

## waktu terhapus, jejak pun akan aus

Kuratorial oleh Hendro Wiyanto

## album foto lama di ruang keluarga

Suatu ketika di pertengahan'70-an, saat masih berstatus sebagai mahasiswa seni rupa di Yogya, Harsono pulang menjenguk ayahandanya. Orang tua itu baru saja bebas dari tahanan penjara satu tahun. Pасalnya, oleh serangkaian peristiwa yang lebih bersifat kebetulan, ayahnya pernah dianggap terkait dengan seorang tokoh paranormal “berbahaya” di kota kecil Ponorogo (Jawa Timur). Orang-orang nasionalis “baru” yang dicap kekiri-kirian, kebetulan beberapa adalah pelanggan tokoh karismatik itu. Agaknya, di semua tingkat, hubungan antara politik dan praktek paranormal tidaklah mustahil. Paling tidak, begitulah yang sering kita dengar di Indonesia.

“Kesalahan” ayahnya? Membuat dan menjual tongkat kayu berlapis besi yang boleh dianggap sebagai jimat setelah “diisi” oleh Mbah Suro, sang paranormal. Tokoh karismatis yang dianggap bisa membagi-bagikan berkah keselamatan, kekayaan dan kekuasaan itu, berikut orang-orang di sekitarnya ikut pula ditangkap. Sudah barang tentu, ayahnya tersangkut. Anda tahu, itu adalah masa-masa akil-balik Orde Baru yang sebelumnya sukses menggulingkan kekuasaan Orde Lama.

Di saat pulang ke Blitar itulah ia menemukan kembali sejumlah album foto lama di ruang tamu. Benda itu sudah sering dibolak-balik, barangkali juga dihafal oleh seisi rumah, termasuk Harsono. Tapi, tak ada yang mempertanyakan setumpukan foto aneh di situ.

Di antara tumpukan album foto keluarga, ia menemukan foto-foto yang paling menarik perhatian. Jumlahnya sekitar delapan puluh lembar. Foto-foto hitam putih itu menggambarkan upaya sekelompok orang untuk melakukan penggalian kembali jenazah yang sudah lama tertimbun tanah. Mereka adalah orang-orang Cina yang menjadi korban peristiwa yang agaknya merupakan pembunuhan massal, antara 1946-1948. Itu memang foto-foto bersejarah yang dibuat oleh ayahnya.

Ayahanda Harsono, Oh Hok Tjoe – kemudian berganti nama menjadi Hendro Subagio- adalah seorang juru foto di Blitar. Sekitar awal 50-an sampai pertengahan 60-an ia memiliki studio foto “Atom”, studio paling ternama di kota itu. Semua yang ingin kelihatan keren, keluarga biasa atau keluarga wayang orang, akan datang berfoto di sana.

Foto-foto itu agaknya terkait dengan keberadaan organisasi Chung Hua Tsung Hui (CHTH) di Indonesia. CHTH adalah gabungan dari perkumpulan orang-orang Cina di Indonesia, baik yang sudah menyatakan

diri sebagai WNI maupun yang belum (Tionghoa asing). Adanya CHTH dimaksudkan untuk mengimbangi kehadiran para wakil peranakan Tionghoa dalam berbagai konferensi yang diselenggarakan oleh Belanda, selama aksi-aksi polisionil pasca-kemerdekaan 1947-1949. Pembentukan CHTH merupakan inisiatif pemerintahan Republik. Tugas khususnya tak lain adalah sebagai penasehat pemerintah untuk menyelesaikan masalah-masalah Tionghoa di Indonesia.

Pada 1951, perkumpulan ini memprakarasi upaya penggalian dan pendataan kembali para korban pembunuhan massal orang-orang Cina di sejumlah kota di Jawa. CHTH –melalui cabangnya di berbagai kota di Indonesia- berupaya menyusuri identitas para korban pembunuhan yang berlangsung selama tahun-tahun kekacauan itu. Mendata jumlah korban, menghubungi anggota-anggota keluarga yang masih berupaya mencari dan mengingat, lalu menguburkannya secara layak. Ayah Harsono ada di dalam upaya-upaya kemanusiaan kelompok ini.

Sejumlah keterangan tertulis pada foto-foto penggalian itu bertanda Oktober- Desember 1951. Tanda itu memberi petunjuk waktu penggalian kembali atau sering disebut sebagai “ndudah” oleh penduduk setempat. Melalui foto-foto itu, sebagian sejarah kelam yang nyaris ikut terkubur mulai terkuak. 1)

Peristiwa perjumpaan Harsono dengan foto-foto itu sudah lewat sekian puluh tahun. Suatu saat ia sadar bahwa foto-foto itu adalah dokumentasi sejarah yang teramat berharga untuk dilupakan begitu saja. Ia menyimpan baik-baik album foto itu, seakan lebih bernilai daripada foto-foto dokumentasi keluarganya sendiri. Kelak, dalam sebuah karyanya secara mengejutkan ia akan menjejerkan antara keduanya: foto-foto penggalian kembali itu seakan memberi identitas baru bagi potret keluarganya yang *survive*. Ia masih sebagai janin buta di dalam kandungan sang ibu, ketika ladang-ladang pembantaian masih haus ceceran darah para korban. Kehidupan menempuh jalannya sendiri. Sayang, ayahnya sangat hemat bicara mengenai foto-foto itu. Ada upaya bahkan untuk mewawancarainya oleh seorang wartawan, rekan Harsono, tapi gagal. 2).

Rezim otoriter yang memenjarakan ayahandanya terguling pada 1998. Ayahnya meninggal dunia tak lama setelah itu, pada 1999, membawa sejumlah kisah di balik penggalian mayat para korban. Apa yang terjadi dengan para korban sebelum dibunuh? Di mana saja lokasi pembunuhan? Siapa saja yang dibunuh? Dengan cara bagaimana mereka dibunuh?

Di masa tak menentu setelah tumbangnya pemerintahan Orde Baru, sejumlah pertanyaan yang selama ini seakan hanya menjadi persoalan pribadi, mulai muncul di kepala Harsono. Ia selalu teringat lagi akan

foto-foto lama yang dikerjakan ayahnya. Ini diakuinya sama sekali tak ada kaitan dengan rasa dendam terhadap rezim yang pernah memenjarakan ayahnya.

Album foto yang sekian lama menumpuk di ruang tamu rumah lamanya di Gang Tjoe Tin, Blitar itu, kini seakan meninggalkan sebuah pekerjaan rumah baru bagi Harsono.

## siapakah namamu?

*Di keluargamu kamu dipanggil apa?*

Ong.

*Lengkapnya?*

Oh Hong Boen. Tapi saya nggak tahu kenapa panggilannya bisa “Ong.”

*Kamu tahu arti nama ?*

Nggak tahu. Tapi belakangan saya dikasih tahu. “Hong” itu artinya banyak, kaya ... “Boen” itu artinya sastra, seni.

*Siapa yang memberimu nama?*

Saya juga nggak tahu. Sekarang bahasa Cina yang saya bisa, ya nama Cina saya saja. Menuliskan nama saya saja.

Ia mencoba menuliskan namanya sendiri kembali. Berulang dan berulang kali. Terus dan terus seakan tak bisa dihentikan oleh apapun. Mencoba mengingat-ingat lagi bagaimana cara menuliskan huruf-huruf yang sekarang terasa asing itu. Huruf-huruf yang dulu, berpuluh tahun lalu pernah dipelajarinya dan dikenalnya dengan baik. Artinya sama, hanya bunyi dan bentuknya sedikit berbeda dengan tiga suku kata namanya sendiri dalam abjad Latin..

Itu adalah namanya sendiri yang pernah diberikan padanya. Nama itu pernah ada untuk menunjukkan siapa dia. Namun, suatu ketika nama itu seperti jejak yang harus dihapus dan bahkan dilupakan. Ia seakan ingin menemukan kembali sang “ketika” itu, kalau saja mungkin.

Sudah lama, ya, lama sekali ia tidak mendengar gaung namanya sendiri diucapkan. Olehnya sendiri bahkan, atau orang lain. Ia tidak lagi dipanggil dengan sebutan seperti itu. Entah kemana gaung itu. Entah kemana huruf-huruf itu. Hanya samar-samar saja ia masih bisa mengingatnya. Entah apa pula arti namanya yang sekarang.

Kata-kata memang akan hilang, tapi tulisan tinggal.

Karena itu, ia berusaha menuliskannya kembali.

## pulang, pulang kemana?

“...Begitu menjelang maghrib pukul enam, banyak sekali anak-anak dari kampung agak jauh, mereka pergi ke masjid lewat kampung sini. Kalau kami masih duduk-duduk di situ, selalu dikata-katain, “Cina, Cina, Cina ... ayo, pulang ...Kadang-kadang dilempar batu kecil. Sehingga kami selalu merasa bahwa pukul enam sore itu sudah harus masuk rumah...” - 3)

Upaya Harsono untuk menengok kembali sebagian masa lalunya, latar belakang keluarga, pengaruh macam-macam pendidikan, bahasa dan lingkungannya di masa kecil adalah keinginannya untuk memahami atau mengenali lebih jauh problem-problem identitas dirinya.

Dari mana pokok identitas itu harus mulai dipersoalkan? Terberi sejak dalam kandungan? Semacam “religion of seed” 4) yang berhubungan dengan keyakinan dan paham keunggulan benih ras tertentu? Atau, pencarian yang terentang sejak lahir sampai mati? Apakah identitas itu lebih merupakan problem kultural atau politik? Politik identitas macam apakah yang terus-menerus memproduksi kekerasan dan mayat-mayat di sekelilingnya?

Bagi Harsono, identitas menjadi masalah karena selama ini ia tak bisa mengatakannya, kecuali mesti menelan pandangan dari pihak luar secara mentah-mentah. Terlahir dari sepasang orangtua Cina bukanlah sebuah pilihan, dan tampaknya tidak niscaya keberuntungan. Geger Peraturan Pemerintah No 10/1959 mewajibkan semua pedagang eceran Cina harus menutup usaha di wilayah pedalaman Indonesia. Ribut-ribut itu mendorong orangtuanya nyaris memilih untuk “pulang” kembali ke Cina. Tapi, apa artinya “pulang” bagi Harsono, juga bagi keluarganya, dulu dan sekarang?

**Etnis apa pun tidak pernah mengalir dalam darah.**

**Etnisitas tak diturunkan dari ayah-ibu ke anak-cucu...**

**Secara obyektif, alamiah, atau biologis yang dinamakan “orang Cina” tidak ada. Juga yang dinamakan “pribumi”.**

“Bapak saya pada waktu itu sudah siap-siap mau pulang. Dan saya, saya nggak mengerti Pulang bagaimana ? (Bahasa) Cina saja saya nggak ngerti. Tapi Bapak saya sudah siap-siap, sudah beli pakaian tebal, memanggil tukang jahit di rumah untuk membuat baju dingin... Ya, pulang, tapi kami nggak tahu kemana...” tuturnya.

Menjadi seorang Cina – atau etnis apapun bahkan- agaknya harus selalu bersiaga untuk mengalami semacam “rasisme tak sengaja”. Yang “tak sengaja” itu bisa saja dihinakan, dibenci atau karena dimuliakan. Semua karena orang merasa memiliki ras, bahkan keyakinan bahwa ada semacam esensi ras.

“Etnis apa pun tidak pernah mengalir dalam darah. Etnisitas tak diturunkan dari ayah-ibu ke anak-cucu... Secara obyektif, alamiah, atau biologis yang dinamakan “orang Cina” tidak ada. Juga yang dinamakan “pribumi”. Yang ada hanya orang yang “dicinakan” oleh proses sosial. ...Perempuan diperkosa Mei 1998 bukan karena Cina, tetapi mereka dicinakan karena diperkosa.” 5)

Harsono bahkan pernah merasa ketakutan karena tak bisa menjadi bagian dari “Indonesia”. Kalau bukan bagian dari Indonesia, di manakah tempat baginya? Dimanakah Indonesia di dalam dirinya dan dirinya di dalam Indonesia? Ia harus menyangkal sesuatu pada dirinya sendiri untuk menjadi “Indonesia”. Tapi apa yang persis harus disangkalnya, ia juga tak tahu. Dengan menyangkal, ia melukai dirinya yang paling dalam. Tapi agaknya dengan itulah, melalui ketakutan dan “politik penyangkalan”, jalan (pencarian) identitas terbentuk.

Di salah satu karyanya, di pameran 2003, Harsono mulai menampilkan sebuah foto keluarganya, yakni foto pernikahan kedua orangtua. Potret-potret dirinya juga mulai muncul pada waktu itu. “Aku” dan atau “diriku” yang menjadi kawasan persaingan antara politik penyangkalan dan pengakuan, menjadi lebih penting bagi Harsono setelah 1998.

Ia tahu ada yang kosong pada “aku” atau “diriku”. Lalu ia mulai ingin tahu apa yang disebut sebagai percampuran. Seperti dulu di depan kamar tidur, neneknya menyandingkan foto Soekarno, salib Yesus dan DN Aidit. Tiap Minggu ke gereja, hari Jumat untuk tasawuf.

Ada sekolah kebelanda-belandaan, isinya anak-anak Cina. Ada cara makan kebelanda-belandaan pula, tapi mereka mengaku sebagai orang Indonesia dengan wajah Cina. Ibunya yang Cina dan Katolik terdidik di Holland Chinese School. Dia sendiri dulu belajar di sekolah Cina dengan nama Cina sampai kelas IV SD, lalu pindah ke sekolah Katolik, dengan nama Indonesia dan identitas Katolik. Semua bercampur dan tak ada susunan yang membuat orang yakin dengan identitas tunggal. Identitas tunggal adalah senjata untuk membunuh yang lain, yang berbeda.

## nama dan kisah

Lebih kurang enam puluh tahun sudah berlalu, sejak ayahnya almarhum, bersama kelompok Chung Hua Tsung Hui melakukan upaya penggalian dan penguburan kembali tulang-tulang berserakan itu.

Di usia yang lebih tua dari ayahnya, Harsono datang ke tempat para korban yang sudah dimakamkan dengan layak. Mereka memiliki nama-nama sebagaimana mereka dulu diberi nama. Kubur mereka bisa dikunjungi oleh sanak saudara mereka lagi. Diri dan nama mereka dikenang. Mereka bukan lagi korban anonim, tapi korban dengan nama-nama. Jumlah seluruhnya 191 nama.

Bisa jadi, orang menjadi korban karena namanya.

Nama-nama korban berderet-deret tertera pada nisan itu. Lagi-lagi tulisan itu tetap aneh dan tak punya makna bagi Harsono. Tapi kekerasan, pembunuhan, dan penganiayaan selalu punya nama bagi Harsono. Ia, janin yang ternyata survive di kawasan ladang pembantaian, tak bisa begitu saja percaya bahwa narasi-narasi besar sudah habis dan tak punya makna atau pun greget lagi.

Ia bersua dengan orang-orang setempat yang kini dengan berani menunjukkan lokasi pembantaian.

Mereka tahu, pernah ada orang-orang yang dibantai di suatu ketika, pada suatu tempat. Dan pada hari yang lain, ada sekelompok lain melakukan upaya “ndudah”. Mereka mengisahkannya kembali dengan ingatan-ingatan yang masih ada. Ya, apa lagi kalau bukan merangkai kisah, untuk waktu yang sudah lewat, untuk jejak peristiwa yang selalu nyaris terhapus?

Kutemukan sebuah kutipan dari Bateson, entah pernah tercantum di mana: “Apa yang penting dalam sebuah kisah, apa yang benar di dalamnya, bukanlah orang-orang, benda-benda atau plotnya, melainkan hubungan-hubungan di antara orang-orangnya”. ■

## Hendro Wiyanto

*kurator pameran*

**Catatan**

1. Harsono memperoleh gambaran tentang peristiwa pembantaian itu melalui buku karangan Benny G. Setiono, *"Tionghoa dalam Pusaran Politik Mengungkap Fakta Sejarah Tersembunyi Orang Tionghoa di Indonesia"* (Transmedia, Jakarta, 2008). Benny Setiono menyebutkan peristiwa itu antara lain sebagai "ekses revolusi kemerdekaan tahun 1946-1948".

Dia menulis: "Pembakaran, penjarahan, pemerkosaan, dan pembunuhan terus berlangsung di berbagai daerah di Jawa dan Sumatera hingga akhir 1949. Kejadian yang hebat terjadi di kawasan Jawa Timur, terutama sejak para tahanan Kalisosok, Surabaya dilepaskan dan dipersenjatai serta direkrut ke dalam sejumlah satuan pasukan. Mereka ini dipersilakan melakukan apa saja asal membantu pengosongan kota guna mendukung politik bumi hangus yang dipilih pihak Republik. Beberapa daerah di mana mayoritas Tionghoa jadi korban aksi penjarahan dan pembunuhan ini antara lain adalah Kertosono, Nganjuk, Caruban, Madiun, Blitar, Tulungagung, Kediri, Wlingi, dan Malang."

(Lihat: Benny G. Setiono, *"Tionghoa dalam Pusaran Politik Mengungkap Fakta Sejarah Tersembunyi Orang Tionghoa di Indonesia"* (Transmedia, Jakarta, 2008), khususnya Bab 31, hal. 585- 619).

Buku ini juga memuat beberapa foto yang dibuat oleh ayah Harsono mengenai penggalan kembali jenazah korban, di halaman 626, 627, 628.

2. Kawan wartawan itu adalah Stanley Adi Prasetyo, yang kemudian membuka pameran Harsono di Galeri Nasional Indonesia ini.
3. Wawancara dengan FX Harsono, 19 Mei 2009
4. Anggapan bahwa benih atau tsing Tionghoa, melalui rahim apapun akan tetap menurunkan orang Tionghoa, tulis Pramoedya Ananta Toer di bukunya yang sangat terkenal, *"Hoakiau di Indonesia"* (Pen. Garba Budaya, Jakarta, 1998, hal. 222)
5. Ariel Heryanto, "Rasisme Tak Sengaja", KOMPAS, 6 Februari 2004.
6. Saya akan selalu teringat akan Ibu saya almarhum. Dalam kesempatan bepergian ke sebuah tempat yang baru, selalu saja kalimat pertama yang diucapkannya adalah, "Di sini aman". Kata-kata itu terlontar gara-gara melihat ada orang Cina di tempat itu.

Apakah ia merasa aman karena ada sesama Cina? Apakah ada penanda bagi jaminan suasana aman pada umumnya karena (masih) ada orang Cina di sana? Artinya, di situ orang Cina tampak diterima dan terbukti masih survive? Apakah kata-kata itu hanya selubung bagi rasa tak aman karena identitas Cina-nya yang tak bisa disangkalnya?

**erased time, disappearing traces**

Curated by Hendro Wiyanto

**an old photo album in the family room**

One day in the mid-seventies, when Harsono was still an art student in Yogyakarta, he came home to visit his father. The old man had just been freed after having been incarcerated for a year. The reason? Due to a series of events that were rather coincidental in nature, the father was seen as linked with a "dangerous" psychic in the small town of Ponorogo (East Java). A lot of the "new" nationalists that the authority deemed as leftist (and therefore culpable) happened to be the clients of this charismatic clairvoyant. Apparently, in all levels of the Indonesian society, the link between politics and paranormal practices is likely. At least that is what we often hear of in Indonesia.

What was the father's "wrongdoing"? Well, Harsono's father made iron-clad wooden sticks that could be considered as amulets after Mbah Suro, the psychic, "filled it with supernatural forces". The charismatic figure—whom many thought as able to distribute well-being, wealth, and power—was apprehended, along with all the people around him. Naturally, Harsono's father was arrested as well. That, you know, was the time when the New Order regime was in its adolescent stage, after having successfully toppled the Old Order.

It was when Harsono came home to Blitar that he rediscovered the old photo albums in their living room. All members of the family—including Harsono—had often flicked through those albums, and perhaps even memorize the pictures inside out. Still, no one had ever questioned a series of peculiar photographs there.

Amongst the family pictures, Harsono found intriguing photographs—around eighty pieces of them. The black-and-white pictures depicted the efforts of a group of people to exhume long-buried bodies of the Chinese people that had been the victims of the mass killings in 1946 – 1948. Those were the historical pictures taken by Harsono's father.

Harsono's father, Oh Hok Tjoe—who subsequently changed his name to Hendro Subagio—was a photographer in Blitar. In the early fifties to the mid-sixties, he owned the “Atom” photo studio, the most popular photo studio in town at the time. Everybody who wished to look cool—the general families or those who were members of the traditional wayang troupe—would come there to have their pictures taken.

The pictures were apparently related to the Chung Hua Tsung Hui organization (the CHTH) in Indonesia. It was an umbrella organization that housed the different associations of the Chinese community in Indonesia, be it those whose members had already affirmed their nationalities as Indonesians, or those whose members were yet to become Indonesian nationals (i.e. they were still known as “foreign Chinese”). The CHTH was established to serve as the counterpoint of the representatives of Chinese-descendants in the various conferences initiated by the Dutch during the post-independence “political actions” in 1947 – 1949. The establishment of the CHTH had been initiated by the government of the newly independent Republic of Indonesia. The organization's specific task was to serve as a consultant to the government in dealing with matters related to the Chinese community in Indonesia.

In 1951, the organization began the effort to exhume and record the victims of mass killings against the Chinese communities in several towns on Java. The CHTH—through its branches in many Indonesian towns—tried to track down the identities of the victims that had been murdered during the chaotic years. They made records of the number of the victims, contacted family members who were still searching and trying to remember, and then buried the victims again in appropriate manners. Harsono's father was involved in this group's acts of benevolence.

Some of the photographs were dated October – December 1951, pointing at the time of the exhumation, or what the locals called “ndudah”. Through the pictures, parts of the dark history that were almost laid to rest, were beginning to be disclosed.1)

Harsono's encounter with those photographs took place scores of years ago. One day, he became aware that the pictures were invaluable historical records, too precious to be forgotten. He kept the albums well; it was as if those pictures were even more valuable than the photographs of his own family. Later on, in one of his works, he would unexpectedly put the two different kinds of pictures side by side: the photographs of the exhumation seemed to give a new identity to the pictures of his family members, who had survived the chaotic period. Harsono himself was still in his mother's womb when the killing fields still consumed the victims' blood. Life has its way to survive. Unfortunately, his father never talked a lot about the pictures. A friend of Harsono's, a journalist, once attempted to interview him to no avail.2)

The authoritarian regime that had put Harsono's father behind bars was toppled in 1998. The father died not long after, in 1999, carrying with him the stories behind the unearthing of the victims' bodies. What happened with the victims before they were murdered? Where did those murders take place? Who were murdered, actually, and how?

In the tumultuous years after the New Order regime collapsed, a series of questions, which had seemingly been mere personal matters, started to surface and bother Harsono. He was haunted by the old pictures that his father had taken. He maintained that this had nothing to do with any feeling of bitterness that he might have toward the regime that had incarcerated his father.

The photo albums that had for so long been left in his old house at the Tjoe Tin Alley, Blitar, seemed to have given him a new assignment.

## what is your name?

*What did they call you at home?*

Ong.

*What was the full name?*

Oh Hong Boen. I don't know how they got to call me "Ong".

*Did you know what your name meant?*

Nope. Later they would tell me, though. "Hong" means affluent, rich... "Boen" means literary, art.

*Who gave you that name?*

I don't know. Today, the only Chinese words I know are those in my Chinese name. I can only write my name.

He then tried to re-write his name. Again and again. He went on, seemingly unstoppable. He tried to recall how to write the characters that today felt so alien to him. The characters that he, scores of years ago, had learnt about and mastered. The shapes and sounds of these characters are rather different from the three syllables in his name in Latin alphabets, but the meaning remains the same.

That was his own name, given to him once, a long time ago. The name was there to show who he was. One day, however, the name was like a trace that must be erased and even forgotten. Now he wants to rediscover it, recapture the time, had it all been possible.

It has been so long—very long, indeed—since he heard his old name was uttered, by himself or by someone else. He no longer goes by that name. He does not know where that sound has gone—the sound of his name. He does not know where those characters have gone. He can only remember them vaguely. He does not know what his name today means.

Words disappear, but the text remains.

He thus tries to write them again.

## home? home, where?

"As soon as dusk came, there would be so many kids from another village, which was rather far from ours. They went to the mosque through my village. If we still hung around, they would call us names. They would say, 'Chinese, Chinese... go back home!' Sometimes they would throw pebbles at us, so much so that we always felt we had to be home by six in the evening..."<sup>3)</sup>

Harsono's efforts to revisit his past, his family, and reconsider the influence of his education, language, and environment during his childhood constituted his desire to understand or become aware of the problems of his identity.

Where should one begin to dissect the issue of one's identity? Is identity a given, something that is assigned to us since we are still in our mothers' wombs? Is it a kind of a "religion of seed" that is related to the belief about the superiority of a certain race? Or is it about a never-ending search from the day we were born to the day we die? Is identity a cultural problem, or is it political? What kind of identity politics that keeps on generating violence and causing death?

For Harsono, identity is an issue because he has not been able to affirm it; he could only accept what others had assigned to him. Being born from Chinese parents had not been an option, and was apparently not necessarily a good fortune. There was the chaos generated by the Government Regulation No. 10/1959 that obliged all Chinese retailers to close their businesses in the remote Indonesian regions. The chaos almost forced Harsono's parents to return "home" to China. But what did it mean for Harsono, and for his family, to "go home", yesterday and today?

"My father was getting ready to go home. As for myself, I couldn't get it. Home? What did he mean, home? I didn't even understand any Chinese words. Still, my father was getting ready. He bought warm clothes, asked the tailor to make winter clothing... We were going home, but we didn't know where home was..." Harsono reminisces.

To be a Chinese—or a member of any other ethnic group—apparently means to be ready to experience a kind of "accidental racism", which could mean being jeered at, hated, or honored. This is all because people think that they belong to certain races, and even believe that there is such a thing as the essence of a race.

“Ethnicity never flows in our blood. It is not inherited from parents to children. Objectively, naturally, or biologically speaking, there is no such thing as ‘a Chinese.’ Or ‘an indigenous’ for that matter. What indeed exists is a person that has been ‘made Chinese’ through social processes... Women were raped in May 1998 not because they were Chinese; rather, they became Chinese because they had been raped.”5)

Harsono had even been scared before; he feared that he might not become a part of “Indonesia.” If he is not a part of Indonesia, where does he belong to? Where exactly is Indonesia within him, and where does he stand in Indonesia? He must deny something within him to become “Indonesia.” But he does not know for sure what it is that he must deny. By denying it, however, he inflicts a wound in the deepest part of him. It seems that it is only through that, through fear and the ‘politics of denial’, that the way is formed to pursue his identity.

In one of his works, exhibited in 2003, Harsono began to present his family pictures—the pictures of his parents’ wedding, to be exact. He also presented pictures of himself. “I” or “myself” was the realm of contention between denial and recognition politics, and it has become even more important to him after 1998.

He knew that something was missing in the “I” or “myself.” He then started to become curious about what one calls as ‘hybrid.’ A long time ago, his grandmother used to hang pictures of Soekarno, the communist leader DN Aidit, and Jesus on the cross in the bedroom. She went to church on Sundays, and practiced Islamic mysticism on Fridays.

There were schools practicing the Dutch lifestyle, attended by Chinese children. There were Dutch table manners, practiced by Indonesians with Chinese looks. His mother was a Catholic Chinese who went to the Holland Chinese School. Harsono himself used to go to a Chinese school and had a Chinese name until he reached the fourth year in the elementary school, and then he moved to a Catholic school where he had an Indonesian name and had the identity of a Catholic boy. Everything is mixed up. There is not one single structure that makes people trust a monolithic identity. A monolithic identity is a weapon to kill the others, the ones that are not like us.

## names and stories

Sixty years have passed since his late father, along with the Chung Hua Tsung Hui organization, exhumed the bodies and buried those scattered bones again.

Now, older than his father had been at the time, Harsono returns to the place where the victims were properly buried. The graves had names, in keeping with the original names of the victims. The victims’ family members can visit them again. Their names and their stories live in memories. They are no longer anonymous victims, but rather victims with names. There are 191 names in total.

People can become victims because of their names.

The names of the victims are written on the graves. The characters remain alien and meaningless to Harsono. Violence, murder, and torture, however, always have names for him. Harsono, the baby in his mother’s womb, had survived the killing field, and now cannot immediately believe the claim that grand narratives are done for, meaningless, limp.

He meets the locals who now bravely show him where the killing fields had been. They know that people had been massacred, somewhere, sometime ago. One day, another group also tries to exhume the bodies. They recount the stories with the help of the surviving memories—what else if not to narrate stories, for the time past, for the almost disappearing traces of events?

I find a quote from Bateson, I don’t know from where: “What is important in a story, what is true in it, is not the plot, the things, or the people in a story, but the relationships between them.” ■

**Hendro Wiyanto**

*Exhibition curator*