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THE LEGACY OF VIOLENCE IN INDONESIA

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UNRESOLVED PROBLEMS IN THE INDONESIAN KILLINGS OF 1965–1966

Robert Cribb

More than a generation separates today's Indonesians from the world in which the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) was exterminated. Nonetheless, during the last days of President Suharto's slow fall from power, one of the dire warnings commonly heard was that Indonesia perhaps stood on the brink of a bloodletting similar to that which took place during the six months from October 1965 to March 1966. In fact, the broader political context of 1998 only slightly resembled that of 1965 and no genocidal slaughter took place. However, that the events of 1965–66 could be conjured up as a terrible warning demonstrated that the issues surrounding the means Suharto used to come to power were still alive even three decades later, ready to be conjoined with more current concerns as he was being forced out.

The possibilities for reexamining the bloodletting have increased in recent years and with them so too has the need to do so become ever more urgent. During the past decade, a small but valuable stream of publications has appeared discussing the killings, especially in their regional context. Studies undertaken by Hefner, Robinson, Sudjatmiko, and Sulisty¹ have greatly enriched present-day understanding of what took place throughout Indonesia in

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1. Robert W. Hefner, *The Political Economy of Mountain Java: An Interpretative History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Geoffrey Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995); Iwan Gardono Sudjatmiko, "The Destruction of the Indonesian Communist Party: A Comparative Analysis of East Java and Bali" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1992); and Hermawan Sulisty, "The Forgotten Years: The Missing History of Indonesia's Mass Slaughter (Jombang-Kediri 1965–1966)" (Ph.D. diss., Arizona State University, 1997).

those months of 1965–66; the soon-to-be completed research of Goodfellow² will add substantially to this material. The killings have also become a topic of public discussion in Indonesia in a way that was not possible under Suharto. Though muted, this discussion gives some insight into what previously was no more than speculation about the way in which contemporary Indonesians conceived of the killings. Moreover, levels of violence in Indonesian society in general have risen dramatically—approaching that of civil war in Maluku. Such violence provides indirect evidence of the factors that may have contributed to the killings in 1965–66. In particular, it draws one’s attention to the complex relationship between state institutions such as the army and informal, militia-style armed organizations.

It is timely, therefore, to take stock of the most important gaps in present-day knowledge of the killings and consider how those gaps might be filled. This article is an attempt to assess both what has been learned during the past decade and what remains to be discovered in the three broad areas of agency, numbers, and contemporary significance of the bloodshed of 1965–66 that inaugurated Suharto’s New Order.

Agency

Broadly speaking, four paradigmatic explanations for the events of 1965–66 can be identified. They are by no means exclusive; many authorities employ them in combination. The explanations point the finger in turn to the complicity of the military in instigating the events, extreme political tensions at the national level, local political and social tensions, and a more inchoate culture of violence permeating Indonesian society.

Military Agency

There is a powerful argument that the killings came about as a deliberate and massive act of political assassination carried out by Suharto and his allies in the army against their rival for power, the PKI. In this view, while Suharto may or may not have secretly instigated the coup of September 30, 1965, he certainly took rapid advantage of events to launch a pogrom against the communists. He justified his response first by deliberately fostering the myth that the generals murdered in the course of the coup had been obscenely tortured.³ He then took steps to consolidate the already widespread public presumption that the PKI had masterminded the coup (and was probably planning further

2. Robert Goodfellow, “Forgetting What It Is to Remember the Indonesian Killings of 1965–66,” in *Historical Injustice and Democratic Transition in Eastern Asia and Northern Europe: Ghosts at the Table of Democracy*, eds. Kenneth Christie and Robert Cribb (Richmond, England: Curzon Press, forthcoming [2002]), pp. 38–56.

3. This myth has been comprehensively refuted in Benedict Anderson, “How Did the Generals Die?” *Indonesia*, vol. 43 (April 1987), pp. 109–34.

actions) and encouraged rumours that the communists had been planning to torture and murder their enemies.⁴ By applying such measures, Suharto was able to cultivate a “kill or be killed” atmosphere that incited people on to the communists.

Suharto followed up on his manipulation of public opinion with concrete measures. The Resimen Para Komando Angkatan Darat (RPKAD, Army Paracommando Regiment), a formidable unit led by Sarwo Edhie, was dispatched first to Central Java and then Bali to murder the communists district by district, using carefully compiled lists of victims. Together with a small number of other reliable units, the RPKAD not only killed communists themselves but armed, trained, and supervised militia units—especially from the Nahdatul Ulama youth affiliate Ansor—to conduct the killings. Evidence for the military’s involvement in and control of events can be seen not only in the movement of troops at the time but also in the general disappearance of the armed Ansor units after the killing work was done. Had those units not been firmly under military supervision, one might have expected them to present a serious ongoing security problem. However, in the following years there were few killings in West Java, where the army had only recently suppressed the radical Darul Islam movement.⁵

The main objection to this explanation is that it does not seem to account for the scale of the killings. The number of people killed was vastly greater, actually and proportionately, than, say, in the so-called dirty wars in Argentina and Chile shortly afterward, both being cases where a military government was suppressing a powerful and previously legal communist party. The Indonesian army could have achieved its primary political goal of destroying the PKI as a political force with a much smaller death toll. If the killings were solely a matter of military agency, one has to believe that Suharto wanted mass violence for the sake of its terrifying effect and to bloody the hands of as many people as possible in order to ensure that they would never be able to swing back to the PKI if political circumstances changed.

For the record, I find the argument that Suharto may have arranged the coup implausible though, like most conspiracy arguments, not impossible.

4. See Robert Cribb, “Problems in the Historiography of the Killings in Indonesia,” in *The Indonesian Killings of 1965–1966: Studies from Java and Bali*, ed. Robert Cribb, Monash Papers on Southeast Asia, no. 21 (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, 1990), pp. 35–37.

5. The argument that the U.S. was complicit in the killings is, I believe, part of this paradigm. There is considerable evidence that the U.S. encouraged the killings, by both providing funds to anti-communist forces and supplying the Indonesian army with the names of people whom it believed were PKI members. There is no evidence, however, that U.S. intervention significantly increased the scale of the killings. See Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise*, pp. 282–86; and *Indonesia; Malaysia-Singapore; Philippines*, vol. 26, Foreign Relations of the U.S. series, 1964–68 (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 2001), pp. 379–80, 387.

The argument for Suharto's complicity rests on three observations: first, he was not included on the list of generals to be kidnapped; second, he was known to have a relationship with two of the key coup organizers, Untung and Latief, and met the latter at a hospital on the night of the coup; and third, the incompetence of the coup organization was such that one suspects it was intended to fail. With respect to the first factor, I find that Suharto's absence from the list of generals to be kidnapped is unremarkable. Despite his relative seniority, he was not a member of the clique of anti-communist generals who were presumed to have formed a Council of Generals. The coup was a risky operation as is and would have been riskier still if the plotters had begun to target relatively professional and non-political generals such as Suharto. Suharto's personal relationship with Latief and Untung adds to the reasons why they should have put him into the category of figures who though perhaps not part of the plot might be relied upon not to block it. Suharto's relationship with them would account for both their feeling of having been betrayed by him and his dissembling about his connections with them. Finally, the apparent incompetence of the plotters is ambiguous at best and does not itself point to Suharto as a mastermind behind the events.⁶

Extreme Political Tension

The vast scale of the killing and the widespread reports of mass engagement in the murders suggest that, whatever the army's role might have been, broader factors within Indonesian society may have played a significant role in magnifying the death toll. This view argues that the political polarization in Indonesia in 1965 was extreme.⁷ The very nature of the Indonesian nation was at stake, along with the questions of whether Indonesian modernity would be expressed in communist, Islamic, or developmentalist terms, and which set of elites would be in control. The tremendous significance of the issues being faced generated correspondingly enormous passions. Moreover, the conflict took place in a time of unusual political opacity, hypocrisy, and doublespeak. Sukarno's Guided Democracy was a kingdom of words, in which everyone from PKI leader D. N. Aidit to Defense Minister A. H. Nasution had to speak in the language of ideologically correct discourse, conceal his or her true feelings and intentions under a veil of NASAKOM⁸ and na-

6. For a recent statement of the case against Suharto, see Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, "Petrus Dadi Ratu" (Petrus becomes king), *Indonesia*, vol. 70 (October 2000), pp. 1–7.

7. The argument is expressed most eloquently in Ruth McVey's unpublished paper, "The Great Fear in Indonesia" (London: University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, n.d. [ca. 1980]).

8. NASAKOM—from NASionalisme, Agama (religion), and KOMunisme—was Guided Democracy's dominant ideological formulation. It postulated that there were no fundamental conflicts between these three ideologies and that all three reflected different aspects of the Indonesian national personality.

tional unity, and talk about glorious achievements that could only be seen by those who closed their eyes. It was simultaneously a world of polarization and uncertain allegiances, uncertainty about who planned to do what, who was working with and for whom, and who's manipulations were actually having an effect. The only certainty in fact was that most people were lying. Under such circumstances, rumours thrived, suspicion flourished, and fears swelled.

All this took place in a time of catastrophic economic decline that had left Indonesia as one of the poorest countries in the world, its name conjuring up much the same connotations of chaos and misery that the names of the Congo and Sierra Leone conjure up today. Economic decay, bad enough in objective terms, was made worse by the Sukarno government's refusal to concede that things might be amiss with its policies. These circumstances created an apocalyptic atmosphere in which people became increasingly willing to believe that their plight was not simply a consequence of policy incompetence and political conflict but a deliberate outcome of evil and malice. Sukarno's attempts to focus such beliefs on outside forces, the neo-colonialists and imperialists (NEKOLIM), were successful only up to a point; by 1965, people were willing to find the culprit in their own society, a scapegoat upon whom the blame for all misfortune could be heaped. The circumstances of the 1965 coup made it almost inevitable that the culprit would be the PKI. In this view, the massive scale of killing that took place in Indonesia in 1965–66 was not primarily a consequence of human intervention but the expression of a human society placed under such intolerable pressure that it erupted in a kind of temporary mass psychopathy.

Local Political and Social Tensions

A third line of argument shares the starting point that military agency is not sufficient to explain the magnitude of the killings. However, those who adopt this view believe that arguments positing a pervasive atmosphere of fear across the archipelago do not account for the enormous variation in local patterns of the killing, even given the uneven distribution of PKI support. Rather, this view argues that the killings were primarily a consequence of complex and often deep-seated local antagonisms that became intensified in the charged atmosphere of Guided Democracy. Some writers have expressed this perspective through the crude and unsatisfactory proposition that Indonesians used the opportunity of the political chaos following the coup to settle personal and local grudges.⁹ Such a stance, however, ignores the absence of

9. See, e.g., Damien Kingsbury, *The Politics of Indonesia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998); and a short story by Manaf Maulana, "The Communist," *Jakarta Post* (Internet edition), May 14, 2000, available at <<http://basisdata.esosoft.net/2000/05/14/0008.html>>. It is striking that this interpretation is so powerfully expressed in general and literary works and yet

even anecdotal evidence of such revenge seeking and misses the point that a high proportion of the personal and local grudges that bedeviled Indonesian societies had a political dimension by 1965.

Most of the important work that has been undertaken on the killings in recent years (that by Hefner, Robinson, Sudjatmiko, and Sulisty) has in fact consisted of regional studies that bring out the diversity of factors leading to the killing in each region. Disputes over land, rivalries between local elites, religious hostilities, and so on festered and grew under Guided Democracy, but their direct roots could often be traced back to the years of the revolution (1945–49) and indirect roots from still earlier times. Vickers writes of grudges (*puik*) in Bali that extend across generations, while Geertz describes the killings as “a postscript to a story long in the writing . . . more . . . a completion, a rounding off, than . . . a breaking into something new.”¹⁰ Hefner writes in similar terms of the killings in upland East Java: “[H]ighlanders regarded the conflict that culminated in the blood-letting of 1965–66 as but the latest phase in a struggle pitting them against the stronger, more hierarchical Islamic lowlands.”¹¹ Robinson is careful to point out that identifying the roots of a conflict should not lead one to ignore its more immediate causes;¹² the point is rather that the PKI was diligent in its social research and rather effective in identifying local contradictions that party activists could use to build the PKI’s constituency. Sudjatmiko emphasizes the role of the PKI’s revolutionary strategy in feeding on and building up these tensions; his conclusion is that the PKI brought its fate upon itself.¹³ National political polarization meant that these antagonisms were expressed in terms of rivalry between the PKI and its various enemies. It was by no means foreordained that these antagonisms would be given the opportunity to erupt into bloody conflict, but the circumstances of the September 30 coup ensured that extreme conflict would indeed break out and that its main victims would be the communists.

rarely appears in individual testimonies. For an exception—a man victimized for trying to stop a local tough from beating his wife—see Degung Santikarma, “Exploring the Meaning of Reconciliation,” *Jakarta Post* (Internet edition), June 21, 2000, available at <<http://basis-data.esosoft.net/2000/06/21/0062.html>>.

10. Adrian Vickers, “Reopening Old Wounds: Bali and the Indonesian Killings—A Review Article,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 57:3 (Fall 1998), pp. 775–76; and Clifford Geertz, *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 7.

11. Hefner, *Political Economy of Mountain Java*, p. 194.

12. Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise*, p. 197.

13. Sudjatmiko, “The Destruction of the Indonesian Communist Party,” pp. 232–38.

Cultures of Violence

The earliest attempts to explain the killings in cultural terms were thoroughly unsatisfactory. They commonly made reference to running amok or *wayang* (shadow puppet) imagery and involved the now well-known weaknesses of simple cultural determinism. Robinson is especially scathing about the inadequacies of cultural explanations of the violence in Bali.¹⁴ During the past decade, however, the reemergence of militias as a prominent factor in Indonesian politics and the small but growing number of historical studies of men of violence in the past¹⁵ have drawn attention to the relationship between *jago* (*garong*, *gali*, or *preman*, all of which broadly speaking may be translated as “toughs” or “tough guys”) and society. Now that culture’s malleability is recognized and it does not have to be regarded as eternal and unchanging, one can more easily accept the idea of subcultures of violence, domination, conciliation, and so on emerging—or disappearing—rather rapidly within particular social formations and powerfully influencing the course of events over a brief period of time.

This paradigm is the least explored of the four, partly because research on *jago* has generally taken a rather instrumentalist approach. This is to say, research results have emphasized the role of the state in tolerating and even creating the *jago* because they fulfill a political role. Most commonly, this role involves extralegal intimidation, murder, and theft. However, there has been relatively little investigation of the modus operandi of *jago*, perhaps on the assumption that the exercise of violence is relatively uncomplicated. My own casual observation suggests that they depend especially on a cultivated fearsomeness that is enhanced by their clothing and demeanor, deeds of violence, and a reputation for commanding magic powers. In the Indonesian context, they are not primarily killers. Rather, the response they seek from their victims is paralyzing fear, an inertness and passivity that allows the *jago* to have their way. At first glance, this culture of violence does not seem to be particularly amenable to conversion into mass killing. It may be that the violence of the *jago* is normally held in check by the risk of provoking either official retaliation or public revenge in the form of lynching¹⁶ but that the

14. Ibid., pp. 275–80.

15. Bill O’Malley, “Criminals and the State in Java” (Canberra, Australian National University, 1983); Henk Schulte Nordholt, “De jago in de schaduw: Misdaad en “orde” in de koloniale staat op Java” [The jago in the shadow: Crime and “order” in the colonial state on Java], *De Gids* 146:8/9 (August–September 1983), pp. 664–75; Robert Cribb, *Gangsters and Revolutionaries: The Jakarta People’s Militia and the Indonesian Revolution 1945–1949* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991); and Loren Rytter, “Pemuda Pancasila: The Last Loyalist Free Men of Suharto’s Order?” *Indonesia*, no. 66 (October 1998), pp. 45–74.

16. Freek Colombijn, “Maling, Maling! Lynching in Indonesia,” in *Roots of Violence in Indonesia*, eds. Freek Colombijn and J. Thomas Lindblad (Leiden: KITLV Press, forthcoming [2002]).

impunity given to killers by the circumstances of 1965 led to a kind of uncontrollable orgy of violence by *jago*.

Numbers

There is a fifth paradigm that seeks to explain the events of 1965–66. It is worth mentioning largely for its pernicious tenacity, but it also raises the important question of numbers. This paradigm, which recurs regularly in the press, claims that the main victims of the killings were Chinese Indonesians.¹⁷ However, it largely ignores the empirical evidence,¹⁸ which suggests that the vast majority of the victims were selected for their involvement with the PKI regardless of ethnicity.

That said, unfortunately there is little else that can be stated for certain about the number of people who died in 1965–66. The range of estimates cited in *The Indonesian Killings*, stretching from 100,000 to two million,¹⁹ is one indication of opacity, and there is a host of reasons why the figures from different sources might be inflated or understated. The shortcomings in present knowledge about numbers become still clearer if one considers the standard range of techniques that are available to count casualties. In a few cases—some of the Nazi death camps and state executions in the U.S., for instance—one can rely on the figures produced by the perpetrators themselves. However, the closest material there is to an Indonesian official record of the killings is a report prepared in 1966 by KOPKAMTIB, the new Command for the Restoration of Security and Order. This report, which has never been made public and which I have not seen, reportedly puts the number of deaths at one million. Given the chaotic conditions of the time, it is hard to imagine that this figure represents the counting of one million individual deaths. Especially because of the roundness of the figure, it is likely to be no

17. See, for instance, “Wages of Hatred: Indonesia’s Hostility to a Minority Costs the Country Dearly,” *Businessweek Online*, October 9, 2000, available at <<http://basisdata.esosoft.net/2000/10/05/0012.html>>, which refers to the army slaughtering “hundreds of thousands of Chinese-Indonesians.”

18. For a more detailed refutation of this paradigm, see Robert Cribb, “Indonesia’s Chinese: The Genocide That Never Was,” *NIASnytt* (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies News), no. 1 (April 1999), pp. 20–22; and Charles A. Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 58–61.

19. Cribb, “Problems in the Historiography,” p. 12. An official Fact-Finding Mission in late 1965 put the figure at 78,000, but the killings were still underway when this figure was issued so it has been omitted from this range. A review of Hermawan Sulisty, *Palu Arit di Ladang Tebu: Sejarah Pembantaian Massal yang Terlupakan* (Hammer and sickle in the sugar fields: The history of a massive slaughter that has been forgotten) (Jakarta: Gramedia, 2000) in *Kompas* online edition August 7, 2000, available at <<http://basisdata.esosoft.net/2000/08/06/0070.html>>, mentions a maximum figure of three million. For a more extensive and updated list of estimates, see Sulisty, “Forgotten Years,” pp. 52–54.

more than a plausible estimate (or perhaps a composite of plausible estimates) by KOPKAMTIB officers.

Nor has there been any systematic collection of personal testimonies from survivors, perpetrators, and witnesses of the kind that partially illuminates, for example the Nanjing Massacre of 1937–38, let alone the Holocaust. The individual testimonies available are in fact so few in number that they cannot reliably be used for any statistical purpose. Even less is there evidence from the disinterment of bodies. The recent discovery of a mass grave of communists near Wonosobo in Central Java aroused considerable attention, precisely because it was a unique event, but the excavation team identified the remains of “only” 24 people. Nor are census records useful. National censuses were held in Indonesia in 1961 and 1971 and it is possible to compare population figures district (*kabupaten*) by district for these two years, but the result gives no clear indication of excess population loss in communist-dominated districts.²⁰ All that is available are the educated guesses of a number of variously informed people whose judgements are based on what they think is plausible, considering the anecdotes with which they are familiar and their overall knowledge of Indonesian society and politics. The KOPKAMTIB estimate mentioned earlier, is one such example. So is the estimate of 500,000 to 600,000 made by Oei Tjoe Tat, a former member of the Fact-Finding Commission that originally put the death toll at 78,000.²¹ So is Benedict Anderson’s recent estimate of “at least 600,000” deaths.²² The 1965–66 killings are sometimes paired with the later massacres in East Timor, but there, too, the widely accepted figure of 200,000 “premature” deaths (that is, murders along with deaths from hardship and disease in detention camps) is based on careless, or perhaps selective, use of census figures. Closer examination of all available census figures suggests rather an East Timorese death toll of perhaps 100,000.²³

Stalin, who knew about these things, is reported once to have said, “One death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic.” Because it involves disre-

20. Detailed figures for East Java can be found in Robert Cribb, “How Many Deaths? Problems in the Statistics of Massacre in Indonesia (1965–1966) and East Timor (1975–1980),” in *Violence in Indonesia*, eds. Ingrid Wessel and Georgia Wimhöfer (Hamburg: Abera, 2001), pp. 82–98.

21. Oei Tjoe Tat, *Memoar Oei Tjoe Tat, pembantu Presiden Soekarno* (Memoirs of Oei Tjoe Tat, assistant to President Sukarno) (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 1975), p. 192.

22. Anderson, “Petrus dadi ratu,” p. 4.

23. See Cribb, “How Many Deaths?” Also evidently flawed is the other mass murder figure firmly entrenched in general perceptions of Indonesian history. The Dutch paramilitary terrorist R. P. P. Westerling, commanding the Korps Speciale Troepen (Special troops corps) is commonly assumed to have killed 40,000 people in southern Sulawesi between January 1946 and March 1947. Closer examination of the records, however, suggests that the death toll was approximately 4,470. See Willem Ijzereef, *De Zuid-Celebes Affaire* (The Zuid-Celebes affair) (Dieren: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1984), p. 141.

garding tragedy, there is something particularly distasteful, therefore, about squabbling over the death count in catastrophes such as those in Indonesia or East Timor. Moreover, it tends to be the case that higher estimates come paired with a sharper hostility to Suharto and the New Order, while lower ones come with more enthusiastic views of the New Order's achievements. Perhaps fortunately, in the Indonesian case the analytical significance of the difference in estimates is small. It is probably true that the argument attributing the killings mainly to military agency becomes steadily less plausible as the estimated death toll rises. The idea that Suharto intended to kill half a million people is inherently more difficult to believe than that he intended to kill 50,000; indeed there is an unconfirmed report that Suharto flew to Central Java in late 1965 and attempted unsuccessfully to halt the killings. Nonetheless, the four paradigms that I outline above can cope individually and in combination with a death toll as low as 200,000 or as high as one million and it is unlikely now that one will ever be able to be more precise.

Contemporary Significance

Under the New Order, little was heard of the killings. The regime never attempted to deny that the killings had taken place and indeed used the memory of them to reinforce its power, as an example of both what it would do to its enemies and what Indonesians would do to each other if they were not restrained by firm government. Nonetheless, official and semiofficial accounts such as the National History of Indonesia and the so-called "White Book" on the 1965 coup famously ignored the killings,²⁴ and there was a widespread perception that they could not be discussed publicly. Except for a handful of novelists and short story writers, Indonesians generally refused to talk or write publicly about that terrible time. Foreign researchers also generally found it difficult to persuade Indonesians to talk about 1965–66. Goodfellow describes an old woman whom he interviewed whose description of the time was "*lumayan, selalu lumayan*" (fine, always fine); he later discovered that her husband had been a *becak* (pedicab) driver, killed because of his party membership.²⁵ Even those who did hear stories felt that they did not know enough to discuss the killings in a serious academic way.

Because scholars assumed that censorship (and cautious self-censorship) was the main reason for Indonesian reticence on the killings, a rather widespread expectation grew that with the fall of Suharto Indonesians would grasp the opportunity to recover the truth about 1965–66. Especially because of the

24. *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia; Gerakan 30 September, Pemberontakan Partai Komunis Indonesia: Latar belakang, aksi, dan Penumpasannya* (The 30 September movement, revolt by the Communist Party of Indonesia: Backgrounds, actions, and suppression) (Jakarta: Sekretariat Negara Republik Indonesia, 1994).

25. Goodfellow, "Forgetting What It Is to Remember."

slow tightening of legal processes around Chile's General Pinochet, talk even arose that those responsible might be brought to some kind of reckoning. Mary Zurbuchen, whose position in the Ford Foundation put her in close touch with Indonesian elite thinking, remarked, "In the public mind the New Order's controlling instruments . . . should account for [their] record."²⁶

The most prominent body seeking to reopen the issue of the massacres has been the Institute for Research into the Victims of the 1965–66 Killings (YPKP, Yayasan Penelitian Korban Pembunuhan 1965–66), founded on April 7, 1999, by Ibu Sulami, a former leader of the left-wing women's organization, Gerwani. The organization's principal aim has been to race against time by collecting as much data as possible on the killings. Members of the YPKP have gathered oral histories and begun to open known mass graves of victims from 1965–66. Ibu Sulami's efforts, however, have remained relatively marginal in Indonesian politics, certainly in comparison with the activities of Judge Gusman in Chile or the issue of bringing the Khmer Rouge to judgement in Cambodia. The extensive talk of establishing a Truth Commission that was heard in mid-2000, moreover, has now largely disappeared.²⁷ Many observers have commented on the fact that the Indonesian public (at least the middle classes in Jakarta) are much more interested in recovering the money that Suharto stole during his years in office.²⁸

It is likely that there are several reasons for the marginality of the issue of the killings in contemporary Indonesia. First, Indonesia faces enormous practical political problems. The country may be in a far better state than it was in 1965, but issues such as achieving economic recovery, implementing decentralization, creating the rule of law, and resolving separatist and religious conflicts all loom much larger in the contemporary political consciousness than does reckoning for crimes committed over 35 years ago. Just as it has always been easy for elites in developing countries to dismiss environmental protection as an expensive and distracting luxury, so too do many Indonesians appear to regard the truth about the killings as a matter of low priority. Soedjati Djiwandono put it as follows:

26. Mary S. Zurbuchen, "Looking Back to Move Forward," *Inside Indonesia*, no. 61 (January–March 2000), p. 23.

27. See Zurbuchen, "Looking Back"; "Truth Commission Considered Crucial," *Jakarta Post* (Internet edition), February 21, 2000, available at <<http://basisdata.esosoft.net/2000/01/1144.html>>; "Our Conscience" (editorial), *ibid.* (Internet edition), March 17, 2000, available at <<http://basisdata.esosoft.net/2000/03/16/0101.html>>; "Failure to Deal with Past Crimes Can Bring about Revenge," *ibid.* (Internet edition), March 28, 2000, archived at <<http://basisdata.esosoft.net/2000/03/27/0041.html>>; "PKI: Opening a New Chapter without Closing Book" (editorial), *ibid.* (Internet edition), March 30, 2000, archived at <<http://basisdata.esosoft.net/2000/03/29/0043.html>>; and "Truth Commission Urged to Unveil 1965 Bloodshed," *ibid.* (Internet edition), April 12, 2000, archived at <<http://basisdata.esosoft.net/2000/04/11/0063.html>>.

28. For example, Anderson, "Petrus dadi ratu."

There are . . . two main categories of the problems faced by the nation at present. One belongs to the past, the other to the future. . . . They are of equal importance. . . . Both will be very costly in terms of time, financial and human resources. Unfortunately it is doubtful if the nation can deal with both successfully. . . . To try to tackle the first, we are likely to forfeit the second. . . . The most sensible alternative . . . would be to take up the second. That is not to say that we should forget the suffering of many people and the loss of thousands of lives in the past. We grieve over them. But there is no point in avenging them. We will never get them back. . . . Of great importance, however, is that as a nation we should never be forever obsessed by hatred and vengeance. . . . We need to bear in mind that by focussing our attention on the past, crying over the suffering and the loss of the past, we would at the same time forget and sacrifice our future generations. Would we continue to demand vengeance for all wrongdoings in the past . . . at the cost of our future generations? We have talked about the lost generation during the crisis, babies and toddlers who lack proper nutrition. Would we add thousands or even millions more to their number? That would be terribly wrong and immoral. We should not look and step back into the past, but forward into the future. We should whitewash and forgive the past, and turn over a new leaf in our life as a nation, not only for ourselves but for our future generations and for humanity.²⁹

Second, it is clear from experiences elsewhere in the world that investigating past political crimes can be done for two broad but contradictory reasons. Firstly, in the spirit of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the recent Finnish official investigations of the 1918 civil war, it can be done as a way of drawing a line between present and past so that past conflicts can be regarded as a shared national tragedy, rather than as the victory of one side over another. This vision underlies the calls for a Truth Commission in Indonesia. Pursuing it implies, however, exonerating the PKI, thus abandoning the political demonization of the party that began before 1965 and was reinforced during the next three decades by a systematic conjuring up of communism as a source of national peril. Even though anti-communism now seems almost ludicrously outmoded in other parts of the world, its appeal in Indonesia is still strong, and many associated with the new government have sought to reinforce the view that the PKI deserved its fate.³⁰ In early 2000, President Wahid suggested a lifting of the ban on communism and Marxist-Leninist teachings (Ketetapan [Decision] no. 25, Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat Sementara [People's Deliberative Assembly])

29. J. Soedjati Djiwandono, "Turn Over a New Leaf for Future Life of Nation," *Jakarta Post* (Internet edition), December 21, 2000, archived at <<http://basisdata.esosoft.net/2000/12/20/0046.html>>.

30. For a military warning against the encouragement that the PKI might receive from a re-opening of the history of 1965–66, see A. Supardi Adiwidjaya <a.supardi@chello.nl>, "Catatan sepotong sejarah kelam bangsa," in INDONESIA-L, <apakabar@saltmine.radix.net>, September 28, 2000, archived at <<http://www.indopubs.com/>>. Iwan Gardono Sudjatmiko's dissertation is the most important academic attempt to make this point.

that the acting parliament had instituted in 1966 at Suharto's behest, and still more remarkably proposed a judicial investigation of the mass killings.³¹ This proposal, however, met with determined resistance, especially from Islamic and military groups and soon dropped from the political agenda.

Moreover, as the examples of Pinochet, the Khmer Rouge, and indeed the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and Former Yugoslavia demonstrate, investigating past crimes can also be done with the explicit aim of apportioning blame—and often punishment—to those who deserve it. Forgiveness is by no means the dominant global sentiment when it comes to crimes against humanity. Under these circumstances, many figures in and close to President Abdurrahman Wahid's government had reason to fear a reopening of the events of 1965–66. Many were complicit in the killings as members of Ansor and did not want any investigation of events to damage their political positions. As suggested above, part of the New Order discourse on the killings was to regard them as a national tragedy, but this tragedy was always one that had been created by the PKI. Even though such central New Order icons as the Pancasila have evaporated remarkably quickly, the fundamental anti-communism of the Indonesian political establishment makes it highly unlikely that there will be any official enthusiasm for properly investigating the killings.

Moreover, even among those who do not necessarily hate communism or fear the personal consequences of historical investigation, there are serious misgivings about the likely effects of reexamining 1965–66. On the one hand, "everyone" in Indonesia knows what happened in 1965–66. Of course, no one has the full picture, but within each community gossip and the simple passing on of traditions mean that people know what happened in their own community. On the other hand, three decades of silence does destroy collective memory. Tales that are not rehearsed as a part of family or community life live on in only an attenuated form in later generations and may disappear altogether. Given the abundance of social, ideological, cultural, economic, and religious conflicts that currently plague Indonesia, many people legitimately ask whether any good would be served by dragging into the open yet another cause of hatred. The historian Taufik Abdullah has warned against "opening the nation's wounds or encouraging revenge."³² There is at least a case for allowing the memories of 1965–66 to die unrecorded.

31. "Gus Dur Backs Probe into '60s Massacre of Leftists," *Jakarta Post* (Internet edition), March 14, 2000, archived at <<http://basisdata.esosoft.net/2000/03/14/0014.html>>; and "Gus Dur Approves Reopening Old Communist Files," *ibid.* (Internet edition), March 15, 2000, archived at <<http://basisdata.esosoft.net/2000/03/14/0123.html>>.

32. Statement at the seminar "Memandang Tragedi Nasional 1965 secara jernih" [Taking an honest look at the national tragedy of 1965], held under the auspices of the Masyarakat Sejarawan Indonesia (Indonesian Community of Historians), Serpong, September 1999.

Nor is it necessarily true that people would be eager to reopen the past, even in the absence of contemporary political considerations. The *Jakarta Post* reported on a student who visited a household in Bali where it was reported many people had been killed. When he began to discuss the killing, the atmosphere froze. "But we're trying to find out what happened so that we can have a reconciliation in Bali," he told the widows. The reply, however, was, "For me reconciliation would mean people stop making an issue of the past. My husband has already become a *dewa*. . . . He's already at God's side. Even though we never found his body, I had a small ceremony for him, to help his soul leave this suffering world. Please, just let him be."³³ And yet, another woman interjected to say that opening the past gave her the last chance of rehabilitating her memory.

For perhaps another 10 years, Indonesians and Indonesianists have a window of opportunity to investigate the mass killings of 1965–66. By 2010 most of the senior figures and many of the others involved in the events as perpetrators, survivors, or witnesses will be dead or senile. Archival material may emerge that may indeed decisively influence how one judges the roles of Suharto and the army high command in instigating and supporting the murders. Archival materials, however, are unlikely to add to the texture of how these events are understood. They will probably not tell scholars and others much about the complicated circumstances in each region and village that helped to turn political conflict into mass killing.

But the greatest unresolved question of the killings is not "Whodunit?" but "Can it happen again?" Should the Indonesian people be liberated from the spectre of the past, or should they be considered blessed precisely because it stands there as a constant, horrible warning? As has been suggested, the Suharto regime had more than one reason to encourage people to believe that mass killings could occur again in Indonesian society. The perception that toppling the New Order might unleash the same kind of whirlwind as accompanied its establishment seems to have slowed the political pace in the months leading up to May 1998. Now, too, we have to be alert to the various political agendas that may be served by the different interpretations of the killings. The violence that has returned to Indonesian politics has been of a different kind—smaller scale but more persistent. Is this the kind of violence that would have been seen in 1965–66 if it were not for military intervention and the unusually acute atmosphere of tension and uncertainty of late Guided Democracy?

33. Degung Santikarma, "Exploring the Meaning of Reconciliation," *Jakarta Post* (Internet edition), June 21, 2000, archived at <<http://basisdata.esosoft.net/2000/06/21/0062.html>>.