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## When a History Seminar Becomes Toxic: A Reading of the Attack on LBH Jakarta in September 2017

*Quand un séminaire d'histoire devient toxique : une lecture de l'attaque du LBH de Jakarta en septembre 2017*

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On September 16th-17th 2017, a group of scholars and activists<sup>2</sup> organised a discussion on the controversial events which took place in 1965-1966 in Indonesia: the abduction and murder of top-military figures, which led to the massacre of hundreds of thousands of people, most of them associated with the Indonesian Communist Party, PKI, others staunch supporters of President Soekarno.<sup>3</sup> The PKI was banned thereafter. The new president Suharto established the repressive New Order regime. The 2017 gathering was one more in a series, as many have been held since 1998, when the new political regime began to allow free speech. The main organiser was the Forum 1965, an umbrella association of various organisations of victims of this genocide.<sup>4</sup> Co-organisers were members of the International People's Tribunal 1965, a foundation which had organised a People's Tribunal in 2015 in The Hague, which had concluded that the Indonesian State should be held responsible for the post-1965 massacres, and that these killings amounted to genocide. The

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1. Emeritus professor, Gender and Women's Same-sex Relations Crossculturally, Amsterdam University.

2. Invited were well known researchers such as Professor Dr Asvi Warman Adam, Dr Baskara Wardaya, Dr Kusnanto Anggoro, Dr Abdul Wahid and others, as well as some of the country's best known human rights lawyers including Nursyahbani Katjasungkana and Todung Mulya Lubis.

3. A shorter and slightly different version appeared in *Inside Indonesia* November 3, 2017. <http://www.insideindonesia.org/when-a-history-seminar-becomes-toxic>.

4. As I will explain below, the use of the word genocide is justified by the conclusion of the Panel of Judges of the IPT 1965 in July 2016 and published in 2017.

venue for the seminar was the office of the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation in Jakarta (Yayasan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Indonesia, YLBHI). It was to be a modest, closed symposium for which—as it was held inside an office, and with less than 50 participants—no permit was needed. Such seminars are regularly held in the YLBHI office without any problem. But this seminar turned toxic.

The preparations for the seminar had come to the attention of some groups with a vested interest in maintaining the New Order version of this tragedy and they planned to disrupt it. The evening before the date of the seminar, Rahmat Himran, coordinator of the Anti Communist Students' and Youth Alliance (Aliansi Mahasiswa dan Pemuda Anti Komunis) had met with retired general Kivlan Zen and representatives of several radical Muslim militia including the PMII (Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia, Indonesian Muslim Students' Organisation). They decided to break apart the seminar.<sup>5</sup> They contacted the police and asked them to prohibit the meeting.<sup>6</sup> When on the morning of September 16, 2017, the first participants arrived at the seminar venue they found it barricaded by the police. They were not allowed to enter the office. The survivors of the genocide, in their 80s and many in poor health, had to wait and stand outside in the sun while negotiations were carried out. Eventually the staff was allowed to bring some plastic chairs outside so the elderly could sit. Outside the gate, members of the PMII, the Laskar Merah Putih (Red White Militia) and GP Ansor (Gerakan Pemuda Ansor, Ansor Youth Movement) had gathered, shouting out slogans to eliminate the PKI and to dissolve this seminar which, they asserted, was meant to revive the banned PKI. They were well prepared, carrying banners, the attributes of their respective organisations and their uniforms. They had also come equipped with a van complete with megaphones and loudspeakers. This mob had come from a demonstration against the crimes against humanity committed by the Myanmar government against the Rohingyas. The politician Amien Rais (of the conservative Muslim Party PAN) had not only held forth on the situation in Myanmar, he had also called for a *jihad* against the so-called revival of the PKI.<sup>7</sup>

5. <https://tirto.id/rapat-sebelum-menyербу-gedung-ylbhi-cwSG>. see also <http://www.suaraislam.co/inilah-sosok-rahmat-himran-korlap-penyenang-ylbhi-korlap-gerakan-tangkap-ahok/>

6. Rahmat Himran is also a leader of the so called 313 militia, an organisation set up in 2016 to make the governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, usually called Ahok, step down. They organised a mass rally on 31 March 2016, the start of a campaign of mass demonstrations that eventually saw the governor imprisoned on a charge of blasphemy, losing his campaign for re-election to his Muslim rival. Rahmat Himran had also been in the forefront of the virulent anti-LGBT campaign which erupted late 2015. See <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-3650087/koordinator-aksi-di-lbh-semat-dikabarkan-hilang->. For his long involvement in the campaign against the LGBT community: see <http://nasional.harianterbit.com/nasional/2016/02/25/57556/86/40/Sebarkan-Kelainan-Komunitas-LGBT-Bisa-Kena-Sanksi-Penjara>. For an analysis of how the anti-communist and anti-LGBT campaigns are connected, see Wieringa 2017.

7. <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-3645929/amien-rais-bicara-cebong-dan-pki-di-aksi-bela-rohingya>. Ironically the chair of the YLBHI foundation and general coordinator of the IPT 1965,

The police explained to the organisers that the meeting had to be dissolved as it didn't have a permit. Human rights lawyers of the YLBHI argued with the police that this constituted a violation of the right of assembly and of freedom of expression, and that by law no permit was needed for this closed, small seminar. The demonstrators outside shouted "Allah is great" and "eliminate the PKI," the slogans also heard during the mass demonstrations in 1966, which had been taking place while the genocide was unfolding, both justifying the violence and inciting vigilante groups to participate in the riots, mass arrests and massacres. The old victims patiently sitting outside the building had heard it all before. The slogans, the brutality of a mob set loose. A reminder of the violence experienced 50 years ago. Yet even under Suharto, an attack like this one had never occurred. The YLBHI building has always been a safe space, where people could discuss issues freely. The question is therefore: what allowed this sabotage to happen? An attention to a strict chronology of the facts and a review of the distinct groups and figures involved shed some light on the issue. It clearly appears that the continued wilful misrepresentation of the events surrounding 1965-1966 allows the old mechanism of rumours—renamed hoaxes—to be operative. What remains to be answered is the meaning to grant to this attack, which is far from an isolated case, for Indonesian politics.

### **The well-known events: a reminder**

The period 1965-66 in Indonesia was a troubled one. On October 1st 1965, six generals and one lieutenant (by mistake) were murdered. A genocide followed with estimates ranging from 300,000 to one million victims, while hundreds of thousands were taken prisoner under inhuman circumstances or set to work in forced labour camps.<sup>8</sup> Under great pressure from right-wing students, President Soekarno was removed. General Suharto replaced him, heading up a repressive military dictatorship for 32 years, which he called the New Order. Increasingly attacked by students and human rights activists he was forced to step down during the economic crisis of 1998. A period of democracy followed, called Reformasi. But the all-powerful military never lost control over the reins of the state, though they stepped aside to allow Indonesia to present a less repressive face to the outer world.

Who murdered the generals on October 1st, 1965? The actual murderers are known, middle-ranking officers of the same army. They have all been tried, apart from the lieutenant who headed the abduction squad and who saw

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Nursyahbani Katjasungkana, was about to depart to join the panel of judges of the Permanent People's Tribunal on the Rohingyas, in Kuala Lumpur.

8. In the First comprehensive study on the mass murders, Cribb (1990), concludes possibly 500,000 people were murdered. The Final Report (2016 published in 2017) by the IPT 1965 follows this estimate. Other reports mention different figures.

to it that all generals were killed. He has mysteriously disappeared. But who ordered him to kill the generals? And who organised this affair? And why? The organising group called themselves the September 30th Movement (in Indonesian, Gerakan 30 September, G30S). They declared they just wanted to abduct the army's top brass and bring them before President Soekarno, as they had understood these generals planned a coup against the President in the coming days. Perhaps an unusual way to deal with political matters, but not uncommon in Indonesia. The President himself had been abducted by eager youth to force him to proclaim independence. But then why were the generals murdered? For when he heard that news Soekarno became angry and refused all support.<sup>9</sup> With their murders the G30S group signed their own death warrants, and ensured that, in view of the very limited support they had, their movement headed towards a sure defeat.

General Suharto, who was not murdered, though he was a high enough general to have appeared on the list, quickly subdued the small rebellious units. He immediately blamed the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) for masterminding a 'coup' and set about eliminating the PKI. Muslim and Catholic mass organisations<sup>10</sup>, which had long been antagonistic towards the growing influence of the PKI, were trained and drummed up to demonstrate against leftist organisations and President Soekarno. Students were mobilised by the army and a conservative Catholic group led by a Jesuit priest. These demonstrations turned violent and under the pretext of restoring order General Suharto managed to wrest the presidency from Soekarno. In the meantime, he had mounted a propaganda campaign in which the PKI was painted as a-religious group, 'always already' traitors to the Nation, who had used the Gerwani organisation to train their women members to engage in sex orgies. In such an orgy, young girls who happened to be present at the site where the generals were killed would supposedly have seduced and castrated them. They were also alleged to have sung a popular song about a special kind of weed, Genjer-genjer. These lies were repeated throughout the New Order and became the official version of this period, endlessly repeated in school books and the media.<sup>11</sup> In 1984, a propaganda film ('Pengkhiranatan G30S/ PKI', 'The Betrayal of the G30S/PKI') was made in which this fictional story was presented as historical fact,

9. There is a lot of literature on these events. The most well known analysis of the September 30th Movement is Roosa (2006). On the mass violence that followed it see for instance Kammen and McGregor (2012).

10. Interestingly, a conservative Catholic group, guided by the Jesuit priest Father Beek had been particularly active in the first stages of mobilisation. The former student leader Wanandi provides an illuminating inside account of the Catholic student movement which had prepared itself long in advance with printing presses and safe houses (Wanandi 2012:189).

11. See Wieringa (2002) for an account of the slander against Gerwani.

and in which Suharto was portrayed as a hero and Soekarno as a traitor, the army as trustworthy, and rival units like the Air Force as complicit. This bloody film was compulsory viewing for generations of school children, until 1998.<sup>12</sup>

### **State-sponsored narration: its deconstruction and the recent political answer**

In the meantime, both foreign and national researchers exposed the lies. The autopsy, which turned out to be signed by Suharto, was made available to the public decades ago. It showed no marks of castration.<sup>13</sup> The stories told by the girls themselves (who were never tried, though they were all imprisoned) also made clear that there had been no orgy. Although a few leaders of the PKI had known of and supported the G30S group, the party as a whole had been totally unprepared and caught unaware. It was revealed that Suharto had known of the plans to abduct the generals and had done nothing to protect his colleagues. There have also been suggestions that he was behind the G30S group or at least may have promised them support. Soekarno was even accused of having planned the coup against himself, although this accusation defies all logic.<sup>14</sup> In short, there is a lot of unclarity and confusion about this crucial period in Indonesian history, which has left such deep scars on the nation.

This has not prevented the army chief of staff, General Gatot Nurmantyo, from ordering that the notorious propaganda film ‘The Betrayal of G30S/PKI’ be shown again both for the army and for the millennial generation, to teach them about history.<sup>15</sup> It is this film that contains the scene showing alleged Gerwani members happily dancing nakedly the dance of the “fragrant Flowers,” singing the song *Genjer-genjer*, castrating the generals and gouging out their eyes. The film also “proved” that the PKI planned to betray the nation, and that the Air Force and President Soekarno were complicit. The army and General Suharto on the other hand were presented as heroes.<sup>16</sup> Also, this film has not been shown since 1998 because the Air Force had protested against the way they were portrayed in the film.

In a recent television programme, Sukmawati Sukarnoputri reminisced about a discussion she had had with the producer of the propaganda film, Arifin C. Noer. He had acknowledged that the film had been ordered and paid for by the army, which had kept close control on the production process. He was well aware that many scenes contained historical distortions.<sup>17</sup>

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12. See McGregor (2007) for how the military wrote its own history on this period.

13. See Anderson (1987).

14. For the interviews with the girls see Wieringa (2002). For the various versions of what happened, see Roosa (2006) and Wieringa and Katjasungkana (2018 forthcoming).

15. <http://nasional.republika.co.id/berita/nasional/politik/17/09/18/owh1q2354-nobar-film-g30spki-panglima-tni-perintah-saya-mau-apa>

16. See for instance McGregor (2007) for an analysis of this film.

17. As told by Sukmawati in the TVOne programme ILC Indonesia Lawyer’s Club on 19

Islamist politicians such as Amien Rais of PAN and lawmakers of Golkar and PKS (Partai Keadilan Sosial, Social Justice Party) recently chimed in to support the showing of the film.<sup>18</sup> On social media images appeared of the FPI and other militias such as the group Bang Japar of the hate-mongering Senator Fahira Idris and her supporters who organised showings of the film.<sup>19</sup> However, protests remain against the army chief's plans to widely screen the movie again. The NU is rejecting the directive, and the Ministry of Education does not want school children to be exposed to this film again.<sup>20</sup>

The president has chosen to take an ambiguous position. While he voiced his support for the showing of a film on the 1965 period, suggesting a new film, better suited to the needs of the present generation, should be produced,<sup>21</sup> he attended the screening of the "Betrayal of the G30S/PKI," in the presence of general Gatot Nurmantyo.<sup>22</sup> The Director General for Education, well known historian and former human rights activist Hilmar Farid, seized on the occasion. He said it was an excellent idea indeed, a new film must be made, which should incorporate recent historical findings. While this announces a possible political battle, several films are already available which portray the period in a different light from the army propaganda film. The lies on Gerwani are refuted in the film "The Women and the Generals" (2010) by Swedish filmmaker Maj Wechseltmann, and the two documentaries produced by Joshua Oppenheimer—"The Act of Killing" (2012) and "The Look of Silence" (2014) could be widely screened (and the ban on *The Look of Silence* lifted) as suggested by the lawmaker Eva Sundari.<sup>23</sup>

On social media (opini.id), a short video was uploaded immediately suggesting what this new film might contain. A well-known scene from the original propaganda film, in which PKI leaders are shown allegedly planning to take power, has been given a new voice-over. In this fake video they are

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September 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86gYmZ\\_wwFg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86gYmZ_wwFg)

18. <https://kumparan.com/pranamyadewati/amien-rais-saya-gembira-seminar-pki-di-ylbh-jakarta-dibubarkan>

19. See <https://sketsanews.com/news/fahira-idris-hukum-tegas-lgbt/> Fahira Idris is well known for her virulent hate speech regarding LGBT organisations. This group also joined the attack on the YLBHI building.

20. <http://www.surat kabar.id/53169/news/pbnu-anggap-film-g30spki-adalah-propaganda-dan-tak-cocok-diputar-saat-ini> and <https://www.tempo.co/read/news/2017/09/17/078909929/tni-ajak-tonton-film-g-30s-pki-pbnu-tak-cocok-diputar-sekarang> Menteri Pendidikan juga melarang anak SD/SMP menonton Film G30S/PKI : <https://kumparan.com/teuku-muhammad-valdy-arief/mendikbud-larang-siswa-sd-dan-smp-nonton-film-g30s-pki>

21. <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/09/22/millennials-confront-nations-dark-past-in-their-own-way.htm>

22. <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20170930001458-20-245149/jokowi-dan-panglima-tni-nobar-film-g30s-pki>

23. [http://www.asia-pacific-solidarity.net/southeastasia/indonesia/indoleft/2017/viva\\_tnchiefchallengedtoscee\\_200917.htm](http://www.asia-pacific-solidarity.net/southeastasia/indonesia/indoleft/2017/viva_tnchiefchallengedtoscee_200917.htm)



discussing the marriage of a popular singer, Raisa Andriana, and the leaders are told to watch infotainment news so as to be better informed. This is of course a nice but bitter—for powerless—parody.

### **The opposed voices of the Muslim groups**

During the negotiations with the police, activists alerted the chair of the Nadhlatul Ulama (NU) youth movement, GP Ansor, Gus Yaqut. He immediately called back its members for he had not authorised them to join the demonstrations. This is an interesting development, for members of GP Ansor and its militant unit, Banser, had participated in the mass killings in 1965-66. At the moment however, the moderate Muslim mass organisation NU is engaged in a struggle against radical Muslim groups which have more and more influence on a large part of the Muslim population. These last groups operate via front organisations such as the PMII. The NU, a large organisation with millions of members, includes progressive groups such as Gusdurian, consisting of young progressive Muslim scholars.<sup>24</sup>

The secretary general of the GP Ansor, Abdul Rochman, issued a statement that said that GP Ansor wanted the truth out and supported a seminar like the one organised. A related group JIAD (Jaringan Islam Anti Diskriminasi, Muslim Anti-Discrimination Network) also released a message, stating that to speak the truth about the 1965-66 genocide will liberate the people from the shackles of the past. Another statement of support came from the HMI (Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam) branch of Gajah Mada University in Yogyakarta.<sup>25</sup> Later, to show their solidarity with the embattled human rights defenders, members of GP Ansor as well as KOKAM, the youth organisation of the Muhammadiyah and many other organisations which are assisted by lawyers of the LBH, such as those of paralegals and domestic workers, helped clean up the debris of the attack on the YLBHI building.<sup>26</sup>

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24. The name refers to Gus Dur, or Abdurrahman Wahid, the country's fourth President and the only one so far to search for a way to find justice for the survivors of the 1965 genocide. He was a very influential leader of the NU. Durian is the name of a fruit with a hard prickly shell, a foul smell and a sweet taste.

25. <http://hmfisipolugm.or.id/rilis-sikap-hmi-komisariat-fisipol-ugm-mengecam-pembubaran-seminar-dan-penyerangan-di-lbh-ylbhi-jakarta/>. This is also noteworthy, for before 1965 the HMI and the student organisation associated with the PKI, the CGMI, often clashed.

26. KOKAM is the abbreviation of "Komando Kesiapsiagaan Angkatan Muda" (Resilience Command of the Muhammadiyah Youth). It is striking that this militant youth group which often operates in smart military-style uniforms is now engaged in such a peaceful activity, as can be seen in their support of a human rights organisation that also helps 1965 victims. So far they have usually been associated with attacks on 1965 victims. Apparently they have shifted gears in the wake of the polemics between the traditional, so-called moderate Muslim mass organisations such as the NU and Muhammadiyah and the Islamist, neo-Salafist groups such as HTI, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia. This sudden shift, by the way, also indicates the control of the central leadership over their members. Whether they attack or clean up, these are no spontaneous actions.



Finally, the participants were allowed in. Yet in the afternoon police stormed the building after all, rushing right up to the 4th floor, under the pretext they had understood the seminar was underway despite the fact it had been prohibited. Their suspicion was aroused when the elderly survivors had returned to the building around 3 pm. They had been evacuated to a safe place but as they had come from all over Indonesia they wanted to evaluate the event. The police were however still swarming all over the grounds and decided to attack. They did not act on their own initiative, though. Apparently Kivlan Zen and his associates had received information about the discussions inside the building. At least during the television programme the “Indonesia Lawyers’ Club’ on 19 September he waved his mobile phone, saying “I may be retired, but I get enough intelligence.” The participants were forcibly dispersed by the police, who took the banner and documents as proof.

On Saturday evening indignant activists sent out messages denouncing what they called the “emergency of democracy” and called for activists and artists to join them the next day at 10 in the morning to celebrate a cultural festival of free speech, *Asik Asik Aksi*.<sup>27</sup> Some 200 people eventually came, including singers, poets and musicians. If we cannot speak the truth, we will celebrate it through art, was the message.

By the beginning of the evening of Sunday 17 September, when the art fair was over and the participants wanted to go home, all of a sudden, demonstrators entered the grounds and filled the streets around the building of the YLBHI. It turned out that a hoax had been circulating on social media, conveying the message that a PKI meeting was going on after all and that they were singing the song *Genjer-genjer*.<sup>28</sup> The ca. 1000 aggressive protesters shouted slogans like “long live the army,” “disband the PKI,” “it is allowed by Islam to drink their blood,” “burn them alive,” “Allah is great.”<sup>29</sup> This time, the protesters included members from the large militias of the FBR (Forum Betawi Rempug, Betawi Brotherhood Forum), and the FPI (Forum Pembela Islam, Islam Defenders’ Front) as well as from the smaller *Majelis Rasulullah*.<sup>30</sup> These very well-organised vigilante groups are well-funded, equipped, trained, and known for their violence.<sup>31</sup> They had been mobilised via their whatsapp groups and other forms of social media.

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27. A play with words, *Asik* or *Asyik* means passionate and is an anagram of *Aksi*.

28. <https://tirto.id/hoax-pki-penyerbuan-dan-kericuhan-senin-dini-hari-di-ylbhi-cwSW>

29. There were also specific calls with pictures of particular activists, with calls to burn them alive. For security reasons I do not provide their names.

30. The FBR is a militia which combines cultural activities of the Betawi group with vigilante actions. The FPI is a hardliner Muslim militia known for its attacks on minority groups. The *Majelis Rasulullah* is a youth group, mostly known for the spreading of ultraconservative Islamist teaching.

31. See also: <https://tirto.id/dari-mana-1000-an-orang-yang-mengepung-lbh-jakarta-cwT9>

They tried to storm the building. This time the police had to protect the participants. They explained to the protesters this was no PKI seminar, only a cultural festival. They denied the song *Genjer-genjer* was sung.<sup>32</sup> To no avail. The protests grew increasingly violent. Stones and bottles were hurled at the police and at the building, injuring officers and smashing the windows. Inside the building the participants barricaded the doors with chairs and desks. The gate was damaged, the grounds were trampled, doors ruined. The police used tear gas and water cannons to sweep the streets clear, but the protesters kept coming. Finally, after midnight it was possible to evacuate the first festival participants in police buses; by three o'clock in the morning the last convoy of buses left the premises. They were followed by aggressive youths on motorbikes all the way to the grounds of the National Human Rights Office, where the participants were safe, and from whence they were finally able to regain their homes. Only 22 violent protesters were arrested.

### **Post-truth? Hoaxes as political manipulation**

Shifts in power constellations often create the need to engineer historical “facts,” called black propaganda, and are usually accompanied by hate speech, to support the rise of a new victorious group.<sup>33</sup> The most conspicuous form of such manipulation in Indonesian modern history is the use of the song *Genjer-genjer* and the portrayal in army propaganda of naked dancing girls castrating the country's top brass. This image is repeated, again and again, to justify the genocide in 1965-66 and the continued persecution and stigmatisation of supporters of President Soekarno and the PKI. It is still effective 52 years after it was conjured up, as discussed above. But who are the present-day targets? It has become a little difficult to see any danger in the timid, frail, poorly-dressed octogenarians, who are the survivors of the massacres and army prison camps and the militias which assisted them. The new scapegoats are human rights defenders. In social media, messages appeared during the attack on the YLBHI office which read “YLBHI is the nest of the PKI.” Pictures were disseminated of discussion participants inside the building, over which a hammer and sickle and the letters PKI were pasted, everything dripping with blood. The PKI scare is kept very much alive. But for what purposes?

Hardliner Muslim organisations employ the bogeyman of a communist revival to keep their supporters literally boiling with anger. Before you know it, so the message goes, these activists are singing *Genjer-genjer* and the *Gerwani* witches may start castrating again. The power of such a simple and melodious

32. One of the protesters called to a female participant of the art fair: “Hey, cadaver (*bangke*), devil. If you are true then you undress.” A clear reference to the slander against *Gerwani* which is still, 52 years after it was invented, used to incite hatred (see reference on *Gerwani* above).

33. See Timmermann (2005), Welch (2014) and (2015).

song seems rather exaggerated.<sup>34</sup> Yet the police and the YLBHI staff had to repeat again and again that this song was not sung during the cultural festival. Instead participants sang Indonesia Raya and songs by the band Banda Neira, its lead singer Ananda Badudu bravely continuing to sing when the windows began to be pelted with stones in order to comfort the panicking audience.

This red scare is used to mobilise the Muslim masses. The sexual moral panic of young castrating Gerwani girls is one tactic to do so. And when nobody can be reasonably stirred up by the fantasy of such girls given the fact that Gerwani has been banned since 1966, the just as frightening but real bodies of LGBT persons are used. This is the second sexual moral panic, sweeping the country from late 2015 onwards. And, conveniently, rights defenders attempt to defend sexual minorities as well (as they do for Muslim victims of violence, members of religious minorities, victims of forced evictions and other forms of exploitation of the poor and defenceless). Banners appeared in several places which read that a particular local or religious organisation opposed both communists and LGBT persons. Several persons prominently visible in the YLBHI attack, such as Rahmat Himran and Fahira Idris, also feature in this homophobic campaign.<sup>35</sup> The same groups which demonstrate against LGBT groups were trying to destroy the YLBHI building.

Victimisation is another tactic. Though Muslims were in the majority during this attack on the YLBHI building, a list of possible topics for the new film was circulated on social media, which included more than 10 examples of alleged PKI cruelty, mostly incidents from around 1945. This was indeed a bloody period in Indonesian history, in which various groups struggled to impose their interpretation of what should typify the nation state. Characteristically, violent acts of Muslim groups perpetrated on their socialist adversaries, such as those that occurred during the long drawn-out and bloody Darul Islam rebellion (in which mosques were also burned in villages that did not support this movement) are ignored.<sup>36</sup>

During the raid on the YLBHI this form of victimisation came with a reversal of the truth. On social media the violent demonstrators asked indignantly ‘why are the police targeting us? We are not killers such as the PKI was in 1965’. These messages suggested that the generals were murdered by the PKI, in line with the state-sponsored version, ignoring the fact that personnel from the armed forces carried out the killings, and that those killed by the G30S group were generals, not Muslim leaders.

<sup>34</sup>. See Wieringa (2014) for an analysis of the song Genjer-genjer.

<sup>35</sup>. See the report by Nursyahbani Katjasungkana and Saskia E. Wieringa on the incipient homophobia in the country <https://www.outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/CreepingCriminalisation-eng.pdf>

<sup>36</sup>. See Anderson (2006) on the national revolution and Van Dijk (1981) on the Darul Islam Movement.

Indonesian politics is characterised by a paradox. At the national level Islamist parties do not dominate Parliament or government. Yet at the subnational level hundreds of regional regulations have been imposed which entail the “shariahtisation” of society. These regulations typically target women and LGBT groups. They are promulgated by local leaders who vie for the Muslim vote, often in areas where Islamist rebellions were waged in the late 1950s against the national state. Though at present the idea of an Indonesian caliphate is openly called for by one organisation alone, the recently banned Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), at the regional level these Muslim leaders have managed to impose all kinds of regulations that restrict women’s freedom of movement and other rights.<sup>37</sup>

The various disaffected groups are easily swayed by populist leaders and they are vulnerable to lies on social media. The Gerwani hoax is not the only slander to have made a deep political impact. In mid-2017 the Saracen group was dismantled after having been paid to spread hoaxes, fake news and hate speech.

Though the participants in the seminar were investigating past human rights violations, the President has so far not condemned neither the constitutional rights violations of the participants nor the violence of the mob. Demonstrating their power to organise street violence may act as a warning to remind us that what happened to Ahok – who is now in jail and has lost his election – could happen again.<sup>38</sup> In pictures taken during the attack on the YLBHI office, several demonstrators wore jackets with the name of the Muslim candidates who defeated the once popular incumbent. The Jokowi’s declaration on May 17, 2017, when he stated that the PKI must be clobbered (*gebug*), for it might raise its head again, was eagerly repeated by the Muslim rabble battering at the doors of the YLBHI building.

The army also has its own interests to pursue. First, they want to keep the monopoly on their version of the events of 1965-66. In his shrill aggressive voice, speaking in the already mentioned television programme of the Indonesian lawyers’ Club, Kivlan Zen repeated all the old lies about the murder of the generals, the presence of Gerwani women, the eye gouging, the weapons the PKI had allegedly stashed. The general called human rights defenders the

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37. The HTI was banned in mid-July 2017 under the controversial law (following a presidential regulation on the same topic) that bans groups that go against Pancasila and the Constitution, without any court ruling. <http://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2017/10/25/editorial-the-states-perppu-blank-check.html>. This is a return to the authoritarian New Order, when the government had the right to ban all groups they disapproved of, be they leftist or rightist.

38. Ironically Budi Yuni, who edited the video which then went viral, has also been convicted – to 1.5 years in jail. He had edited out a crucial phrase in Ahok’s speech, so that it seemed Ahok had criticised the Quran, instead of those who use the Quran for their own political ends. The conviction of Budi Yuni does not entail the release of Ahok.

“new PKI,” suggesting the same fate would befall them as had befallen PKI members in 1965-66. He is supported by various lawmakers who called for a ban on discussions of 1965 as that only would cause frictions in society.<sup>39</sup>

Right after the attack on the YLBHI office a call was circulated for a “peaceful action” to be held after the Friday prayers at mosques around the Parliament. The slogans were “refuse the revival of the PKI” and “eliminate the defenders of the PKI.” They were also agitating against the recent Presidential Instruction under which the radical Islamist group HTI was banned. The action was advertised as the “299 action,” standing for 29 September, just as the mass demonstrations against Ahok got the dates when they were held as titles. In the end the demonstration was not as large as expected. Some 20,000 police officers were kept in reserve, ultimately 7,000 of them were deployed. The participants, who had been expected to number in the tens of thousands, turned out to add up to around 10-15,000. The organisers rallied against the revival of the PKI, as in the case of the history seminar in the YLBHI building. They also demanded that the certain members of Parliament who they called PKI members be purged. So clearly political interests prevailed.

A prominent speaker was the self-exiled leader of the FPI, Rizieq Shihab, who had led the mass demonstrations against Ahok. He had been caught in his own trap and had to flee the country. Radical Muslim groups were behind the Anti-Pornography Law of 2008, in which such a broad definition of pornography was coined that the sexting of Rizieq with his own mistress fell under it. When this was discovered the police launched an investigation and declared him suspect of violating that law. Via a telephone connection from Saudi Arabia he too railed against the “new PKI.” His “proof” for this allegation? That the history of the PKI (army version) is no longer taught in schools.<sup>40</sup>

Interestingly, that day (29/09/2017), Rahmat Himran had gathered a small group of his supporters around the well-known statue of a young farmer going off to the war for the liberation of Irian Jaya in the early 1960s, as his mother bids him farewell. His argument? Usually farmers don’t walk around with rifles cum bayonets, so this must represent a member of the BTI (Barisan Tani Indonesia – Peasants Front of Indonesia), the farmers’ association of the PKI. His speech fell rather flat as protesters started to leave while he was still raving on.<sup>41</sup>

39. <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/09/18/lawmakers-want-discussion-on-1965-purge-banned.html>

40. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0UIXdXpIiEo>

41. <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20170929134759-20-244922/massa-aksi-299-kami-minta-dpr-bersih-bersih-dari-pki/>

<https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20170928211749-20-244780/rahmat-himran-berkukuh-patung-tugu-tani-simbol-komunis/>

<https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20170929151852-20-244967/rizieq-shihab-omong-kosong-pki-tak-bangkit/>  
<https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20170929151852-20-244967/rizieq-shihab-omong-kosong-pki-tak-bangkit/>

Apart from radical Muslim groups and the political and army elite, there is a third group interested in keeping the spectre of communism alive. Since the PKI, the farmers, and trade unions associated with it have been destroyed, capitalist exploitative practices have been able to continue unchecked. Protests on labour issues or against the destruction of nature by unscrupulous mining companies are quickly suppressed, as the local activist Heri Budiawan discovered. His case speaks for itself. He led a demonstration against a gold mine that was destroying his native forest in the Banyuwangi area in East Java and was arrested. He was charged with “spreading communism,” as apparently a banner had been seen in the demonstration with the hammer and sickle logo. It was unclear who had put up that banner.<sup>42</sup> Only human rights defenders have protested against forced evictions, illegal land grabs and violations of labour rights. They are often confronted by right wing militias. These thugs, as is clearly demonstrated in the film “The Act of Killing” by Joshua Oppenheimer, are often paid by rogue capitalists, who are happy to turn them loose on those who oppose their own interests.

Economic interests play out in other ways as well. The 1965-1966 genocide not only resulted in an enormous loss of life. Many people also profited economically. Properties owned by murdered or imprisoned supporters of Soekarno and the PKI were seized. As discussed elsewhere in this volume, beneficiaries of the land reform laws in the mid 1960s were deprived of the land they had legally acquired.

Finally, this renewed repression of human rights defenders cannot be seen as separate from the conclusions of the International People’s Tribunal on the crimes against humanity committed in 1965-1966. It decreed that the Indonesian state must be held accountable for these crimes, which amount to genocide.<sup>43</sup> Though the government and the military swept this verdict aside, it renewed discussions on this dark period in Indonesian history and in April 2016 a seminar was held—organised by the government—in which both perpetrators and victims told their versions of the events. For the first time, millions of people heard the harrowing stories of genocide survivors. The results of this seminar were never released. Following this event, Kivlan Zen and his colleagues held a counter seminar in Balai Kartini in early June 2016, and the social and political climate became increasingly repressive.<sup>44</sup>

42. <https://www.smh.com.au/world/gold-mine-protester-tried-for-spreading-communism-as-red-scare-sweeps-indonesia-20171012-gyzqad.html>, 12 October 2017. He was ultimately sentenced to 10 months, though the offensive banner was never presented at court and he consistently denied he had ever made or approved of such a banner [www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/.../communism-article-used-sentence-activist.html](http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/.../communism-article-used-sentence-activist.html)

43. See the *Final Report of the IPT 1965*, 2016, published in 2017: [www.tribunal1965.org/en/final-report-of-the-ipt-1965/](http://www.tribunal1965.org/en/final-report-of-the-ipt-1965/)

44. They are united in Pepabri (Persatuan Purnawirawan Angkatan Bersenjata, Association of Armed Forces retired officers). This is an influential group of conservative retired generals.



## Conclusion

It is actually no wonder that the majority of the Indonesian population does not believe the PKI is being revived. According to the results of a survey in the first half of September 2017 by the Saifulmujani Institute, only 12.6 % of the population currently believes that the PKI is being restored. The majority of that group belongs to the PKS and to Gerindra, the party of Jokowi's opponent in the 2014 elections.<sup>45</sup> But it is also clear that certain political groups will do all they can to keep the spectre of communism alive. It is a convenient bogeyman behind which to hide political machinations.

The lies around the 30 September Movement have been exposed; the literature is available for anyone with access to the internet. But these mobs and their leaders move in self-referencing circles, in which they only listen to hardliner clerics and loud-mouthed generals. In these groups myths, lies, hoaxes and slander circulate, while rational analyses of the events discussed are relegated to the sidelines. Historians will continue conducting their painstaking research into events, knowing they will hardly counter the hoaxes. Presenting data in the media for a general audience would however be a useful contribution.

This violent episode may mark the start of the 2019 presidential campaign. And it may become even rowdier than the anti-Ahok campaign.<sup>46</sup> The spectre of communism will be used again and again by those who feel their interests are served by it. Even by the President himself. His comment on October 1, 2017, "don't let the PKI cruelty happen again," seems to suggest he believes the version of events presented by the film "Betrayal of the G30S/PKI."<sup>47</sup> Historical discussions in Indonesia may become even more toxic indeed.

45. Saifulmujani, research and consulting company. Isu kebangkitan PKI; sebuah penilaian publik nasional; temuan survei September 2017.

46. See for instance <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/what-did-indonesias-anti-ahok-reunion-rally-reveal/>

47. <http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2017/10/01/09403511/jokowi-jangan-sampai-kekejaman-pki-terulang-lagi>. He even posted this sentence on his facebook page; [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=768582436663941&id=390581294464059](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=768582436663941&id=390581294464059)



## Abbreviations

- BTI: Barisan Tani Indonesia (Peasants Front of Indonesia)  
 CGMI: Concentrasi Gerakan Mahasiswa Indonesia (United Movement of Indonesian Students)  
 FBR: Forum Betawi Rempug (Betawi Brotherhood Forum)  
 FPI: Forum Pembela Islam (Islam Defenders' Front)  
 Gerindra: Gerakan Islam Raya (Great Indonesian Movement)  
 Gerwani: Gerakan Wanita Indonesia (Indonesian Women Movement)  
 G30S: Geraka 30 September (30 September Movement)  
 GP Ansor: Gerakan Pemuda Ansor (Ansor Youth Movement)  
 HMI: Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (Association of Muslim Students)  
 HTI: Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia  
 JIAD: Jaringan Islam Anti Diskriminasi (Muslim Anti-Discrimination Network)  
 KOKAM: Komando Kesiapsiagaan Angkatan Muda (Resilience Command of the Youth)  
 LGBT: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender  
 NU: Nahdlatul Ulama  
 PAN: Partai Amanat Nasional (National Mandate Party)  
 Papebri: Persatuan Purnawirawan Angkatan Bersenjata (Association of Armed Forces Retired Officers)  
 PKI: Partai Komunis Indonesia (Indonesian Communist Party)  
 PKS: Partai Keadilan Sosial (Social Justice Party)  
 PMII: Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia (Indonesian Muslim Students' Organisation)  
 YLBHI: Yayasan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Indonesia (Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation).

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