

Chained Men: History Revived by UGM Students

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Historical narratives especially that are presented in Indonesian historical narratives take sides with big names. Presentation is usually monotonous, which is unable to attract the attention of the wider public to learn the country's history.

This has inspired Jenifer Papas and Sandy Maulana Yusuf from Faculty of Cultural Sciences and Aan Saputra from Faculty of Engineering, along with supervisor Dra. Djaliati Sri Nugrahani, M.A., to explore a marginalised history through the Student Creativity Programme funded by the Higher Learning Directorate.

Jenifer and team have chosen the story of 'chained men', the name given to forced labour at coal mining of Sawahlunto since the end of the 19th century - mid 20th century.

"The people in general know Sawahlunto as a coal producing city in West Sumatera, unknowing of the dark life of the chained men that once lived there. They were not much told about, but, in fact, they played a great role in the Sawahlunto coal mining," said Jenifer.

Jenifer said many of the chained men were actually political prisoners who had been brought by the Dutch from across Nusantara, such as Java, Madura, Makassar, Nias, etc. Cultural differences

between them did create problems which eventually led to social and ethnic conflicts.

“They were seen by the Dutch as rebels who only disrupted stability while in fact for the indigenous people, they were heroes who dared to fight against Dutch despotic moves,” she said.

In their research conducted from 4-12 May 2018, the UGM students further observed the social problems, interaction intricacies, and other stories of the chained men. The students came to the old mining facilities in Sawahlunto and interviewed the children of the miners, foremen, and previous researchers.

Jenifer and team turned these stories into a documentary titled *Chained Men: Labour under the Coal* that can be seen through ugm.id/orangrantai.

This research is done to acknowledge the inheritance of the chained men that is increasingly forgotten as well as broadening the knowledge of the general public on this almost forgotten history in Sawahlunto.

“We hope through this film, the Indonesian people would learn about the chained men and understand that major history is often written based on the heavy perspiration of the lower class people. It is them that should be given more attention in the country’s historical narratives,” said Jenifer.

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