5-17-2021

Communicating fragmented memories: Explorations of trauma as autoethnographic bridges

Alberta Natasia Adji

10.1080/09574042.2021.1922003

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in WOMEN: A CULTURAL REVIEW on 17/05/2021, available online: http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/09574042.2021.1922003.

Adji, A. N. (2021). Communicating fragmented memories: Explorations of trauma as autoethnographic bridges. *Women: A Cultural Review*, *32*(2), 181-197. https://doi.org/10.1080/09574042.2021.1922003

Communicating Fragmented Memories: Explorations of Trauma as Autoethnographic Bridges

Alberta Natasia Adji

Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia

Abstract

Through an experience of reading, researching and interacting with people with different cultural backgrounds in academia, I explore autoethnographically how my personal experience can offer a way to contemplate connections and disassociations of cultural memory in relation to the May 1998 Riots of Indonesia. I attempt to show how disruptive events can bring the traumatic memories back into current consciousness both within individual lives and in the challenges that Jakarta as a city has in coming to terms with the dead and raped bodies that were the result of the country's denial of its practices of violence. Disturbing memories emerge as cities deal with perturbing events that destroy their image as multicultural cities. Moving across the boundaries of generations, timeframes, and space that connect fragmented memories embodied in selected literary works, I aim to explore different ways in which denial can bring back fragmented memories and a need to 'come to terms' with such traumatic histories. I also explore how the May 1998 Riots memory has been dynamically shaped through the adoption of traumascapes in literature, and how questions of re/membering mass rape and violence have affected the creative writing practice.

Keywords: memory; fragmentation; May 1998 Riots; autoethnography; trauma

Introduction

Although the May 1998 Riots – a period of civil unrest which involved burnings and lootings of Chinese-owned properties, systematic rapes and murders of hundreds of Chinese women in Jakarta, Medan and other Indonesian cities – occurred more than twenty two years ago, it is still considered 'a very sensitive topic' by many Chinese Indonesian diaspora communities in Australia, and 'a memory that is largely left unaddressed in Indonesia today' (Blakkarly 2014). Indeed, this is a cultural memory painfully shared by more than 2,800,000 Chinese Indonesians living in various places across the Indonesian archipelago which has continued to persist from the New Order (1966-1998) to the Post-Reformasi period (the 2010s). Nevertheless, this cycle of violence is still used to incite fear and resentment among many *pribumi* (indigenous) Muslim populations in the twenty first century (Ang 2001; Budiman 2005; Purdey 2005). As Ariel Heryanto writes:

> There has been no complete reversal of the status of this long stigmatised ethnic group. Racial prejudice between the so-called Chinese Indonesians and their fellow nationals (especially in the western and central parts of the archipelago) is alive and kicking both ways (Heryanto 2004: 32).

Yet, despite being 'emblematic of our time', such memories – like the ones about the May 1998 Riots – are often repressed due to the general public's unwillingness to believe their validity, and if they are recalled or 'recovered', many analyses would consider them simply 'a sexual panic or cultural hysteria that is producing false memories', thus reiterating 'the true-false debate' (Sturken 1999: 232). In the case of the May 1998 Riots, this similar pattern occurred when after the Habibie government's Joint Fact-Finding Team (TGPF, *Tim Gabungan Pencari Fakta*) investigated and identified the perpetrators of the May 1998

violence, their consensus report ‘was rejected by the military upon its release, ignored by the government, and contested by some sections of the national media’, and ‘no one has been brought to trial or even charged with the violence’ (Purdey 2002: 606). Despite the denial, memories about such events are hard to repress since they haunt us like ghosts, tending ‘to emerge in the aftermath of times of swift and often traumatic change, when old social bonds have been unhinged and new group identities must be formulated’ (Brogan 1996: 8). As Christopher Poulos notes, ‘the problem with memories is that no matter how much you try to ignore or bury them, they won’t stay put. They show up in the strangest of places, at the oddest of times’ (2008: 50). As a strategy to ‘resituate’ them, I support Marita Sturken’s arguments that ‘recovered memories are part of cultural memory’, and that ‘the question of their origins and relationship to experience must necessarily be thought of as a complex mix of narrative, displacement, shared testimony, popular culture, rumour, fantasy, and collective desire’ (1999: 233-234).

Recalling the words of Joan Scott, ‘Since discourse is by definition shared, experience is collective as well as individual’ (1991: 793), I argue that collective trauma, despite not happening to all members of a particular group, gradually enters the psyche of these individuals and haunts their memories. Jeffrey Alexander notes that cultural trauma is ‘first of all an empirical, scientific concept’ that suggests ‘new meaningful and causal relationships between previously unrelated events, structures, perceptions, and actions’ (2004: 1). Cultural trauma particularly ‘occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways’ (Alexander 2004: 1). In contemplating the difference between collective and individual trauma, Kai Erikson writes:

> By individual trauma I mean a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively … By collective trauma, on the other hand, I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with "trauma". But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared. (1976: 153-154)

Members of a community that did not directly experience abusive treatments still unconsciously internalise and have their memories affected by such traumatic incidents. This echoes Mieke Bal's arguments that the term '*cultural memory*' indicates that 'memory can be understood as a cultural phenomenon as well as an individual or social one', and that 'cultural memorization' is 'an activity occurring in the present, in which the past is continuously modified and redescribed', even as it ceaselessly constructs the future (1999: vii). While traumatic re-enactment is 'tragically solitary' since the subject/victim 'lacks the narrative mastery over it', it becomes 'inflexible and invariable' because 'the addressee is also missing' (Bal 1999: x). As such, in this essay I position myself as a Chinese Indonesian writer-researcher who acts as 'a second person' or 'confirming witness' to a 'painfully elusive past' that occurred to my cultural group (Bal 1999: x). Thus, the act of integrating and narrating traumatising/problematic events of the past is a form of 'critical reading', a need to make the past 'narratable'. Memory is not simply 'confined to the individual psyche' but is also 'constituted in the culture in which the traumatized subject lives' (Bal 1999: x).

Engaging with painful memories of the May 1998 Riots during the novel writing process, I acknowledge the significance of Tessa Morris-Suzuki's observation that 'the impulse to use the past as a mirror for the present seems to intensify in particular eras—in

times of imperial expansion, or in periods and places where restrictions on free expression encourage allegorical forms of fiction' (2005: 47). As Purdey puts it, stories by individuals who are affected by the traumatic memories of the May 1998 Riots are both independent and specific in the way they preserve the shared trauma, as their narrative itself generates a further process of remembrance and representation (2002: 620-621). Thus, taking the time to sit down and write about our personal histories is the first step in recognising and getting to the heart of any dark chapters in our own and, eventually, other people's lives. As writing slows down time, it creates an unsettled sense of place and time, but it also gives us something to hold on to while threading the underlying cultural framework. Rob Gibson reminds us:

> Words on a page resemble seedlings purposefully planted in a plot so that they will yield riches again and again, generation after generation. To write is to stop the amnesiac leaching that can be caused by time in cultures that rely on shared memories to keep wisdom … the page is a place where the delineation of space can make a world of knowledge and influence. (Gibson 2015: 79-80)

In *Religion and Cultural Memory*, Jan Assmann explains the canonisation of the tradition through writing:

> Texts are not merely written down: their authority is increased. This increase in authority refers both to their shape (their wording) and their status, which is closely bound up with it. Authority means that everything the text says possesses absolutely normative validity, and whatever lays claim to normative validity must be able to prove itself to be the meaning of that text. (Assmann 2006: 64)

Once we decide to put our stories on paper and commit to completing them, the validity, the truth or the authority of a text is created and increases through our telling and writing. As

Scott argues, ‘When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence on which explanation is built’ (1991: 777). Through narrating fragmented stories, I am able to preserve and reshape personal and public memories and leave their traceon paper as my way to ‘witness’ and critically ‘analyse’ them. Thus, to write autoethnographically means bringing our ghosts or haunted and traumatic memories into the present where they can incite emotional reflection and critical assessment. The act of writing autoethnographically relieves us from dwelling in the darkness and leads us into the light of epiphany about ourselves (Ellis and Bochner 1992; Poulos 2010), which can be healing. Epiphanies are ‘an acute awareness of something new, something which the individual had previously been blind to’ (McDonald 2007: 19) and ‘remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of a person’s life’ (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011: 275). Discussing the issue of the ethics and legitimacy of writing autoethnography in the context of collective trauma, Wolff-Michael Roth argues that in communicating one’s own experience, one at the same time ‘provides space for others to speak’. Thus ‘the understandings (about what has happened) are not conflated into the homogenizing one (usually the researcher’s) voice but retain multiplicity arising from the co-presence of all participants’ voices’ (2009: 8).

Often it is through our remembered moments that we become sympathetic to individuals whose lives have been significantly affected by certain events. We need a sense of structure, depth and density of personal experience in order to relate to the different ways in which individuals, families and communities navigate traumatic histories and their position in society. In my own case, it involves bringing together various interconnected serendipities that help me shape my views on cultural memory and collective trauma. It includes exposures and reflections on a process of reading, researching and writing into the long history of

discrimination and violence towards Chinese Indonesians. In my novel-in-progress, *The Longing*, I describe some of the hardships in maintaining personal and family lives as double minorities in Surabaya, East Java, which was affected by the memory of the May 1998 Riots. However, this was an event that could not be freely discussed because its traumatic implications still persisted among those who endured sexual violation and loss of properties and the younger generation had to be shielded from these traumatic histories, for we represented future possibilities and new beginnings.

I was born in 1993 and grew up to survive Suharto's authoritarian New Order after its downfall in 1998 – when many Chinese people were sexually violated and perceived as scapegoats of the Asian financial crisis (Hoon 2004, 2006; Marching 2017; Purdey 2005; Suryadinata 2006). I belong to the younger generation of Indonesians who, as Ann Laura Stoler argues, have been 'schooled with purged history books and with access only to bookstores immaculately emptied of ways of making sense of the world into which they were born, where liberation from the past cannot be attained by forgetting but by knowing how their lives have been shaped by it' (2002: 646). After all, the textbooks and my teacher only provided brief details about the May 1998 Riots, when Suharto's authoritarian regime collapsed and used the military troops to go after the protesting students before putting the blame for the financial crisis on the Chinese, triggering the mass rape and violence of hundreds of Chinese women, as well as the mass looting of Chinese-owned properties (Ang 2001; Heryanto 2004; Hoon 2004, 2006; Marching 2017; Purdey 2002, 2005; Sai and Hoon 2013; Suryadinata 2006; Turner 2003). The tragedy was by all means symbolic; it established the long-enduring cultural and multigenerational trauma among the Chinese and cemented the ever-antagonistic relationship between the *pribumi* or *Indonesia asli* (which literally means real Indonesians) and those of Chinese descent, initiated during the Dutch colonisation in 1595 with their zoning system (Suryadinata 1993). While I was fortunate enough to have

never encountered any physical violence from these cultural tensions, since I was born and have lived in Surabaya, a city that rarely sees any of this large-scale violence erupting, I certainly could not escape the hatred, resentment and even internalisation of prejudices that came out from these daily intercultural interactions.

It was in 2016, the year I started my master's degree in Universitas Airlangga, when I was exposed to 'serious' Indonesian literary works by women writers that addressed those bloody chapters of Indonesian history. It was also the year when the first Chinese Christian governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (popularly known by his Chinese nickname Ahok), received the much-publicised mass protest organised by Islamist groups (known as December 2016 Jakarta protests or 212 Action) following accusations of blasphemy, which led to his removal from his gubernatorial office and a two-year jail sentence (Setijadi 2017). The image of thousands of men in white religious attire bringing protest signs marching along the Merdeka Square around the National Monument in Central Jakarta and the main road of Hotel Indonesia Roundabout provoked much fear and concerns about the growing religious conservatism in Indonesia. This symbolic violence of the anti-Ahok movement was indeed used 'to assault Indonesian minorities and their sense of legitimacy and selfhood' (Osman and Waikar 2018: 90).

In the afternoon on Monday, 3 December 2016, I was walking with friends from the postgraduate program at the university cafeteria when a group of young male students suddenly stood up and stared at me with silent hatred, anger and disbelief in their eyes. As I kept my head down and cautiously looked at other tables, I immediately noticed that most people's eyes were fixed on me with intense hatred and some sort of disbelief, because I dared to show up at a cafeteria of a public university, where the majority of the students were Javanese Muslims, exactly one day after that upheaval happened against Ahok in Jakarta. In short, I was silently being held accountable for something that was done by someone from my

cultural group, regardless of the fact that neither of us was related. Although the gazing or the staring is nothing new to me (I was often the only 'pure-looking' Chinese Indonesian student in the faculty since 2012), my experience that afternoon reminded me of my difficult experience with relational aggression and discrimination I received for over a year in 2014 from a group of peers at a student organisation. That evening I cut class and opted to spend many hours at the reading room perusing scholarly books about the Chinese in the Indonesian archipelago and was still shocked to find that our past history with the *pribumi* since the Dutch colonisation (1595-1945) had always been hostile.

I was shocked to read that many Chinese were also murdered during the Anti-Communist killings of 1965-66 for their presumed affiliations with mainland China, and how brutal and violent were the mass gang rapes of the Chinese women in Jakarta, Solo, Medan and other cities were in 1998 (Ang 2001; Marching 2017; Purdey 2005; Suryadinata 1993; Turner 2003; Zha 2000). Most importantly, the books mentioned that the government at that time turned a blind eye towards the gang rapes and even rejected the idea that such things could have occurred. It somehow felt like a joke that a team like Habibie's Joint Fact-Finding Team could exist – if only for reasons of formality – given the facts that: 1) the rape victims 'believed that some of these security officials were themselves complicit in the violence', and that 2) they perceived giving testimony 'as having the potential to endanger their lives or cause further trauma', as well as 3) 'a number of politicians, social commentators, religious leaders, and military figures . . . publicly challenged the validity of the rape claims' (Purdey 2002: 609). Thus, after walking down the bloody memory lane through my archival research, I finally understood why my mother rarely allowed me to play outside in my own kampung when I was a young girl, and that despite giving me permission to enrol at a public university that full of *pribumi* students, she warns me from time to time to never consider the idea of getting close or even marrying a *pribumi* man.

The idea that I would be lost to both of my cultural and religious identities if I do so has often been repeated to me. I found solace in reading Audrey Yu Jia Hui's *Mellow Yellow Drama* (2014) since she has undergone the same kind of adversity as I did and realised that this trauma and the aftereffect of the violence has always been heavily politicised to repress the minority, to keep them in a certain corner where they would not dare to cross the boundary and disrupt the domination of the majority. Then on 13 May 2018, three suicide bombings happened simultaneously in three churches in Surabaya – at Immaculate Saint Mary Catholic Church (*Gereja Katolik Santa Maria Tak Bercela*, SMTB) on Ngagel Madya Street, Indonesia Christian Church (*Gereja Kristen Indonesia*, GKI) on Diponegoro Street, and Surabaya Central Pentecost Church (*Gereja Pantekosta Pusat Surabaya*, GPPS) on Arjuno Street, leaving us shocked, devastated and uprooted with the sudden deaths of family members and friends. While it might be true that these bombings were the result of religious extremism, it is common knowledge, even stereotypical, that most Chinese descendents in Indonesia are Christians (Hoon 2016), and that the hatred that justified this radicalisation was, more or less, triggered by the tensions between the two ethnic groups. To the current time, occasional whispers of indifference and dislike of the *pribumi* spread among family members and close friends (who are mostly Chinese) are all telltale signs that the past is still unfinished business and doomed to repeat itself, and that the trauma is still alive and fresh within our minds despite our attempts to appear intact and unaffected.

I want to talk about the ways other life writers and I employ these connections between feelings of discontent and space to contextualise our narrative works. I want to draw here on James T. Siegel's argument in *A New Criminal Type in Jakarta*, where he suggests that 'trauma' or 'shock' can be associated with ghosts, and creates a 'place that one knows one does not know about and cannot fathom …' (Siegel 1998: 96). I would like to associate the traumatic effects that come out as the product of violence in Indonesia with the haunting

of ghosts or ghostly possession, since 'the ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life' (Gordon 1997: 8). Thus, by exploring the idea of trauma as ghosts – which also refers to the notion of inherited memories in Indonesian contemporary discourses – I would like to propose that this article analyses the influences of Indonesian historical and literary archives that 'have many unrecognised losses, recurring returns, ruptures, and wounds that become spectral presences haunting contemporary narratives of the past' (Sears 2007: 39).

Between inherited trauma, place and imaginative creation

As young women we very much wanted to be 'normal', but it felt impossible once you acknowledged how your cultural group had been affected by the May 1998 Riots. As one of the young generations like myself, Maria Tumarkin states that we carry this 'heavy imprint of both individual and shared past' within 'the opposition of trauma and cognition, representation and affect' and try our best to answer these lingering questions (2013: 318). I belong to what Eva Hoffman calls a 'postgeneration', whose received memory is different from those of contemporary witnesses and participants (2004: 187). Marianne Hirsch addresses the notion of inherited trauma as 'postmemory', the second-hand experience, a continuity that shapes us as a 'generation' (2012: 3). She writes:

> "Postmemory" describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. (Hirsch 2012: 5)

Hirsch's critical reading of Morrison's *Beloved* also leads her to suggest that postmemory 'made women both the carriers and the narrators of historical persecution' (2012: 11). Thus, in positioning myself within such a contextual frame, I immerse myself in acts of understanding, production and reinterpretation by engaging with memories that will prove worthwhile decades later or, as Tumarkin puts it, 'that can be fully accessed *somewhere else*, away from their original location' (2013: 311-312). I weave my stories from the points of view of my deceased family members and the ones who are well and alive – and these memories, too, are like ghosts to me. I carry with me the memory of my late maternal grandmother, who spent her whole life toiling at our family restaurant to make ends meet, being the sole breadwinner of her family while silently enduring her husband's abuse for many years. It was also her complex difficulties in dealing with her *pribumi* helpers, government officials, and local thugs at her restaurant that constantly made her feel frustrated and challenged. My mother's constant anxious state, her easily-worried nature, and her habitual panic attacks were the way she coped with being haunted by memories of her abusive father as well as by what she has heard and read about the May 1998 Riots. I finally understood why as a child and teenager, I was rarely allowed to go outside and interact with friends my age, as we lived in a neighbourhood surrounded by *pribumi* people. Whenever I write about my hometown, I try to incorporate this mixed feeling of pride and anxiety as I am glad that I belong there, but at the same time I possess this innate dread that violence is still lurking around the corner somewhere, waiting to catch us off guard. Yet, in times of adversity, I always remember that my neighbours were honest, friendly and peaceful people, and that my six years studying at the public university were happy, enriching, and intellectually challenging.

The relationship between trauma and place is inextricably intertwined in the concept of post-traumatic disorder. Maria Tumarkin coined the term *traumascapes* – 'physical places marked by one or a series of tragedies' – to study the relation between 'the fate and social power' embedded in 'the legacies of neo-colonial and other kinds of violence' (Tumarkin 2004: 22). Tumarkin also uses her notion of trauma and lived experiences to understand 'how loss and reckoning are inscribed in and transmitted through the land, and how the recurrence of violence shapes life-histories' (Tumarkin 2004: 22). In her book *Traumascapes,* Tumarkin writes:

> The point is that the civic significance of tramascapes is not purely symbolic. When sites of death and loss are forgotten and all traces of the tragic events are erased, the responsibility for what happened is far easier to dispense with. The burden of memory is shifted onto the shoulders of survivors and victims' families. They, and not the society as a whole, are the ones who have to carry the full weight of knowledge and grief, while the rest are free to forget, free to absolve themselves of any link to the tragedies (Tumarkin 2005: 120).

While the Indonesian government still ignores the aftermath of the May 1998 Riots, the Chinese have learned not to complain or share their feelings. Instead, they channel their bitterness, anger, resentment and disappointment into treating the local *pribumi* as trash, perceiving them as lower than themselves, undermining them as an uneducated mass eager to seize the fortune of the Chinese whenever things went badly (Ang 2001). Most Chinese Indonesians have turned their attention to business and social media, and they are busily trying to protect their children by providing them with sheltered lives, 'safe' homogenous communities, as well as safeguarding them from other cultural groups by imposing stereotypes and prejudices against the *pribumi* populations.

While studying in Australia, I came across a digital graphic novel entitled *Chinese Whispers*, created by Rani Pramesti, a Chinese-Javanese-Indonesian actor and Melbourne-based performance maker, and her team of collaborators. It is a visualisation and verbalisation of the May 1998 Riots and their racial violence–violence, which is maintained throughout the whole narrative where the pictures displayed become blurry and the stories of the gang rapes that took place on the streets of Jakarta are told in all their horror. Rani says that she needed to create *Chinese Whispers* as she feels that Chinese Indonesians who have migrated to Australia still find themselves traumatised, and the work helps relieve these memories since, in the poet Mark Gonzales' words, 'We cannot heal what we will not face' (P collaborations 2018). The phenomena of people repressing traumatic experiences are common, but if unrecovered, they can produce 'a serious mental and physical troll' (Otgaar et al. 2019: 1073). Bringing the 'ghosts', in this case the repressed traumatic memories 'to the surface of consciousnessis necessary for engendering symptom relief' (Otgaar et al. 2019: 1073). Acts of street violence surface between the vigilantes – either the arbitrary police officers or the unruly thugs who are deeply embedded in the landscape of both the private and public memories of Indonesians then and now, as well as in the nation's history. Streets can suddenly turn into dangerous and traumatic spaces where fights break out, traffic accidents occur, all daily phenomena. Drawing on repressed memories and geographic distance, Pramesti explores Chinese Indonesian women's stories of migration to Australia to create 'a reflexive space in which she reconstructs what it means to be a feminist artist with a minority Chinese Indonesian background and an activist mother' (Winarnita et al. 2019: 81).

Indonesian culture focuses on notions of collectivity, both in terms of being together in peace and in chaos. While the image of peaceful togetherness in a big family is something to be praised and preserved, the image of an angry mob running amok and persecuting other people is another thing. In Ayu Utami's English translation of *Saman*, there is a scene when

one of the main characters, Wis or Wisanggeni joins a small group of protesting villagers at Perabumulih in 1990:

> Then he heard Anson talking … "The Chinese are colonizing us. The Indonesians are being turned into little more than poor laborers." And Wis realized that their bitterness had been transformed first into profound anger and then into a deep and troubling suspicion. He thought about Kong Tek, who had been so generous with his provision of building materials. He thought about the Chinese journalists who had visited the village. He thought also about how the Chinese always had to pay more for their passports and ID cards … Wis felt he must interrupt. "Please, Anson!" He held up his hand. "I just want to remind you that we got all the materials for building the smokehouse we're sitting in very cheaply from a Chinese trader in Perabumulih. Some of it was free. Secondly, the shares of Anugrah Lahan Makmur aren't owned solely by that one Chinese businessman; he's in partnership with a Javanese man and a big Batak plantation-owner. Thirdly, the bosses of the palm oil company have been paying native-born Indonesians – dark skinned people just like us – to intimidate us. To destroy, to steal, to rape. They're native mongrels! Bastards from around here!" (Utami 2005: 91-92).

The scene vividly represents the typical 'sparks' of ethnocommunal rioting against the Chinese Indonesians. This is the image that has been constructed for hundreds of years by the Dutch, and then the local *pribumi*, and unfortunately reinforced by many of the Chinese themselves as they feel that they are entitled to good fortune and treatment from the locals (Ang 2001; Heryanto 2004; Hoon 2004, 2006; Marching 2017; Purdey 2002, 2005; Sai and Hoon 2013; Suryadinata 2006; Turner 2003). This scene is particularly significant to me. Belonging to the present generation of writers, '*Angkatan 2000* (the Generation 2000)' and classified as a writer of '*sastra wangi* ('perfumed' literature)', Utami's work is 'identified with liberalism in every aspect' of her writing, using language that is 'fresh, alive, and loaded with colloquial speech narration' and 'covering all topics from sex, drugs, and homosexuality to politics' (Arimbi 2015: 175). The imagined voices and space where brutal violence takes

place in *Saman* has embodied what Sears calls as ‘a method of reading the traces that exceed the archive, traces that historians are unable to record or to witness’ (Sears 2007: 18). The novel has helped me to make out the shapes of the ghosts and the haunting of bloody chapters of the past on which many scholars and writers have focused.

Chinese Indonesian novelist Clara Ng’s *The Last Dim Sum* suggests another reason why a place such as an old family house can help us think differently about time and memory:

> A prayer table was noticeable in the living room. The ash falling from the incense sticks made the table looked dirtier. A statue of the goddess Guanyin stood gracefully between two lanterns on the table. A bunch of yellow chrysanthemums which was laid in a vase, appeared to be slightly dry. Next to that vase was where my ash was rested.
>
> Million memories blew from my head. My body gradually evaporated. And a droplet of tears streamed down the face (Ng 2015: 5-6).

Alongside the idea of memories as ghosts, this scene also portrays how descriptions of objects and space can encode the living, unfinished past. Maria Tumarkin suggests that ‘Shared and recognisable memories were planted and buried deep in texts, sealed inside metaphors, allusions, parables and irony’ (Tumarkin 2013: 317). Indeed, multiple kinds of memories and objects of remembrance portrayed in Ng’s novel suggest that the characters’ ‘Indonesianness does not clash in any way with their sense of Chineseness, although it adds complexity to the intersections of such multiple hybrid identities’ (Budiman 2011: 251). This way, life writers can preserve the legitimacy and living power of their memories ‘through condensed, displaced and symbolic modes of representation’, memories sometimes also marked by ‘an affective force field’ (Tumarkin 2013: 317).

In her memoir *Mellow Yellow Drama*, the Chinese Indonesian memoirist and writer Audrey Yu Jia Hui tries to inject her private or family memory in the public narrative by concealing it in the skin fold of her story[1]:

> I remember perfectly how I was too shaken to argue so I could only watch silently as my things were packed for our (sudden) trip to Bali. My father and our private driver took turns driving the long journey to the eastern point of Java. Then, my parents and I continued by taking a ferry to the western point of Bali. We headed to a remote monastery in the middle of nowhere. Fortunately, in that monastery there was a television and there I watched President Soeharto's resignation … As if immersed in the feeling of uncertainty, as a woman, I felt that at that time many doors had been closed in front of my face. (Hui 2014: 44)

Addressing her traumatic memories of the May 1998 Riots, Hui's memoir serves as 'a prism that reflects the current Chinese Indonesian millennials who are still in search of their hybrid identity' (Adji et al., 2018: 113). Reverting to the notion of fragmented memories as inherited memories in this article, Hoffman says that what was passed down to her were 'not memories but emanations', which were communicated in 'flashes of imagery' (2004: 6), 'broken refrains' transmitted through 'the language of the body' (9). Correspondingly, Hirsch describes 'the structure of postmemory' and 'the process of its generation', suggesting that 'To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness' means risking 'having one's own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors', being 'shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension' (2012: 5). In relation to embodying traumascapes in literature and other forms of imaginative

[1] Hui's *Mellow Yellow Drama* was published in Indonesian language and has not been translated into English up until March 2020. I took the liberty to translate the passage myself in order to display and explain its significance to the readers.

creation, Tumarkin argues that traumascapes 'emerge as spaces' which abound with 'visual and sensory triggers, capable of eliciting a whole palette of emotions' that 'catalyse and shape remembering and reliving of traumatic events' (2005: 9). Connected to the embodiment of traumascapes in the Indonesian literary world and popular culture, I argue that they should continue to be infused in the public sphere in an unfiltered, fragmented manner to both reveal and vocalise the buried accounts of the past, so as to warn against oblivion and forgetting, to underline the injunction 'Never again'.

Acknowledgements

This essay stems from my creative doctoral project, which is about the intergenerational relationship of three Chinese Indonesian women. I am grateful for the immense support of my supervisors, Dr Marcella Polain and Dr Ffion Murphy, whose suggestions and ideas motivated me to write this essay. I thank the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and guidance on this article. I would also like to acknowledge that the article was written by the support of an ECU (Edith Cowan University) Higher Degree by Research Scholarship.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ORCID iD

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3966-7809

Works Cited

Adji, Alberta Natasia, Diah Arimbi, Adi Setijowati, Nur Wulan, and Kukuh Karnanta (2018), 'Confessing Love to the Nation: Audrey Yu Jia Hui's Works and Identity Reconstruction', *Journal of ASEAN Studies* 6.1, pp. 97-115.

Alexander, Jeffrey (2004), 'Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma', in Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser, Piotr Sztompka (eds.), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 1-30.

Ang, Ien (2001), *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West*, London and New York: Routledge.

Arimbi, Diah Ariani (2015), 'Indonesian Muslim Women Writers and Their Writings: Women, Islam and Religious Identity', in Yvonne Michalik and Melani Budianta (eds.), *Indonesian Women Writers*, Berlin: regiospectra, pp. 167-192.

Assmann, Jan (2006), *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies* (trans. R. Livingstone), Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bal, Mieke (1999), 'Introduction', in Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (eds.), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, Hanover: University Press of New England, pp. vii-xvii.

Blakkarly, Jarni (2014), 'Rani Pramesti Talks Chinese Whispers', *Peril*, https://peril.com.au/topics/rani-pramesti-talks-chinese-whispers/.

Budiman, Arief (2005), 'Portrait of the Chinese in Post-Suharto Indonesia', in Tim Lindsey and Helen Pausacker (eds.), *Chinese Indonesians: Remembering, Distorting, Forgetting*, Victoria: Monash University Press, pp. 95-104.

Budiman, Manneke (2011), 'Ethnicity and the performance of identity', *Wacana* 13.2, pp. 233-255.

Brogan, Kathleen (1996), *Haunted by history: Louise Erdrich's Tracks*, *Prospects* 21, pp. 169-192.

Ellis, Carolyn, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner (2011), 'Autoethnography: an overview', *Historical Social Research* 36.4, pp. 273-290.

_____ and Arthur P. Bochner (1992), 'Telling and performing personal stories: The constraints of choice in abortion', in Carolyn Ellis and Michael Flaherty (eds.), *Investigating subjectivity: Research on lived experience*, Newbury Park: Sage, pp. 79-101.

Erikson, Kai (1976), *Everything in Its Path*, New York: Simon and Schuster.

Gibson, Ross (2015), *Changescapes: Complexity, Mutability, Aesthetics*, Crawley: University of Western Australia Press.

Gordon, Avery F. (1997), *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Heryanto, Ariel (2004), 'Ethnic Diasporas as Cosmopolitans? Indonesian Chineseness, Citizenship, and Pop Cultures', the Asia Research Institute Workshop of Ethnicities, Diasporas and 'Grounded' Cosmopolitanisms in Asia Identities, Nations and Cosmopolitan Practice: Interrogating the Work of Pnina and Richard Werbner, Singapore: National University of Singapore, pp. 26-41.

Hirsch, Marianne (2012), *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Hoffman, Eva (2004), *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust*, New York: Public Affairs.

Hoon, Chang-Yau (2004), 'How to be Chinese: Ethnic Chinese Experience a 'Reawakening' of their Chinese Identity', *Inside Indonesia* 78, pp. 13-14.

_____ (2006), ‘Assimilation, Multiculturalism, Hybridity: The Dilemma of Ethnic Chinese in Post-Suharto Indonesia’, *Asian Ethnicity* 7.2, pp. 228-247.

_____ (2016), ‘Mapping Chineseness on the landscape of Christian churches in Indonesia’, *Asian Ethnicity* 17.2, pp. 149-166.

Hui, Audrey Yu Jia (2014), *Mellow Yellow Drama*, Yogyakarta: Bentang Pustaka.

Marching, Soe Tjen (2017), ‘The Mass Rape of the ethnic Chinese in May 1998 and the War on Terror’, *Pacific News* 27, pp. 18-21.

McDonald, Matthew G. (2007), ‘Epiphanies: An Existential Inquiry’, *Existential Analysis* 18.1, pp. 17-30.

Morris-Suzuki, Tessa (2005), *The Past within Us: Media, Memory, History*, New York: Verso.

Ng, Clara (2015), *The Last Dim Sum*, or *Dimsum Terakhir* [2006] (trans. M. H. Krisnasari), Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama.

Osman, Mohamed Nawab Mohamed and Prashant Waikar (2018), ‘Fear and Loathing: Uncivil Islamism and Indonesia’s Anti-Ahok Movement’, *Indonesia* 106, pp. 89-109.

Otgaar, Henry, Mark Howe, Lawrence Patihis, Harald Merckelbach, Steven Jay Lynn, Scott Lilienfeld, and Elizabeth Loftus (2019), ‘The Return of the Repressed: The Persistent and Problematic Claims of Long-Forgotten Trauma’, *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 14.6, pp. 1072-1095.

P Collaborations, Rani (2018), *The Chinese Whispers*, https://thechinesewhispers.com/.

Poulos, Christopher N (2008), ‘Narrative conscience and the autoethnographic adventure: Probing memories, secrets, shadows, and possibilities, *Qualitative Inquiry* 14, pp. 46-66.

_____ (2010), ‘Spirited accidents: An autoethnography of possibility’, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16, pp. 49-56.

Purdey, Jemma (2002), 'Problematizing the Place of Victims in Reformasi Indonesia: A Contested Truth about the May 1998 Violence', *Asia Survey* 42.4, pp. 605-622.

_____ (2005), 'Anti-Chinese Violence and Transitions in Indonesia: June 1998-October 1999', in Tim Lindsey and Helen Pausacker (eds.), *Chinese Indonesians: Remembering, Distorting, Forgetting*, Victoria: Monash University Press, pp. 14-40.

Roth, Wolff-Michael (2009), 'Auto/Ethnography and the Question of Ethics', *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 10.1, pp. 1-10.

Sai, Siew-Min and Chang-Yau Hoon (2013), 'Introduction: A critical reassessment of Chinese Indonesian studies', in Siew-Min Sai and Chang-Yau Hoon (eds.), *Chinese Indonesians Reassessed: History, Religion and Belonging*, London: Routledge, pp. 1-26.

Scott, Joan (1991), 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry* 17.4, pp. 773-797.

Sears, Laurie J. (2007), 'Reading Ayu Utami: Notes toward a Study of Trauma and the Archive in Indonesia', *Indonesia* 83, pp. 17-39.

Setijadi, Charlotte (2017), 'Chinese Indonesians in the Eyes of the *Pribumi* Public', *ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute* 73, pp. 1-12.

Siegel, James T. (1998), *A New Criminal Type in Jakarta: Counter-Revolution Today*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Stoler, Ann Laura (2002), 'On the Uses and Abuses of the Past in Indonesia: Beyond the Mass Killings of 1965', *Asian Survey* 42.4, pp. 642-650.

Sturken, Maria (1999), 'Narratives of Recovery: Repressed Memory as Cultural Memory', in Mieke Bal, Jonathan V. Crewe and Leo Spitzer (eds.), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, Hanover: University Press of New England, pp. 231-248.

Suryadinata, Leo (1993), 'The State and Chinese Minority in Indonesia', in Leo Suryadinata (ed.), *Chinese Adaptation and Diversity: Essays on Society and Literature in Indonesia, Malaysia & Singapore*, Singapore: Singapore University Press, pp. 77-100.

_____ (2006), *Southeast Asia's Chinese Businesses in an Era of Globalization*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Tumarkin, Maria (2004), 'First as a Tragedy, Second as a Farce…: Traumascapes, memory and the curse of indifference', *Overland* 175, https://search.informit.com.au/fullText;res=IELAPA;dn=200407170.

_____ (2005), *Traumascapes: The Power and Fate of Places Transformed by Tragedy*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

_____ (2013), 'Crumbs of memory: Tracing the 'more-than-representational' in family memory', *Memory Studies* 6.3, pp. 310-320.

Turner, Sarah (2003), 'Setting the Scene Speaking Out: Chinese Indonesians After Suharto', *Asian Ethnicity* 4.3, pp. 337-352.

Utami, Ayu (2005), *Saman* (trans. Pamela Allen), Jakarta and Singapore: Equinox Publishing.

Winarnita, Monika, Wulan Dirgantoro, and Raelene Wilding (2019), ''Close, not close': Migrant artists negotiating transnational mother-daughter intimacies', *Emotion, Space and Society* 31, pp. 78-85.

Zha, Daojiong (2000), 'China and the May 1998 riots of Indonesia: exploring the issues', *The Pacific Review* 13.4, pp. 557-575.