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CHAPTER 11: REMEMBERING SUFFERING AND SURVIVAL: SITES OF MEMORY ON BURU

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Introduction

Survivors and their families have remembered the events of 1965 and the related suffering of persons targeted in the violence in complex ways.[1] In the absence of state recognition of the suffering of victims of 1965, survivors and families have had to pass on their memories in personal ways making their own meanings of these sites of terror within families and communities of former political prisoners. This chapter considers this process in terms of memories of imprisonment on the remote eastern Indonesian island Buru.

In the aftermath of the 1965 events, more than 10,000 *tapol* (an abbreviation of *tahanan politik* or political prisoners) were imprisoned without trial on Buru. The island was a crucial part of remaking Indonesian society in the aftermath of the 1965-66 killings. Buru was envisaged as a place of permanent resettlement for political prisoners and their families in order to secure their removal from Java, Indonesia's political centre. As will be discussed below, Buru's prison camp was planned at the highest levels of government and its day-to-day operations were in the hands of the local military command, another example of the Army's command responsibility in the Indonesian genocide.

Conditions of detention on Buru were extremely harsh. Prisoners were subjected to forced labour and worked long days under constant military supervision. Torture and other forms of inhuman and degrading treatment were a systematic part of military conduct towards prisoners (Adam, 2014; Krisnadi, 2001; Nadia et al., 2014). While sites of terror often become public spaces of commemoration (Jacobs, 2011), the state-enforced silencing of the 1965 events in Indonesia means that on Buru there are no memorials to commemorate its

past as a place of banishment and locus of mass violence (Setiawan, K., 2015). This not only leaves victims and survivors without formal acknowledgement, but also raises the question what sites former prisoners use to remember the past and communicate their memories to others.

In May 2015, I travelled to Buru for the first time and was faced with the paradoxical situation of coming to a new, yet very familiar, place. My father survived eight years of incarceration on the island, and I grew up with his stories of life in prison. Together with my father and other former *tapol* I visited many places associated with the island's prison camp and realized that the few structures that remain evoke strong memories from, and are of great significance to, former prisoners and their family members.

The importance of place can be illustrated by a discussion I had one evening with Sri, the daughter of a former prisoner who stayed on the island after the prison camp was gradually closed in the late 1970s.[2] While talking about the arts building that was built by prisoners in the village Savanajaya, Sri said that the structure was part of "our history" (*sejarah kita*). In using the inclusive first plural *kita* ("we"), Sri signified that the building was also part of my history. That we had only just met was irrelevant: we shared a similar background and as such she included me in the larger community of former *tapol* on Buru, illustrating the power sites can have in binding individuals together. Moreover, in choosing the wording "our history" she demonstrated her strong identification with her father's past on Buru. The prison camp was not just his experience but it had become her narrative too, even though she was born after her father's detention and had thus never experienced his imprisonment.

The strong connection of the second generation to the often deeply painful experiences of their parents has been defined as postmemory (Hirsch, 1997, 2008). Postmemory plays a crucial role in the transmission of memories by reactivating past events.

As Sri explained, sites can play an important part in bringing the past to the present, even when formal memorials are absent. This chapter will look at two sites of memory in the village Savanajaya that enable the verbalization of individual memories, which allow former political prisoners to give meaning to their experiences and position themselves in the social and political context in which they live. This chapter will thus argue that in a context where the narratives of victims and survivors of the events of 1965 continue to be repressed, sites offer an avenue for the transmission of memories.

Sites and objects of memory

While on Buru there are no formal places dedicated to the experiences of former political prisoners, many sites are an important medium for former *tapol* to tell their stories. As such, these sites can be considered as *lieux de mémoire* (realms of memory or memory spaces), defined by Pierre Nora as "any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element in the memorial heritage of any community" (Nora, 1996, p. xvii).

While Nora's work focuses on *national* memory – to which the experiences of 1965 victims and survivors do not belong – this definition can also be used to the memorial heritage of "societal subgroups" (Smith, 2013). Departing from Maurice Halbwachs' theories on social memory, Andrea Smith argues that while individuals have unique memories, these are fundamentally social in nature: shared memories can hold social groups of various scales together. In these "social frameworks" in which individual memories are present, places and objects play a crucial role in recollection. Sites and objects of memory bear the imprint of individuals and others, providing a sense of continuity and stability and as such shape the direction of social life. Space can thus become a powerful unifying force in that it defines not only the group's image of itself, but also its external environment (Smith, 2013).

Sites and objects of memory thus fulfil a social role. This means that they are not just a depository of memories, but a referent that allows recollections to be articulated (Argenti & Schramm, 2010). This is highly relevant for survivor-witnesses, as sites play an active role in giving meaning to their experiences (Abrams, 2014; Argenti & Schramm, 2013), as well as communicating their memories to others.

In the context of former political prisoners engaging with sites of memory on Buru, the conceptualizations on the transmission of memories by Jan and Aleida Assmann are particularly useful. Jan Assmann developed the concept of collective remembrance, consisting of communicative (biographical, factual) on one hand and cultural (institutionalized, archival) memory on the other (Assmann, 1997). Aleida Assmann extended these concepts further, distinguishing four memory formats. Individual and family or group memory correspond to Jan Assmann's notion of communicative remembrance; while national or political memory, as well as cultural or archival memory, fall under the umbrella of cultural memory. While communicative memory is intergenerational, cultural memory is transgenerational (Assmann, 2006).

These memory formats do not, however, account for the ruptures that emerge in instances where histories have been suppressed and eradicated. This situation is relevant to the Indonesian situation where accounts of the 1965 violence and its aftermath are systematically silenced. In her seminal article "The Generation of Postmemory", Marianne Hirsch argues that postmemorial work can counteract these losses caused by historical suppression. In her analysis, photographs can mobilize postmemory by offering access to the event itself, and thus become a powerful medium for transmitting "unimaginable" events (Hirsch, 2008).

Building on Hirsch's insights, I will argue that sites and objects of memory play a similar role in reactivating distant memories. Before turning to specific sites on Buru, I will

discuss the wider context in which these places and objects are situated: the island's background as a prison camp and the establishment of the village Savanajaya, where many former *tapol* and their families continue to live today.

A place of no return

By the late 1960s, the Indonesian government was faced with the question what to do with the 34,000 B-category political prisoners languishing in prisons on Java.[3] B-category prisoners, mainly members of the PKI (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, Indonesian Communist Party) and affiliated mass organizations, could not be tried as there was insufficient evidence against them but were considered to have been involved in the 1965 events. The government was therefore unwilling to release them even though their continued detention was costly and, as will be discussed below, politically difficult.

In 1967, a government delegation researched the possibilities to detain these prisoners on Buru, part of the Maluku islands in East Indonesia. According to the delegation Buru was particularly suitable as a site of detention because of its dense forests that formed a natural barrier to possible escape attempts, as well as its rich natural resources. This meant that sending prisoners to Buru would be a cost-effective way for the government to develop the island as a "special transmigration area", which was also in line with the government's transmigration program to Indonesia's outer islands in an attempt to ease overpopulation in Java (Adam, 2014; Amnesty International, 1977; Krisnadi, 2001).

The "Buru project" was orchestrated at the highest levels of government. On 26 February 1969 President Suharto, in his capacity as Commander for the Restoration of Peace, Security and Order, officially designated Buru as a resettlement area for B-category prisoners. The Attorney General, Soegih Arto, was given responsibility for the so-called Buru Rehabilitation Installation Project. Subsequently, Soegih Arto ordered the military to

implement the project under the umbrella of the Buru Resettlement Implementation Body, which fell under the local military command known as the Pattimura Division (Nadia et al., 2014).[4]

On 17 August 1969, the first group of 850 prisoners was sent from Java to Buru. They were not informed of where they were taken. Within three years, more than 10,000 male prisoners were sent to the island (Adam, 2014; Krisnadi, 2001; Nadia et al, 2014).[5] Those imprisoned on Buru included former government officials and intellectuals, as well as artists and writers (Krisnadi, 2001), such as novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer and film director Basuki Effendi. Both the large number of prisoners as well as the presence of prominent figures meant that Buru became "better known internationally than any other camp or prison" (*TAPOL Bulletin*, 7, October 1974).

The Indonesian government rejected international criticism of Buru's prison camp, most prominently led by TAPOL (The British Campaign for the Release of Indonesian Political Prisoners) and Amnesty International, and insisted that sending prisoners to Buru was necessary as they considered political prisoners to be a threat to national security. The presence of *tapol* in prisons on Java was particularly deemed undesirable ahead of the 1971 general elections, which the government portrayed as a "celebration of democracy" (Adam, 2014, p. 351). According to the authorities the relocation of prisoners to an outer island, "far away from the very sensitive political environment in the capital [Jakarta]" (Marsudi, 1971, p. 17) was thus essential from a political and security perspective.

The authorities also presented Buru as an opportunity for prisoners, in which they could live outside "the four walls of a prison cell" (Marsudi, 1971, p. 51), and gave them "a new field of work in a completely new society" (Marsudi, 1971, pp. 16-17). The authorities thus conceived of Buru, in the words of then Attorney General Soegih Arto, as a "humanitarian project" (Krisnadi, 2001, p. 95). This was believed to be in the best interest of

tapol: ongoing anti-Communist sentiments and the stigmatization of those believed to be involved in the 1965 events as “unclean” (*tidak bersih lingkungan*), meant that returning prisoners to their own communities put their safety at risk (Marsudi, 1971, p. 47).

The relocation of prisoners was intended to be permanent and the authorities ruled out an eventual return to Java. In 1975 Admiral Sudomo, the Commander for the Restoration of Peace, Security and Order, said that the *tapol* were “settled and successful; there is no need for them to return” (Krisnadi, 2001, p. 10). That Buru was a site of indefinite detention was made clear to the prisoners from the outset: former *tapol* Hersri Setiawan recalled that upon arrival in 1971 a guard told the prisoners: “here you will eat, drink, sleep and work. And don’t forget to pray! You will be here forever. Until you die!” (Setiawan, H. in Nadia et al., 2014, p. 310).

The arrival of political prisoners changed Buru dramatically. Before, the island was sparsely populated by indigenous peoples: only 300 to 500 lived in the direct vicinity of the prison camp, which would eventually cover almost 3,000 km2 or approximately one-third of the island. A number of local rulers voluntarily donated land to the authorities, which was then used as agricultural land and worked on by the prisoners. The establishment of the prison camp had a profound impact on indigenous communities and their traditions, many of which disappeared in a short period of time (Krisnadi, 2001).

Many of Buru’s dense forests made way for prison units. By 1972, there were 22 units that held around 500-1000 prisoners each and which were surrounded by barbed wire. Units were sub-divided into barracks, holding 50 prisoners each. There were a number of special units: including the isolation (punishment) unit Jiku Kecil,[6] while units R, S and T held elderly and sick *tapol* (Krisnadi, 2001; Nadia et al., 2014).

While the Indonesian government claimed that the prisoners were “free, in good health and being treated humanely” (Marsudi, 1971, p. 10), in reality life and death were in

the hands of the military (Nadia et al., 2014). Prisoners were subjected to forced displacement, deprivation of liberty, forced labour and slavery. On average they worked ten hours of hard labour every day under continuous military supervision. There are many accounts of torture and other forms of inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, as well as indiscriminate killings (Adam, 2014; Nadia et al., 2014).[7] Prisoners were not provided with adequate nutrition and suffered from many diseases. They received minimal health care: the government only budgeted 400 Rupiah per prisoner for an eight month period (*Tapol Bulletin*, 8, January 1975).[8] It was not uncommon for stomach aches to be "treated" with beatings, while prisoners with malaria were ordered to run laps until they fainted (Hersri, 1995).

The responsibility of the Indonesian state in establishing Buru's prison camp and the role of the Indonesian Army in the systematic violation of rights have been the subject of inquiries by the Indonesian National Human Rights Commission, Komnas HAM. In 2003, the Commission finalised a report on the island, part of a larger research project on human rights violations under the Suharto regime. Nevertheless the report was not made public because of internal disputes (Setiawan, K., 2013).[9] In 2012, the Commission issued a report on the 1965 events, based on a four-year investigation, for which it collected testimonies of hundreds of people. For the specific case of Buru, Komnas HAM found indications of crimes against humanity, including slavery, indiscriminate killings and torture.[10] The Commission has recommended the case to be addressed through judicial and non-judicial means, but the Indonesian authorities, however, have yet to act on the report's findings.

Savanajaya: Village of *tapol* families

While the government portrayed Buru as a humane place of detention, by sending prisoners to Buru they also forcibly separated them from their families. In response, the authorities

started encouraging family members to join imprisoned relatives on the island.[11] The reunion of families on Buru also addressed a number of security concerns. Many government officials were worried about sending a large group of political prisoners to Buru, which in their opinion would expose the local population, as well as guards, to Communist and leftist ideologies. This carried the risk that Buru would become the "Red Island" (Krisnadi, 2001). It was thought that by bringing family members to Buru, chances of prisoners socializing with the local population were reduced. At the same time relatives of *tapol* – who were also considered "unclean" – were removed from their communities, meaning that these were cleansed of carriers of leftist ideologies – another government objective.

Most detainees rejected the government's plans (Krisnadi, 2001; Setiawan, H., 2006). When Pramoedya Ananta Toer was asked whether he wanted his family to join him he replied that he could under no circumstances accept the offer and described the idea as "immoral" (Toer, 1989, p. 32). Many *tapol* believed that if their family members would join them this diminished their chances of an eventual return to Java. They were also concerned with how their wives and children would adjust to agricultural work, with which they had little experience. Moreover, they were worried about the lack of educational facilities for their children on the island (Krisnadi, 2001). Many *tapol* wives had their reservations about the government's plans too: according to a survey, 70% did not want to come to Buru (*The Guardian*, January 5, 1972). Women were subjected to significant pressure, including physical threats, to convince them otherwise (Setiawan, H., 2006).

In 1972 the first family members arrived on Buru, a group of 164 wives, 485 children and three mothers (Krisnadi, 2001). According to the authorities, these families had "won the lottery" and they were congratulated on commencing a "new life" (Setiawan, H., 2006, p. 123). This discourse illustrates the importance the authorities accorded to the arrival of families as part of the larger objective to create a new society on Buru. However, life on Buru

for the newly arrived women was far from easy. While the authorities had promised the women that they and their accompanying children would remain free, in practice they were not allowed to move around the island, let alone leave (Amnesty International, 1977). They were subjected to interrogations, as well as verbal and physical abuse from guards (Setiawan, H., 2006). One woman recalled that sometimes she tried to negotiate with the guards: "after all, I came as a free woman! But I always drew the short straw – they had the iron, the gun!" (Rooijen, 1998, p. 10). These women thus effectively "became B-category *tapol*, but without a photo or shirt number" (Setiawan, H., 2006, p. 127).

The *tapol* families were settled in Unit IV, where prisoners had built small houses. In 1972, the unit was renamed Savanajaya village and by 1976 there were 240 houses. Assuming that there were at least 10,000 prisoners on Buru, less than 3% of families decided to join their relatives on the island – the scheme could thus hardly be called successful. The authorities continued to pursue the permanent resettlement of political prisoners on Buru, amongst others by putting on mass weddings for marriages between prisoners and the children of other *tapol* (Krisnadi, 2001; Setiawan, H., 2006).[12]

The permanent resettlement of political prisoners on Buru was eventually not feasible due to international pressure on the Indonesian government.[13] As a consequence, between 1977 and 1979 all *tapol* were "returned to society".[14] While most prisoners returned to Java, 298 stayed. This number included 209 families already residing in Savanajaya and 89 single men (Krisnadi, 2001). They had various reasons for staying, including that they had lost all their property in Java, or because they had married local women (Setiawan, H., 2006, 2016). Over time, some of these families relocated to other parts of the island, or even left Buru altogether. In May 2015, approximately 30 *tapol* families were living in Savanajaya.

While no longer prisoners, former *tapol* continued to face difficulties. Despite being allocated land similar to Buru transmigrants, in the case of former *tapol* it was often taken

from them. Both then and now, former prisoners have little access to legal redress: the nearest court, in Ambon, is a long and expensive journey away; and understandably many former *tapol* have little trust in state bodies. To this day, former prisoners are subject to intimidation: when they meet, military officers often warn them “not to form a new Communist Party”. From time to time, their (grand)children remain the subject of discriminatory practices, including attempts to prevent them from enrolling at certain schools. These realities mean that remembering and addressing the past on Buru remains fraught with tensions and is actively resisted by local authorities.

Sites of memory in Savanajaya

Little remains of Buru’s prison camp: the barracks have long been demolished, and there are no memorials for political prisoners. Yet, many places are connected to the island’s history as a prison camp. For former political prisoners these sites are very significant as they offer a starting point to speak about their experiences, which have been erased from mainstream narratives. In this section, I will discuss how former political prisoners engage with two sites in Savanajaya: the Tugu (“Pillar”) monument and the arts hall.

The Tugu monument (Figure 11.1), in the heart of Savanajaya, marks the formal establishment of the village. The monument has two plaques, with the one on the back stating the parties involved in the “village project”; the camp and unit commanders. While the word “unit” alludes to the prison camp, there is no mention of the prisoners who built the village.

INSERT Figure 11.1: The Tugu monument

Two former Buru prisoners who returned to Java, Hersri Setiawan[15] and Tedjabayu Sudjojono,[16] were asked to reflect on the monument.[17] Hersri said "I have no feelings at all. It is as I'm looking at a monument that has no meaning to me." For Tedja, the monument represented repression. Hersri agreed with this interpretation and nodded quietly, while Tedja continued: "Inside, I'm angry, but what can you do? I don't think it should be demolished. Rather, it is proof that the military were part of Suharto's machinery of repression."

Hersri and Tedja's conversation illustrates that a particular site can hold different meanings to individuals. Once these interpretations are verbalized, individual interpretations or memories become part of a broader social group, in which memories are shared, but can also be queried (Hirsch, 2008). This interaction then gives way to creating a site's meaning. Tedja's comments regarding how the monument should be retained as proof of the military involvement and responsibility for the violence perpetrated against political prisoners on Buru show his desire for this information to be shared more widely. This can be seen as a reflection of Jan and Aleida Assmann's theories on communicative and cultural memory. In wanting to share the meanings associated with Tugu beyond a particular social group (former political prisoners and their families), Tedja expresses a desire for these memories to become institutionalized, becoming part of national and political memory.

Opposite Tugu stands Savanajaya's arts hall (*balai kesenian,* Figure 11.2). During Buru's time as a prison camp all units, except the isolation unit Jiku Kecil, had an arts barrack (*barak kesenian*) used for cultural performances for the entertainment of the camp commanders, guards, as well as other prisoners (Setiawan, K., 2015).[18] These arts barracks were complete theatres, equipped with a stage, backdrops for performances, two sets of Javanese gamelan and benches to seat more than 500 people (Hersri, 1995).[19]

INSERT Figure 11.2: Former political prisoners stand together in the renovated arts hall. Tedjabayu Sudjojono stands second from left and Hersri Setiawan fourth from left.

Of Buru's arts barracks, only the one in Savanajaya remains. In 2014, it was renovated with funding from the Governor of Maluku, who agreed that the building was a site of historical significance. The wishes of the former political prisoners in Savanajaya to restore the building to its original state were, however, ignored. The supporting poles of the building, made from cajuput trees indigenous to Buru, were removed. Now, the art building is an impressive modern structure, which former political prisoners feel has lost its original character. While walking through the hall Udin, a former prisoner, explained:

> They replaced all the wooden poles with concrete ones. You can still see a few of them there [on the field]. I remember cutting the tree and then bringing the poles here! Now, they are all gone, replaced with these ones [taps with his hands on the concrete]. The only thing that remains – what was made by us – is the framework of the roof. The rest… all gone! (personal communication, May 17, 2015)

The strong sense of ownership expressed by Udin was thus related to the physical experience of building the hall. Similarly, because there are very few remnants of Buru's prison camp the significance of those that remain increases.

In an article on art and entertainment in Buru as well as Jakarta's Salemba jail, Hersri Setiawan has argued that for many *tapol* creative expression (whether by performing, writing, or making instruments) was very important as it represented a sense of normalcy within the extremities of prison life. While some prisoners viewed performances as "useless and treacherous activities" (Hersri, 1995, p. 12) as they provided entertainment for the

commander and guards, for many other *tapol* – among them accomplished dancers, musicians and *dalang* (master puppeteers) – performing, even when it took place in a context of oppression, was

> […] not without benefit for the artists and performers involved. They represented an opportunity to maintain, even develop, their technical skills. And however cruelly a system of power oppresses creative freedom; it can never destroy the artist and the work of art (Hersri, 1995, p. 12).

This analysis helps explain the importance many former *tapol* attach to the arts building. As briefly mentioned in the introduction, the descendants of former political prisoners share this attachment too. Sri, the daughter of a former political prisoner, said, “we want to salvage the poles and keep them somewhere. Maybe we can establish some kind of museum” (Sri, personal communication, May 19, 2015). Sri’s perceptions are insightful in various ways. As noted in the introduction, on considering the arts hall a part of “our history”, she demonstrated profound identification with her father’s past. This illustrates the privileged role of the family in memorial transmission (Hirsch, 2008), as well as that sites can help bring a distant time to the present. As such, these places or objects have a role as a “memory technique” (Pichler, 2010, p. 139), which allow survivor-witnesses to express their memories and pass them on to subsequent generations (Argenti & Schramm, 2010). In so doing, sites can mobilize postmemory, as illustrated by the daughter who expressed her desire for memories, attached to the arts building, to become institutionalized. This would enable the stories of Buru *tapol* to be shared beyond the circle of former prisoners and their families, moving from intergenerational to transgenerational memory.

The manner in which former political prisoners engage with sites also illustrates that physical places play an important role in the construction of the self, and the social group that individuals belong to (Filippucci, 2010). Here, it is important to contrast the different emphases chosen by former prisoners at the sites of memory discussed. While both at Tugu and in the arts hall the prisoners alluded to their ultimate survival; at Tugu, Hersri and Tedja emphasized military repression, while at the arts hall former prisoners underlined their role as builders and developers of the island.

The emphasis on development is closely related to the profound changes *tapol* made to the island's landscape. Many former political prisoners also use this discourse when discussing the plans of the government for Buru to become the main supplier of rice for eastern Indonesia (Setiawan, K., 2015). In the eyes of former *tapol*, Buru's present agricultural success cannot be separated from their forced labour. In locating their memories as prisoners on Buru beyond a context of suffering and loss, and in one of survival and development, the narratives of former political prisoners show that sites and memory play a role in the construction of identity and positioning in the social world (Abrams, 2014).

Meanwhile the emphasis on oppression at Tugu, as expressed by Hersri and Tedja, cannot be separated from the monument's direct link to the role of the military on Buru as well as the different experiences of former *tapol* after the prison camp was closed. Tedja and Hersri were among those who returned to Java, where both were exposed to, and became actively involved in, human rights activism. The community of former political prisoners in Savanajaya, however, has barely been the subject of activism.[20] Their discourse of development has perhaps also emerged because there are little other frameworks available to them to express their experiences (Abrams, 2014), reinforced further by ongoing pressure from the local security forces to remain silent about the past.

The emphasis of development rather than survival of violence can also be explained by taking into account the particular context of Buru. The former political prisoners who stayed, were not only faced with the challenge of rebuilding their lives, but had to do so in a place where they were detained and where remembering the past remains actively resisted. This combination of profound suffering and "institutional silencing" (Shaw, 2010, p. 258) makes it even more difficult for survivors to articulate painful memories. It is in these situations of "unspeakable" memories (Hirsch, 1997, p. 13), that material objects – including sites – can become a bridge between what can and cannot be expressed, creating an avenue for the transmission of memories.

Conclusion

Buru's history as a site of serious human rights violations has virtually been erased. There are very little remnants of the prison camp, let alone memorials. Ongoing resistance from local authorities has meant that remembering the past, even when it takes place in private settings, is fraught with difficulties. Despite this situation, former political prisoners have found ways to communicate their experiences. Sites play an important role in this process.

The recollections of former prisoners at both Tugu and Savanajaya's arts hall underline the various memory formats that emerge simultaneously: from collective memory in the form of individual and group memory, to wishes (shared by those who have not directly experienced the prison camp) for the institutionalization of their experiences as part of national and cultural memory.

From the engagement of *tapol* with these places, sites fulfil various roles in the recollection and transmission of memories. Tugu and the Savanajaya arts hall show that sites are a locus of memory, allowing for the retrieval of individual recollections. Sites are more than just a vessel, however, as individual memories are also fundamentally social: they do not

only bear the imprint of one former *tapol*, but also those of others. Especially when recollections are shared between people, memories are no longer the exclusive domain of the individual, but they become a social agent, in which sites create an active relationship between individuals, spaces and objects.

This relationship gives way to a number of other processes. First, sites themselves gain a particular meaning: Tugu symbolizes military repression, while the arts hall stands for the contribution of prisoners to the island. Both sites are proof of the past of *tapol* on Buru, a history that is deliberately forgotten by most government bodies. Second, in bestowing meaning to sites, they help to shape social identities, binding together individuals with a common past. In that sense, sites influence the positioning of former *tapol* both as survivors of military violence and the developers of an island. Third, by transmitting narratives of suffering and survival to others, sites have the power to mobilize postmemorial work.

Sites are thus a medium for the transmission of memories. This is particularly important in a context where there are no public commemorations or monuments, and where sites thus represent a unique framework allowing former prisoners to tell their stories, and pass them on to subsequent generations. In imbuing their narratives with a discourse of survival, former Buru *tapol* show that remembering at a site of terror does not only serve to acknowledge past suffering but recognizes the power of the living, who continue to tell their stories.

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Endnotes

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[1] An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the Indonesia Council Open Conference with Dr Baskara T. Wardaya. I would like to thank him for his support and comments on this paper. Thanks also to Whisnu Yonar and Edwina Brennan for their thoughts on earlier drafts.

[2] For safety reasons, pseudonyms have been used for the former prisoners and their family members who live on Buru.

[3] The government never admitted there were political prisoners in Indonesia. Instead, it argued that because of security considerations, individuals involved in "political issues" were being detained. Unsurprisingly, the authorities never gave full disclosure of the number of individuals held. In 1973 Amnesty International estimated that there were 55,000 B-category prisoners (*TAPOL Bulletin*, 2, November 1973).

[4] For detailed discussions of the role of government agencies and the military in the design and operation of Buru prison camp, see Adam (2014) and Nadia et al. (2014).

[5] According to the authorities, those sent to Buru were healthy men under forty-five years old (*TAPOL Bulletin*, 8, January 1975), but in fact most were between twenty and seventy years old, and also minors were sent to the island (Krisnadi, 2001). It is unclear exactly how many prisoners were sent to Buru. In 1976, the authorities stated that there were more than 10,000 prisoners, Amnesty International estimated the number to be 14,000 (Amnesty International, 1977).

[6] Ironically in 1974 Jiku Kecil was renamed Ancol, the same as a recreational area in Jakarta (Hersri, 1995).

[7] According to Krisnadi (2001), 320 prisoners died on Buru, a number based on notes by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. However, this number is likely to be higher: the data obtained by

Toer only refer to one prison unit and do not include any deaths after 1978. The Indonesian government has never issued information on the exact number of detainees, let alone deaths.

[8] The Catholic Church played a crucial role in providing medical assistance (Sumarwan, 2007).

[9] The executive summary of the report on Buru was eventually published in 2014 (see Nadia et al., 2014).

[10] It is difficult to assess the quality of the Komnas HAM investigation on 1965 as the Commission has not made the full report available. The summary has a number of flaws; in the case of Buru, it fails to explicitly state that it was a labor camp (Meijer, 2015). Nevertheless, to date the report remains the only condemnation on the violence of 1965-66 and its aftermath by an Indonesian state body.

[11] Language was used to present Buru as a humane place of detention. Military policy dictated that prisoners not referred to as "detainees" (*tahanan*) but as "citizens" (*warga*) (Krisnadi, 2001). Interestingly, former political prisoners on Buru continue to use *warga*, particularly when differentiating themselves from transmigrants and indigenous peoples.

[12] A number of *tapol* married local women, for which they required permission from the military.

[13] For an extensive discussion, see Krisnadi (2001, pp. 156-171).

[14] It would be inaccurate to speak of "release", as the prisoners were never given release letters, only one that changed the status of a detainee from "a full prisoner to one returned to society" (Setiawan, 2006, p. 225).

[15] A former member of the left-wing cultural organization Lekra (*Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat*, Institute of People's Culture) and general secretary of its central Java branch (1958-60), Hersri was also Indonesia's representative at the Asia-Africa Writer's Bureau in Colombo, Sri Lanka (1961-65). He was arrested in December 1969 and sent to Buru in 1971.

[16] A former member of the student organization CGMI (*Consentrasi Gerakan Mahasiswa Indonesia*, Indonesian Student Movement Concentration), Tedjabayu was arrested in October 1965 and sent to Buru in 1971. He is the eldest son of pioneering painter and former PKI-member S. Sudjojono and Mia Bustam, former general secretary of Lekra Yogyakarta.

[17] These reflections were part of the 2016 documentary *Pulau Buru: Tanah Air Beta* (Buru Island: My Home Land), directed by Rahung Nasution.

[18] Between 1971 and 1975 performances on Buru truly represented forced labour as they were held entirely for the camp commander, his staff and guards. Prisoners developed a number of terms to describe work associated with performances based on "forced labour" (*korve*), i.e. "eye *korve*" meant having to watch the performances (Hersri, 1995).

[19] For an extensive discussion on art and entertainment on Buru and Salemba prison in Jakarta, see Hersri, 1995.

[20] An exception to this has been the involvement of a number of wives and daughters of former *tapol* in a number of programs of Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR), including the photo exhibition "The Act of Living".