

**THE STATE AND UNSEEN
REALMS: STATE IDEOLOGY,
HISTORY AND MEMORY IN
INDONESIA**

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is about ideas and its consequences. After the Second World War, post-colonial regimes in Southeast Asia began exploring new ways and methods of improving the livelihoods of its people as well as 'catching up' with the modern economies in the west. This context also allowed different ideas to coalesce on notions of nation, nationhood and statehood. In my paper, I will attempt to understand the life of ideas as they pulsate through one of the largest nations within Southeast Asia: Indonesia. With a population of more than 200 million people, it is one of the largest Muslim democracies in the world. Indonesia's history however, like its traditional shadow puppet plays, is one of both triumph and tragedy. Before achieving its present level of democracy, Indonesia was ruled by former president Suharto whose political career began with one of the largest purges of political dissidents within the region. When Suharto finally stepped down after a 32-year long rule in 1998, Indonesia was left with an abysmal human rights record of assassinations, forced disappearances and the suppression of dissent. Why then did it take more than three decades for Indonesians to overthrow Suharto's kleptocracy? Why did so many Indonesians remain compliant in the face of widespread human rights violations? This paper will then also enter a discussion on how a changing Indonesia is beginning to deal with the past legacies of Suharto's rule and the 'organic' nature of the New Order Regime.

While the *Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia* (or the Armed forces of the Republic of Indonesia) was an important element in maintaining

the regime's 'cohesion', it was but only one of many coercive instruments available to Suharto's New Order government. At the core, lay a web of ideas which gave ideological shape and structure to Suharto's Indonesia. Therefore, I will investigate both the character and evocative power of these ideas as they are transmitted to the people of Indonesia. My paper will state that these ideas in themselves gave Indonesians a clear vision of a united Indonesia as it rose from the ashes of centuries-long colonialism by the Dutch. These ideas appealed to deeply held cultural-historical values, which at the same time also allowed Indonesia to lay claim to its past as a region wide maritime empire. I posit that by appealing to its grand past, Indonesia could then rise above the stigma of being a former colony. In order to do this however, the people of Indonesia had to be 'incorporated' into the 'body' of Indonesia given the plural nature and character of this archipelagic nation. Regardless of ethnic backgrounds or religious belief, all Indonesians had to become an 'organic' part of the Unitary Republic of Indonesia. It is precisely this 'organic' nature of the New Order regime which allowed different ethnic groups to be absorbed into it while those deemed inimical could be 'neutralised'. I will utilise political theorist Hannah Arendt's concept of the 'social' in order to understand how the Indonesian nation-state used cultural concepts to blur the lines between the individual, the state and the practice of democratic politics.

While this study is exclusively of Indonesia, I believe that similar studies can also be conducted on regimes throughout the Asian region as many states continue to utilise the 'organicist' model at the expense of democracy and human rights. While the Asian values

discourse may no longer hold water, Southeast Asian regimes, I believe, will continue to evoke cultural values to justify limits on democratic participation and human rights. More importantly, this paper reflects my own concerns as to why groups and individuals tend to place so much more faith in the institutions of state rather than in what political theorist Martha Nussbaum would call, their own 'capabilities'. Lastly, it is my belief that the closer the interconnectedness with the state, there is greater the opportunity for arbitrary state behaviour and human rights violations. Thus, Southeast Asia's developmentalist state model has created an environment where 'politics' is not seen as arena open for contestation and debate but rather as a space meant exclusively for the those with the right kind of 'knowledge'. It was precisely the lack of democratic space which gave rise to violent confrontations between citizens and the armed forces in the lead up to Suharto's downfall in 1998. Indonesians left out of the development process saw no other avenue than to violently oppose the New Order regime which had effectively closed off all avenues to dissent, discussion and debate. It is my hope that in arguing for an open democratic space, that Southeast Asian nations may gravitate towards greater democratic debate consolidation rather than violence and destruction.

BEFORE THE END AND IN THE BEGINNING

Following the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, the emerging economies within Southeast Asia began to crumble as the Thai baht began to slide. Many foreign investors, economists and intellectuals had before the crisis, bravely announced that the 'tiger economies' of

Southeast Asia were marching inexorably into a new era. The years of economic boom beginning in the early 1990s had imbued many Southeast Asian nations with pride in their 'Asianess', distinct from the free-wheeling, liberal and individualistic West. Despite the paltry human rights records of many of these countries, their emerging economic power was proof that economics had trumped civil liberties. However when the Asian financial crisis erupted, the so-called 'Asian values' proved to be ineffective against the relentless onslaught of currency speculators from without and the endemic corruption from within. Nearly all of the Southeast Asian tiger economies were affected but the political repercussions were especially drastic in Indonesia. Its currency, the rupiah, lost nearly half of its value signalling an overnight rise in the price of basic commodities. Students began demanding accountability, calling for an end to *KKN (Korupsi, Kolusi, Nepotisme)* or corruption, cronyism and nepotism. The shape of Indonesia also began to change when BJ Habibie, whom replaced Suharto, allowed a referendum where the East Timorese overwhelmingly voted for independence from Indonesia. The speed of the events in Indonesia threw many observers off guard but this was also a testament to the fragility of Indonesia's unity.

With boundaries encompassing thousands of islands and home to a multitude of ethnic groups, Indonesia appears haphazardly cobbled together. Achieving independence in 1949, Indonesia's sovereignty was constantly under attack, initially by the returning Dutch after World War 2 and internally by groups opposed to the central government located in Jakarta. During its founding years, Indonesia served as

a chaotic ideological battleground with Marxism, social democracy, nationalism and even Islam contending for the soul of the nation. It was however the abortive coup by a cabal of generals in 1965 that signalled the beginnings of a unified New Order.¹ The newly minted president Suharto sought to differentiate himself from former president Sukarno's old order where political parties, "...had only succeeded in dividing Indonesians along religious and ideological lines, threatening national unity and leading ultimately to political and economic ruin" (Bourchier & Hadiz 2003: 11).

Not only did Suharto force Sukarno to step down, the New Order regime began on the bodies of nearly half to a million souls, sacrificed in a baptismal pogrom. Many were members of left-leaning organisations and the banned Communist Party of Indonesia with the largest membership outside of the Soviet Union and China. Others consisted of ethnic minorities and elements deemed dangerous to the state. With his ideological opponents effectively destroyed, Suharto began consolidating both his power as well as the state's. To this end, Suharto and his ideologues began fine-tuning a form of political organisation which had already been in existence when the Indonesian republic was founded in the mid 1940's.

¹ The New Order sought to 'overturn' Sukarno's old order which was perceived to be fractious, weakened by over politicking and inclined towards Communism. Sukarno's many misadventures including the failed 'Crush Malaysia Campaign' during the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation from 1962-1965 also prompted more conservative generals such as Suharto to 'step in'. However it is not within the scope of this paper to analyse that period of Indonesian history. For more detailed discussion, please refer to Franklin B. Weinstein's *Indonesia Abandons Confrontation: An Inquiry into the Functions of Indonesian Foreign Policy* (1969).

Referred to as *organicism*, its "...recurring concepts are order, harmony and hierarchy." More importantly, "...Suharto and many of his closest political allies promoted the idea that authority within the Indonesian state should reflect the patterns found within traditional families and orderly village societies" (Bourchier & Hadiz 2003: 8). This New Order emphasis on village 'culture', inspired by the traditional village structures in Java, served to depoliticise the general Indonesian populace whilst also promoting the so-called village values of consultation and consensus. *Mufakat* and *musyawarah* ensured that there would be no active dissent within the populace. By using the Javanese village as a model, the New Order leaders were well aware that rural environments had in place strict hierarchical structures, led by village heads. Suharto, by default became Indonesia's chief village head presiding over the lives of millions. Nonetheless the use of these cultural markers as potent political symbols reflected an Indonesian reality where its populace still lived in rural environments.

Suharto's choice of a 'regime of truth' is also influenced by its past colonial history. According to Michel Foucault, such 'regimes of truth' are formulated by the state to create "...a circular relation with systems of power that produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it..." (Foucault in Gordon 1980: 133). The political symbolism behind the uses of concepts such as village values is also intertwined in a 'circular' fashion with the state's reliance on traditional or *adat* law in the formulation of Indonesia's constitution. The organicist principle's inception into Indonesian political life began when Dutch administrators began utilising local

conceptions of law and order to administer the lives of their colonial 'children'. The immediate effect though was the 'reification' of the natives, represented as beings incapable of achieving agency and modernity. This 'regime of truth' was disseminated through local Indonesian elites who received their education in Holland. One such local scholar was R. Supomo who later became one of the principal architects of the Indonesian Constitution. Disillusioned with their own societies, Dutch professors ensured that students such as Supomo would return to Indonesia spreading the belief that all peoples have a "...a *Volkgeist* (national spirit), and that it is on the basis of this living breathing essence - rather than on abstract universal principles such as popular sovereignty or democracy - that nation states should be built" (Bourchier 2007: 115). Japanese colonial administrators during the World War 2 further bolstered organicist thinking amongst Indonesian elites, stressing that, "...nations were living beings" (Bourchier 2007: 116). Suharto's new order regime inherited this legacy, reifying indigenous values on one hand but ultimately conflating it with the state. The creative implementation of the 'family' and 'village' state ensured that Indonesian citizens remained compliant and yet at the same time melded into the body politic of the Indonesian state. They were then to be regarded and shaped as the 'floating masses'.

According to Suharto's chief ideological craftsman, Major General Ali Moertopo, the 'floating masses' (*massa mengambang*) refers to a large majority of Indonesians who were 'played' upon by political parties and ideologies. As such, "...the people, especially those in the villages always fell prey to the political parties and ideological interests of those

parties" (Moertopo 1972: 80). Easily swayed by external influences, Moertopo believed that these 'simple folk' would then ignore "...the necessities of daily life, the need for development and improvement of their own lives, materially as well as spiritually" (Moertopo 1972: 85). According to him, these 'floating masses' should instead turn to 'functional groups' or (*Golongan Karya* or *Golkar*) in order to fulfil their political needs. Comprised of non-political elements, *Golkar* was essentially a conglomeration of technocrats, civil servants and groups associated with the government. The most important grouping though within the *Golkar* is the army. During the New Order era, the armed forces were given a special role as the protectors of both Indonesia's sovereignty as well as its internal unity. It had a dual function or *dwi-fungsi* of providing external defence as well as guiding and accelerating the development process. However, throughout the New Order period, they were the greatest single perpetrator of human rights violations undermining both the state as well as Suharto's presidency. From the beginning of the New Order regime till 1998, the armed forces were actively suppressing political dissidents, involved in extra judicial killings as well as perpetrating atrocities in the outer island provinces of Aceh, Papua as well as the ex-province of East Timor. While the armed forces have been 'reformed', they continue to play an important role in the political life of Indonesia.

THEORISING THE ORGANIC STATE

For Indonesia, East Timor's independence was a terrible loss. When the results of the referendum were announced in September 1999, the Indonesian military

armed local militias allowing them to burn, loot, rampage and kill before the arrival of international peacekeepers. The Indonesian army, as described by Joseph Nevins, wanted to raze everything to the ground leaving nothing but rocks (Nevins 2005). Why was the army so reluctant to let go of East Timor even when it was clear that Indonesia stood to lose more in maintaining East Timor as a province? Why was the Indonesian government so willing to undergo international condemnation and pressure in order to maintain control over half an island with a population of less than one million? As former foreign minister Ali Alatas surmises, the Indonesian state realised that East Timor would become a 'pebble in the shoe', a problem which would not go away (Alatas 2006).

According to Indonesian scholar Samuel Moore (2001), his discovery of a cache of documents on the eve of the army's departure revealed that despite the cost of the war in East Timor, military leaders insisted on maintaining the conflict. Indonesia's armed forces, Moore states, ignored warning signs, insisting that the war could be won. These messages were then relayed back to the government in Jakarta, who were lulled into a sense of false security. The central government "...viewed the East Timorese as it did Indonesians, a 'floating mass', a mindless public that would be easily swayed and manipulated, and could therefore not be trusted with democracy" (Moore 2001: 11). Clouded by its very own state ideology, the Indonesian state could not reconcile the fact that the East Timorese were able to sustain their resistance through steely resolve and ingenuity. Moore states that "...deluded by its own myths, the Indonesian military never fully understood the nature of its enemy - and this ultimately ...

contributed to its own undoing" (Moore 2001: 12). What was the compelling nature of these myths which made the Indonesian government willing to ignore the costs of a long-drawn and unpopular war? Why did both the New Order regime and the military not concede that they were not able to win the war?

The fates of East Timor and Indonesia became enmeshed intertwined when the former's ties with Portugal became undone. Neglected by the Portuguese for several hundred years, the opportunity for independence came when the *Estado Novo* regime was toppled during the Carnation Revolution. As the ensuing political unrest threatened to escalate in East Timor, secret discussions took place between Suharto, then US president Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. After receiving implicit approval from the US, Suharto then sent in troops to occupy East Timor, ending its hopes for formal independence. East Timor was important strategically to Indonesia because it bordered Australia and the body of water in between was known to have vast reserves of fossil fuel. Thus Indonesia's colonial exercise in East Timor was also prompted by profit. On the other hand, the Indonesian government required an ideological reasoning for its foray into East Timor. In a speech given to East Timorese officials just before its integration into Indonesia, Suharto deemed the officials his "...brothers who were separated for a long time" (Suharto in Krieger 1997: 47). According to him, colonialism had separated the East Timorese from their archipelagic heritage which now lies within Indonesia. Suharto adds that,

...all of this was merely the result of foreign colonial politics and interests. Without dividing us, they would not be able to dominate this vast and densely populated archipelago. This archipelago was once united, with an area approximately the size of the present territory of the unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. History noted the famous Sriwijaha Kingdom, as well as the well-known Majapahit Kingdom.

(Suharto in Krieger 1997: 47)

Indonesia's pre-colonial history has provided the state with a powerful imaginary in which to bolster its organicist approach to both internal and external affairs. The Sriwijaha and Majapahit empires were archipelagic empires which existed between the 7th century and 14th century. Their influence encompassed nearly all of maritime Southeast Asia, with its civilisation centred on the islands of Sumatra and later Java. Therefore the Sriwijaha and Majapahit empires served as blueprints for a newly minted Indonesia state to reclaim its 'former' glory. The archipelago's pre-colonial past justifies the unity and existence of the Indonesian state whilst at the same time placing the blame for its colonial period on the divisive nature of western imperialism. Indonesia's colonial adventures, from East Timor to Irian can then be justified as an attempt to make whole again empires of the past in the present. This is perhaps one of the most compelling ideological reasons why Indonesia found it especially traumatic to 'let go' of East Timor. This 'trauma' on the part of Indonesia also partially explains the scorched earth policy following East Timor's referendum on its

independence. Therefore its resolve has hardened over the retention of another restive province, Irian, despite an on-going armed resistance. Any further attempt to secede by any other province in Indonesia is likely to be seen by the Indonesian state as a threat to its very ideological unity.

Indonesia, its neighbours within the region and even China are examples of countries where the past is not a 'foreign' country. Students and intellectuals of the May Fourth movement in China during the 1920's based its ardent sense of nationalism on the perception that it had been 'bullied' and 'disgraced' for nearly a hundred years (Mitter 2004). Other countries within Southeast Asia are also quick to subscribe to the view that colonialism was a stain on their national being. Many of the national narratives within these nations would state that had it not been for the deleterious forces of colonialism, these countries would have achieved greatness in their long march towards modernity. Nonetheless, colonialism's stain on the national narrative serves also to differentiate these countries in the east from their former colonial masters in the west. In the early 1990's Malaysian and Singaporean premiers Mahathir Mohamad and Lee Kuan Yew stated that the west was in state of decline due to their heavy emphasis on individuality, free speech and liberal-democratic values. It was because countries in Southeast Asia looked towards 'Eastern' or 'Asian' values that they were able to flourish. Lee appealed to ideas of 'Confucianism' while Mahathir preferred to 'look east'. Indonesia however, did not officially adopt the 'Asian Values' discourse but what it did instead was to use local conceptions and values, similar to the 'collectivist', 'patriarchal' belief system

espoused by its neighbours. For the Indonesian state there was no need to look outside of its borders as it had its own 'civilisation'. At the very core of Indonesia's 'civilisational values' was the village. In a way it can also be argued that the state had to exist in order to protect the 'purer' village from the corrupting influences of liberal democracy, thus the need for a policy on both 'floating masses' and 'functional' groups.

FRAMING IT WITHIN THE SOCIAL

While conducting research, I was tempted to place it within Hannah Arendt's theory of the 'social' (Arendt 1958). Elucidated within her seminal work, *The Human Condition*, the 'social' is simply put, a grey area between two other categories she refers to as the 'public' and the 'private' realm. Arendt states that the 'public' is a realm where individuals interact with one another as equals discussing, and practising politics in a democratic, contentious but open space. On the other hand is the private where the master of the house returns to in order to deal exclusively with "...survival, the needs of the body, and biological necessity in the household ... was private. When in modern times, it went public, it became the social" (Pitkin 1998: 11). Therefore, when private matters leaked into the public sphere, housekeeping takes on national proportions in the form of the economy, public healthcare, trade, division of labour *et cetera*. Arendt then contends that the danger lies in the expanding role of the government due to the correlating expansion within the private realm. The public, which is where democracy remains the most alive, is foreshadowed by the Leviathan-like state. Borders between the private and public become blurred leaving only the state to manage

the matters of the expanded national 'family'. This sets a dangerous precedent as the state subsumes everything in the name of the 'family's' well-being, destroying the democratic 'public' realm. This, according to scholars of Arendt, was what gave rise to totalitarian regimes such as Nazi Germany, fascist Italy and the Soviet Union. Suharto's New Order regime was certainly no totalitarian regime (there were many instances where its citizens vociferously resisted the 'family' state) but Arendt's concept makes understanding Indonesia much easier. There was little 'public' space and the state had taken over the affairs of the family. As the head of the family and village, it would not allow the needed public space to exist since the 'floating masses' were so innocent, gullible and pliant. Therefore through 'functional groups' which provided the direction and the army which provided the needed 'push energy', Indonesia would be able to return its former glory, inheriting the grandeur of both the Sriwijaya and Majapahit empires. Nonetheless Arendt's concept can only go so far in explaining Indonesia's organic nature. If we were to take Indonesia state as a 'body' or a 'being' in its own, we can also see that like any other organism it is prone to moments of 'lapse'. Within these moments then I believe is when the 'public' actually reappears leaving behind conundrums and paradoxes.

INTERSTICES AND LAPSES

One of the most contentious events within Indonesian national history is without doubt the massacres following the abortive September 30th coup in 1965. Many Indonesians born post-1965 are familiar with a state produced film shown every year depicting how

the Communists had plotted to undermine the Indonesian government and its leaders. While the film is no longer shown following Suharto's downfall, Indonesians continue to ponder on the event. The Indonesian 'body' seems to be living in a state of confused amnesia pertaining not just to this particular event but also on many others. The enforced 'forgetting' in the Indonesian body has been so pronounced that many are still unaware of the dynamics of the event except what is told in official history. However, there is a growing realisation from local Indonesian scholars for a need to investigate and question official accounts of the past. In a collection of essays written by oral historians on the events of that period, an article written by student Rinto Tri Hasworo stands out. In it he describes how "...he had never questioned the version of history given to him" (Hasworo 2004: 25). He blames media manipulation by the government as one of the reasons for this amnesia. He also questions the way in which history is written, by pondering on why a coup which affected only several elites could have caused deaths and disappearances of so many. What vested interests of the few could have affected the lives of so many?

Amnesia or enforced forgetting in any 'organic' state will inevitably produce a 'lapse' in the narrative of the nation. While the state's power over the 'social' may stop a 'public' discussion of the issue, it does not mean that these very lapses exist in the minds of individual citizens. The largest flaw in the ideology of the New Order was in its assumption that the 'floating masses' could easily be duped or would unquestioningly follow the state's logic. While being part of the 'organic' state, its individuals are nonetheless made up of

differing levels of 'being'. Within each individual lies particularistic personal memories coupled with distinct ways of interpreting their lives. These memories thrive despite the control over the outer aspects of their lives by the state. While the state during the New Order saw itself as the caretaker, it made no concession for individual creativity. This also points out a flaw in Arendt's conception of the social. She assumes that individual human beings are only objects to be acted upon by larger forces.

However, I believe that the investigation of personal narratives will yield a greater, deeper and richer understanding of the life of ideas which affect countries like Indonesia. In fact I believe that this paper has raised even more questions for myself. How complicit were the ideological architects of the New Order regime and even other intellectuals in the many atrocities, which occurred in Indonesia? How were many individual Indonesians able to create a counter-narrative to the state's 'social realm'? I will attempt to answer these questions in the second part of my paper.

RUPTURES AND BREAKAGES

What happens then when ruptures begin to appear in the construction of the national narrative? According to Indonesian scholar Ariel Heryanto, the Indonesian imaginary is based on a 'simulacra' or a form of 'hyper reality' (Heryanto 2006). Simply put, the idea of Indonesia is built on a foundation of unreal images and myths perpetuated by the New Order regime since coming into being through the events of the abortive October 1965 coup against its first president Sukarno. The events of that period had been so mythologised.

and officially narrativised through education, propaganda and ideology that anything beyond this rubric simply did not exist. Through the deaths, disappearances and incarceration without trial of 500,000 to nearly 1,000,000 souls, the New Order regime led by former general Suharto, created convenient enemies and bogeymen in which to achieve two things: it sowed fear and through it, a unity which bound Indonesians within this hyper-reality for more than thirty years. It was only with the deleterious effects of the 1999 Asian Financial Crisis that Indonesia's 'veil of ignorance' was removed. However, there is still a need to understand how the New Order regime maintained its grip over the Indonesian populace for such a long period of time.

On 30th September 1965, a cabal of generals were kidnapped, tortured and killed in what appeared to be an attempted coup. Later, in a government 'white paper' penned by historian Nugroho Notosusanto, the coup proved unsuccessful as government forces led by the then General Suharto 'saved' the nation (Notosusanto & Ismail Saleh 1968). What exactly did Suharto save Indonesia from? The state narrative, as espoused by pro-government intellectuals such as Notosusanto, stated that military officers had colluded with the Communist Party of Indonesia to overthrow Sukarno, allowing the third largest Communist party in the world at the time to reign. The murdered generals had stood in the way of the pro-communist conspirators and thus became martyrs for the Indonesian nation. In an act of vengeance, the military authorised large-scale 'cleansing' operations to effectively destroy pro-communist or left-wing organisations in Indonesia. The result was what one

observer states to be the largest instance of human rights violations in Southeast Asia (Roosa 2006). During the height of the communist witch hunt which occurred mainly in the islands of Java, Bali and Sumatra, scores of men and women 'disappeared' either to be executed or to be placed en masse in the concentration camps. If and when released, these political prisoners or *tahanan politik* would continue to be stigmatised and 'observed' by the state apparatus. The events of 1965 pitted communities against each other, as the military stood aside in an 'advisory' role, leaving most of the 'butchering' mainly in the hands of ordinary Indonesians. In the aftermath of this cleansing, the state began creating 'monsters' and 'demons' in the minds of Indonesians constantly repeating the possibility of how these groups, if not properly dealt with, will return to exact vengeance on them. The New Order regime, as described by James T. Siegel, was adept at moulding phantasms to maintain a constant state of fear and uncertainty (Siegel 2006). For instance, even several years after the events of 1965, conservative publication *Tempo* printed an article warning its readers of the continuing existence of 'formless' communists cells carrying out acts of sabotage against Indonesia (Anon. 1972). It added that even as many left-wing elements had been placed in 'quarantine', these groups continued to pose a danger since the detention camps they were placed in were turned into 'schools'. The reminders of an omni-present 'poltergeist' seeking revenge are what have perhaps kept the Indonesian nation together.

Nonetheless, we must also acknowledge the place of ideology and indoctrination in the process. The years following the rise of the New Order, Suharto

embarked on large scale projects, and initiating the beginnings of what is often referred to as the developmentalist state model where all portions were geared towards 'development' and 'modernisation'. With the assistance of newly minted PhD holders from American universities, the state 'depoliticised' Indonesians and geared them towards his development goals. Ali Moertopo and many of his aides were principally responsible for this, incorporating ideas already present from the earlier generation of Indonesian intellectuals. A cohesive organic state began to emerge and also to be 'imagined'. Indonesians underwent an intense period of indoctrination, suppressing memories of the 1965 killings, and instead glorifying the deaths of the murdered generals. Communism and everyone accused justly or otherwise of sympathising with it were labelled as being 'unclean'. Indonesia's body politic then assumed that of a human body which has to be sanitised and keep clean from communism. This was done through means of suppressing the free press and subjecting Indonesian citizens to state narratives passed on mainly through various mediums. One of these mediums was film. In the early 1980's, it was compulsory for school students to endure 4-hour long epic on the events of the 1965 abortive coup. Directed by Arifin Noer, his production entitled *Pengkhianatan G30S* (The Betrayal of the 30th of September Movement) has been touted by some as a masterpiece in Indonesian film-making. However, scholars have drawn attention to the violent imagery in which the production evokes (Irawanto 2004). One particular instance showcases in gory detail how the murdered generals were tortured, murdered and later mutilated by members of a women's group associated with the

Communist Party. While not shown directly, the audience was told that besides having their eyes gouged out, their genitalia were removed from their bodies as female communists danced atop their corpses. This particular episode according to scholars serves as a cautionary tale that should Communism be allowed to flourish, women would run wild and therefore upsetting the harmony and stability within Indonesian society (Wieringa 2002). However, Indonesian media scholars studying the 'structure' of these productions (amongst which include another one of Noer's production entitled *Serangan Fajar* or the 'Attack at Dawn') state that the themes seek to solidify ideas pertaining to gender hierarchies as well as the inseparable nature between the military and Indonesian society. These 'fictional' documentaries blur the line between reality and hyper-reality, as it moulds and creates an organic relationship between the individual and society. As such, the Indonesian state apparatus with its 'command culture', is comparable to fascist states such as Italy and Germany, where the individual merely exists as part of the greater whole. Indonesians therefore became part and parcel of this greater organic entity known as the Indonesian state. The reality of the state thus became the reality of the people.

However, a rupture began to appear in the fabric of Indonesia's simulacra, threatening to tear apart the image which had been so carefully crafted by the state. The heady years of economic boom belied deeper problems within the Indonesian economy. The emphasis on development and progress led to accusations of corruption. When the Indonesian currency, the rupiah and its economy collapsed,

inflation and panic soon spread. The New Order regime began losing its grip in the late 1990's leading to massive violence vented towards the then President Suharto and also Indonesia's ethnic Chinese minority. However, that tumultuous period eventually saw the end of Suharto's 30-over year reign leading to what many observers saw as the dawn of a new democratic age in Indonesia. The long-suffering Indonesian province of East Timor was finally granted independence in a 1999 referendum and the republic began experimenting with autonomy for many of its other restive provinces.

However, the sudden explosion of violence surprised and shocked many Indonesian observers. Many scholars then went on to bring a new focus to Indonesian studies, emphasising instead on a 'balkanising' Indonesia rather than on the 'organic' nature of the state (Erb, Sulistiyanto & Faucher 2005). Indonesia it seems, has evolved from a single unified entity into a fractious and disassembled Frankenstein monster. Indonesianists have begun looking at Indonesia through the lenses of 'fundamentalist Islam' or ethnic politics. In a sense, the greater democratic space brought about by Suharto's departure created an entirely new arena of politics. This 'space' allowed as well 'narratives from the past' to arise which would otherwise be considered taboo and unspeakable. In 1998, when Suharto stepped down, state-produced documentaries glorifying the armed forces and demonising the communists were no longer shown in cinemas and television stations. It was during this period of the Indonesian 'spring', that a different approach was used by both scholars and civil society activists.

In dissecting the New Order façade, many scholars began investigating 'memories' to understand this new phase of Indonesia's evolution. In a sense, the nation's new found belief in democracy allowed many to re-look what was previously thought as being its authentic national memories.² But to say that the new spirit of democracy paved the way for an outpouring of these previously undiscovered and hidden narratives is not entirely accurate.

Even during the early days of the New Order regime, artists and authors have relied on the written word and images contesting the state's narrative in Indonesia's public 'semi-sphere'. A testament to this is 'Silenced Voices: New Writings from Indonesia', a volume published in 2000 as volume 12 issue 1 of University of Hawaii's journal *Manoa* comprising of stories contesting the New Order's interpretation of the Indonesian condition. Entitled 'Silenced Voices', many of the pieces contained therein exposed the 'hidden worlds' of those victimised and silenced by the New Order regime. For instance Ahmad Tohari's *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* which means the *Dancer of Paruk Village* or the *Dancer* for short, tells of a village caught on the wrong side of the New Order/Communist divide (Tohari 2000). Tohari's *Dukuh Paruk* however is only a miniscule sub-story located within the grander national schema. Srintil, a traditional *ronggeng* performer is chosen by her village to become the next *ronggeng*

² One such effort is an edited volume by Mary S. Zurbuchen (2005) entitled *Beginning to Remember: The Past in the Indonesian Present*. The articles included pieces written by scholars as well as a more personal piece written by a former political prisoner. In particular, please see Ki Tristuti Rachmadi's "My Life as a Shadow Puppet Master under Suharto", pages 38-46.

dancer in a tradition spanning generations. Her lover Rasmus, disapproves and later joins the army. Employing a formulaic love story at the surface, the novel provides a microscopic view into the life of the majority of Indonesians as they are torn apart by ideology and a nation intent on devouring itself. In the end, the village is designated a 'red village' given their sympathies for the Communist Party, and is all but wiped out. Srintil is sacrificed as the 'hero' of the story. Rasmus reflects on his role in the destruction of both *Dukuh Paruk* and Srintil. Contained within this particular volume are also writings by other authors relating their direct experiences under incarceration and torture by the New Order regime.

For instance, Hersri Setiawan (2000) speaks of his time in a concentration camp whilst Ayu Utami (2000) writes of her experiences of exile as a human rights activist given the antipathy the Indonesian state has towards the civil society. Utami's writing is but part of a greater body literature which is now referred to as 'exile literature' comprising of works by authors forced to seek refuge outside of Indonesia for fear of reprisals from the state. While 'exile literature' is not considered 'mainstream' Indonesian literature, the country's closest contender for a Nobel Prize, Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1999), has nonetheless provided readers a long deep look into its soul through this genre.

Literature in Indonesia, as such, has provided that needed sphere and space which many assumed have been engulfed by the power of the state. Nonetheless, within the confines of such oppression, and even during the height of the New Order's might, small pockets of activists and writers continued to defy

the state. Hannah Arendt, in her magnum opus *The Human Condition* explained that modernity and the rise of what she referred to as the 'social' had inadvertently closed the space between 'private' and 'public' realms (Arendt 1958). Using these concepts to think about and to analyse Indonesia is very apt given the attempts by the state to absorb individuals and whole societies into an organic whole. The Indonesian ideology of *pancasila* and the constant use of media to enforce a single unified imagery has created the notion that reality appears to emanate only from one distinct point which is the state's stand point. Arendt's 'social' realm or what Arendtian scholar Hanna Fenichel Pitkin calls the 'blob' has blurred the borders of individual freedom and action into the arena of the state. According to Arendt (1958), the public realm, which traditionally allowed for free men and women to discuss, debate and to put politics into 'praxis' has instead been usurped by modernity and in the case of the Indonesia, the State. While Arendt does not mention specifically the State, she refers to certain bureaucratic apparatuses which have instead taken over aspects of life once set aside for the individual within a private family setting. The New Order government, in its role as the developmentalist state, becomes the family itself, disengaging the individual from the public realm. The state in essence becomes the family, the father and the provider, leaving little space for individual effort and of course freedom. Nonetheless, as Pitkin admits, Arendt's use and design of the 'social' concept is problematic. Almost as if like some kind of unstoppable blob, Arendt assumes that everything within its path will be consumed ultimately. It is depicted by Arendt as a "...living autonomous agent determined to dominate

human beings, absorb them, and render them helpless” (Pitkin 1998: 3).

Pitkin further states that it is both surprising and ultimately puzzling to have a political thinker exhorting humanity to actively seek freedom and meaning to surrender herself to a concept which in itself is so inflexible, concrete and all consuming. However, by dividing the human condition into three aspects and in light of the post-1965 Indonesian condition, Arendt provides a useful theoretical framework. The New Order regime appears very much the ‘blob’ but its power to ‘absorb and assimilate’ is not total. Beneath the state enforced state of amnesia, ordinary Indonesians continue to inhabit an inner realm beyond which the state cannot penetrate. An entire genre of literature which speaks directly against the state is one such example of this realm, and if we were to look more closely, this is the realm of memories. Scholars have often written about the ‘dual’ nature of both Javanese and Balinese worlds where people live alongside a ‘spirit’ world. In an article written by psychologist Robert Lemelson, a Balinese farmer claims to be surrounded by dark shadows and spirits (Lemelson & Suryani 2006: 389-413). He also states that these dark figures attempt to enter his body, possessing him and thus turning him into a communist. It is later explained that the farmer was a witness to the killing of suspected communists during the period of 1966. On the island alone, it is suspected that between 70,000 to 80,000 people were killed. In the earlier part of this paper, I stated that the state sought to use indigenous understandings of power and hierarchy in order to exert control over what was still a relatively rural population.

However, within these indigenous beliefs, lie an intensely ‘private realm’ where memories of massacres and killings continue to occupy a space, like phantasms refusing to be exorcised. According to scholar Leslie Dwyer, these atrocities continue to be unspeakable, but this does not mean their memories are erased (Dwyer 2009). Instead victims and even witnesses develop signs of psychosis, seeing spirits and ghosts but at the same time muted by the years of New Order rule.

In a recent edition of *Tempo*, its reportage was spread throughout the length of Java, Bali and Sumatra seeking out witnesses, victims and perpetrators of the killings during the fateful year of 1965 (Anon. 2012). Ironically *Tempo*, in its previous incarnation as a New Order sanctioned publication, was also responsible for publishing articles condemning and vilifying the communists. Nonetheless, given the liberal press environment in present day Indonesia, an entire edition dedicated to the year 1965 is an indication that Indonesians are finally being to reveal more of this ‘private’ realm suppressed for so many years. Many of those interviewed, both victims and perpetrators, revealed intimate details of evil committed both by and on them. Amongst those interviewed, one perpetrator stated that had he not taken up the task of killing, he would have found himself at the end of a weapon instead.³ Differing from the state narrative where the military takes centre-stage, these narratives from below speak of the fear and uncertainty brought about by the political climate. According to the stories

³ The title of this article, “Saya Sering Membawa Kampak Panjang. Daripada Dibunuh, Lebih Baik Saya Membunuh” could be roughly translated to literally mean “I always carry a long machete. Rather than being killed, I would rather kill”.

collected from what the *Tempo* writers refer to as *ladang pembantaian* or the killing fields, many figures within the traditional village culture of Java, saw the communist as godless usurpers of the cosmic order. Due to this, many of those in the other parties, especially those closely linked with Islamist organisations went on to 'neutralise' a 'natural' threat to the Indonesian nation. While the armed forces were primarily responsible for the capture and incarceration of dissidents, communist party members and left-wing elements, the killings were left in the hands of ordinary Indonesians. In that given instance, ordinary Indonesians became as complicit in the killings and torture as the state itself. The line between Indonesian society and the state blurred, making it impossible then to pinpoint individual wrongdoers as culpability has become universal.⁴

Following the revelation made by Indonesian Human Rights Commission (Komnasham) in 2012 that the state was the main perpetrator in the series of events in 1965, a veil, it seems, has been lifted. While the Indonesian press has been actively discussing the issues in the past few years, Komnasham's report gave the needed momentum, making the pogroms of 1965 a 'visible' reality. Volumes of oral historical accounts from the victims have made their way into bookstores but their impact paled in comparison with the release of the report. Coincidentally, a documentary based on the experiences of individuals active in the capture and

⁴ In a news article, Coordinating Political, Legal and Security Affairs Minister Djoko Suyanto "...indicated that the mass killings during the communist purge were justified as they were aimed at protecting the country." As such, Djoko claims there is no need for the state to apologise. For more information please see Aritonang (2012).

killings of suspected communists, and screened at a Canadian film festival, fed the growing controversy.⁵ While the current administration under Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono is taking pro-active steps in facing up to the past, many groups remain steadfast in believing that any attempt at national reconciliation is tantamount to admission of guilt. For instance, leaders within the Islamist organisation Nadhlatul Ulama has stated that it would be better to "...forgive and forget what happened in the past and move on" (Aritonang 2012). Thus, even with the increased openness in the discussion of the pogroms, parts of the Indonesian society would rather it slip away into oblivion. Unlike in Germany where the Holocaust sits visibly on the collective conscience of its people, the events of 1965 and of other instances of human rights violation throughout the archipelago continues to occupy only a small part of the Indonesian psyche. Why is this so? The answer becomes clear when we take into consideration how the state ideology remains as an anchor in Indonesia's continued dalliance with democracy. As Indonesia becomes an increasingly important player in the global economy, it will continue to capitalise on the *pancasila* to maintain societal cohesion in the face of globalisation.⁶ However, not being able to 'normalise' its past also presents a clear and present danger in that, if the lessons of the past are ignored, history is doomed to repeat itself.

⁵ For more information, please see Oppenheimer's "The Act of Killing" (2012) and www.theactofkilling.com for further details on the screening of the film.

⁶ The Pancasila refers to Indonesia's five national cardinal virtues of 1) Belief in one God; 2) Just and civilised humanity; 3) The unity of Indonesia; 4) Guided democracy; and, 5) Social justice. While these virtues were important, they were nonetheless the culmination of a larger ideological process which began as early as Indonesia's independence after World War 2.

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About KITA

The Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA) was officially established on 8 October 2007 by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) to undertake academic research on subjects pertaining to ethnic studies in Malaysia. This research institute is 'only one of its kind' in Malaysia, focusing specifically on 'ethnic studies' with thematic studies orientation. The Institute emerged out of the need to maintain at home the present peaceful inter- and intra-ethnic existence against worldwide problematic, and sometimes violent ethnic situations.

Organisationally, KITA has five research clusters, each being led by a prominent scholar or a highly experienced professional person. The five research clusters are: Social Theory and Ethnic Studies; Ethnicity and Religion; Ethnicity at Workplace; Ethnicity and Consumerism, and The Arts and Social Integration. KITA's postgraduate program (PhD and Masters) was launched in December 2009.

Mengenai KITA

Institut Kajian Etnik (KITA) ditubuhkan secara rasmi oleh Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia pada 8 Oktober 2007. KITA merupakan satu-satunya institut penyelidikan di Malaysia yang memberi tumpuan sepenuhnya kepada segala kajian berkaitan dengan 'etnik' dan 'etnisiti'.

Dari segi organisasi, KITA mempunyai lima rumpun penyelidikan. Setiap satu rumpun diketuai oleh seorang sarjana atau ahli profesional yang mempunyai rekod prestasi cemerlang. Lima rumpun penyelidikan berkenaan adalah: Teori Sosial dan Kajian Etnik; Etnisiti dan Agama; Etnisiti di Tempat Kerja; Etnisiti dan Konsumerisme; dan Kesenian dan Integrasi Sosial. Mulai Disember 2009, KITA menawarkan program siswazah (PhD dan Sarjana).