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Silent Strategies:
The Legacy of Sexual Violence among Chinese Indonesians

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Introduction: The May 1998 rapes

1. In March 1997, Indonesia's authoritarian President Suharto was re-elected for a seventh five-year term. Suharto's re-election occurred just as the Asian economic crisis was reaching its peak. In July 1997, the Thai baht crashed, resulting in a global loss of confidence among international businesses in Asian currencies. By January 1998, the Indonesia rupiah had plunged to one sixth of its previous value, reaching a historic low of 17,000 rupiah for US$1.[1] Rising tensions were visible across Indonesia. Unemployment was growing, petrol prices were increasing, there were food shortages and people were getting frustrated. People were especially frustrated with the Suharto regime's corruption, collusion and nepotism. By May 1998, mass demonstrations were occurring across the archipelago. University students were particularly vocal in their anger towards Suharto. Students across the nation rallied to the call 'Bring down Suharto and his family' (*Turunkan Suharto dan keluarganya*). Many rallies soon turned violent and on 12 May 1998, four Trisakti University students were shot dead by the military. The military had been authorised to use only tear gas and rubber bullets, but had used live ammunition against protesting citizens. These shootings escalated the violence and created a sense of lawlessness throughout much of Indonesia.

2. A key target of violence was the ethnic Chinese Indonesian community. Overt discrimination against Chinese Indonesians has a long history in the nation, as we explore later in this article. The military and religious extremists used pre-existing feelings of resentment to provoke and justify violence against Chinese Indonesians. By January 1998, violent attacks were increasingly directed at Chinese Indonesian shop owners who were accused of increasing the price of basic commodities and stock-piling food and other resources. There has, however, never been any evidence to substantiate such claims made against Chinese Indonesian business owners. Nevertheless, Chinese Indonesians had their businesses looted and burned, and these actions were justified against these fallacious claims.[2] Even if security forces were inclined to protect Chinese Indonesians, those forces were often outnumbered by those rioting.

3. The violence perpetrated on Chinese Indonesians reached a peak in May, 1998. During this month between 180 and 400 Chinese Indonesian women were raped.[3] Many more women were sexually assaulted, abused and harassed.[4] The exact number of women raped will never be known because women and their families remain too ashamed to speak of the rapes. Moreover, women and their families have a justified distrust of the organisations to which they theoretically should have been able to report this violence. This distrust is justified because both the police and the military continue to deny that the rapes ever occurred. This denial stems from the fact that it was police and military personnel who committed the rapes.[5] Even when women did report rapes to police, they were not taken seriously or believed. The police and military claimed that any accusations of rape that they were involved were merely part of a smear campaign.[6] The continued denial of the rapes at the highest levels of power seriously hinders the ability of Chinese Indonesians to feel safe, secure and valued in Indonesia.

4. This article examines the ongoing impact of the May 1998, rapes on Chinese Indonesians. The article is divided into four sections. We first outline our theoretical framework, which incorporates the heuristic of silence. Second, we explore the history of Chinese positionality in Indonesia. Third, we discuss our methods. Fourth, we examine how Chinese Indonesians use silence to reduce perceived threats of future sexual violence. In the conclusion we argue that strategies of silences are deployed by Chinese

Indonesians to reduce ongoing levels of fear.

Silence

5. Silence is characterised conventionally as an absence; an absence of sound, an absence of speech. Postmodern scholarship though has rethought silence as something tangible. For instance, silence can reify personhood and dispossession. Luce Irigaray's (1985) work is relevant here as it investigates the silence that is woman, where woman is produced through patriarchy and where her own needs, desires, interests and indeed her very self, is silenced.[7] Women are silenced politically, geographically and socially, and kept outside hegemonic power structures alongside those others (poor, disabled, racialised) who cannot speak.[8] Silence can thus perpetuate regimes of power and result in violent oppression.[9] Adrienne Rich poetically reveals how 'cartographies of silence' are a form of historical repression.[10] Silences can thus be thought of not as absences of sound and voice, but forms of structural violence.[11]

6. Silence can also be read as a form of power. Michel Foucault's (1976) work shows that silence can be forcefully leveraged against an adversary.[12] Silence can be an expression of agency over one's life, a display of rights and individual sovereignty. Silence can represent one's ability to escape formation and surveillance and exist elsewhere, beyond the order of law.[13] Silence may not be the absence of thought, but an active choice of action to suppress pain, emotion, or a way to deal with an extraordinary reality beyond what language can convey.

7. In keeping with the notion of silence as power, Jane Parpart (2010) argues that the discursive conditions determining who can and cannot speak reflect also an expression of agency.[14] Silence then can be an expression of agency as an empowered and wise choice often made in conflict-ridden social environments. The danger of associating silence solely with violence and oppression, then, is that it potentially ignores other modalities of agency that manifest themselves as silence. This reading of silence can empower narratives of women's historical suffering, passivity, docility and submission in a patriarchal world.[15] Wendy Brown also acknowledges this dual modality of silence, first as a way of dealing with something that is beyond language and second as a reflection of one's defence mechanism against suffering and the preservation of self.[16] Silence can be an aesthetic with divisions of visible and invisible, audible and inaudible.[17] The meaning of silence is also socially constructed and may be valued in some cultures and not in others: is speaking for the silent an act of reinstating oppression?[18] The meanings of silence vary cross-culturally.[19] For instance, in Lombok, Indonesia, women working in the tourist industry choose silence as a response to sexual harassment because they do not want to give the men who harass them any attention. As such, it is not an oppressive silence but a deliberate message sent by the women through silence.[20]

8. We have then two notions of silence: silence as a way to perpetuate subordination of the other; and silence as the display of individual sovereignty. These are not mutually exclusive. The silencing by the state of others through violence or mere ignorance can provoke resistance from subalterns. Here, Patrick Hanafin notes, silence reflects the power of resistance residing in the paradoxical state of being 'nobody,' 'in becoming nothing', and being 'imperceptible.'[21] Mahatma Ghandi's nonviolent social protest through silence manifested as resistance is a notable exemplar here.[22] In respect to Indonesia, silence has been deployed as a political strategy to undermine Chinese Indonesians and as a strategy by Chinese Indonesians to forge a life in Indonesia. We acknowledge these multiple meanings and uses of silence, noting its complexity. In this article we expand on what we call strategies of silence in a manner that also acknowledges the body and physicality as key sites of silence, which moves beyond the narrow idea of silence as only pertaining to voice or sound. Before examining how strategies of silence are used by Chinese Indonesians in response to the May 1998 rapes, we turn first to analyse the contentious position of Chinese Indonesians in Indonesia.

Chinese Indonesians

9. The position of Chinese Indonesians in Indonesia has long been fraught.[23] When Suharto came to power in a coup in 1965 he introduced a comprehensive policy legitimising systemic violence towards ethnic Chinese, many of whom had lived in Indonesia for generations. Chinese language schools were banned in 1966.[24] People were forced to change their 'Chinese sounding' names to Indonesian ones.

The number of Chinese Indonesians who were able to join political parties was severely restricted and Chinese Indonesians were not permitted to serve in Suharto's government.[25] Chinese Indonesians were discouraged from attending public universities with their number capped at 10 per cent of the student body.[26] With such restrictions it is little wonder that Chinese Indonesians primarily turned to the market economy to make a living.

10. In 1995, it was estimated that 73 per cent of all publicly listed Indonesian companies were owned by Chinese Indonesians.[27] Chinese Indonesians at this time made up just 2 per cent of the total Indonesian population.[28] It should be noted that Chinese Indonesians are not an homogenous group and while there are many similarities across the country Chinese Indonesian communities include people of various religious and socio-economic statuses.[29] The visibility of Chinese Indonesians in the economic domain, alongside their absence in political, media and educational domains, meant that Chinese Indonesians became an easy target to blame for the economic crisis.[30] The wealth of many Chinese Indonesians led people to accuse them of being in collaboration with Suharto's corrupt regime. Discrimination against Chinese Indonesians had begun as early as the 1800s,[31] but the two most violent events occurred in 1965, when a massacre of Chinese Indonesians occurred,[32] and again in May 1998, with the mass rape of Chinese Indonesian women. Before we turn to analyse the stories of women living through this latter event, we outline our methods.

Methods

11. Exploring the legacy of the May 1998 rapes among Chinese Indonesians was the objective driving this research and underpinned the submission of a research proposal to the New Zealand Peace and Disarmament Trust (PADET). Following the award of funds, Sari Andajani-Sutjahjo conducted in-depth interviews in November and December 2013, with 17 Chinese Indonesians who lived through the May 1998 riots. Our research design explicitly excluded women rape survivors in order to avoid retraumatising these women. Most interviewees, however, had family members who witnessed or had been targets of sexual violence. Participants were aged between 30 and 70, and all were Christian. All except two identified as Chinese Indonesian. The remaining two women identified as *campuran*, or of mixed Chinese and Indonesian heritage.

12. Eleven participants were women and six were men. While four women were single, the remainder were married. Two married couples were interviewed jointly. It is not unusual for Chinese Indonesians to be highly educated and aspire to postgraduate studies, despite prior exclusion from public universities. The high level of education is reflected in the fact that all participants were tertiary educated and half held postgraduate degrees. All but one participant resided in Jakarta and all but one participant had witnessed the May 1998 riots first hand. Several informants were teenagers at the time. One female participant lived outside Jakarta at the time of the riots but was aware of the violence through media reports and the anxiety she witnessed among family and friends. Most participants had lived around the epicentre of the riots including in Trisakti, Tangerang and Glodok, an area known as Jakarta's Chinatown. All participants were born in Indonesia and were third or fourth generation Chinese Indonesians. Only one participant, a 70-year-old man, was able to fluently speak a Chinese dialect. The remaining participants were not fluent in any Chinese dialect, and were unable to read or write Chinese scripts. All interviews were conducted in Indonesian. All names used in this article are pseudonyms.

13. Interview respondents were recruited through Andajani-Sutjahjo's social networks in Jakarta. Recruitment was also initiated via visits to a private university in Jakarta and by distributing information about the study to university staff. The criteria for participation included: being over 18 years of age; having lived in Indonesia during the May 1998 riots; and identifying as Chinese Indonesian. A number of academics first volunteered to participate and this led to recruitment of other participants via snowballing. Our qualitative sample represents those people who felt confident engaging with the difficult topics of ethnic and sexual violence and its impact on Chinese Indonesians.

14. Several interviews were conducted in cafes in Chinatown or in a local Buddhist temple, while others were conducted in participants' homes or at the university campus. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were audio recorded with consent. They were then transcribed and analysed in Indonesian. Relevant quotes were translated into English for this paper.

15. As this article is concerned with the intersection of identity politics and violence, it is relevant to acknowledge the authors' subjectivities and experiences of ethnic violence, and the impact this had on data collection and interpretation. Andajani-Sutjahjo is a third generation Chinese Indonesian. She speaks fluent Indonesian and a Javanese dialect. She has never had a Chinese name, has never visited China and is unable to speak or write any Chinese language. Due to ongoing threats and incidents of ethnic violence and discrimination against her and her family, she now resides in Aotearoa New Zealand. Andajani-Sutjahjo is tertiary educated and she spent much of her early professional career in large Indonesian cities, including Surabaya and Jakarta, and is thus typical in terms of her life experiences and status to interviewees.

16. The shared identity of Andajani-Sutjahjo with participants likely put the latter at ease in the context of discussing painful and politically charged issues. Whilst Andajani-Sutjahjo is not a survivor of the sexual violence perpetrated during the May 1998 riots, she arrived in Jakarta as the riots were ending to assist family who had experienced destruction of personal and commercial property, and to oversee the medical treatment of family members, some of whom live with permanent disabilities as a result of violence perpetrated against them. Andajani-Sutjahjo's shared history of having lived through the violence, and being part of the targeted community, assisted with recruiting people who perceived her as a safe confidante. Additionally, Andajani-Sutjahjo is a qualified psychologist and researcher of gender-based violence, which also added to her competence as a sensitive and ethically aware interviewer.

17. The authors were all acutely aware of the possibility of retraumatisation of participants and thus discussed issues around recruitment in order to reduce the potential for harm. Linda Bennett and Sharyn Davies also communicated during field work to debrief Andajani-Sutjahjo after difficult interviews. This debriefing was important because of the impossibility of Andajani-Sutjahjo maintaining objective boundaries over memories of the violence being disclosed to her. It was also important for the authors to work through interpretation of narratives to discuss possible points of bias or over-emphasis due to emersion with the community. Bennett and Davies are both Australians who were living in Indonesia in 1998 and have continued their close connection with Indonesia in the intervening two decades.

Silent strategies

18. While the Indonesian government and the military continue to use silence as a strategy to ensure that the perpetrators of the May 1998 rapes remain unpunished, Chinese Indonesians use silence to keep themselves safe. Strategies of silence have long been used by Chinese Indonesians. During the Suharto period Chinese Indonesians created *yayasan* (foundations) as a way to silently conduct business and to evade taxation;[33] creating *yayasan*, rather than businesses, meant such endeavours seemed benign and nonthreatening. Confucian practice was banned under Suharto and so Chinese Indonesians silently developed *klenteng* (places of worship) that outwardly conformed to Buddhism, which was not banned. Parents silently hired private Mandarin tutors for their children to ensure language transfer.[34] While Chinese Indonesians want to see justice, they also know that strategies of silence have proved effective in keeping them safe. There may also be, as one anonymous reviewer pointed out, 'a mentality of "kalah dan salah" (always losing, always be in the wrong), which is deeply embedded in the psyche and practices of Chinese Indonesians'.[35] Below we examine four strategies of silence: invisibility; movement; quietness; and care.

Silence as invisibility

19. Silence for some women who lived through the May 1998 riots is enacted through making themselves invisible. Lisa was born and raised in Jakarta and was 19 during the May 1998 riots. Lisa continues to live in Jakarta, with her husband and children, and she talked about the continuing need to hide her 'Chinese-ness' and also to de-sexualise her appearance:

> When I go to the market I always wear *gombrong-gombrong* (baggy clothes) with messy hair to make myself look unattractive. Also I do it so I won't attract attention because my skin is fair. I always ask my husband to accompany me if he can. I used to go to school and university by bus. Back then I used to wear a jacket, even when it was very hot, over 30 degrees. Also I didn't put any make-up on. I was *nyamar* (in disguise). I covered all of my body, arms and legs. But of course I couldn't cover my face, my hands or my slanting eyes (*miring mata*) so I wore a hat.

20. Lisa, like many other Chinese Indonesian women, is publicly aware of her vulnerability, not just as a woman but as a Chinese Indonesian woman. Lisa's choice of attire and where to sit on public transport are closely circumscribed by her desire to avoid attention. Clothing is seen as an effective shield to disguise her 'Chinese-ness' and her femaleness. Lisa also wanted her husband, or other male kin, to act as chaperones.

21. For Dewi, a single woman who was 18 at the time of the May 1998 riots, her key to survival as a Chinese Indonesian woman has been to become socially adaptable and to continuously adjust her way of being and behaving. Dewi learned from her interactions with others how to navigate social life and how to disguise her 'Chinese-ness' and her feminine attractiveness in public. The ability and choice to disguise herself according to how she perceives her safety in different contexts is described by Dewi below:

> Anytime I go to Bali, I wear a tank-top and shorts and I feel ok and I feel free (*merasa bebas*) and no one is harassing me (laughs) because there are so many *bule* (Western tourists) in Bali, and they even wear bikinis so no one notices me. I am not in the spotlight (laughs). It feels good to be less visible.

22. Angel, who was 18 at the time of the May 1998 riots, was raised in a small town in Eastern Nusa Tenggara Province. Angel moved to Jakarta several years after the May 1998 riots and described her shifting understanding of personal space and safety. It was only after the move that she was made aware of her 'Chinese-ness,' both directly and indirectly, through her interaction with locals. She felt that she then needed to redefine what safe public appearance and safe space were in the company of non-Chinese Indonesian men:

> I was raised in a place with little ethnic conflict or apparent racism. But here in Jakarta, I became more aware of my Chinese-ness. I now have these two radars [gesturing two antennas hovering above her head]. My safe-space boundary is very important. I always do a scenic scanning of people around me so no one stands within my radars. When waiting for the bus, I always try to find a space or a place where I can stand. I choose to stand next to a wall or against the wall away from the crowd. I am hoping not to be noticed but at the same time to be able to see any threat.

23. East Nusa Tenggara Province, where Lisa grew up, is a predominantly Christian area. Whilst Angel's childhood was not marked by intense feelings of being born into an ethnic minority, her adult experiences of being a Chinese Indonesian woman in Jakarta following the May 1998 riots have led to a heightened sense of belonging to a threatened group. This belonging resulted in Angel reexamining the way she presented herself in public and constantly seeking a safe hiding place in public. Angel's experiences demonstrate how the historical and geographic specificity of the assaults of Chinese Indonesian women endure over time and across space and manifest more intensively for those living in particular sites where the violence was most extreme. The spatial nature of the act of invisibility and camouflage can be read here as the art of political disguise.[36]

Silence as movement

24. The majority of Chinese Indonesians have had no desire or intention to leave Indonesia. There can be no return to a Chinese homeland when one has never been to China, does not speak the language, has no contacts in the country and has always lived in Indonesia. Lani, who at the time of interview was 35 and single, did have thoughts of moving abroad following the May 1998 riots but did not have the financial means to do so. Lani understood Indonesia's political culture as volatile and unpredictable and felt that at any time *kerusuhan* (riots) could occur. If the riots occurred again Lani felt that 'Chinese Indonesians will be scapegoats for such violence and will be the last priority in terms of receiving government protection.' Thus, while Lani sees no option except staying in Indonesia, she feels a constant threat of violence. Brevie, who was 38 and married at the time of interview, feels deep ambivalence about the possibility of having to relocate in the event of further violence. She stated: 'My work is here, I am being educated here. My church and my family are here so I don't want to move out.' Brevie does not want to give up all that is familiar and valuable in her life despite her fears of recurring ethnic violence.

25. Dewi, who was introduced above, explained that her survival strategy has been to be ready to move at any point, to make no fuss, to be adaptable and to be inaudible:

> **Dewi**: One has to be ready to remove oneself/carry oneself in terms of body language and gesture (*bisa bawa diri*) because here in Indonesia we Chinese Indonesians are only *numpang* (lodging).

Andajani-Sutjahjo: *Numpang*?

Dewi: Yes, Chinese Indonesians are born here but most Indonesians do not consider us Indonesian. We are like half this and half that. We have an ambiguous status. We supposedly want to go back to the Chinese mainland. But if we do we won't be accepted there either. And here we are not getting acceptance either, especially not by the government which always makes things difficult for us. You see we can't cover our face so wherever we go they call us *Cina* [a derogatory term for Chinese]. So basically whatever the government or its local representatives tell us we do. That is all. No less, no more.

Andajani-Sutjahjo: What do you mean?

Dewi: Well, for example, we need to get lots of letters and certificates from the civil office to do things. So because we need to get those things we just keep quiet and don't cause any fuss (*jangan aneh-aneh*).

26. This excerpt from Dewi shows that Chinese Indonesians use silence as a way to deal with living in a society that considers them merely lodgers. Being ready to move, and by not making a fuss, Chinese Indonesians seek to live largely under the radar. At the same time, this silence is used as a political tool by those in power to continue to control Chinese Indonesians and render them inaudible and invisible. [37] In public spaces, Chinese Indonesians adopt a passive and indirect approach against the more direct and active methods used by those in positions of power.[38]

Silence as quietness

27. Christina has completed degrees at both Australian and United States of American universities and was 47 at the time of interview. She identifies as both Javanese and Indonesian Chinese. Christina explained the discrimination against Chinese Indonesians as a form of structural racism:

> Subjectively, I have never felt safe living in Indonesia. I feel as if I am an object of violence and this causes significant social trauma. It's a form of violence perpetrated by the state as a system against me as an individual. Imagine, my father is indigenous Indonesian but I never feel myself as 'original' because of my Chinese blood from my mother. I am not *utuh* (whole/intact). My self-identity is always in conflict. It is because of the way I look, my face. Once I went to visit a civil office to get my marriage certificate. I read the fee structure and it said the fee was 50 thousand rupiah. But then they made it difficult for me by asking for my certificate of citizenship. Of course I don't have that as I am Indonesian by birth. They asked me to pay 350 thousand rupiah which is seven times more than the official fee. I asked for clarification, but one of the female officers shouted to embarrass me and said sarcastically 'Yes Ma'am, marry that board then.' Then my husband pulled my hand, told me to be quiet, and asked me to leave so we wouldn't cause a scene.

28. Christina has learnt that Chinese Indonesians must be quiet. Christina's attempt to seek just treatment was impossible. Chinese Indonesians are expected to be absent in the public sphere, they must be invisible and refrain from speaking. Fanny, who was 35 at the time of interview, has also learnt to be quiet:

> As someone who is Chinese, you are different; you are seen as being different. Indigenous Indonesians and the state consider us as different. I can't change my face. When someone calls me *amoy* (a derogatory name for a Chinese Indonesian girl), well that's harassment. So I keep quiet.

29. Chinese Indonesians embody narratives of silence so as not to draw attention to themselves and to not provoke arguments. Chinese Indonesians also learn about public spaces that are forbidden, or when they must enter them they keep quiet. In a longer interview, Fanny talked of how her father reinforced for her their 'otherness' and how they could never properly belong to Indonesia.

Silence as care

30. Chinese Indonesian men also spoke of a strong sense of responsibility for protecting Chinese Indonesian women from potential sexual violence. This responsibility stemmed from their socialisation into the role of family protectors and desire to be in solidarity with the Chinese Indonesian community. These men expressed a keen awareness that Chinese Indonesian women are viewed as sexual objects of non-Chinese men's desire. These men described a sense of non-kin protection, or fictive kinship, in which individuals who are not biologically related share a historical and cultural bond.[39] Hence, being Chinese Indonesian influences collective awareness among Chinese Indonesian men with regard to their role in protecting Chinese Indonesian women from sexual violence. Men's sense of duty translates into

practical terms in forms of monitoring and chaperoning women's movements.[40] This attention to women's mobility is intended to protect women, but at the same time reinforces the notion that women are not safe. The two quotes below illustrate how Chinese Indonesian men of different ages express their concerns and duties about protecting Chinese Indonesian women. Budi, who was a 35-year-old married man at the time of interview, noted:

> I think a Chinese man has more privileges than a Chinese woman. We are relatively safe when we walk alone. Often when I see a Chinese girl walking alone, I felt *deg degan* [worried and my heart beats faster]. I often observe how groups of *pribumi* [native Indonesian] men watch a Chinese girl from hair to toe with *mupeng* [*muka pengen*, a hungry/desiring face]. So even if such a girl is not a relative of mine, I feel as if I have to watch over her until she is safe from the harassment of those men.

31. Lina, a 30-year-old single woman at the time of interview, spoke of her father in terms of his wanting her to stay safe:

> My father always reminded me that whenever I am in a bus I have to sit next to an older lady, and always start a conversation with someone sitting next to me, but keep it to speaking with women only. Then if something happens that woman hopefully will help me.

32. The advice given by Lina's father acknowledged the vulnerability of his daughter in public, as well as his feeling of powerlessness and hope that an older woman would help Lina if she were in danger. Similarly, Angel who moved to Jakarta for her study also mentioned that she would sit close to an older woman if possible, especially when travelling alone on public transport. Silence here denotes a way of blending in and protecting oneself in a vulnerable position. The disguise or camouflage becomes a spatial practice that is effective when one examines and pays close attention to the surrounding environments. James Robinson describes this act of disguise, or camouflage, as being closely associated with social and cultural imaginings where social space becomes rendered an emotional space of sanctuary and refuge.[41]

Conclusion

33. In many ways life for Chinese Indonesians improved after the downfall of Suharto. Following the events of 1998, demands were made by human rights activists and others for the political protection of women from violence. In October 1998 the independent National Commission on Violence against Women was formed. Incumbent President Habibie made a formal apology in a speech on Martyr's Day, 10 November 1998, condemning the rape of women and the violence of the May riots.

34. In 1998, Presidential Instruction No 26 removed the regulation requiring ethnic Chinese Indonesians to produce certificates of citizenship when enrolling in school or making official applications. In 2000, Presidential Decree No 6 removed the ban on the practice of Chinese traditions, beliefs and customs. In 2001, then President Wahid removed the ban on the display of Chinese characters and the importation of Chinese publications, and this removal resulted in a booming Chinese-language educational sector in Indonesia.[42]

35. In 2003, President Megawati, declared support for Chinese education and the establishment of Chinese Studies departments in Indonesian universities and she officially included the Chinese New Year as a state holiday.[43] In 2004, President Megawati declared that Chinese Indonesians were no longer required to possess an Indonesian Citizenship Certificate and she stated that Chinese Indonesians are no different to those claiming themselves bumiputera (indigenous Indonesians).[44] It should be noted, even after President Megawati's declaration, these rules are still being broken by officials at the local level.[45] Chinese Indonesian communities took advantage of reforms to establish political parties, non-government organisations and action groups to promote solidarity and fight for the abolition of discriminatory laws. Some of those groups included the Chinese Indonesian Reform Party; the Indonesian Chinese Social Clan Association; the Association of Indonesian Chinese Descents; and youth groups such as GANDI.[46] Many Chinese Indonesian groups also promoted pluralism and multiculturalism to revitalise Chinese culture, media, language and religion.[47]

36. Yet, ongoing discrimination against Chinese Indonesian communities continues to hinder women's ability to come forward and claim justice and demand that perpetrators of the rapes be held accountable.

Discrimination has been internalised as part of Chinese Indonesian identity. There have been ongoing questions of the loyalty of Chinese Indonesians to the state.[48] Fear is tangibly felt, not least most recently during the arrest and imprisonment of Chinese Indonesian politician Ahok. Chinese Indonesians continue to be seen as scapegoats for any political and economic turmoil.

37. The Chinese Indonesian community still fears sexual violence. All Chinese Indonesian women interviewed reported a pervasive fear of rape and sexual harassment. All Chinese Indonesian men interviewed described a sense of heighted fear of sexual violence being perpetrated against Chinese Indonesian women. Chinese Indonesian women, as the perceived property of Chinese Indonesian men, make an easy target for grievances. Women are thus silent subalterns.[49] As a result of continued fear, Chinese Indonesian communities still feel vulnerable and exclude themselves from public life by making themselves silent.

38. An aesthetic of silence continues to exist where Chinese Indonesian women carve out an appearance that silences.[50] This silence can be simultaneously read as disempowering and empowering. Chinese Indonesian women choose strategies of silence: silences as invisibility; movement; quietness; and care. Silence is a modality of defence whereby women can preserve sanity and wellbeing. Silence is an active, informed modality, a form of resistance shaped by historical and ongoing violence. Silence is also used to reclaim dignity and sovereignty.

39. A resolution to the May 1998 Rapes is critical for the healing of Chinese Indonesians, not just for survivors and immediate victims but for the community at large.[51] Indonesia needs to acknowledge wrongs and demonstrate that organised sexual violence against women will not be tolerated. Continued denial by the state is a denial of moral accountability and serves only to further reinforce that Chinese Indonesians cannot trust the state. The internalised fear of violence can only be ameliorated and healed once the nation publically condemns the violence, brings perpetrators to justice, and restores dignity for Chinese Indonesians.

Notes

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