear, trauma, and alienation disrupt the identity formation of the novel's three main characters. It has also examined the possibilities of acts of re-memembering identity and the nation portrayed in the novel, as well as some of the limitations to these acts. Although *Amba*

is not the only contemporary Indonesian novel to take the 1965 event as its setting, nor is it the only novel to feature exile as its motif, it derives its power from using exile as a means to enable various formal and narrative strategies. The adaptation of an episode from the *Mahabharata* resonates with the notion of political violence and exile, being an epic tale of civil war familiar to many in the region through *wayang* and other artistic interpretations, as well as echoed in similar incidents of “civil war” in Maluku and the 1965 anti-communist purge. Exile also enables *Amba*’s non-linear, sometimes epistolary and confessional narrative, perhaps as a reminder of the need to challenge official discourse (linear, “objective,” and “disinterested”) using narrative strategies that go against its norms. The fragments of letters and diaries by Bhisma and Amba bring into focus those narratives of exiles that were erased, censored, or suppressed, while the non-linear narrative of the novel can be read as a creative representation of the temporal displacement (time as ruptured) caused by exile. The polyphony of narratives in *Amba* can also be attributed to the way that exile creates—even as it attempts to suppress—multiple voices of those marginalized by the nation. The novel’s inclusion of the people and places exiled from Indonesia—political prisoners and exiles, outcasts, Buru Island, Maluku and Moluccans—underscores those groups and their histories, and calls attention to the importance of re-membering.

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Notes

1. An early version of this paper was presented at the *Third Literary Studies Conference*, Universitas Sanata Dharma, Yogyakarta, October 21 and 22, 2015.
2. However, Widodo has since backtracked on this pledge.
3. In the *Mahabharata*, Amba is a princess who was abducted by Bhishma together with her sisters, Ambika and Ambalika, to be presented as wives to King Vichitavirya. Amba is abandoned by Salva (Salva is the corresponding character in the novel), whom she had already chosen as her husband, after he was defeated by Bhishma. Bhishma, too, refuses to marry her after Salva deserts her. She spends the rest of her life planning revenge on Bhishma, who, however, is invincible. Amba is later reborn as Shikhandi (Srikandi is the corresponding character in the novel), a woman who then transforms into a man, and kills Bhishma.
4. They are *Kehormatan Bagi yang Berhak (Honour for Him who Deserves)* by Manai Sophiaan, former ambassador to the USSR, published in 1994, and *Memoar Oei Tjoe Tat: Pembantu Presiden Soekarno (The Memoirs of Oei Tjoe Tat: Assistant to President Soekarno)* by Oei Tjoe Tat, published in 1995 (Heryanto 55).
5. The same temporal rupture experienced by exiles as a result of political violence is mentioned by Zarzosa in the quote previously mentioned (190).
6. In the *Mahabharata*, Bhishma refused to marry Amba to save her honor because he had taken a vow never to marry.
7. Interestingly, haunting also occurs among perpetrators of the 1965 killings. They have spoken about being haunted by the spirits of the people they had killed.
8. See, for example, Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (2010) and Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (2012).
9. The narrative does not go into the details of the killings by Samuel; he merely confesses to Amba, when queried, that he has killed at least two people.
10. For example, Ken Setiawan, daughter of Hersri Setiawan, a former political prisoner, spoke of finding another “family” in Buru in an essay on her journey to Buru with her father. “Blessings from Buru” (2015) can be accessed at <http://pulangartproject-blog-blog.tumblr.com/post/120991492285/blessings-from-buru-by-ken-setiawan>
11. The narratives can be accessed at <https://medium.com/@INGAT65>
12. Dadang Christanto has a personal experience of the 1965 event – his father was taken away by local militias while Dadang and his siblings were asleep; he was never seen again (Turner and Webb 49).
13. The exhibition can be viewed at <https://genosida1965wordpress.wordpress.com/2016/06/01/dewi-candraningrum-portraits-of-1965-perempuan-65-pameran-online-genosida-1965-tragedi-1965/>

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