

THE CONTRIBUTION OF INDONESIAN NOVELS, SHORT STORIES, AND POETRY TOWARDS TOLERANCE AS TO THE G-30-S TRAUMA

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Abstract

In this paper we discuss the reconciling role of novelists and poets as to the trauma, which was the consequence of the bloody tragedy, known as G-30-S. From the very beginning (1966) till now, a number of short stories, poems, and novels did appear, in which the G-30-S events, mass killings and cruel persecutions, got a central place. The novelists and poets can be divided in three groups. *First* of all, those, who became victims of the repression, either as (ex-)political prisoners, as involuntary exiles or their children (e.g. Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Sitor Situmorang, Gitanyali). A *second* category are those writers who published during the New Order period of President Soeharto (e.g. Ahmad Tohari, Umar Kayam, Y.B. Mangunwijaya). *Finally* a critical generation of young, female novelists appears after 1998: Ayu Utami, Leila S. Chudori, and Laksmi Pamuntjak. In general, though not always, religion plays a rather positive role in their work. These authors have proved to be a brave and independent moral conscience of the nation. In this respect they are an example to the institutional religions in Indonesia, which so far hardly started a process of self-reflection as to this trauma.

Keywords: Indonesian literature, G-30-S trauma, religion.

Abstrak

Dalam karangan ini kita mendiskusikan peran pendamaian yang dikerjakan oleh beberapa novelis dan penyair terkait dengan trauma yang terjadi akibat peristiwa G-30-S dengan pembunuhan massalnya. Sejak 1966 hingga kini sejumlah cerpen, sajak, dan novel telah diterbitkan di mana peristiwa G-30-S memainkan peranan sentral. Penulis-penulisnya dapat

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dikelompokkan ke dalam tiga golongan. *Pertama*, yakni golongan mereka yang menjadi korban pengejaran sebagai eks-tapol, orang buangan, atau anak-anak mereka (misalnya: Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Sitor Situmorang, Gitanyali). Golongan *kedua* terdiri dari mereka, yang berani menulis cerpen dan novel selama masa Orde Baru, yaitu dalam rentang waktu kekuasaan Presidenan Soeharto: Ahmad Tohari, Umar Kayam, dan Y.B. Mangunwijaya. Akhirnya, golongan *ketiga*, yakni suatu generasi kritis muncul pada waktu reformasi, setelah 1998; di antaranya tiga penulis wanita muda: Ayu Utami, Leila S. Chudori, dan Laksmi Pamuntjak. Pada umumnya, walau tidak selalu, agama memainkan peran yang agak positif dalam karya-karya mereka. Harus diakui, bahwa penulis-penulis tersebut menjadi hati nurani moral yang berani dan mandiri untuk bangsa Indonesia. Dalam hal ini mereka juga menjadi teladan untuk agama-agama institusional di Indonesia, yang hingga kini sebenarnya belum sungguh memulai proses refleksi diri terkait dengan trauma tersebut.

Kata-kata kunci: sastra Indonesia, trauma G-30-S, agama.

Introduction

Probably the most traumatic experience of modern Indonesia has been the abortive coup of September 30, 1965, which in the end did cost the lives of hundreds of thousands people, most of them totally innocent. Both in Indonesia itself and elsewhere a debate is still going on as to who have to be blamed for this coup and the subsequent massacre.

In the early sixties a fierce ideological chasm came into being between left-wing, partly communist (and partly atheist) groups, parties and institutions on the one hand, and religiously oriented, partly conservative, forces on the other hand. Apparently President Sukarno had not sufficient grip on the politically, culturally, and economically deteriorating situation; even in his army this crevice was present. This ideological split came to an violent outburst, which till today deeply influences the life of Indonesia as a nation. Many so-called *ex-tapol* and their families still feel a deep hostility and suspicion from the side of other people and especially government officials.

In this paper I want to show, how Indonesian novelists and poets look at this traumatic period. Did they contribute to a healing process? And, to

what extent does religion or religiosity play a (positive or negative) role in their work? First of all, there are novels, short stories, and poems written by (former) political prisoners, political exiles or—the second-generation victims—their children. However, others have written about this theme as well. As to their contribution we can make a division between novels, short stories, and poetry published during the so-called *Orde Baru*, the time of President Soeharto (who had to step down in 1998) and publications from the post-Soeharto period, the so-called *Reformasi* period, which continues till now.

Publications by Former Political Prisoners

Quite a few *ex-tapol* wrote a kind of autobiography. Many of these writings have an important historical and journalistic value, but they cannot be called *sastra*, literature, in a proper sense. To give two examples: the bitter memories about their eighteen and twenty years of prison life of Ibu Sudjinah¹ and Ibu Sulami², both of them prominent members of *Gerwani*, are moving documents; they tell in a reserved way about their arrest, torture, and harassment, their years in isolation, their legal process and prison life in Bukit Duri (Jakarta) and Tangerang. Yet, these autobiographical documents are, of course, not literature. Several other *ex-tapol* wrote their memoirs as well, like the writer and poet Hersri Setiawan, who was detained at Buru Island during the same years Pramoedya Ananta Toer was there (Setiawan, 2004).³

1. Pramoedya Ananta Toer

The report by Pramoedya Ananta Toer about his years at Buru Island, *The Mute's Soliloqui* became known world-wide (Toer, 1989b).⁴ Though this book was intended to be a historic witness of a cruel time, it is also a piece of literature. Pramoedya never lost his skills as a novelist and storyteller. Read, for instance, what he wrote to his daughter, after she had visited him in a Jakarta prison, shortly before he was to be transferred to Nusakambangan and Buru:

You left on your honeymoon. Then I, too, went away—into exile. If a person cannot free himself from three-dimensional time—from either the past, the present, or the future—how must this be viewed? As God's gift or His curse? During the Revolution when I was being held by the Dutch

in Bukitduri Prison, I memorized a Negro spiritual, the first line of which went “There’s a happy land somewhere...”—a symbolic promise for every person’s future. With hope as his guide, sweat as the symbol of his labor, the present as his starting point, and the past as his provisions, a person goes forward, toward a happy land somewhere. But because one can never be sure of reaching that place, the second line of the song goes “And it’s just a prayer away...” The song is a beautiful one, especially so when the time is right and one is not plagued by matters that set one’s nerves on edge. “Somewhere,” my child, but where? Where is this “happy land”? People are raised to believe that happiness is the land to which they are destined to travel. But that belief, which one so easily accepts as true, might just as well be a mirage. It’s August 16, 1969, and you are off on your honeymoon to a happy land. I, too, am off to a happy land somewhere, to Buru I’ve been told, an island in the Moluccas about the size of Bali.⁵

Pramoedya reports about the hard laborship, about atrocities, about the dry land of Buru, about his meetings with fellow prisoners, prominent visitors, and interrogations. He writes about sermons in the prison mosque by imams, who were fundamentalists without any phantasy (Toer, 1988: 135). Also, he accuses Muslim prison chaplains of humiliating the prisoners, who for that reason turned to the protestant or catholic chaplains (Toer, 1988: 146).⁶ However, when for some reason a whole prisoner camp at Buru was punished in a terrible way (several prisoners died because of it), even a protestant chaplain, with the rank of lieutenant, was jeering at the prisoners: “Even a dog knows who is giving food to him, how is it possible that humans don’t know this?” (Toer, 1989a: 241).⁷

When in 1994 general Soemitro visited Buru with a group of journalists, Mochtar Lubis, certainly not a kindred spirit, asked Pramoedya: “Pram, did you by chance find God here?” Pramoedya’s answer: “Which God? Quite a lot of divine envoys come to Buru.”⁸ These are among the rare remarks in which Pramoedya, mostly in a negative way, expresses himself about religion.

2. *Sitor Situmorang*

The poet Sitor Situmorang (1924-2014) was imprisoned in the Salemba prison, Jakarta from 1967 till 1975. Only a handful of poems in his large oeuvre are related to these years in prison. They show a rather detached, almost meditative attitude. This fits with a remark by Sudjinah, who met Sitor when both of them were, for a time, prisoners in the same place: “I

had the opportunity to talk with a well-known poet, Sitor Situmorang, who tried to remain quiet with a humorous attitude at the most horrible moments in our lives.”⁹ One of his poems is titled “In-communicado”:

The cell is solid black
the locking-up proceeds
from cracks in the door electric lights
perce the eyes
(at the nearest mosque
the call to evening prayer
has just finished).

A civilian informant looks around
then strikes a match,
checking to see
that his prisoner is still there
(while outside civil war rages).

He lights a candle,
a stub from last night,
then suddenly asks:
“So you’re Sitor Situmorang?”

I stare at the candle
let my eyes grow accustomed to the light
and the buzz of that name.

Like the name of that one
in Eden
when God was looking,
and calling out: Adam! Adam!

Outside is civil war
history counts victims and dreams.
Between the informant and myself
is but the candle light
and a yawning gap
between God
and the first man.¹⁰

Here and elsewhere Sitor is able to reflect about his existence, placing it in a much wider context: that of mankind as such, including his sins (Adam, where are you?), dreams (they occur more often in his oeuvre),

the small inner distance between the prisoner and the guard, that is, victim and perpetrator, and the enormous gap between God and man. Another, later example of this very attitude we find in “Nyanyian Krishna”, of which we quote a fragment:

On the wall of the cell can be heard
the spirits of the Ancestors at the mountain reciting
and the saints in heaven, praying:
Carry on testing yourself! We are witnesses!

– Yes, Lord! –
– Yes, Father! –
– Yes, all you who died who are germinating Life! –

The inner eye
an open red lotus
on a lake of blood.

On the wall of the cell
Buddha is silent
contemplating
His own inner self.¹¹

3. *Exiles and Second Generation Victims*

The poetry of those, who escaped prison, but had to live in exile, often shows signs of such contemplation as well, next to resignation and, as can be expected, solidarity among themselves and with the beloved ones far away. Yet, according to the compiler of the anthology *Di Negeri Orang* (‘In the Land of Other People’), not their personal fate becomes the main issue, but the fact that they lost their readership, a publisher, an arena, and that as a consequence their poems remain locked away in a desk. That makes them feel desperate.¹² Religion hardly plays a role in this poetry, nor do we find many bitter remarks towards their oppressors, though the tragedy, which did strike their homeland, directly or indirectly is present in the poems of these fifteen authors, many of whom are rather unknown.

Other work by those, who suffered from the 1965 tragedy, could be mentioned here as well. A small publishing house in Bandung, Penerbit Buku Ultimus, has specialized in editing and publishing such volumes with poetry, short stories, and memoirs.¹³ Unfortunately it is often rather difficult to get access to these works.

Finally, a son of a communist father, who soon after the violent events was captured and murdered, wrote—using Gitanyali as his pen name—how he, as a young child and later teenager and student tried to survive; actually by forgetting as much as possible, enjoying life including sexual affairs, and moving from his small town (Salatiga) to Jakarta, where he can live anonymously. In two novels, *Blues Merbabu* and *65* he gives an account of this life. Two quotations may be sufficient to show his way out, by escaping the past: “Once upon a time I needed a letter indicating that I was not involved in the PKI. In my heart I wanted to answer: ‘A communist went to bed with a Sundanese woman, and then I was born...’.” And, “I never ever reflected whether I felt I was unfortunate or successful in my life. I just underwent whatever I had to live through” (Gitanyali, 2011: 142, 172; translation AGH). So he never felt unfortunate for having been a son of a PKI member. Like many other people, Bre Redana (= Gitanyali) being a journalist with the daily newspaper *Kompas*, had to resign when in the eighties Soeharto’s government promulgated an order, *bersih lingkungan* (‘clean surroundings’), forbidding relatives of (former) communists to hold public positions or other important positions in society. Apparently, he did not suffer from it. However most other people in such circumstances did, and this *bersih lingkungan* subsequently became an issue in several short stories and novels.

Short Stories and Novels During the Period of the Orde Baru

Soon after the tragic events of the fall of 1965, a number of short stories about the G-30-S tragedy appeared in literary magazines such as *Horison* and *Sastra*. The Australian scholar Harry Aveling, who was to dedicate his whole life to the propagation and translation of Indonesian literature, brought together ten short stories, published between 1966 and 1970, and translated them into English.

1. *Early Short Stories*

Almost all of these short stories try to represent a reconciling attitude; sometimes the protagonist even provides a really moral example, like the man in Gerson Poyk’s story about a man, who visits a poor, ex-Gerwani widow with five children. The village where she lives is shunning

her. Her communist husband, who once was a foe of the visitor protagonist, has disappeared, killed. The visitor tries in vain to find foster families for the five children. All wealthy friends refuse. When, out of desperation, the widow commits suicide, he takes all children with him to his own home (Poyk in Aveling, 1975: 58-77).¹⁴

In another of these short stories, “Dark Night”, written by Martin Aleida, a young man is to visit for the first time a village, where his fiancée is supposed to live, with the intention to celebrate their marriage there. On his way he meets a man, who tells him, that the whole family, including his fiancée, has been killed as alleged communists, and their house has been burnt down. The young man commits suicide because of his grief, but before doing so prays, into the direction of Mecca:

“O God,” he whispered to the Most Merciful, “It was not your hand that swung the sword or pushed the bayonet, or pulled the trigger that killed Partini, her mother and the fatherless children. It wasn’t, it wasn’t. You are the Merciful One. Forgive the sins of my beloved and her family. They were my family. I was theirs, even if You had not yet married us. Forgive us all. Amen” (Ameida in Aveling, 1975: 83-96).¹⁵

What is striking, here, is first of all the statement, that the Most Merciful Allah is not part of the cruel killings of alleged communists. Both among Christians and among Muslims these killings often have been justified because the communists were “atheists”. And second, apparently, just by being leftists the murdered people had sinned! This motif is recurring in some of the later novels of this period, especially in Ahmad Tohari’s novels.

The first motive, the role of God in this bloody event, is also mentioned in at least two other short stories in this volume. In one of these, three workers in a batik factory are discussing Marxism and Islam. One of the men had gone to a mosque to attend the Friday prayer. There, the kyai had not held a sermon, but a political speech: “Crush the PKI and its mass organizations.” So, apparently Allah agreed! The three men doubt whether this can be the right way (Nugroho in Aveling, 1975: 97-107).¹⁶

2. *Umar Kayam*

During the next decades several authors wrote important short stories and novels about the G-30-S theme. We mention here three of them: Umar Kayam, Ahmad Tohari, and Y.B. Mangunwijaya.

Between 1969 and 1975 Umar Kayam wrote at least three short stories about the tragic events of October 1965 and its aftermath; two of them were published in the above-mentioned periodical *Horison*.¹⁷ All three stories try to give a genuine and sympathetic picture of the suffering of the victims of the mass killings. Just to mention one of them briefly: Bawuk tells the story of a young woman, from a *priyayi* village family. All other sisters and brothers did find good marriage partners. Bawuk, may be the brightest one, married a high-ranking member of the PKI, who after the coup had to hide in East Java. By then, she was aware of his ideological obsession. Running for life herself, Bawuk brings their children to her mother. During a family deliberation, all sisters and brothers urge Bawuk to stay with their mother; through their high positions they can guarantee safety to her. Nevertheless, she decides to follow her husband Hassan. Their mother is the only one who understands this loyalty of Bawuk. In the end, Bawuk's husband is executed in East-Java; her own fate remains unknown. The (grand)mother decides to bring up the grand children. A religious teacher comes to her house to learn them to recite the Quran. The short story ends with the first lesson, quoting a part of the *Al-Fatiha* opening *Surah*: "Guide us to the even path of those whom Thou hast favored. Not to the path of those who have earned Thy wrath, nor to those who have veered and gone astray. May all be received into Thy womb...."¹⁸

As far as I my limited knowledge goes, these very last words, "May all be received in Thy womb" in this form are not to be found in *Al-Fatiha* and they puzzle me. It is already interesting, that apparently *rahmah* (in the first verse of *Al-Fatiha*) is connected with the deep emotion a mother (or grandmother?) feels.¹⁹ Even more striking is the fact, that here is written, "may *all* be received in Thy womb...." Does the author, having an intrinsically reconciling nature, want to emphasize, that victims and perpetrators, communists and anti-communists, all find a place near the Eternal One? Is this the religious message Umar Kayam wants to share with his readers?

Several of Umar Kayam's novels are situated in Javanese *priyayi* circles; the ethics and religiosity of such circles seem to guarantee simplicity, a well-balanced life together, and honesty. In *Para Priyayi* the family, which is described in this novel, is chanting verses from the *Serat Wédhatama* to receive moral and religious instruction in hard times. In his novel *Jalan Menikung* ('The Road is Bending', 1999, a sequel to *Para Priyayi*) the most sincere member of the large *priyayi* family is the father of the bright son who studies in the USA; in the eighties, this father loses his job because

of the *bersih lingkungan* measure. He simply accepts his fate, since this belongs to the moral and religious values the family wants to preserve; yet, he has to warn his son: there is no future for you here, just stay in the USA. Nevertheless the (good) son—together with his Jewish North-American bride—returns to Indonesia.

3. *Ahmad Tohari's Novels*

In no less than three novels by Ahmad Tohari the 1965 drama is playing an important role.²⁰ The first time this happens in *Kubah* ('Cupola' or 'Dome of a Mosque', Tohari's second novel, published in 1980), telling the story of a village clerk Karman, who more or less by chance had been seduced to join the communist party, served 12 years at Buru and finally was released. Going back to his village, he realized that his wife had remarried—as in reality has often been the case. Then the novel unfolds itself in a rather moralistic way: even the military who guard him, behave chivalrously; Karman accepts his fate; the villagers forgive him; and Karman returns to the faith he had lost earlier and finds a sense of belonging to the Muslim community, by constructing a *kubah*, dome, for the dilapidated village mosque.²¹ Some literary critics praised the novel (it was one of the first novels in this genre), others characterized it as *dakwah*, Islamic preaching. The later president Abdulrahman Wahid at that time described it "as the first novel to deal with reconciliation between PKI members and the general Indonesian society after the September 1965 events"; it lacked however suspense and had a predictable plot.²² Though Ahmad Tohari was and is a devout Muslim, clearly his faith has been influenced strongly by the Javanese way of life. A poor, simple sailor, who earns his living by bringing bamboo rafts to a place downstream, meets Karman when the latter is hiding in 1965 and teaches him Javanese wisdom from the hymn *Sangkan-paraning Dumadi* (about the origin and aim of all which has been created): "Aku mbiyen ora ana, saiki dadi ana, mbesuk maneh ora ana, padha bali marang rahmatullah" ('Formerly I did not exist, now I exist, tomorrow I will not exist any longer, back to God's compassion') (Tohari, 2005 [3]: 152).²³ Seemingly this is the life device, not only of the protagonist of this novel, but of the author as well, as becomes clear in subsequent novels. It means, one has to take life as it comes and goes.

Kubah passed censorship without problems, unlike Tohari's trilogy *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, which was published a few years later; there the

section, in which the innocent young *ronggeng* (dance girl) of the village was captured and imprisoned because of alleged communist sympathies, had to be cut by order of the censors. An uncensored edition could only appear after Soeharto's fall, in 2003, and since then no less than some ten editions have been published and in 2011 a popular movie, "Sang Penari" ('The Dancer') was made after the book. The fact, that Tohari accepted censorship aroused some debate as to his steadfast attitude.

4. *Mangunwijaya's Durga Umayu*

The third author dealing with the G-30-S problematic in the *Orde Baru* period in a novel, is the catholic priest, activist, and well-known intellectual Y.B. Mangunwijaya. *Durga Umayu* (1991) is in more than one sense difficult to read; the author uses long, complicated, and poetic sentences, as if to tease his readers, and provides a bird's eye sketch of Indonesia's modern history by telling the story of a young village woman Linda, who actually represents the Indonesian society or *Ibu Pertiwi*. Using many identities and names, she manages to accommodate in all political situations, as a spy, a prostitute, and mistress of high ranking politicians, entrepreneurs, and others. At one moment she is a *comrade* in the LEKRA and Gerwani cadre, ten years later she is a large land owner and international entrepreneur during the *Orde Baru*. The title *Durga Umayu* refers to a wayang story about *Batara Guru* and the beautiful *Dewi Uma*, in which both curse each other after having had public sex in the skies. *Batara Guru* changes into a wild boar, whereas *Dewi Uma* is cursed to become *Batari Durga*, a bad woman, living in exile at a place smelling death. In other novels as well, Mangunwijaya starts with a reference to the wayang puppet plays.²⁴ Thus, this title makes clear that Indonesia has both sides: good and bad. Both sides are to be found in the colonial times, during the Japanese occupation and the early years of independent Indonesia, within the PKI and its leftist organizations before 1965, as well as in the corrupt bureaucracy of the *New Order*. In a playful and often humorous way Mangunwijaya nevertheless is giving serious warnings, as an Old Testament prophet, pointing to the original vision of the Proclamation of Independence in 1945 as a perspective of redemption and salvation:

A dilemma, Pertiwi always lives with all kinds of dilemma. But formerly Iin (=Linda) was young, now she is over half a century old; will it always be this way, being Durga in Setragandamayit in Lebanon in Iraq in

Cambodja but also in her own land, distributing deathly food in order to please her accomplice in collecting buffalo's Batara Kala by trading arms, cocaine, and prostitutes, even her own kind of friends? Ah, mystery of goodness! Mystery of wickedness! When Batari Durga and Dewi Umayi are identical, will it be the fate of Iin to continue to live till the end of her life with this duality and dilemma and conflict and contradiction, and why and for what reason and what aim? Is there no breakthrough, does the Proclamation of Independence not have a resonance of freedom redemption salvation who knows from where? (Mangunwijaya, 1994: 183; translation AGH).²⁵

Three Novels During the Reformasiera

Finally, three young female novelists, all of whom have been professional journalists, should be mentioned here.²⁶ They write very candidly and without restraint about this bitter episode.

1. Ayu Utami

Ayu Utami dedicates several pages in her novel *Manjali dan Cakrabirawa* (2010) to a critical assessment of the events of Lubang Buaya, concluding that the killing of seven high ranking army officials there was a secret military operation by the Cakrabirawa batalyon of Colonel Untung and not by the PKI, which subsequently was blamed by the Soeharto regime. Then she continues with a moving story about an old woman, living in seclusion in the woods; the woman had been a Gerwani member, had served ten years in prison and was desperately searching for the grave of her husband, executed as an member of the Cakrabirawa batalyon (Utami, 2010: 134-154).²⁷ It turns out the old widow is the mother of Musa Warana, a military and friend of Yuda, one of the protagonists of the trilogy *Bilangan Fu, Manjali dan Cakrabirawa*, and *Lalita*. Musa, who as a baby had been taken away from his mother in prison, is a staunch anti-communist. To this soldier it is difficult to accept this astonishing fact that his parents were communists:

... he has to change his conception of the history of Indonesia. He has to free himself from being a hostage of the indoctrination of the state, which says that this is a war between the holy Pancasila and the outrageous communism. However, war between good and evil is something, which is not physical. But all who have a body have also the original sin. Therefore

nobody is holy. The PKI was not holy. The military regime, too, is not holy. So, let us not consider this history as a collision between the armies of satan and angels. *Look at man* (Utami, 2010: 240; translation AGH).²⁸

Though she is not pursuing this line of biblical thought, we have to admit, that Ayu Utami is one of few authors who tries to place the G-30-S tragedy explicitly in a religious and theological framework. The novel wants to indicate, that a necessary change of mind in looking at the truth of the history of Indonesia, as a step towards reconciliation, is necessary and possible with help of friends. In her recent novel *Maya*, too, the events of 1965 and 1966 play a (minor) role (Utami, 2013: 164-170).

2. *Leila S. Chudori*

In her novel *Pulang* ('Coming Home') Leila S. Chudori brings her readers back to the life of four political exiles, who try to make a living in Paris by starting an Indonesian food restaurant in Paris (Chudori, 2012). Her book has been inspired by the true story of "Restaurant Indonesia". It tells the readers about the rude intolerance they experience from the side of Indonesian Embassy officials; about the mental difficulties they have, since their beloved ones stayed behind in Indonesia and have been persecuted or harassed there; about the unwillingness of the embassy to provide them an visitor's entry permit to Indonesia; about the fact that the wife of one of them remarried in Indonesia with a military man, and that the marriage of another, with a French woman, in the end failed because he cannot forget his beloved one in Jakarta. And it also tells, how families in Jakarta, related to such exiles or *ex-tapol*, are hit by the rule of *bersih lingkungan* and a similar intolerance from the side of well-to-do people there. However, here, too, there is a perspective. Younger diplomats at the Indonesian Embassy are much more relaxed about this situation, and the novel ends with the hopeful events which happen in Jakarta, when Soeharto has to step down.

3. *Laksmi Pamuntjak: Amba*

Finally we want to mention Laksmi Pamuntjak's novel *Amba* (2012), which became a bestseller. It brings the reader back to Buru. Though it is also a moving love story, above all it tells the life story of the young medical doctor Bhisma, who was detained there and decided to stay after all *tapol*

were allowed to go back. The novel provides much information about the life of these 12.000 *tapol*, partly based upon literature, partly upon a visit to Buru together with other journalists (and *ex-tapol*) in 2006. Because of his exceptional dedication to his fellow-prisoners and to the indigenous population of Buru, Bhisma is described by the Buru people as “a kind of Jesus” (p. 32) or as “the saviour of Unit XVI” (p. 58) or “a holy man” (469). In one of his (fictive) letters to Amba, his beloved one in Jakarta, he writes: “In the end you are right: our life has been written in the sky. And we are not able to resist it” (459). Having been optimistic all his life, in the end, after having watched the deadly fighting between Muslims and Christians near his place in December 1999, he seems to have turned a pessimist:

Once I was of the opinion that one has to sacrifice one self has in order that hate does not prevail. However, even in the hearts of brave warriors, like I met during my detention, hate is not leaving, not even among “comrades”. Hate has become the force to endure life. After I witnessed enmity and killings in Kediri (where Bhisma was a medical doctor in October 1965), I hoped for some time that there would be stronger and more useful values to endure life. But during these days I feel something has disappeared from my inner self (Pamuntjak, 2012: 471; translation AGH).

Laksmi Pamuntjak places this story of Amba and Bhisma in the framework of a scene in the Mahabharata epos about two lovers with these names, who in the end were unable to join their lives. That, again, seems a sign of the fact, that our life is dependent on fate.

Literature as a Means of Criticism and Healing

1. One contribution of the authors of these novels, short stories, and poems certainly is the fact that they help to review the official side of this bitter episode within the Indonesian history. Not surprisingly, the autobiographical reports by former *tapol* and political exiles represent clearly their side of that history. Pramoedya’s report about Buru is intentionally meant to become a witness of another look at this sad history. However, also Manguwiyaya’s novel, and the recent novels by Ayu Utami, Leila Chudori, and Laksmi Pamuntjak want to make clear to their readers, that the reality of the events in the fall of 1965 most probably differs from the official version. Of course, it will take yet a

long time before archival material will be made public which can prove what happened really. Yet, writing candidly about it may help to start a process of turning over the perception of history.

2. Almost all the authors, not belonging to the leftist camp, write about their communist or allegedly communist protagonists from a perspective of sympathy and understanding. Especially during the time of the *Orde Baru* this was a brave statement, indicating that healing of memories is necessary.
3. It is striking, that many of these authors have a professional background as journalists. This may mean, that during a time of repression of free speech, such as the *Orde Baru* period, journalists represent the independent, critical, and even prophetic voice of the Indonesian society. Several authors worked for magazines, which were banned and forbidden during the Soeharto era, or were forced to resign from their position in newspapers or magazines.
4. In many novels and poems mentioned above we notice, that the G-30-S events were not a one-time tragedy. Several times, the *lingkungan bersih* period (1980s) is mentioned, which extended and deepened the gap between punished, allegedly leftist people, and others in society. The message is: such a tragedy can happen again and we ought to prevent this. Other authors showed a similar brave attitude, like for instance Seno Gumira Ajidarma, who wrote a complicated novel about the massacre of hundreds of innocent young people in Santa Cruz (Dili), East Timor in November 1991 (Ajidarma, 1996).²⁹ Yet another example is Wiji Thukul, whose poetry was a clear protest against the Indonesian rulers of the *Orde Baru*. Wiji Thukul has been missing since May 1998, most probably murdered.³⁰
5. Formal, “official” religion does not play a major role in the above-mentioned work of most authors, may be with the exception of Ahmad Tohari. Incidentally quotations from the holy books of Islam or Christianity can be found; sometimes religious leaders (pastors, kyai’s) are mentioned, either positively or in a negative way. However, we have to divide here between “religion” and “religiosity” in the sense Mangunwijaya did, when he started his essayistic work *Sastra dan Religiositas* with the statement: “In principle all literature is religious” (Mangunwijaya, 1982: 11; “Pada Awal Mula, Segala Sastra adalah Religius”). According to Mangunwijaya, *agama* or formal religion

deals with institutional worship in society, focusing upon *Tuhan*, God, or the *dunia atas*, the supernatural world. Religiosity, on the other hand, emphasizes aspects of what is *di dalam lubuk hati*, in the deepest parts of the human heart; it is personal, and reflects the intimacy of the human soul. It has no direct connection with rituals or with what has been called by the apostle Paul (in 2 Corinthians 3:6) *huruf yang membunuh*, the letter, which kills, but in stead with the Spirit (*Roh*), which gives life. That is, what good *sastra*, literature, should provide (Mangunwijaya, 1982: 15). So, it may well be that the values, which the authors we discussed in this paper want to share with their readers, are not indirectly or in a direct way taken from formal Christian or Muslim sources. In stead, it seems rather many of the authors use the ancient wisdom mythology of Ramayana and Mahabharata or the works of well-known mystics as the sources of the values they want to pass on to their readers. We can call this the level of religiosity, which also functions as a challenge to the formal religious institutions. Quite a few names of protagonists in these works have been taken from these great epic stories. And often their message is: mankind is dependent (at least partly) on a sort of cosmic fate; harmony (*keseimbangan*) and tolerance play a role. Most authors I discussed here are Javanese or at least live or lived at Java; their religiosity has been coined by these famous epic narratives. Even Pramoedya Ananta Toer accepts a universal kind of mysticism. "Mysticism is the meaning of the bond between man and God.... Mysticism is a really individual experience, which cannot be explained. My bond with God develops through meditation."³¹ In a sense, the poet Sitor Situmorang is an exception. He was raised a Christian and right after his release from prison he wrote several "Christian" poems. Yet, later the "Bali saga's" and especially Hamzah Fansuri's panentheistic thinking influenced him deeply, next to the Batak ancestral religious views. So apparently, the comfort these authors want to provide, and the cosmic solution of this tragedy, they are looking for, is found in the realm of such religiosity.

6. Individual leaders and leadership councils of the main institutional religions in Indonesia recently have become aware of the need to start a process of healing memories. For a long period many religious leaders and their organizations have remained silent about the tragedy of 1965 and later years, maybe because many of their believers had

been involved in hunting and pursuing left-wing people. See for instance the extensive and critical report *Memori-Memori Terlarang* by Mery Kolimon and others about the G-30-S period on the Islands Sumba, West Timor, and Alor, and the lasting suffering of many women there due to these events (Kolimon and Wetangterah, 2012). In my opinion such introspection needs to be done by all major religions in Indonesia, as a first step towards a real reconciliation. Hopefully the 50th commemoration of the G-30-S episode will be a good occasion to start such an introspection and evaluation, and to issue clear and honest statements of reconciliation.

Epilogue

The present paper has been written by an author, who is not an Indonesian citizen. It has not been my aim to point to or accuse any person or institution in Indonesia. On the contrary, provided there would have been time, space, and expertise, a comparison between the situation in Indonesia with, for instance, the way Dutch novelists deal with the period of German occupation (1940-1945), when a minority of the Dutch people chose the side of the German Nazi's, would have been useful. As far as I know, very few Dutch novelists took a Nazi sympathizer as their protagonist, let alone such a protagonist is depicted in a sympathetic way.³² Other comparisons could be made as well, which could prove that the kind of critical introspection, which some Indonesian authors provide as to their history, is needed elsewhere as well. In this respect, the Dutch literature—and Dutch churches and other religious or moral institutions—can learn much from the Indonesian example.

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Endnotes

¹ Sudjinah (1928-2007) also wrote a book about young female prisoners in Bukit Duri and Tangerang, who served a time as "regular" criminals; besides she wrote an unpublished "novelet". Sudjinah had been a journalist before 1965.

² Sulami (1926-2002) wrote a few novels as well; the last one being *Merenteng Purnama* (Jakarta: Cipta Lestari, 2001), about a group of women guerilla fighters against the Dutch, during the years 1945-1949 in Central Java.

³ Hersri Setiawan wrote other books as well about this position as an *ex-tapol*, like *Aku Eks-Tapol* (Yogyakarta: Galang Press, 2003). Besides, after his release from Buru, he made extensive sound-recordings of autobiographical narratives by Indonesian exiles; a selection of these recordings is available in the collection “In Search of Silenced Voices: Indonesian Exiles of the Left”, in the International Institute of Social History (IISG), Amsterdam (see Hill, 2008). Laksmi Pamuntjak (2012: 487-488), mentions several people who wrote their memoirs about their detention at Buru island, as well as other literature concerning the G-30-S episode, all of it published after Soeharto’s fall.

⁴ Reprinted by Hachette Books, 1999 and Penguin Books, 2000. The original text in Bahasa Indonesia, *Nyanyi Sunyi seorang Bisu* first appeared in 1988. I used a copy of a preliminary typewritten text with many handwritten emendations and crossings-out, *Nyanyian Tunggal Seorang Bisu; Catatan-Catatan Pribadi dari Tahanan Pulau Buru* (1988). Available in University Library Leiden, KITLV collection.

⁵ Taken from the English translation, which can be found at internet.

⁶ “Pada tahun-tahun pertama para ulama, yang didatangkan kepenjara, dengan semangat perang penuh kemenangan, merasa tak perlu lagi mengendalikan diri dalam memuntahkan penghinaan, pengecilan. Dan karena bagi seorang tapol RI hidup tanpa agama sama dengan biadab dan hewan berbudi hewan, berbarislah umat Islam yang terhina dan terkecilkan itu datang pada kemurahan pendeta atau pastor.”

⁷ The serious incident of Wanareja of November 12, 1974, is not yet found in the preliminary edition *Nyanyian Tunggal Seorang Bisu*.

⁸ The original Indonesian text can be interpreted in yet another way. “Pram, Anda telah menemukan Tuhan di sini?” The answer: “Tuhan, yang mana? Ada banyak tuhan, kadang-kadang mengunjungi Buru.” Here, “tuhan” (without a capital “T”), can also be understood as *tuan*, ‘sir’, ‘gentleman’. Hence, maybe, the next question by Mochtar Lubis about Pramodya’s deafness (see Mrazek, 2000: 87-94).

⁹ Sudjinah, *Terempas Gelombang Pasang*, 28. “Saya sempat berbicara dengan seorang penyair terkenal, Sitor Situmorang, yang mencoba untuk tetap tenang dan bersikap kejenakaan pada saat-saat paling buruk dalam kehidupan kami.”

¹⁰ Originally in “Peta Perjalanan” (1976); in Situmorang (1989: 201). Translation by Henk M.J. Maier in *To Love, to Wander: The Poetry of Sitor Situmorang* (1996: 99).

¹¹ (Situmorang, 189: 340-342). Fragment. Translation AGH. The original text sounds:

Di tembok selter dengar
zikir roh-roh para leluhur di gunung
dan para santu di sorga, berdoa:
Tahan ujilah kamu! Kami saksi!
– Ya, Allah! –
– Ya, Bapak! –
– Ya, para marhum yang membenihi hidup! –
Mata batin teratai terbuka
Di atas danau darah
Di tembok sel
Buddha diam
memandang
ke dalam batinnya sendiri.

¹² Asahan Alham, in the Foreword (Pendahuluan) of the collection of poems edited by Asahan Alham, *et. al.* (eds.), *Di Negeri Orang*, Jakarta: Amanah-Lontar, 2002, xiii.

¹³ See the “Pengantar Penerbit” by Bilven (the editor) in Syarkawi Manap (2013: v-viii), where many titles and almost fifteen authors are mentioned; besides Syarkawi Manap among others Putu Oka Sukanta, May Swan, and Nurdiana.

¹⁴ Originally as “Perempuan dan Anak-anaknya” published in *Horison*, November 1966.

¹⁵ Originally as “Malam Kelabu” published in *Horison*, February 1970.

¹⁶ Originally as “Sebuah Perjoangan Kecil”, published in *Horison*, October 1976.

¹⁷ The three short stories “Bawuk”, “Sri Sumarah”, and “Autumn in Connecticut Once More” have been translated by John H. McGlynn and form one section in Umar Kayam (2012).

¹⁸ “Bawuk” in Umar Kayam (2012: 64-96; quotation on p. 96).

¹⁹ See for this interpretation Adnan Majid, “Rahmah—not just ‘Mercy’”, acquired in www.muslimmatters.org/2012/12/03/rahmah-not-just-mercy/: “I will argue that we speakers of modern English must understand rahmah as Allah’s Messenger understood the term—not simply as “mercy” but something deeper—an emotion closely tied with motherhood.”

²⁰ *Kubah* (1980 [1], 2005 [3]), *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* (1982), and *Orang-orang Proyek* (2003 [1], 2007 [2]).

²¹ See [id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kubah_\(novel\)](http://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kubah_(novel)).

²² According to a footnote in the lemma id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmad_Tohari, this is apparently mentioned and quoted by Tohari in a contribution in Pamusuk Erneste (2009: 113-126).

²³ It is the only place in this edition, which uses a bold letter type.

²⁴ See Yoseph Yapi Taum, “Wacana Multikulturalisme dalam Novel *Durga Umayi* karya Y.B. Mangunwijaya”, acquired at www.academia.edu, 9 February 2015.

²⁵ In his collection of essays, *Menuju Republik Indonesia Serikat* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1998), Rama Mangun is arguing in a similar way that the idealism of the 1945 Constitution should become the source of the future Indonesia.

²⁶ Of course, more novels about the G-30-S tragedy have been written during this period, such as Ngarto Febuana (2012). See the review of this novel by Esti Susilarti in *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, November 10, 2002.

²⁷ This novel is a sequel to her well-known novel *Bilangan Fu*.

²⁸ The quotation “Lihatlah pada si Manusia” actually refers to the Gospel of John 19:5. Several English Bible translations have here *Behold the Man*. See about the influence of religion in Utami’s work Alle G. Hoekema (2014: 132-152).

²⁹ Translated as *Jazz, Perfume, and the Incident*, Jakarta: Lontar Foundation, 2002. Before he wrote this novel, in his volumes of short stories *Penembak Misterius* (1993) and *Saksi Mata* (1994), translated as *Eyewitness*. He had asked attention already to the tragedy of East Timor during the Indonesian occupation.

³⁰ See *Tempo*, *edisi Khusus: Tragedi Mei 1998-2013*, dedicated entirely to Wiji

Thukul's life and work, with a small anthology of his poetry during his last years, "Para Jendral Marah-marah: Kumpulan Puisi Wiji Thukul dalam Pelarian".

³¹ As quoted by Pramoedya Ananta Toer in an interview with Kees Snoek about "The Mute's Soliloqui." In August Hans den Boef and Kees Snoek, *Pramoedya Ananta Toer: Essay en Interview*, Breda: De Geus/Manus Amici/Novib, s.a. (ca. 1992), 56.

³² One of the rare exceptions being Dirk Ayelt Kooiman (1982).