Volume 11 | Issue 15 | Number 4 | Article ID 3929 | Apr 14, 2013

Impunity and Reenactment: Reflections on the 1965 Massacre in Indonesia and its Legacy 免罪と再現—1965年、インドネシアにおける大虐殺事件及びその後遺症についての感想

Benedict Anderson

Domestic mass murder on a large scale is always the work of the state, at the hands of its own soldiery, police and gangsters, and/or ideological mobilization of allied civilian groups. The worst cases in the post-World War 11 era – Guatemala, Sri Lanka, Cambodia,Sudan,Bosnia,Rwanda, Liberia, China, East Pakistan, East Timor, and Indonesia – show much the same bloody manipulations. It is equally the case that the killer regimes do not announce publicly the huge numbers killed, and rarely boast about themassacres, let alone the tortures that usually accompany them. They like to create a set of public euphemismsendlesslycirculated through state-controlled mass media. In the age of the UN, to which almost all nation-states belong,in the time of Amnesty International and its uncountable NGO children and grandchildren, in the epoch of globalization and the internet, there are naturally worries about 'face,' interventions, embargos, ostracism, and UN-ish investigations. No less important are domestic considerations. National militaries are supposed heroically to defend the nation against foreign enemies, not slaughter their fellow-citizens. Police are supposed to uphold the law. Above all, there is need for political 'stability,' one element ofwhich is that killing should not get out of control, and that amateur civilian killers should be quietly assured that 'it's over' and that no one will be punished.

But every norm has its exceptions. In the article that follows below, readers are invited to reflect on Joshua Oppenheimer's two recent sensational films about organized gangsters in and around the city of Medan (in northeastern Sumatra) who played a key, but only local, role in the vast anti-Communist murders in Indonesia in the last months of 1965. Almost fifty years later, they happily boast about their killings, with the grimmest details, and relish their complete immunity from any punishment. They are also happy to collaborate with Oppenheimer, contribute to his films, create bizarre reenactments of 1965,and do not hesitate to dress up their underlings to act as communists (male and female). The problem is to explain why Medan was the scene of the exception, within the larger framework of Indonesian politics from the late colonial period to the present.

The final irony is that Joshua's (and the gangster's) film is banned in Indonesia – that is to say, by Jakarta.[1]

It is worth mentioning that in the early years after Suharto's fall from power in 1998 (remembered as the time of Reform) censorship of publications almost disappeared. Long-forbidden works by dead communists – going back as far as the 1920s – were resurrected. Accounts by communist survivors of their suffering inSuharto's gulag circulated without being banned. A flood of conflicting analyses of 'what really happened in 1965' sold well, especially if they claimed that the secret masterminds of the Gerakan 30 September were Suharto, the CIA, or MI-5.

It seems that the post-Suharto authorities

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466013033834 Published online by Cambridge University Press

assumed that the masses were not readers, and the distribution of the books by the market would depend on the character of regional readers (say, plenty in Java, very few in Medan). TV and the cinema were another story since they appealed to large non-reading publics. Controversial films could arouse old and new hatreds and seriously threaten 'stability.' Typically, the notorious Suharto-era film about G30S, year after year forced on schoolchildren, was now silently taken out of circulation.

***

There is a jolting moment in Jean Rouch's famous 'anthropological' film *Moi, Un Noir,* about a small, attractive group of young males from then French colonial Niger trying to find work in the more prosperous, but still French colonial, Côte d'Ivoire. We see them periodically at work, but most of the film shows them at leisure, drinking, joking, hooking up with women, so that the atmosphere is generally lively and cheerful. But toward the end, we find the main character, who calls himself Edward G. Robinson (parallel to a friend who names himself Lenny Caution), walking with a sidekick and an invisible Rouch along a riverside levee. Quite suddenly he starts to re-enact for the camera an ugly scene from his real or imagined past. He was among the many francophone Africans who were sent as colonial cannon fodder to fight for France against the Ho Chi Minh-led Viet Minh – before the fall of Dien Bien Phu. He seems to enjoy replaying his bloody killing of captured Vietnamese. His sidekick pays no attention, making us realize that he has seen this shtick many times and knows it by heart. So the brief show is meant for Rouch and for us. Once the scene is over, and the cheerful tone resumes, the viewer is immediately assaulted by the obvious doubts and questions. Why did Rouch include this short scene in an otherwise friendly film? Did Oumarou Ganda aka Edward G. Robinson, who was Rouch's main collaborator, insist upon it? Why did the African perform this way, quite suddenly? Did he really do what he re-enacted? Why the sudden turn from jokes to horror – and back? Did Rouch intend to situate the Niger boys of that generation in the large framework of the ferocious decline and fall of France's empire? Was Gonda releasing a kind of frustration about his life, and resentment of the French, perhaps even of his patron and friend, the famous Rouch?

When I watched the film, some years ago, it occurred to me that the crucial motif to think about was simply impunity. Like everyone else involved in France's huge, disastrous military endeavour to recover colonial Indochina between 1946 and 1954, the young African soldier could not be punished for 'acts of war,' no matter how sadistic and in contravention of the Geneva Convention. He would always be a hero of a very small sort thanks to this impunity. At the same time, impunity is nothing without repetitive, boastful demonstration to different audiences. Drifting, poor, irregularly employed, Ganda takes on the menacing "Don't mess with me, motherfucker!" persona of Edward G. Robinson, the master actor of gangsters in the Hollywood of that era – who usually dies at the end of each film, but comes back as saturninely alive as ever in the next. But the film goes on to show the local hollowness of the impunity. In French Côte d'Ivoire, the colonial authorities put one of Ganda's comrades into jail, and clearly would not hesitate to nab the hero of Vietnam, if he broke the local laws. At the end he is beaten up by a large drunken Portuguese sailor in a quarrel over a prostitute.

Always somewhere in the back of my mind, this episode tentatively offers me a way to think about Rouch-fan Joshua Oppenheimer's extraordinary films about the massacres of communists in Indonesia in 1965-66, and their next-century reenactment before the camera. One of these films – Sungai Ular or River of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466013033834 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Snakes – shows (to me at least) a connection between the situations of Rouch and Joshua, as well as deep differences. The grisly re-enactment of the torture and murder of doomed communists on the bank of this river, half a century after they happened, is also about impunity and boastfulness. The two starring elderly brutes take the young man from anti-comunist USA as more or less on their side, just as Edward G. Robinson took Rouch as a sympathic anticolonial Frenchman. But they also evince a kind of "Don't mess with me, motherfucker!" attitude which they regularly practice for various other local audiences. They are not suspicious of Joshua's motives, and Joshua gets his own immunity from this guilelessness and also from inviting them and other killers to participate as they wish in the filmwork, not merely as actors, but also as, up to a point, film-makers. Another tie between the films is, as we shall see later on, the collaborators' fascination with Hollywood. This time not Edward G. Robinson, outlaw, but Rambo and the Duke, patriots.

Yet Joshua's performing killers do not have their exact counterparts – so I think – in other parts of Indonesia, for example, East and Central Java, as well as Bali, provinces where the numbers of those barbarously tortured and murdered were far higher than in North Sumatra where the serpentine river flows. The question is why? In what immediately follows I will try to offer a historical explanation that deals with the national-level and official version of 1965 and its commemorative aftermath, and at the same time contrast North Sumatra with East Java, which can be thought of a the most striking opposites.

Source: CIA

October l, 1965

In the wee hours of that Jakarta morning, six important generals were murdered by soldiers and NCOs belonging to President Sukarno's elite guards, the Tjakrabirawa Regiment. At 7 a.m. a military group calling itself the September 30th Movement announced over the national radio that it had taken action to forestall a coup to overthrow Sukarno four days later, on Armed Forces Day. The deaths of the generals were not mentioned. A few hours later, two key announcements followed. One declared that in place of the existing cabinet, a large Revolutionary Council would temporarily take power for protection of the president. Its membership was a weird mixture of left and rightwing civilians and military men, but also included the leadership of the September 30th Movement: one general, one colonel, one lieutenant-colonel, and two or three lower down. The second announcement was even stranger. The Movement said that lower military ranks were enraged by the corruption and sexual license within the military high command, which also neglected the poverty of the rank and file. Therefore, all ranks above that of lieutenant-colonel were abolished, while all supporters of the Movement would be promoted two ranks. A spectacular – and stupid – mutiny, in effect, creating a crisis of solidarity among clique-ridden generals and colonels. The Movement did not last long. After 3 p.m. it went off the air, to be replaced at 7 p.m. by proclamations in the name of General Suharto,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466013033834 Published online by Cambridge University Press

commander of the army's elite Strategic Forces, who, curiously enough, was not a target of the Movement. By midnight, the mutiny had been crushed, and its leaders scattered and on the hopeless run. The capital's newspapers, except those of the military, were closed down the next morning, and national TV, along with national radio, fell into Suharto's hands.

Gen. Suharto front left, 1965. New York Times

The Communists

The PKI (Indonesian Communist Party), Asia's oldest, had made the fateful decision – once Indonesian Independence had been recognized by the Dutch colonialists and the rest of the world (near the end of 1949) – to take the parliamentary road to power, shutting down a few small guerrilla bands left over from the Revolution of 1945-49. In the first national elections (1955), it was already the fourth of the four huge parties that dominated Parliament. When provincial elections were held two years later in the densely populated and impoverished island of Java, it secured the largest number of voters, but still less than 25%. After that, elections were not held again. The primary reason for this was the government's decision, in the spring of 1957 to declare nation-wide martial law in the face of warlordism, regional discontent, and rising, fanatical anti-communism in the so-called Outer Islands, most significantly in Sumatra and Sulawesi. The situation deteriorated till the point that in February 1958 a civil war broke out between the now military- dominated government in Jakarta and its Sumatran competition, the PRRI, or Revolutionary Government of the Republic, led by a mixture of national-level 'modernist' Muslim politicians, regional warlords, and many of the local inhabitants. A sister-rebellion in Sulawesi soon joined the Sumatrans. The rebellion, in spite of being heavily supported by the CIA, was rather quickly crushed by mostly Javanese troops loyal to the High Command, ironically with help from both the Pentagon and Moscow. By the time President Sukarno repealed Martial Law in May 1963, the army had entrenched itself in national power and refused to tolerate any further nation-wide elections on grounds of 'national security.' But, protected by Sukarno, who used it to counterbalance the dangerous anti-communist Army leadership, the PKI rapidly expanded its popular support by putting its energies into its mass organizations, rather than the parliamentary Party. By early 1965, it was the largest communist party in the world outside the Communist bloc, with over three million members, and perhaps eighteen million followers in its mass organizations: for women, students, intellectuals, peasants, agricultural labourers, workers, fisherfolk, youths, artists and so on. (It was far better organized and disciplined than its political- party competitors). The shift had momentous consequences. Electoral politics are punctuated in time from this election to the next; but mass organization politics are tensely ceaseless, day in day out, especially when no elections are foreseeable.

In the early 1960s Indonesia became increasingly polarized between right and left. A major factor was economic decline and an inflation that eventually became beyond control. People on fixed salaries and pensions,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466013033834 Published online by Cambridge University Press

mostly civil servants, tried to maintain their standards of living by corruption, embezzlement, and investing in farm land. This last not only put pressure on land-hungry small farmers, tenants, and rural labourers, but clashed with the PKI's attempts to enforce a weak land reform law, fiercely resisted by landowners old and new.

Rural Medan today (Credit: Andre Vltchek)

Where such landowners were respected ulamas and rich hajis, resistance was often couched in terms of religion versus atheism. Many of them shrewdly donated surplus hectares to mosques as unalienable *wakaf* property, and sat on the boards administering these gifts. Now religious, no longer personal private properties they were difficult for the PKI to attack, since even poor and land hungry Muslims would come militantly to their mosques' defence. Generally speaking, the collapse of the currency helped to create a pervasive atmosphere of fear, uncertainty and anger. These tendencies help to explain why the largest and worst massacres took place in the country's villages, where land was most seriously contested and the big-party mass organizations were most active.

Great Mosque, Medan (Credit: Andre Vltchek)

The fatal weakness of the PKI emerged from its decision to take the parliamentary road. It was not an irrational decision, given the vast extent of the archipelagic country and its huge ethno-religious diversity, as well as the Party's commitment to 'national integrity,' and the menacing proximity of America's armadas and air power. But it meant that the Party was mostly above ground, its members well known nationally and locally, and it had no armed power of its own at all. The PKI attempted to substitute for this weakness an increasingly harsh rhetoric, which did not add to its real power and frightened its every-day enemies. Meantime, the anti- communist army leadership increasingly backed, openly and surreptitiously, rightwing social, political, religious, and intellectual organizations. Communism was banned within its own ranks.

Origins of the Slaughter

Army leaders, helped by advice and half-concealed support from both the Pentagon and the CIA – then reeling under heavy reverses in Vietnam – had long been looking for a justification for a mass destruction of the Party. Now the September 30th Movement and the murder of the six generals provided the opening they awaited. Almost immediately the army-controlled media started a lurid and successful campaign to convince the citizens

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466013033834 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that the Movement was simply a tool, manipulated behind the scenes by the Party. By no means was it an internal military mutiny. The communists were said to have been planning a vast extension of the murders to the civilian population all over the country. The army's campaign began on October 3, when the bodies of three of the generals were exhumed from a dry well in a remote part of the Air Force's Jakarta base. (They had not been killed at home, but kidnapped to this area and then shot dead). The media, using blurred and retouched photos of the bodies, claimed that the victims had had their eyes gouged out and their genitals sliced off by sex-crazed communist women. (Many years later, thanks to military carelessness, the post-mortems written up on October 3 by experienced forensic doctors, and directed personally to Suharto that same day, came to light. No missing eyeballs or genitals, just the lethal wounds caused by military guns.). In a move that would have pleased Goebbels, the Movement's full name was deleted in favour of Gestapu (GErakan September TigA PUluh). No one noticed that the word order here is impossible in the Indonesian language, but is syntactically perfect in English. Very few Indonesian generals then had perfect English). On top of the hyperinflation, this cunning Big Lie propaganda had the desired effect: massive anti-communist hysteria.

The coolly-considered plan of Suharto and his henchmen for the physical and organizational destruction of the Party was based on the huge numbers of its members, affiliates, and supporters. To accomplish this mission as rapidly as possible, army personnel were not enough; civilians had to be involved on a large scale, with half concealed military direction, financing, intelligence, transportation, and even supply of weapons. As secretive corporate bodies notionally devoted to external defence against foreign enemies, armies almost never boast about mass murder (see the mendacious handling of the Rape of Nanking by the Japanese military and the near-genocide of Armenians by the Turkish army). International scandal was to be avoided as much as possible. National armies are not supposed to slaughter their fellow-citizens, especially, as in the case of the PKI, if they are unarmed and put up very little resistance.

Who were the primary collaborators? The two provinces with the highest number of victims, Muslim East Java and Hindu 'Paradise Island' Bali are exemplary. Both provinces were densely populated, ethnically quite homogeneous, and with strong, conservative, traditionalist leaderships. The key thing to bear in mind when we come to consider North Sumatra) is they were longstanding strongholds of the two well-rooted legal, 'national' political parties, other than the PKI, both with very large organizational and popular bases. In East Java it was the traditionalist, orthodox Muslim Nahdlatul Ulama, with its militant youthful-male affiliate Ansor. In Bali, it was the PNI (National Party) led locally by landowners, Hindu priests, and members of the two upper castes of Satrias and Brahmins. Small Catholic and Protestant parties with their affiliates were also used in places where these religious minorities were influential. (The large 'modernist' Muslim party, Masjumi, fiercely anti-communist, was organizationally unavailable, since it been banned and disbanded in 1959 for its role in the civil war of 1958-59, of which more later).

These civilians were not professional killers. Once the massacres were over, they 'returned to ordinary life,' while the military went on killing large numbers of people in East Timor, Atjeh and Papua over the final two decades of the Suharto dictatorship. Many of them, in an atmosphere of media-generated hysteria, genuinely believed that "they will kill us if we don't kill them first." Needless to say, the military had no interest in punishing any of those involved, but their immunity was also guaranteed in part by the national institutions

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466013033834 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to which they were affiliated.

Aftermaths? During his brief presidency (October 1999-July 2001) Abdurrrahman Wahid the charismatic, 'progressive,' and politically astute Nahdlatul Ulama leader, decided to ask forgiveness from surviving ex-communists. He did so, however, not for individual killers, but for Ansor in particular and the NU in general. (No other national-level politician has followed his example). More striking is the fact that over the past decade many young members of Ansor, born well after 1965, began systematically to help communists who had managed to survive the massacres and years and years of brutal imprisonment. Fairly recently a reconciliation meeting was held in Jogjakarta between NU and ex-communist women. Everything went well, until an elderly communist described in detail how she had been raped and tortured by Ansor members. As she spoke a young Muslim girl stood up, ashen-faced, and then fainted. Among the rapists and torturers she recognized her own father. It is interesting to note that, quite early on, stories circulated widely that 'amateur' killers had mental breakdowns, went mad, or were haunted by terrifying dreams and fears of karmic retribution. Otherwise, silence. Nothing to boast about in public or on TV, one might say.

Medan and North Sumatra: Local History

Joshua's Medan/North Sumatra was and is very different. The strange, dull name already tells one something. It simply means 'field' or 'open space.' It was the last major city begotten by Dutch colonialism -- beginning to rise only in the 1870s and 1880s, when the colonial authorities was realized that the surrounding fertile and near-empty flatlands were perfect for the development of large-scale agribusiness -- tobacco, rubber, palm-oil, and coffee plantations. One of the earliest oilfields in the colony was also discovered there just in time for the automotive revolution. The area was thinly inhabited by Malays, related to the Malays across the narrow Straits of Malacca in today's Malaysia. In so far as there were any rulers at all, these were very small-scale and without much armed power, even if some called themselves 'Sultan.' For their own reasons, the Dutch protected these petty rulers and allowed them to share in the profits of the expanding economy; but the 'Sultans' had to do what they were told.

Medan was created in the era when the Dutch colonial regime abandoned monopolistic mercantilism and adopted British-enforced economic liberalism and open markets. Hence a motley crowd of investors -- Dutch, British, German, Austrian, American, and eventually Chinese and Japanese – poured in. From the start there was the huge problem of creating a submissive labour force. The local Malays were too few and anyway not interested, and the large numbers of young Chinese imported from Southeast China and Malaya-Singapore soon proved too refractory and mobile to be long usable. The answer came with the recruitment of indentured labourers from poverty-stricken, overpopulated Java. It was a kind of modern slavery. Labourers were not only pitilessly exploited, but had to sign contracts preventing them from quitting and making sure that their 'debts' to the companies that transferred them to Sumatra could rarely be repaid -- thanks largely to company stores. Thus, at least until the onset of the Great Depression, Medan was a bit like a Gold Rush town. One can watch the process by comparing the figures in the only two censuses the colonial rulers ever held. 1920: 23,823 natives, 18,247 so-called foreign orientals (Chinese, Arabs, Indians) 3,128 'Europeans', who included Japanese, for a total of 45,248. 1930: 41,270 natives, 31,021 Foreign Orientals, and 4,293 'Europeans', for a total of 76, 544. It was the only significant Indies city in which the native population had only a tiny 53% majority. (The 1930 total population was a bit smaller than the capital of today's Solomon Islands; meantime Medan has

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466013033834 Published online by Cambridge University Press

grown to over 2 million). From Minangkabau West Sumatra, Atjeh, and Batak Tapanuli came traders, newspaper and magazine publishers, reporters, ulamas, and Protestant small businessmen, schoolteachers, preachers and low-level officials . Non-indentured Javanese moved in too, serving as small and medium merchants, lawyers, newspapermen, teachers, foremen, accountants, nationalist activists, and civil servants. The Field was thus far more variegated than any other Indonesian city, including even the capital Batavia (Jakarta today): Europeans of various kinds, Chinese, Americans, Indians, Japanese, Arabs, Minangkabau, Bataks of many sorts, Atjehnese, Javanese and so on. None formed a dominant majority. As a consequence, religious variegation too: Protestant British, Dutch, Americans, Germans and Toba Bataks, Catholic Dutch and Austrians, Confucian and Buddhist Chinese, Hindu and Muslim Indians, strong Muslims like the Minangkabau and Atjehnese, and syncretic Hindu-Islamic Javanese. But of course, there was always a stable racial hierarchy, with Whites and 'honorary-white' Japanese at the top, Chinese, Arabs and Indians in the middle, and natives mostly at the bottom. The Field also was notorious for its Wild West social mores – gambling and prostitution were widespread, and handled by mainly Chinese taukes and a mixed ethnoracial rag- bag of thugs. (To get a nice picture of Medan at that time, one can profitably read the final, confessional chapter of Mangaradja Onggang Parlindungan's weird masterpiece, *Tuanku Rao*). Opium was a state monopoly.

In early 1942, the Japanese military, having disposed of the British in Malaya and Singapore, took over the Dutch East Indies in a few weeks.

Japanese military attack Rabaul, 1942

Sumatran and Bornean oil was the military's main interest, but the plantation economy also fell into hands. However, effective Allied bombing of Japanese shipping soon made the export-oriented agribusiness economy collapse, leaving in place only domestic demand and the military's local needs. In North Sumatra, the indenture system broke down to make way for smallholder producers of foodstuffs like rice, vegetables, tea, and coffee, as well as castor oil. To make this new wartime economy work the Japanese authorities opened the door to 'illegal' occupiers of agribusiness lands, including a huge wave of Protestant Toba Bataks from the interior.

After the American atom-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese state surrendered unconditionally, but several months passed before the British and Dutch could bring colonial military power back to the Indies, and in this vacuum the Republic of Indonesia was born on August 17, 1945. In the exhilarating, chaotic first year of the Revolution (1945-46), there were a number of regions in Sumatra and Java which experienced vengeful revolutionary onslaughts on 'collaborators' with Japanese and Dutch, semi-feudal local aristocracies, abusive civil servants, and so on. The most chaotic and bloodthirsty of these occurred -- unsurprisingly – in North Sumatra. The local petty sultanates were overthrown with ease; many of the Malay 'aristocrats' were murdered and their wealth stolen or confiscated. Indonesia's greatest poet,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466013033834 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Amir Hamzah, was among the victims. Toba Bataks, Atjehnese, Simalungun Bataks, and Javanese seized Japanese or Dutch guns, and fought each other for the spoils without being able to establish any coherent political order. The Republic's Socialist-dominated government was appalled by all this, knowing that it would blacken the country's name overseas, enrage colonial-era investors wanting their properties back, and alienate possible diplomatic allies. Gradually, with military help, some kind of order was established, after which the Dutch succeeded in reoccupying Medan's plantation belt. But not for long.

In December 1949, after four years of intermittent war and negotiations, the Netherlands signed over sovereignty of the old colony to a 'Federal Republic of Indonesia,' one of whose components was North Sumatra (then still called East Sumatra), headed by surviving local aristocrats. But within a year federalism disappeared, the aristocrats succumbed, and today's Unitary Republic was established. The central condition of this transfer of sovereignty, insisted on by the rapacious Americans, was that all Dutch (and British and American) pre-war properties be returned to their colonial-era owners. The situation was particularly volatile in the surroundings of Medan. Even in the last two decades of colonial rule, the field had become a hotbed of anticolonial nationalism. This trend accelerated in the last year of Japanese rule and after the Declaration of Independence. The radical language of 'Revolution' made a deep impression too, mostly for the good. But 'Revolution' also allowed hardened criminal elements to operate under its aegis, sometimes with half-genuine revolutionary commitment.

North Sumatra was a natural zone for successful recruiting by a reborn PKI,?which had been suppressed by the Dutch after the failed uprisings of 1926-27 and later by the Japanese military. The single most militant organization there in the 1950s was the Sarekat Buruh Perkebunan Indonesia, or Sarbupri, a huge union for plantation labourers, whose mass base lay in the once indentured Javanese labour force, combined with leadership mostly provided by educated Javanese and Protestant Batak activists. It is useful to note that the PKI Politburo, headed from 1951 on by D.N. Aidit, had real trouble with Sarbupri's militancy, since the party, having chosen to join the parliamentary system (at the national and local levels) was worried by unauthorized local revolutionary activities which could damage its cautious political strategy. A number of Sarbupri leaders were demoted, kicked out, or disciplined. Sarbupri also got political support from the smallholder migrants of the Japanese occupations whom the returning white planters were eager to kick out or subdue. Strikes in Tandjung Morawa, in the plantation belt, only 14 kilometers from Medan's city centre even brought down one of the early constitutional-era cabinets.

Medan proved a specially difficult city to handle from Jakarta because there was no 'traditional' social order, to work with, and no ethnic, party-political, or religious group in a dominant position. It also contained, proportionately, the highest number of 'foreign Asian' inhabitants. Situated close to Singapore, it was also notorious for its talented smugglers. In addition, the fractious local military often created additional problems.

When the Revolution of 1945 broke out, the national army was formed in a very unusual way. The core of its middle- and upper-echelon leaders had been low- level NCOs and junior officers in Japanese-created auxiliary forces trained to help the Imperial armies, if and when the Allies landed, in local guerilla warfare, Since Sumatra and Java were controlled by different Japanese armies not subordinated one to the other, the Peta in Java and the much smaller Giyugun in Sumatra had no organic connection. Almost all recruits to the new national army were in their 20s, no matter what

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466013033834 Published online by Cambridge University Press

posts they held, so that it was usual for commanders to be chosen by their own men, rather than by any higher authorities. In the 1950s therefore, the High Command in Jakarta had great difficulties in controlling local, and locally popular, military officers, who frequently refused to carry out orders and sometimes acted like warlords. Medan was a striking case. The Protestant Toba Batak commander for the seven years between 1950 and 1957 was Colonel Simbolon, who controlled large scale smuggling operations through Medan's port, and refused to be transferred. But when he joined the anti-Jakarta coalition, which in February 1958 started the PRRI rebellion,1 he was quickly toppled by a counter-coalition of the High Command, leftist local Javanese juniors, and the clique of his successor, Lieut. Colonel Djamin Ginting, a Karo Batak who claimed to speak for Karos oppressed by their distant Toba cousins. Once installed, Ginting turned on the leftist Javanese officers. Many Islamic organizations, mostly controlled by Minangkabau, who also supported the PRRI, were crippled by its defeat and the ban on the Masjumi modernist Islamic party on the grounds of rebellion.

The other crucial development came from the mess created by President Sukarno's rash decision in December 1957 to nationalize all Dutch enterprises in retaliation for The Hague's constant refusal to settle diplomatically the conflict over Western Papua, which was supposed to have been solved early in the 1950s. Takeovers were initiated by unions affiliated with the PKI's secular rival, the PNI, but the communists quickly joined in. Not for long. The Army High Command used its emergency powers to take control of all the nationalized enterprises, claiming that they were vital assets for the nation. For the first time in its history the military obtained vast economic and financial resources, especially plantations, mines, trading companies, utilities, banks, and so forth. Needless to say, strikes were forbidden in all these sectors. Since these sectors, owned hitherto by foreigners, were those where leftist and nationalist unions had had the greatest freedom, the military had to develop an effective corporatist counterforce. In partial imitation of the PKI's SOBSI, a nationwide

federation of its affiliated unions, the army created SOKSI. Its name indicated the intentions of its creators. K stood for karyawan, a corporatist neologism for 'functionary,' aw its membership included everyone – management, office staff and white-collar workers, as well as labour. One could think of SOKSI as an agglomeration of 'company' unions. Thus the B in SOBSI, standing for Buruh (labour), was to be eliminated.

In the Medan area, and in the face of SOBSI's well-established presence, the military needed substantial manpower outside its own active ranks to impose its will on the huge plantation belt. It so happened that an instrument was at hand. In 1952, the Army Chief of Staff, the Mandailing Batak A.H. Nasution, was suspended for his role in a failed mini-coup in Jakarta. Still young and ambitious, he decided to form an electoral organization of his own, which he called IPKI, Ikatan Pendukung Kemerdekaan, or League of Supporters of Indonesian Independence), described as a movement opposed to the existing major parties, especially the PKI. In the 1955 elections, it won only four seats, but it was evident that the strongest of its bases lay in Medan. In that year, Nasution was reinstated as Army Chief of Staff by Prime Minister Burhanuddin Harahap, scion of a clan of Southern Bataks (Angkola) well comnnected to the Nasution clan -- but he kept control of IPKI. After the crushing of the PRRI, but with Martial Law in solid place, IPKI developed a 'youth wing,' parallel to those of the major legal parties, which came to be called Pemuda Pantjasila, nominally composed of retired soldiers and civilian veterans of the Revolution.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466013033834 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The key figure in this Pemuda Pantjasila was another Mandailing Batak, a serious Medan gangster and ex-boxer called Effendy Nasution. 2 These gangsters had had their own clashes with the PKI youth organization, Pemuda Rakjat, over 'turf' as well as ideology, and were ferociously anti-Communist. But as members of a 'national organization,' sponsored by the top Army officer, they had excellent protection, also for their protection rackets. Over the six years between 1959 and 1965 the military and the Medan gangsters collaborated more and more closely with each other. The PP significantly helped SOKSI to control the plantation belt against formidable SOBSI/Sarbupri resistance. Thus when Suharto decided to inaugurate the massacre of communists, the Medan underworld, dressed up as Pemuda Pantjasila, was ready to 'help' and accustomed to carry out 'confidential' Army directives.

The contrast with the huge Javanese plantation belt is striking. We have seen how in this zone the army could rely on the Nahdlatul Ulama's huge, and legal, mass- organizations, as well as the authority of the mainly Javanese territorial civilian bureaucracy, manned heavily by conservative elements in the PNI. In Medan, the NU presence was minimal, the PNI was factionalized, while the once-powerful modernist Muslim party Masjumi had been banned in 1959. No united civil bureaucracy existed in such an ethnically complex melting pot. This is why, when the massacres drew to an end, NU and Ansor members in Java generally returned to 'normal' religious life (and soon came into conflict with the military), while Medan's gangsters returned to another 'normal life,' of extortion, blackmail, 'protection,' gambling dens, brothels and so on, while staying close to the military. But with new patrons, as time passed. General Nasution, now retired, gradually faded away. Eventually, in 1980, the PP's leadership went to Yapto Soerjosoemarno, the Eurasian son of a Surakartan aristocrat and general, and a Jewish-Dutch mother. Yapto, ice-cold mercenary killer, and big-game hunter had long been close to the Medan gangsters, but was also a relative of Mrs. Suharto. Officially, PP was an independent organization, but it always supported Suharto and his policies, and helped to enforce the steady series of electoral victories by Golkar, the regime's nonparty party-of-the-regime. It remained loyal to its patron right up to his abdication. (Since then, it has found no steady patron, and its power and unity have visibly declined). Meantime, the NU, a national party, tried its best to compete with Golkar in elections, and for a time was the most significant component of the impotent legal opposition.

Petrus

It is instructive to note what happened when Suharto decided, in 1983, to liquidate substantial numbers of petty gangsters. (In the press the killers were initially termed *penembak-penembak misterieus* i.e. mysterious shooters, quickly and sardonically given the acronym Petrus, i.e. Saint Peter, since the operational mastermind was Catholic, Eurasian Lieutenant-General Benny Murdani). In Java several thousands were brutally murdered, in the dead of night, by Army commandos in mufti. In Medan their opposite numbers went untouched. The reason for the difference is clear. In 1980, Central Java was unexpectedly rocked by a coordinated wave of violence against local Chinese, in which petty gangsters played a visible role. Many of these people had worked as electoral enforcers for Suharto's *éminence grise*, Major-General Ali Murtopo, who also headed Suharto's private political intelligence apparatus (Opsus). For an always-suspicious tyrant, it looked as if his once-trusted accomplice might be flexing his own political muscles, to show what his shady apparatus might do before and during the next elections. The unexpected and unauthorized anti-Chinese violence hit Suharto's nerves in another way. 20th century Java had a long

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466013033834 Published online by Cambridge University Press

history of popular Sinophobic movements, which could spread alarmingly fast if the circumstances were suitable. Furthermore, the successes of Suharto's New Order 'development' economy depended heavily on the energies of the country's Chinese, whose safety and prosperity were excellent signs of stability in the eyes of foreign investors. Thus the liquidation of Murtopo's gangster network can be understood both as reassurance to the Chinese, and as depriving Murtopo himself of any independent political power. Not long afterward, he was exiled as Ambassador in Kuala Lumpur where he succumbed to a heart attack. Nothing like this happened in distant Medan, since the gangsters were reliable allies of the local military, not dangerous minions of a key figure in Suharto's own Jakarta entourage. If, as periodically happened, they were behind anti-Chinese violence, the main motive was not Sinophobia, but a raising of the level of protection payments.3 It is instructive, one may note in passing, that in his bizarre semi-ghosted memoir, *Otobiografi: Pikiran, Ucapan dan Tindakan Saya* (Autobiography: My Thoughts, Statements and Actions) Suharto boastfully took responsibility for these extrajudicial killings, in the following dishonest manner: "The real problem is that these events [Petrus] were preceded by fear and anxiety among the people. Threats from criminals, murders, and so on all happened. Stability was shaken. It was as though the country no longer had any stability. There was only fear. Criminals went beyond human limits. They not only broke the law, but they stepped beyond the limits of humanity. For instance, old people were robbed of whatever they had and were then killed. Isn't that inhumane? If you are going to take something, well, take it, but don't murder. There were women whose wealth was stolen and other people's wives were even raped by these criminals and in front of their husbands. Isn't that going too far? Doesn't that demand action? […] Naturally, we had to give them the *treatment* [original in English], strong measures. And what sort of measures? Yes, with real firmness. But that firmness did not mean shooting, bang! Bang! Just like that.. But those who resisted, yes, like it or not, had to be shot……. So the corpses were left where they were, just like that. This was for *shock therapy* [original in English] so the masses would understand that, faced with criminals, there were still some people who would act and would control them." But the dictator never boasted about his masterminding the massacres of 1965.

With this comparative background in mind, it becomes easier to understand the peculiar impunity exhibited by Joshua's collaborators. They had been professional criminals all their adult lives, and if some of the leaders had political ambitions these were essentially local or provincial, aiming no higher than the governorship of North Sumatra, and far removed from Jakarta. In power, they pursued traditional gangsters' interests, money, respect (fear), immunity from the law, and some political positions. They were not associated with any nationally-important political or religious organizations beyond Suharto's own Golkar, which they served obediently. They had worked with the military from well before the massacres, and carried out the killings of communists with savage efficiency. They did not organize serious Sinophobic violence after 1966, nor did they put the squeeze on local foreign investors. One could say that, in an odd way, they even regarded themselves as a sort of half-hidden left hand of the New Order Leviathan: uncivil servants.4 Best of all, when Suharto turned on gangsters in Java, the 'boys' were left untouched. Not surprisingly, there was no question of Abdurrahman Wahid's plea for forgiveness.

Nonetheless, we can surmise that they had their disappointments. One of these must have been lack of official and national recognition for their role in the massacres, the one moment in their otherwise humdrum criminal lives where they could imagine themselves as among

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466013033834 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the saviors of their country. The problem lay with 'Jakarta,' and the stance that Suharto and his henchmen took with regard to the slaughter. The striking thing was that these ruling circles handled the annual commemorations for 1965 by largely concentrating on October l's first victims -- as national heroes. Every town had streets named after these generals, and in Jakarta a special museum was created in their heroic honour. A state-sponsored film – for which annual viewings were compulsory in all schools and colleges – consisted entirely of mourning for the generals, and execration of the diabolical PKI. But in Medan, no general, or indeed any military officer, had been killed.

Furthermore, the basic official account of the last three months of 1965 depended on a rhetoric of popular fury at PKI bestiality. American journalists at the time liked to explain, in colonial-speak, that the primitive population had gone *amok*. The military's propagandists employed this idea, describing the Army's role as curbing and calming down this wave of 'spontaneous' popular violence. (In fact, there is overwhelming evidence that the massacres in Central Java started with the arrival of the red-beret commandos in mid-October, and in East Java one month later when these professional killers moved east.)

There were, thus, no heroic slaughterers honored by the Suharto regime. The most notorious red-beret officers never made it up to the top levels of the military. Finally, the euphemistic official language of the regime precluded heroism. Thus communists arrested by the military, then executed or imprisoned for years without trial, were said to have been *di-amankan*, which can be translated as 'secured,' for the sake of *keamanan* or 'public' security. In later years, when generals got the itch to write their memoirs, they used the same euphemisms. They had 'secured' communists, not least to protect them from 'the anger of the people.' The regime never boasted about the massacres and never announced any figures of the number who had died. This entire propaganda strategy, also aimed at foreign audiences, left no place for 'heroic killers' in Medan's imagery. But hadn't the gangsters helped to save the country? So, willy-nilly, they set up their own monument to themselves, a 30 foot high chrome '66' next to the city's railway station. An ignorant traveller could take it for a logo for some new fast-food competitor for McDonalds.

Furthermore, had these old timers been adequately rewarded in practical terms? If one looks at the two killers featured in *Sungai Ular*, one can see that they are actually nobodies. Elderly men, with decaying muscles and petty bourgeois clothes and homes, few visible signs of prestige, no medals, only local fear. To be sure, the top gangsters have acquired splashy mansions, luxurious cars, expensive kitschy jewelry and wristwatches, and some important but local official posts. But these emoluments were not, primarily, immediate rewards for yesterday's 'heroism,' nor were they much then publicized, but rather evolved incrementally over mundane decades of dictatorship and criminality. They are not 'in national history,' in a country where national history is very important, and national heroes abundant.

This condition helps to explain some of the peculiarities of the figures we can see in Joshua's films. His camera offers them the possibility of commemoration, and transcendence of age, routine, and death. When the more ghastly of the two killers in *Sungai Ular* is shown in his petty bourgeois home with his wife and family, he is renarrating some of the most terrible tortures and murders that he inflicted. The family is used to this endless domestic reenactment. His plump wife giggles to keep him happy, and the children pay no attention at all. He boasts of his magical powers, saying that the widows of communists come to him for healing. True? Maybe, but their arrival at his house is merely a sign that

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466013033834 Published online by Cambridge University Press

forty years later they are still afraid of him. His invisible medal is this abiding terror. A kind of dim hierarchy is still visible, when the two veterans have to decide who will play communist and who killer.

They have a commemorative idea about film, actually Hollywood films which they loved from their teens. The Lone Ranger, Batman, Patten, Shane, Samson, MacArthur, Rambo, et al – all real or imaginary men -- are figures of immortality for killers who are heroic patriots, not grand gangsters. This doesn't mean that they don't live within local cultures – supernaturalism, Gothic horror comics, kitschy melodrama. Joshua thus comes to them as a kind of providential 'Hollywood' ally. They will die soon, but maybe he will make them immortal.

Yet they are stuck. They do not have available to them anything that can represent the communists. While Suharto was still dictator, his regime could issue must-watch films showing the bestiality of the PKI, and mourning the murdered generals. But such films have gone out of circulation since his fall 12 years go. The 'Medan boys' have nothing like this, and local history of events 45 years ago is gradually headed for oblivion or myth. So some of them have to act the communists themselves, sometimes even in drag . As nationalist gangsters, they have no place in a national history into which the Indonesian Army as a corporate institution with an 'honorable' patriotic record can be inserted. Their gangsterism is filmable only in terms of costume, body-language, and kitschy imaginative success. (This attitude resembles the outlook of American Cosa Nostra people, who, journalists report, love going to gangster movies and identify with the FBI!)

At the same time, these old men realize that they are also within a market of industrial fantasies, access to which comes through the American, who is young enough to be their son. This is a market, which, over the years, has increasingly blurred the boundaries between the established genres of heroic war films, gangster films, and horror films, at the expense of the former and to the advantage of the latter. (Shining Shane gives way to cannibal Hannibal Lecter. This condition makes it imaginable to have Apocalypse Now replace Bataan.) But it allows for fantasies not available in 1965. We can take Anwar Kongo as exemplary. He proudly shows himself as a sadistic murderer, but ..... he is haunted, so he enacts, by the ghosts of his victims; but then he congratulates himself on helping to send his prey straight to Heaven, as if in a 'black mass' retroversion of jihad theology. He shows his weird authority by forcing (???) his favorite large, overweight, thuggish henchman Herman to dress up as a Communist woman. 'She' appears with the depressing glitzy outfit of a well-off, middle-aged transvestite in a TV competition. A real Communist woman, a gaunt, shriveled, terrified widow in her 70s would never do. Actually there are no limits (let's see what we can do!) except that only he and his boys can appear in the film. There is a kind of despair at work.

This despair is actuated by Joshua. The gangsters reenact whatever they wish and can imagine, but they can not control what "their" film will be like in the end. Joshua is a conundrum. He is there, like Rouch, beyond the camera's reach, an unseen interrogator, pal, witness, kid, judge, motherfucker. They have no idea how to control him, because they are his actors and there is no final script that they master. He is not part of their film but they are part of his. There are no famous Hollywood films with invisible characters interrogating Joshua's in them. This is a source of anxiety. (Joshua has written to me that while many of these people trust him almost completely, others are becoming suspicious that he may be betraying them)

The inevitable response is a strange mixture of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466013033834 Published online by Cambridge University Press

motivations. Excess first: "Beat this, motherfucker! I sent them all to Heaven and they should be grateful to me." Second: recourse to the filmic supernatural. "That bastard Ramli was so magically invulnerable that it took us ages to kill him, and we had to cut off his dick first!" Third: pride. Today, forty-five years after 1965, " they are still terrified of us." Fourth: hope. "We'll be famous around the world, even after we die, no matter if young Indonesians don't want to think about us, and the government will never give us the monuments we deserve." Fifth: Truthfulness. "There was no *amok*, and we loyally carried out the instructions of the national army." Last: the smugness of impunity. "Kid, we can reenact anything at all, and there is nothing anyone, including you, can do to us." All the same, they are, like everyone else, under sentence of death from the day they are born. They know they will soon be buried, and nobody will give a damn. There is no one who can send them straight to Heaven.

Benedict Anderson is the author of Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism *and an authority on Indonesian politics and culture. He is professor emeritus of Government at Cornell and an editor of* New Left Review.

This article is adapted with a new introduction to a chapter in, Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory and the Performance of Violence, edited by *Joram Ten Brink and Joshua Oppenheimer. Copyright © 2013 Joram Ten Brink and Joshua Oppenheimer*. Reprinted with permission of Columbia University Press.

Recommended Citation: Benedict Anderson, "*Impunity and Reenactment: Reflections on the 1965 Massacre in Indonesia and its Legacy,*" The Asia-Pacific Journal, *Vol. 11, Issue 15, No. 4, April 15, 2013.*

Benedict Anderson's published work on the Indonesian coup of 1965 spans the years 1966-2012 and includes the following:

1. 1966. Benedict R. Anderson, Ruth McVey, and Frederick P. Bunnell,*A preliminary analysis of the October l, 1965 coup in Indonesia*(Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project.

2. 1972.*Java in a time of revolution*(Ithaca: Cornell University Press).

3. 1983.*Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*(London: Verso)

4. 1985.*In the mirror: literature and politics in Siam in the American Period*(Bangkok: Duang Kamol)

5.1990.*Language and Power, Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*

(Ithaca: Cornell University Press)

6. 1998. *The spectre of comparisons: Nationalism, SE Asia, and the World*(London: Verso)

7. 2005.*Under three flags: anarchism and the anti-colonial imagination*(London: Verso).

8. 2008.*Why counting counts: a study of forms of consciousness and problems of language in Noli Me Tangere and El Filibusterismo*(Manila: Ateneo de Manila Press)

9. 2012.*The fate of rural hell: asceticism and desire in Buddhist Thailand*(Calcutta: Seagull Press).

Notes

[1] The PRRI (Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia) was announced after Jakarta rejected an ultimatum demanding Sukarno's return to being merely a symbolic head of state, the formation of an anti-communist extra-parliamentary cabinet, etc. It was substantially aided, financially and militarily, by the CIA. Its stronghold was Sumatra, and its core leadership came from well-entrenched 'native son' officers, though

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466013033834 Published online by Cambridge University Press

various prominent leaders of parties (mainly Masjumi) were included to give the PRRI a better international reception. Not long afterward, a comparable movement appeared in Sulawesi, which allied itself with the PRRI. It should be added that regional discontent with Jakarta's policies and growing insubordination among Outer Island commanders had forced the central government to declare martial law for the whole country in March 1957. This declaration can be said to mark the start of the military's eventual domination of the country over most of the next forty years.

[2] Among Batak purists, the Nasution clan was often suspected of mixed blood impurity, i.e. mix of Batak, Minangkabau, Indian, Atjehnese and Arab. This may explain why Effendy's street title was Effendy Keling (Indian). It is also possible that he was not born into the Nasution clan, but was adopted into it.

[3] In late colonial times, the most feared urban gangsters in the Indies were Eurasian and Chinese, i.e. from marginalized social groups. During the Revolution, some of the Eurasians took the side of the Dutch, while Chinese gangsters were recruited into the Po An Tui, a pro-Dutch force which tried to protect Chinese from Sinophobic violence In the 1950s, over 200,000 Eurasians fled to The Netherlands, willingly or unwillingly. Still, as we have seen above, the two most feared killers under Suharto, Murdani and Yapto, were both Eurasians. Chinese gangsters still existed, but Baperki, the dominant political organization for Chinese Indonesians was, under the capable leadership of leftwinger Sjauw Giok Tjhan, mindful of the bad reputation of the Po An Tui, so that it did not have a serious gangster element. After October l. 1965, many Baperki members were killed, tortured, and imprisoned, and the organization was banned as 'communist'. Hence, 'on the streets' Chinese had no organized protection bodies of their own. This situation opened the way for their fellow 'foreign Asian' business rivals, especially, in Medan, 'Indians' and Arabs' of various kinds, to take over. If one looks at Joshua's list of the names of PP leaders and backdoor masterminds, one will be struck by the number of them who are, wholly or partially, of Punjabi, 'Afghani,' and Arab stock. All Muslims, of course.

[4] In the middle 1980's I was contacted by a lady lawyer in Germany, asking me to provide professional testimony for a youngish Indonesian pleading for sanctuary. In written correspondence, the man said he had fled to Germany on the advice and with the help of his father, a middle ranking officer in the Army's military police. He had been a member of a gang, mostly sons of military men, which made its living by 'guarding' bars, discos, nightclubs. The gang strongly supported the Suharto government and help to make every election a 'success.' Then, out of the blue, came Petrus and he had to run for his life. I told him that since Petrus was aimed solely at gangsters, and this was widely known, the only way to get the German court to believe that they should grant him sanctuary was to admit that he was a gangster. The curious thing is that he could not bring himself to do so, insisting that he had always been loyal to the regime, and where required carried out its policies. This is a perfect example of left-hand bureaucratic consciousness. What, me?

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466013033834 Published online by Cambridge University Press