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Indonesia

Indonesia: Remembering mass-murder

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The 1960s were worldwide a period of turbulence and change. But whereas in many parts of the world, the decade is often remembered as a time of exuberance and hope, in Indonesia it's split in half by a wave of intense violence. About 45 years ago, one of the great crimes of the twentieth century took place: from early October 1965 to March 1966, after a coup attempt by pro-Communist Party officers backfired, Indonesia witnessed the bloodiest massacres in its history.

The predominant form of the killings was an anti-Communist pogrom, targeting not only the leaders of the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Kommunis Indonesia, PKI) and its allied organizations but also their rank and file. Thousands died in these targeted, systematic killings. The outcome of the killings was the establishment of Suharto's Orde Baru or New Order dictatorship. "1965" became the founding myth of Suharto's regime. The memory of it was simultaneously repressed and instrumentalized, formed and denied: "don't talk about the killings", "the killings were a period of mass hysteria", "society ran amok", "the killings were caused by fighting among the Communists", "don't support communism, remember how they killed those people in 1965" – and, in hushed voices; "don't support communism, remember how we crushed the PKI".

Before 1965: a society in crisis

Indonesia in the early sixties was a society in turmoil: politically, socially and economically. The Indonesian state was barely fifteen years old, officially created on 17 August 1945 and winning its independence after a four year guerrilla-war against Dutch colonial forces. Politics in the post-war period were a major issue in the lives of many Indonesians. In the first general elections of 1955, the turnout was staggering, almost reaching 100 percent.

Indonesia's political landscape was varied and lively, with parties and affiliated groups spread throughout society: from credit cooperations to prayer groups, from peasant unions to chess clubs. The conglomerations of a political center and allied organizations were known as *aliran* or streams. The aliran were daily facts of life – they were not campaigning organizations that were only active in election time but structured the lives of their sympathizers the whole year round. What aliran one belonged to was often "the primary identity for an individual" as Indonesia expert Max Lane writes in his *Unfinished Nation. Indonesia before and after Suharto*.

The PKI aliran was the biggest. Formed in 1920, the PKI was one of the oldest Communist parties outside the Soviet Union. After being repressed by Dutch colonial authorities following a badly executed revolt in 1927, it was reorganized when the Japanese occupation ended. After only barely escaping complete destruction by the new Indonesian government in 1948 (after the so-called "Madiun affair", a supposed revolt by pro-PKI militia) the PKI made great strides in winning support and influence with a strategy of peaceful, institutional power building. PKI secretary general D. N. Aidit formulated a theory that the Indonesian state had two aspects: one progressive or "pro-people", identified with the nationalist president Sukarno, one reactionary or "anti-people". For Communists, the task was to support and strengthen the progressive aspect of the state. The theory contradicted Lenin's insistence on destroying the bourgeois state and the Marxist theory of the class basis of states - but the phenomenal growth of the PKI seemed to support Aidit's pragmatism.

The party claimed to have increased, between July 1959 and October 1962, from 1.5 million to 2 million members while its allied mass-organizations supposedly grew from 7.8 to over 11 million, before reaching a peak of 20 million a few years later. In the elections for the Constituent Assembly, the party won 16.47 percent of the vote. In 1962 Sukarno, who had concentrated power in his own hands at the expense of the parliament and appointed his own

cabinet – a system he called “guided democracy” - gave PKI leaders Aidit and Lukman posts as cabinet-ministers.

The PKI was not only active on the level of electoral politics. During 1956-7, almost all Dutch-owned companies in Indonesia were occupied by workers. These occupations came at the peak of mass mobilizations, spearheaded by Sukarno and the PKI, against the continuing role of imperialist powers in the Indonesian economy. However, the party watched as control over companies that were officially “nationalized” was turned over to the army: officers were appointed to manage the newly ‘nationalized’ factories and ruthlessly suppressed any trade-union activity in the factories.

Indonesian society became increasingly polarized along left-right divisions. On the right, the only grouping with the weight and the organization to match the PKI was the army. Opponents of the PKI cultivated ties with army officers who opposed PKI's policies and its suggestions like organizing a people's militia. Meanwhile, the PKI's role was limited exactly by its policy of an alliance with president Sukarno. Bung Karno, as he was called, kept balancing between the right-wing and its supporters in the army and the PKI and its mass movements. Already in the late 1920's Sukarno had began using the slogan of NASAKOM – Nasionalisme, Agama (Religion) and Komunisme – to signal the combination of Communism and Islam in the cause of Indonesian nationalism. Sukarno's thinking subordinated the Islamic and Communist movements into a supposedly encompassing Nationalist movement.

Despite the continuing talk by Sukarno of “continuing the Indonesian revolution”, social-economic change was little. There was a gap between the fiery anti-imperialist rhetoric of Sukarno, that especially targeted Dutch, English and American “neo-colonialism”, and daily reality that helped feed a general feeling of crisis. Frustrated, the party engaged in a bitter Kulturkampf against supposedly ‘reactionary’ or ‘anti-people’ artists and writers – alienating a part of the intelligentsia that supported the anti-PKI forces. The ideology of NASAKOM and the popular figure of Sukarno himself help to shield the party from direct attacks by the right-wing.

But as soon as the party no longer subordinated its actions to policies of national unity, confrontations became inevitable. In 1964 and 1965, unable to ignore the demands of poor peasants, the PKI started to follow a more independent approach in the countryside. In 1960 a fairly progressive law on land-reform, the “Agrarian and Crop-Sharing Law”, which aimed to eliminate big landlords, distribute land to rural laborers and enforce a division of the harvest between tenants and landowners, was adopted. However, the law had been mostly ineffective since its introduction: implementation of the law had been sabotaged by the predominantly conservative state bureaucracy. Attempts by the PKI to enforce the law through mass actions, the so-called Aksi Sepihak (“unilateral actions”), led to intense polarization. And they failed as local landlords, often Islamic leaders and associated with right-wing parties and the orthodox Muslim (santri) aliran, mobilized supporters, which lead to fighting and occasional casualties. In a strongly santri region like east-Java, by early 1965 the PKI was already on the defensive.

The PKI saw in Sukarno the leader of an “anti-imperialist”, “national bourgeoisie” – but in confrontations with the army, the weakness of this ally became visible. Even more, confronted with the deep division over the land-occupations, Sukarno nervously called for “unity” using his slogan of NASAKOM: “avoid the division of the nation, stop the hysteria, stop fighting, write NASAKOM on the banner”. But it had been exactly the deepening of the class-contradictions in the countryside that made continuation of the NASAKOM policy impossible. The army controlled the major state-owned corporations and obstructed attempts by an increasingly left-wing Sukarno to regulate the economy. Like in the struggle over land-reform, the Indonesian Left found the army blocking the way to progressive change and Sukarno unable to change this.

From the end of 1957 on, Indonesia entered a deep economic crisis – a crisis that can not be blamed entirely on Sukarno's policies – the price of import export-products for the world-market collapsed - but one he was unable to resolve. Inflation soared: the value of the rupiah fell week by week. With money losing its value, landholders were even more determined to keep hold of their possessions. The supporters of Revolusi grew more and more frustrated

while for their enemies the danger of revolution grew larger and larger as Sukarno and his supporters kept calling for a "revolution". Sukarno's revolutionary rhetoric more and more contrasted with reality. The contradiction and the economic crisis undermined his authority, worrying the PKI that had seen the limits of its power.

The September 30th Movement

In the early hours of the first of October of 1965, at about 3.15 AM, soldiers boarded trucks and went to the houses of general A.H. Nasution, minister of Defence, Lieutenant General Achmad Yani, commander of the army, and five staff generals of Yani: S. Parman, Mas Tirtodarmo Haryono, R. Suprapto, Soetomo Siswomihardjo and Donald Ishak Panjaitan in the capital of Jakarta. These generals were generally considered to have right-wing sympathies and to be hostile to Sukarno. The soldiers belonged to a group called the "September 30th Movement" which claimed to support Sukarno. The goal of the action was, they would claim later, to prevent the right-wing generals from a coup against Sukarno by "arresting" them. However, Ahmad Yani, M. T. Haryono and D.I. Panjaitan were killed in their homes, trying to avoid abduction. The most important target of the operation, Nasution, escaped capture: in the confusion his would-be kidnappers shot his five-year old daughter and a guard before returning with Nasution's adjutant.

The kidnappers made themselves known in radio-broadcasts. The first broadcast on the national radio station was made at about 7.15 A.M. The report was in the form of a news-report, talking in the third person. Maybe this was meant to give a more reassuring character to the broadcast – but it would be one of many sources of confusion. The only name announced in the report was that of Lieutenant Colonel Untung, a battalion commander of the presidential guard who claimed the movement wished to prevent a 'counterrevolutionary coup' by a group identified as the 'Council of generals' (Dewan Jenderal). Although the participants in the September 30th Movement went against their superior officers, they claimed to be acting out of loyalty to their supreme commander, president Sukarno.

After receiving confirmation of the kidnappings, three leaders of the movement, brigadier general M. A. Supardjo, captain Sukirno and Major Bambang Supeno, tried to contact the president in his palace. But Sukarno was not at home. What would they have done if Sukarno had met them? Place him under arrest, as in a coup? Or were their professions of loyalty sincere? In that case, historian John Roosa suggests, they might have confronted him with the fact of the 'arrest' of the right-wing officers and asked for his support. Later broadcasts, in which the movement announces the dissolving of Sukarno's government, would then be an improvised reaction to their failure to win the support of the leader they claimed to defend. No matter what Sukarno's feelings on the movement were, it would have been extremely difficult for him politically to voice his support for the bloody kidnaps and the murder of at least three of the highest ranking officers in the country. But after the killings, there was no way back for the movement, even when the symbol of the Revolusi turned his back on them.

The operation of the September 30th Movement has been described as an 'unilateral retooling' attempt. During the intense power struggle of the early sixties, 'retooling' was the term for replacing leaders and politicians hostile to the PKI and its allies with more friendly ones. After the PKI's decision to shift from a strategy of the overthrow of the government to attempting to win power in the institutions of the state, 'retooling' became an important tactic to extends its influence. The theory that the September 30th Movement was a botched attempt at 'retooling' would explain many of the puzzles thrown up by the events: Why did the movement move ahead with so little military support? Why took it so long for them to officially announce the formation of a new government? Why the professions of loyalty to a president whose cabinet they later declared 'dissolved'?

It also explains why the PKI somewhat supported the movement at first but didn't attempt to mobilize the massive number of its sympathizers for a serious coup attempt. The party voiced sympathy for the movement through an editorial in its newspaper *Harian Rakyat*. Untung and his compatriots received some help from PKI-affiliated transport

and communications unions and a small number of unarmed members of the party's youthorganisation, Pemuda Rakyat – but mass mobilizations in support of a coup never materialized. After the September 30th Movement announced they would 'dissolve' the government and new organs of 'revolutionary power' would be installed, right-wing forces under the command of major-general Suharto, then head of military intelligence and of KOSTRAD, a rapid response reserve force, quickly squashed the movement. Small in number, badly organized and without mass support, the rebel soldiers were no match for Suharto's troops.

After setting events in motion, the movement, its actions and whatever motives it had or claimed, melted away, overshadowed by the army's violence and the motivations it imputed to the movement. Sukarno tried to play down the significance of the movement as nothing more than a 'ripple in the ocean of the Indonesian revolution' - but the military was determined to make the events of early October the most significant historical events since independence.

The killing fields

No sooner had troops loyal to Suharto restored their control of Jakarta than a massive propaganda campaign was launched. Army-run newspapers came up with the far-fetched acronym Gestapu for Gerakan Tiga Puluh September/September 30th Movement in order to associate it with the secret police of the Nazis. At the same time, the movement was presented as a cats-paw of the Communists, trying to seize power in a Chinese backed coup. The propaganda campaign was not limited to denunciations of the party's leadership but cast all of its supporters as involved in an nefarious plot. The goal of the PKI, according to the army scenario, was to seize all power and install an atheist, sinful dictatorship. Stories circulated that Communists had drawn up extensive death-lists, prepared pits to dump bodies in and were planning on torturing their victims.

By painting them as threats to two pillars of authority, patriarchy and religion, the army mobilized support. The supposed role of members of Gerwani, the women's organization allied with the PKI, was especially grotesque. Gerwani members were alleged to have danced naked in front of the captured officers before they were castrated and dumped into a pit. Afterward, the Gerwani members were said to have engaged in an orgy with PKI members. This kind of fantasy, a clear example of projection, functioned to mobilize men in the witch-hunt for supposed Communists. Parallel, the atheist character of Communist ideology was emphasized, implying that the Communists were a threat to religion – ignoring that many Communists were practicing believers and the party had even drawn on certain interpretations of Islamic teachings to attract people to its cause.

The army made it clear that the Communist threat had to be eradicated by violence. On the 8th of October the army newspaper Angkatan Bersendjata declared: 'the sword must be met by the sword'. General Nasution himself would play a prominent role in the campaign against the PKI. In an address to anti-PKI students he declared that the PKI had 'committed treason' and had to be 'destroyed'. PKI-supporters had to be 'immediately smashed'. The extermination of the PKI aliran proceeded in a number of escalating phases. The first was administrative measures, banning the PKI and allied organizations, suspending PKI representatives and purging Communists from government departments. The official news agency, Antara – suspected of being 'pro-communist' - was placed under military control and dozens of journalists were arrested. These administrative steps cleared the ground for the massive use of violence.

After Yani's death, command of the army had gone to general Suharto, a position he effectively kept even though Sukarno appointed Major General Pranoto the new Army Chief. For the duration of the crisis, Suharto had been given responsibility for 'restoring security and order' after a five hours-long meeting with Sukarno. Two weeks later, Suharto would take formal control of the army and from there ascend to the position of head of state.

From the beginning, the army covered its tracks, making it difficult for future generations to find out who was responsible for what or what the sequence of events were. Even while army newspapers and officers called for 'crushing' the PKI, instructions inside the army were conveyed only informally. Much of the killing was done by civilians, organized and encouraged by the military. This phase of the mass killing started a week after the coup, when on the 8th of October a crowd, consisting mainly of anti-PKI Islamic groups, set the Jakarta headquarters of the PKI on fire. Army special forces armed and trained anti-communist youth-groups. Working together, the army and youth-groups tracked down PKI members, using membership-lists obtained from destroyed PKI offices. At the end of October, Lieutenant-General Sarwo Edhie emphasized in a talk to the Joint Security Staff the importance of 'psywar' – psychological warfare - through pamphlets and 'spreading information'. In his memoirs, he writes that the army 'encouraged anti-communist civilians to help with the job' and describes training right-wing groups before 'sending them out to kill the communists'. The army used civilian groups and indirect orders, aware that Sukarno still supported the PKI and many people were still sympathetic to this alliance. The time between the failed coup-attempt and the first waves of killings was used by the military to take administrative measures to weaken the organizational structure of the Communist aliran, extend the military's influence over the media and spread anti-PKI propaganda. Only after this, the killing started. In Bali for example 'the arrival of army units with death lists' played a 'key role in prompting the killings'.

The highpoint of the killings was reached in December 1965, two months after the failed coup, and would continue on a diminished scale until March 1966. It is still unknown exactly how many died: conservative estimates put the minimum at 500.000; others give a total number of one or even two million.

The systematic, planned character of the mass-killing doesn't mean there were no other, more or less spontaneous, dynamics in play as well. A number of Chinese were victimized because they were seen as foreigners or, like in other South-East Asian countries, were associated with exploitative trade. Zealous Muslims and Christians attacked PKI supporters as 'enemies of God'. But these religious and ethnic conflicts were side-effects of a political purge. The mass-killing was an attack by the army on a political rival - other dynamics blossomed in a context in which supposed PKI-members were already put outside the law. The persistent idea that many people were killed in looting or the settling of private scores is not supported by much evidence: the overwhelming motivation of the killers was indeed to kill 'communists'.

Still, the scale of the killings poses a problem for the theory of a 'political purge'. In other countries in which a military dictatorship took power to crush a powerful left-wing movement, the number of people killed was far smaller. Thousands of people were killed during Pinochet's dictatorship and up to 30.000 by the Argentinean junta – but even taking the large size of Indonesia into account, this is a qualitative difference with 500.000 to one million. To explain the scale of the killings, the purge has to be put into context. The deeper the implantation of the left-wing movements, the fiercer the violence used to crush it. Indonesia would never see the kind of resistance that troubled so many Latin-American junta's and neither has the left been able to recover on a scale similar to Latin-America. Seen in this perspective, Suharto and his companions were just more efficient than the Latin-American dictatorships.

The higher the number of victims, the higher the number of perpetrators must have been. Considering the relatively short time in which the killings took place and the way in which many were killed, with primitive weapons and tools, the number of perpetrators must have been high – Benedict Anderson has estimated it must have been in the tens of thousands. What motivated all these people? It's unlikely they were all directly organized by the army, there must have been a significant element of motivation 'from below' involved.

The role of foreign powers

The destruction of the largest Communist party outside the 'Communist bloc' was greeted with enthusiasm in

Western political circles. Recalling the mass killings, Howard Fedderspiel, the United States' State Department's intelligence staffer for Indonesia, observed that 'No one cared as long as they were Communists, that they were being butchered.' Indeed, the US and other western governments had encouraged the creation of conditions that would lead to a violent clash. This kind of intervention was not new either. The fact that Sukarno himself almost crushed the PKI after the Madiun affair was an important reason why the US at first supported him against the Dutch. As Sukarno took an increasingly radical course, they turned against him.

American presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson at first implemented programs of economic, technical and military assistance to encourage a greater role for the army in Indonesia's economic and political life as a counterweight against the PKI. In mid 1964 the US went further, actively trying to provoke a clash between the army and PKI. American officials realized Sukarno would not drop the alliance with the PKI and that his popularity made direct action like a military coup very risky. But something like a failed pro-PKI coup would be the perfect excuse. The Americans weren't the only ones trying to provoke a crisis in Indonesia: even earlier, Britain had adopted policy to if possible provoke 'a prolonged struggle for power leading to civil war or anarchy'.

Despite this, the events of late 1965 took the Western intelligence services by surprise. There is no real proof for the theory that the whole September 30th Movement was a trap, set-up by the CIA and Suharto. But somebody like US Assistant Secretary of State, George Ball, immediately recognized that 'If the Army does move they have [the] strength to wipe up [the] earth with [the] PKI and if they don't they may not have another chance.' At this point, the greatest fear of Western governments was that the army would not move fast enough and if it did move, it would not annihilate the social base of the PKI and leave the possibility of a resurgence of the Left open. The US, Britain and Australia all quickly offered their services to the army in its propaganda-campaign against the PKI.

When it became clear the army had actually embarked on a campaign of massive killings, the American embassy started discussing giving material aid to Suharto and his companions. As gruesome reports poured in, they still feared not enough people would be killed. Outside Indonesia, the official Western response to the massacres was mostly silence. A limited but politically significant stream of aid, including the provision of small arms and cash to army officers, gave the generals the signal they could count on Western support. US officials turned over lists identifying thousands of PKI leaders and cadres to the Indonesian army, who used them to track down PKI members for arrest and execution. Since the Indonesian Communists had drawn closer and closer to the Chinese in the conflict between Moscow and Beijing, the Soviet Union made it known to the generals that 'if it comes down to a choice between the PKI or no PKI, the USSR would prefer the latter'. For the Western powers, the destruction of the PKI was necessary to secure the integration of the country in the global capitalist economy. And they were successful in it: during Suharto, Indonesia would faithfully follow western approved liberal economic policies.

Rewriting history

One of many problems in evaluating the mass killing of 1965 and formulating an alternative to the discourse of the New Order is that this discourse is itself contradictory. Of course, the regime could not admit it was a product of massive bloodletting. At the same time, it had an interest in reminding everyone who would consider forming any kind of opposition just what it was capable of. The official version of the events was straightforward: the September 30th Movement was a front of the PKI, planning on seizing all power for itself and installing a dictatorship. By acting swiftly, the military claimed, it had 'saved the nation'. This interpretation of history was repeated time and time again, in schoolbooks, monuments and films shown every year to commemorate the deaths of the generals. Official and semi-official accounts of 1965, such as the 'National History of Indonesia' and the so-called 'white book' on 1965 ignored the killings that followed the violence of the September 30th Movement. The greatest name in official history was Nugroho Notosusanto, who was director of Pusat Sejarah Abri (the Center of Army History) before becoming Minister of Education and Culture in the eighties. The school-texts based on the 'National History of Indonesia' he

edited were so anti-intellectual and so stark in their anti-communism that they fueled a distrust among Indonesian students towards any kind of history. For the regime, apathy and cynicism – instead of enthusiastic endorsement of its view of history - were probably enough anyway.

Official history put the army at the center of a long tradition of struggle against enemies of the Indonesian nation. Dutch colonialism was of course one of those but 'Communism' became another. The Madiun affair was portrayed as a betrayal of the fight against the Dutch and of course the September 30th Movement was another example of 'treason'. The important role of the PKI and other left-wing groups in the Indonesian independence-movement was buried.

This didn't mean that the memory of the mass-killings of 1965 was silenced. Instead, the memory of the killings was relegated to the domain of rumors. The result was that the regime, without admitting responsibility for mass murder, could benefit from the fear left in its wake. Grueling stories of bloodletting circulated in areas where no killings had taken place, adding more confusion.

A national monument, called Lubang Buaya or Crocodile Pit, was built for the generals at the site where their bodies were dumped. It features six individual statues. Yani, the commanding officer, stands in the middle, pointing his finger to the pit as if reminding the audience of what happened. A large Garuda, the mythical bird that serves as the symbol of the Indonesian nation, hovers over the officers, linking the generals to the nation. A bronze frieze tells the official version of the kidnappings, murders and the noble role of the military. Before its intervention, there's chaos, murder – after-wards, order is restored: the country is peaceful, protected by the army, developing, women again virtuous mothers. In a nearby museum, diorama's repeat the official story, including the gruesome torture. Artifacts like Yani's car and one of the trucks used by the kidnappers emphasize the authentic nature of the site.

For the New Order, 1965 was more than just its birth moment: whenever it had to deal with opposition, it invoked 'the communist threat' for its repression and as argument for the continuity of the New Order. Paradoxically, this meant that this most anti-Communist regime could never declare the final victory over its hated enemy. Indonesia became a country where the specter of Communism would not leave, not even after the global implosion of the Soviet bloc in the early nineties. The threat had to be invoked time and time again. After 1965, the PKI was shattered – its members and supporters lost their political compass with the disappearance of the leadership and Sukarno's fall from power. The sudden implosion of Sukarno's rule discredited the whole of the PKI's approach. An organization built for agitation within the limits set by the Indonesian state, the PKI was completely unprepared for any kind of underground resistance. Although some kind of underground activity continued throughout the New Order, attempts to organize resistance of any kind were rare and weak – the army's operations against Communists after 1965 were not a counterinsurgency but the hunt for survivors of a defeated movement.

Still, it was in the army's interest to exaggerate the capacities of the PKI, always fighting a Communist menace that now really had become a ghost. It was the army that would determine what the Communist enemy looked like. This made it possible for them to accuse the most unlikely candidates to be 'Communists' – something that was akin to a death-threat. The continuing threat to 'national security', epitomized by Communism, played a large role in the army's doctrine of a 'dual function', dwifungsi, in both politics and national security. The continuing emphasis on a persisting threat to national security was formalized in 1978 when the army organized the National Defense Institute (Lembaga Pertahanan Nasional-Lemhannas). This 'military education institute' set up a program called the National Vigilance Refresher Course (Penataran Kewaspadaan Nasional-Tarpadnas) aimed at teaching both officers and civilians about the supposed threats to national security. The 'Refresher course' was partly a reaction on student protests against the Suharto regime. One of the course documents from 1979 stated that a 'New Left' had stepped in the PKI's footsteps of organizing communist activity, now by mobilizing students and intellectuals. According to the National Defense Institute, the PKI had after 1965 formed a 'formless organization' (organisasi tak terbentuk) consisting of cells that tried to infiltrate legitimate organizations.

Suharto's regime embarked on a deep-going social and political remodeling of Indonesian society. The political system was turned into a kind of triangle, with Golkar – the state party, originally established in '64 by the military as an umbrella for anti-communist groups – firmly at the top. Underneath were the only two legal other parties into which all existing parties were forced to merge: one 'Islamic', the other 'secular'. Even during the increasingly autocratic rule of Sukarno's 'Guided Democracy', political debate had been relatively free and Indonesian society regularly saw mass political mobilizations. Suharto's regime would be the complete opposite. In his book 25 Years of Accelerated Modernization of Development, the architect of the political set-up of the New Order, general Ali Murtopo, outlined its principles. Describing the Sukarno years, he wrote that 'the mass of people, especially those in the villages, always fell prey to the political and ideological interests' of political parties, which led the people to 'ignore the necessities of daily life, the need for development and improvement of their own lives, materially as well as spiritually'. Instead, the New Order would follow a policy of 'depolitisation', defined as 'freeing the people from political manipulation' so that the people would be 'occupied wholly with development efforts'.

This sums up the distinctive elements of the New Order's ideology: a deeply elitist attitude towards the lower classes and the fetish of 'development'. The people in the villages had been the most numerous supporters of Sukarno and the PKI, for the generals they were backward, lacking in development. Instead of busying themselves with politics, they should work to 'develop' the country. The paternalist elitism that shut out the largest part of the population from active politics was justified by reminding the public of the dangers of intense political polarization and what had happened when 'the people ran amok'.

These ideas didn't fall out of the sky: prejudices from educated city-dwellers, like the generals, against people from the countryside were not new. And neither were the complaints about political chaos: Sukarno himself had defended the curtailment of democracy under 'Guided democracy' with the argument that political disagreements were overwhelming the country. The military's nationalist rhetoric, that squarely placed the enemy outside the nation, was not new either. The PKI had played down the importance of class struggle inside Indonesia because such a policy would have been in contradiction with Sukarno's emphasis in national unity.

Suharto named himself the 'father of development': for those who profited from it, economic progress was often reason enough to accept the military's monopoly on political power and Suharto's grandiose abuses of power and privileges. Even the Islamic groups that had supported Suharto's coup were neutralized and shut out from politics. The dominant discourse for the decades between 1975, when the New Order regime took its final form, and 1998, when it fell, was one of rising general prosperity, which supposedly depended on acceptance of the control of the country by the army and the suppression of dissent and parallel. Over 2000 books are estimated to have been banned during Suharto's role, the majority of these dealing with '1965'. Indonesian nationalism changed from Sukarno's 'anti-imperialist', Third-Worldist variety to one that was focused on national cooperation for development.

A new narrative?

The fall of Suharto in 1998 and attempts to democratize Indonesia ('Reformasi') strongly contributed to Indonesians' ability to formulate an alternative interpretation of '1965'. But any kind of 'rehabilitation' of the Indonesian left in the writing of history will still be a long process. Many of the supporters of the New Order are still in power, years after the fall of the regime itself. And after more than 30 years of continuous repetition, the New Order's version of history has taken a life of its own. Whole generations of elites were incubated by the 'New Order-as-social-order'. Although Suharto was undoubtedly the leader of the New Order regime, he was supported by a coalition of interests. After the fall of Suharto himself and the official restoration of democracy, these people merely reinvented themselves as 'reformers' and 'democrats'. Employing more fashionable rhetoric, former New Order supporters dominate Indonesia's 'democratic' institutions.

The example of president Abdurrahman 'Gus Dur' Wahid's 21 month term as president, 20th October 1999 to July 23th 2001, is instructive. Although he was the chairperson of Nahdlatul Ulama, a Muslim religious organization whose youth-wing Anser played an important role in the killings of '65, Gus Dur himself was a progressive liberal and the first national political figure to apologize for the killings. His attempts to reform the Indonesian state were continuously frustrated by remnants of the New Order. His attempt to formally lift the ban on Communism, created in 1966, was one of his most controversial moves: it was met with hostility and failed. An alliance between the military and political rivals removed him from power.

Unwillingness to confront the past is not only the result of a decades long indoctrination. Many ordinary people were participants in the massacres of 1965. Any re-examination of 65 will create feelings of anxiety and maybe guilt. And of fear: the New Order propaganda used to suggest that surviving Communists or their children or grandchildren would one day try to take revenge.

The orthodox nationalist school of history is then still dominant in post-Reformasi. The writers of 'national history' refuse to confront the revelations made in the much more free press of post-1998. At the end 1999 the Education Department issued a guide for teachers to cope with the discrepancy between 'official' (resmi) and 'media' accounts of history. The guide was coordinated by a former protégé of Notosusanto. The reason given for it was that 'uncertainty' would end in 'negative consequences for national togetherness'.

If one group has an interest in reformulating history, it would be the victims and the Left that follows in their footsteps. It should be kept in mind that the fall of the New Order regime was the result of the combining of social unrest and a particular acute manifestation of the Asian economic crisis. On its own, the fragmented opposition movement would not have had the strength to put up a real challenge to Suharto. The leading leftwing force in the Reformasi period was the PRD (Partai Rakyat Demokratik or People's Democratic Party) which never had more than a few hundred active members. Still, it was frequently attacked as a new incarnation of the PKI. Even after the fall of Suharto, PRD leaders were arrested and tortured. Going back to the almost legendary figure of the revolutionary socialist leader Tan Malaka, Indonesia however knows a tradition of left-wing historical writings. But the fragile left-wing movement of Indonesia has so far not been able to really challenge to New Order orthodoxy. The space opened up by Reformasi has however allowed dozens of books about 1965 to appear, many of them critical of the New Order viewpoint. The criticism of New Order history and attempts to rehabilitate the Indonesian left is not limited to books but also includes periodicals, exhibitions and documentaries.

In this context, one of the most important figures is novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Already an important writer before 1965, when he was arrested for belonging to Lekra – the Communist allied Institute for People's Culture – he wrote prodigiously during his 14 years of imprisonment. Much of his work is historical and concerned with showing the role of 'common people' in making history – directly contradicting the New Order's elitism. After his release from imprisonment, Pramoedya founded, together with two other former political prisoners, the publishing house Hasta Mitra. Former political prisoners remained pariahs in Indonesia: their passports declared their status as former prisoners and they were required to regularly report to the police. Still, Pramoedya, Hasyim Rachman and Joesoef Isak, all coming from the left-wing of 'Sukarnoism', defied the ban on publishing works written by former political prisoners, among them Pramoedya's novels. The publications of Hasta Mitra have played an important role in creating an alternative to orthodoxy.

Autobiographies written by surviving PKI members and supporters show that even during the height of the New Order's influence, alternative discourses were kept alive – although just barely. But this kind of memory poses problems of its own. Many of these were written years, even decades, after the events they describe. As such, they might be more relevant in evaluating what people felt in the wake of Reformasi than how they experienced 1965 and its aftermath. And politics is not limited to the macro-level of the state and state-sanctioned history. These texts have been written as challenges to the New Order's discourse but are situated in a context where the demonization of the PKI and anti-Communism are very strong. This has lead their writers to adopt a defensive posture, avoiding for

example the involvement of the PKI aliran in repression and intimidation of political opponents before 1965. PKI activities are presented first and foremost as legal and as in support of the legitimate president, Sukarno.

This defensive posture papers over the contradictions in Indonesian that would give '1965' its shape. And the desire to redeem the PKI also leads to denying the possibility of any Communist involvement in or support for the September 30th Movement. Instead, theories that cast Suharto as the evil mastermind plotting the whole course of events are set up. Like the tales spun by the New Order, this is a political useful myth – but it also mystifies what happened in these tragic days.

In 1999, journalists curated an exhibition called 'Presenting Three Orders of Yogyakarta-Solo photojournalists' of photo's by both journalists and student-activists. The 'three orders' refers to Sukarno's Old Order, Suharto's New Order and the Reformasi era. One of the pictures that drew the most attention was taken shortly before the killings started. It depicts a group of young people at a rally of the PKI in Yogyakarta. The orator is not visible, one sees only the crowd of listeners. They seem to relaxed and even enjoying themselves. In the center of the photo, a young woman looks at the camera: she's smiling and seems to be full of life. As one writer described the picture; 'there is nothing sinister in this photograph, nothing that would conform to the evil image of communists perpetuated by the New Order regime'.

The reactions to the picture are a snapshot of post-Reformasi attitudes to 1965. Visitors felt sympathy for the people in the picture – the 'evil Communists' had become humans again. But this sympathy partly rested on denying the victims a part of their identity: the idealistic youth depicted is supposed to not 'really have known' what the PKI planned, not to have been 'real Communists'. The taboo on their ideas remains so strong it is impossible to reconcile the idea that they were people, 'just like us', and Communists as well. Recognizing the humanity of the victims of 1965 is undoubtedly an important first step. But remembering the human tragedy teaches us little about what happened. For Indonesian society to come to term with its past, the political convictions of the victims, so central to their lives and their deaths, also need to be recognized.