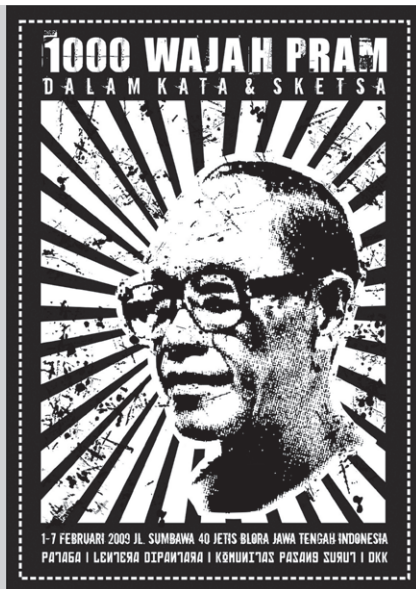


Indonesian literature in exile, 1965-1998

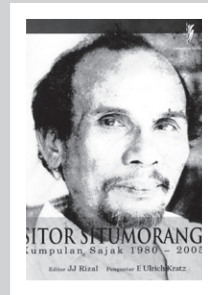
The events of September 30 1965 had a profound impact on the lives of many Indonesians, including a group of intellectuals and writers who were compelled to live in foreign countries in the aftermath. Despite their political exile, authors refused to be silenced and continued to write and publish poetry, prose and essays. Dorothea Schaefer's research sheds light on this relatively unknown part of Indonesian literature and examines these exile writings in the wider context of contemporaneous Indonesian literature.

Dorothea Schaefer



ABOVE:
Image of Pramoedya Ananta Toer on a political poster.

BELOW:
Jonie, Mawie Ananta. 2005. *Anak Minang itu bercerita*. Jakarta: First November.



ABOVE:
Sitor Situmorang.

BELOW:
Exile journal *Kreasi* Vol. No 3 (1989), Amsterdam: Stichting Budaya.



THE EVENTS OF 1965 forced approximately 20 Indonesian writers to seek refuge overseas. Subsequently, much was written by Indonesian exile writers in the former Eastern Bloc, in particular Russia, the People's Republic of China, Albania and Vietnam, where they continued to publish their works in journals and newspapers. Only in the late 1980s did many of the writers leave these countries and settle in Western Europe, where they were granted asylum or citizenship. Foundations to support the publication of exile writings were established, and consequently it was possible for exile authors to publish their works in a more structured way. Around the time of *reformasi* in the late 1990s, writings by exile authors started to appear on the Internet forming a large volume of 'grey' literature via webgroups, websites and blogs. Since 2000, exile writers have been able to publish in Indonesia once more. The group includes names such as Agam Wispi, Utuy Tatang Sontani, Sobron Aidit, Asahan Alham (Aidit), Z. Afif and Soepriyadi Tomodihardjo, who, in 1965, were among the promising and established writers of the time.

Studies on Indonesian exile literature

The existence of these exiled authors and their writing have been acknowledged by various scholars. In particular at Australian universities, academics studying the modern history, politics and culture of Indonesia, and with a concern for those that were marginalised during the Suharto presidency, took up their case. Until now however, no thorough documentation of Indonesian exile literature has been attempted. Available studies have mainly taken a historical, political or biographical approach as the study on the cultural institute Lekra (*Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat*) by Foulcher (1986), Stephen Miller's PhD study and David Hill's research illustrate (Hill 1984, 1991). Hill recently embarked on a new project at IAS on the development of diasporic left-wing communities of Indonesian exiles (Hill 2008). Michael Bodden currently works on the genre of Lekra drama, first studied by James R. Brandon.

Some former Lekra authors and other political prisoners under the Suharto regime were able to publish their works in Indonesia after their release in the late 1970s (albeit with difficulties), and works by Pramoedya Ananta Toer and Sitor Situmorang, who had not been a member of Lekra, were available in Indonesia already at this time. Yet it was only after 2000 that a number of compilations and anthologies of exile writing appeared in Indonesia. The first anthology, which was widely reviewed in the Indonesian media and caught my attention, was *Di Negeri Orang* (Alham et al. 2002). It is the work of a team of exile authors and presents, to a wider readership in Indonesia, what they consider the best of exile poetry. *Menagerie 6* provides English translations of selected works by exile authors for an international audience (McGlynn and Ibrahim 2004). Additionally, I am aware of at

least three more compilations of exile writing published in Indonesia. All the same, this material represents only a fraction of what has been written and published in difficult circumstances.

Identifying works published in exile is challenging. Texts published in countries of the former Eastern Bloc are mostly inaccessible. I have discovered and collected more works from the later period of exile because texts are available from the writers themselves, individual collectors or selected archives in Western Europe. The majority of this material exists in the form of photocopied or stencilled pamphlets or loosely-bound journals. Many texts, anthologies of poetry or short stories were self-published in the cheapest possible way. The fact that exile writers have made extensive use of the Internet as a forum for their works presents another challenge when collecting data. Essays, poems and short stories by exile writers are dispersed over various websites, webgroups and online journals or newspapers. The willingness of exile writers to communicate with me and share their knowledge has been extremely valuable. Exile authors have provided detailed information on their literary activities and their lives, and they have often granted me access to their published and unpublished texts.

The anthologies of exile writing published in Indonesia are a valuable source of reference, even though I consider them to be highly selective representations as they merely scratch the surface of the abundant material available and present differing points of view. I have benefited greatly from the material published by Indonesian and Western academics. Contemporary Indonesian literary critics have commented on exile literature on the Internet, and exile writers have also presented their views on the subject both in exile journals and various online forums. Related studies on Lekra, former Lekra members, political prisoners and the political culture of Indonesia have also been very useful for my initial research (including Budiawan 2004, Nilsson Hoadley 2005).

My study concentrates on the literary analysis of texts written by Indonesian authors in exile which to date has come second to political aspects, such as the human rights violations during Suharto's presidency, and the study of individual life stories. My doctoral research aims to fill this gap and examines these texts in the wider context of Indonesian literature.

Exile writing in the context of Indonesian literature

My study employs a text-focused approach to evaluating exile literature, and I am interested in the self-perception of Indonesian exile writers, their views on and their place in the context of Indonesian literature. Chronologically tracing the literary activities of former Lekra intellectuals in exile from the 1950s onwards into the early 21st century, with a particular emphasis on the large corpus of works written and disseminated abroad, I analyse the texts produced and the language used in relation to the 'widely received' canon of Indonesian literature (Kratz 2000a). I critically examine the claims made about the nature of exile literature, political affiliation of the authors and the role of the venues of publication.

In the 1950s, Indonesian critics wrote extensively about their opinions and definitions of modern Indonesian literature, and a polarisation amongst Indonesian writers in two groups – Gelanggang and Lekra – became apparent. Taking into account the essays by Indonesian scholars (Kratz 2000b), I intend to use the concept of modern Indonesian literature as it has been perceived by Indonesian writers and critics to provide a

thorough analysis of exile literature. I have ascertained that in the 1950s and 60s, writers of both groups sought to publish their poems or short stories in journals and newspapers that were generally considered as venues for 'high-quality' literature. I am struck by similarities in the style and form of the works published by authors of 'opposing' groups. Whilst writers were engaging in fierce polemics, it is evident that their differences did not extend to their understanding on what constitutes literature of good quality. Works share similar criteria in terms of linguistic and stylistic means and forms, suggesting that their writers also share a similar perception regarding standards of literary quality. I expand this analysis to include the content and themes of works written by Lekra and non-Lekra authors alike.

A 'social commitment' to Indonesian society is apparent in the majority of works by Indonesian writers. The main difference lies in the degree to which politics is used to shape and influence literary works. Lekra authors were encouraged to make politics the guiding principle when writing poetry and prose. My study seeks to define the exile writers' understanding of, and in turn their contribution to, modern Indonesian literature. Analysing fictional and non-fictional work to determine their views that are explicitly or implicitly expressed, I seek to establish how exile authors relate their writing to Indonesian literature at large. My research suggests that they have continued to consider their works a part of Indonesian literature, although they were marginalised, neglected and misunderstood. I suggest it is clear that they never ceased to see themselves as Indonesians and have continuously been engaging with Indonesia on an intellectual level. Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru Quartet*, published after his release from prison was well received because he was able to capture and incorporate those important changes in the use of Indonesian language that had taken place during his imprisonment. I seek to investigate if exile writers followed a similar path, particularly after 1998 when their writings were made accessible for the majority of Indonesians and after many had returned to Indonesia albeit on brief visits. The extent to which exile writers have been able to connect and integrate their writing with contemporary Indonesian literature will be a major focus of my research.

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