SCREENING THE 1965 VIOLENCE

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The relationship between film and the history of the infamous 1965-66 massacres that gave rise to Indonesia's New Order regime (1966-98) is not new. ¹ To a significant extent, the justification for the massacre, the silence about its occurrence and the legitimacy of the New Order's authoritarianism could be maintained for over three decades thanks to the regime's successful propaganda, of which the nearly four-and-a-half-hour-long film called Pengkhianatan G 30 September (1984) was a part. For at least the first ten years of its circulation, the film was either the primary or the only available source of detailed information for most Indonesians about what might have happened in September and October 1965 that marked the single most important turning point in the history of the nation since independence.² The film established the central and over-arching framework for any public discussion, fantasy or allusion for most of the New Order period, around and within which details can vary.

Pengkhianatan G 30 September conveys two messages. First, the Indonesian Communist Party was alleged to have masterminded a coup d'état by a group of middle-ranking military officers who called themselves the '30 September Movement'. Second, a counter attack by the army under the leadership of Major General Suharto was a spontaneous, and yet critically necessary and heroic, move to rescue the nation-state from the evil force of the communists. The film is totally silent about the killing of around one million Indonesians in the ensuing months at the instigation and with the support of the army.

For many Indonesians of the next two generations communism was and remains a taboo subject for any critical discussion, but 'Communist' became a popular swearword. In August 1985, the nation's most respected newsmagazine, Tempo, conducted a poll. When asked what the most serious threat to Indonesia was, over one third of around 900 respondents in total gave the single most frequent answer: the potential resurgence of the communists.³ More than half of these respondents were aged between 21 and 30. The daily Kompas conducted similar polls in 2002 and 2003,⁴ and the results affirmed those of the Tempo survey. Two years into the post-New Order era, Tempo held another round of polls, canvassing 1,101 secondary school students from the nation's three largest cities (Jakarta, Surabaya and Medan). To the question of where they had learned the history of the 1965 events, 90 per cent responded 'film'.⁵ As there was only one film on the subject, there is no ambiguity as to which film they were referring to; as many as 97 per cent said they had seen the film Pengkhianatan G 30 September. Asked how many times they had seen it, the largest percentage of respondents had seen it the greatest number times. The lower the frequency of viewing, the smaller the percentage of respondents.

An exuberant rise in the production of short and documentary films among young and non-professional Indonesians ran high in the early 2000s.⁶ The new fascination with filmmaking among young people leads us to ask to what extent, and how, the murky history of the 1965 violence has been represented in the recently produced short and documentary films. My preliminary observation suggests that until early 2010, the number of such films was very small. None has yet been able to exert the impact necessary to challenge the New Order's propaganda legacy. Thus the next question is: why and how has a decade of post-New Order rule not really undone many of the New Order's ideological constructs? Here I can only offer preliminary answers. While older people have remained largely unprepared to come to terms with the past in any reconciliatory fashion, a shrinking number of young Indonesians - who grew up in an environment engulfed by the hyper-implosion of digital messages focusing on everyday life in the present - are interested in the 1965 events.

REVISITING 1965 IN FILMS

The persistent difficulties in coming to terms with 1965 entered a new phase at the turn of the millennium with the rapid development of new media technology. Indonesia has undergone some significant changes since the fall of the New Order, but these changes cannot be wholly attributed to the New Order's fall. The development and dissemination of media technology enjoyed some autonomy.⁷ The end of the Cold War and subsequently the fall of the New Order witnessed the dramatic expansion of the media (old and new) in Indonesia. The political liberalisation following the collapse of the New Order state apparatuses of control,
censorship and surveillance served to enhance the new developments. Soon after 1998 the number of print media had doubled, from nearly 300 to around 600; the number of nationwide television networks doubled from five to ten; and the first 200 local television networks sprouted across the archipelago.\(^3\) The number of officially registered radio stations grew from 700 in 1997 to more than 1,200 a decade later.\(^4\) The number of unregistered stations is not entirely clear but by many estimates they could amount to several hundred.

In 1998 the broadcast hours of television totaled 42,029 per year. Ten years later the figure had grown to 159,097 hours per year. During the same decade the number of households with television nearly tripled to almost 16 million. It is worth remembering that, given the communal style of television viewing in most households, the number of viewers may well be four times that figure. Mobile telephone ownership rose more than tenfold to 42 million, and private access to an internet connection increased more than eleven times to well over 14 million.\(^11\) An estimated 65 percent of internet users were going online at one of the mushrooming internet cafés, making the actual number of internet users several times bigger than the cited number of those \textit{owning} and \textit{using} a personal computer with internet connection. According to the latest report at the time of writing (September 2011), since April 2011 Indonesians have been the world’s second-largest users of the social media network Facebook, second only to the USA, and well above the UK and India.\(^12\)

Against the background of the broad-based developments in media technology, the national film industry made an impressive revival in the number of new titles produced and in their level of commercial success. In tandem with the development of the film and television industry, and partly in unhappy reaction to it, young Indonesians discovered a new preoccupation in making short and documentary films through much of the 2000s.\(^13\) A few striking features characterised this new trend: (a) the wide popularity of filmmaking across much of the central to western region of the archipelagic nation, especially in big cities and small towns in Java; (b) the impressive total number of titles produced, amounting to several hundred per year, although the majority of them are of poor quality;\(^14\) (c) while a few prominent figures played a part in this new development, the demographic profile of filmmakers was predominantly secondary school students and undergraduate university students, aged in the late teens and mid-twenties; (d) the most common themes in these films were to do with everyday life in the immediate surroundings of the filmmakers; and (e) the institutional support and organisational network needed to consolidate the collective efforts of these filmmakers and their activities was sorely lacking, which led to serious problems in the dissemination of the films and hampered collective growth.

Despite these new media developments and what, at face value, appears to be a greater space for freedom of expression, there is a small number of films that have revisited the 1965 tragedy. Out of the hundred short and documentary films per year over the period of ten years, only slightly over a dozen titles were specifically dedicated to revisiting this contentious historical period.\(^16\) Nearly all these 1965-focused films were produced by people who were older, and who had greater skills and political commitment, than the average in the field. Unfortunately, both individually and collectively, these films have had very limited impact in public, certainly too limited an impact to challenge the New Order propaganda on the issue of 1965.\(^17\) The small number of these films and their limited impact can be easily appreciated in the light of the enormous and multi-layered difficulties in producing anything of substance on this sensitive issue. Apart from the sheer logistical difficulties and political censure, content-wise any film revisiting the 1965 violence is confronted with a set of dilemmas as a result of the complexity of the subject matter and the unpreparedness of many Indonesians to come to terms with the issue.

On the basis of their backgrounds, the makers of the few short and documentary Indonesian films about 1965 can be divided into three categories. The first is those who self-identify and are identified by others primarily as former political prisoners of the New Order, and their immediate circles. The second is the various Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), particularly those with a special interest in human rights issues. The third consists of individuals who have become or aspire to becoming professional filmmakers, whose interests are in filmmaking over and above other issues. As with any other categories, in reality there are several cases of overlaps, as several individuals work in, and move to and from, more than one category.

The Institute of Creative Humanity (Lembaga Kreativitas Kemanusiaan, LKK), led by poet/novelist Putu Oka Sukanta, is to date the single largest producer of documentary films (six titles) that revisit 1965 violence. Putu and several members of the LKK were political prisoners for their active membership in Institute of People’s Culture (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, LEKRA), which was affiliated with the Communist Party of Indonesia (Partai Komunis Indonesia, or PKI).\(^17\) The LKK series was most important for giving a voice to those who endured firsthand the sufferings of being political prisoners from 1965 to 1967. One main feature of these films is a large proportion of talking heads, who are mainly 1965 former political prisoners and their children or other immediate family members, plus a few historians and experts who are strongly sympathetic to the plight of these victims. One notable exception is \textit{Seni Ditating Jaman} (2008), where a person from LEKRA’s opposite camp is interviewed. Presentation techniques are not
the major concern in most of these films, but one may notice the steady rise in the quality of presentation in the later titles, especially Tiduruan 19 (2009). As the technical and aesthetic aspects of presentation have enjoyed progressively more attention, the content has become increasingly apolitical. While these films have the special value of authentic testimonies of victims of and witnesses to the 1965 events, they would have limited appeal to the young audience of contemporary Indonesians because of both the subject matter and the style of delivery. Most of the talking heads are frail-looking people in their late sixties or older. While they speak in plain Indonesian about their own concrete experience, the topics are very unfamiliar to many Indonesians, and the storytellers are not well-equipped with the necessary rhetorical devices for addressing the concerns of those outside their immediate circles.

A few other films focusing on the issue of 1965 or its aftermath have been produced by NGOs with special commitments to issues of human rights. I have managed to access five titles. Two documentaries focus on female victims of the 1965 violence are of special interest. The first is Kadoultukubu ('A Gift for Mother') (2004). Like the other works mentioned above, a large portion of these films present talking heads – women who were political detainees in Plentungan prison (Kendal, Central Java) due to their marriage to a Communist Party member or their membership of Gerwani, which was affiliated with the PKI. Many of the women appearing in this film are bold and rhetorically powerful in telling of their extraordinary experiences, including the sexual assaults they had to endure at the hands of their military interrogators. Despite the qualities of the personalities featured and their stories, the overall quality of this and the other two NGO films previously mentioned is not impressive.

The other documentary on female victims is remarkable in content and process of production. Entitled Putihabu-abul: Masalaluperempuan ('Greyish White: Women's Past) (2006), it is a compilation of six short documentary films, all produced by secondary school children (aged 15–17) from Bandung and Yogyakarta. These films are a product of their attending a filmmaking workshop hosted by Syarikat Indonesia and Komisi Nasional Perempuan in August 2006. In some of the films, fellow students as well as schoolteachers are interviewed about their views and understanding of the history of 1965. Although filmmaking workshops for students were common during these years, this specific project constitutes the single consoling practice thus far that runs counter to the general observation about the youth's lack of interest in the sensitive topic of 1965 violence. The name of the two films’ co-producer, Syarikat, is an abbreviation for 'Masyarakat Santriuntuk Advokasi Rakyat' ('Pious Muslim Community for People's Advocacy'). This Yogyakarta-based NGO was founded by activists from Indonesia's largest Muslim organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama. It represents one of the first initiatives by the Muslim communities with culpability in the 1965–66 killings to foster reconciliation with the victims and their families, and it remains the largest, best institutionalised and most radical of these initiatives to date.

We get a significantly different picture when we consider the few 1965-themed films produced by those whose main interest is in filmmaking. Within this category, the three films that are available to me vary widely in terms of their running time, their genre and the identity of the filmmakers themselves. What they all share – in contrast to the films discussed above – is their serious attention to basic techniques of filmmaking, relative to other aspects of the output. The films in this last category pay maximum attention to communicating effectively and artistically with a general audience, including those who have no special interest in the history of 1965. These qualities are sometimes achieved at the expense of the background information that is required for a full appreciation of the significance of the story told. Focusing more on the impact and aftermath of the national tragedy, these more artistic films show less interest in the power struggle among the top political elite in Jakarta that precipitated the mass killings, or in the international context.

Garin Nugraha's Puisitakterkuburan ('Poetry That Cannot Be Buried') (1999) was the first post-New Order Indonesian film to revisit the events surrounding the 1965 killings. Given Garin's unrivalled fame and authority among his peers, and his wide network in this domain, this is also the best-known film with that theme. The film focuses on the verbal recollection of Ibrahim Kadir, a singer of an Acehnese poetry form called didong, who was taken to prison by mistake in 1965. Ibrahim, who plays himself in the film, gives his testimony as a witness to his own situation in his cell and as a forced participant in the preparation for the execution of his fellow inmates. Cinematographically, Puisitakterkuburan is undoubtedly one of the best Indonesian films that focus on the 1965 theme. The dramatic suspense and pathos are intense for a large portion of this gloomy black-and-white film, with most shots confined within the space of two adjacent cells.

Two things from Puisitakterkuburan stand out as unusual for anyone familiar with the comparable situations in Java and Bali as presented in the other documentaries. First, Ibrahim Kadir was released after 22 days when officials discovered his political 'innocence'. Detentions by error and deliberate detentions of the non-target population during the 1965 witch-hunt were common features in Java. To the best of my knowledge, the innocent people held by error in Java were not released before many years of exile, torture and imprisonment without trial. Second, oddly, in Puisitakterkuburan there is only one prison guard on duty for the many political prisoners, and he is extremely...
weak in character. Towards the end of the film, the guard appears helpless when a woman prisoner, in a confronting fashion, challenges the state-sponsored violence in the region and, more specifically, how executions are conducted in this particular prison. This kind of scene is unheard of in any other account (in film or otherwise) from the troubled period in other areas that I have studied.

In contrast, a graphic presentation of violence by the state security apparatus against a meek citizen is the focus of *Djedjakdarah: Surat tentu untkadinda* ("Bloody Footsteps: Letter to the Beloved") (2004). This is short film is directed by Markus Apriyanto and his crew from a small Yogyakarta-based network of young filmmakers called Déjà Vu Production. In 2004 it won two awards: the Second Saraswati Award at the Bali International Film Festival and the prestigious Citra award at the Indonesian Film Festival. Comparing it with Syarikat's *Kadomuntu bâtta* discussed earlier, Barbara Hatley describes the film as

a more ambitious work, incorporating fragments of music and sung poetry, filmic effects such as flashbacks, and subtitles in English, in representing the fictional experience of a young ketoprak performer, seized from his home as a suspected Communist sympathizer and brutally dragged away for 'interrogation'.

The significance of the closing scene is not lost in Hatley's analysis: 'The violence which with which he is treated by his captors, using graphic slow-motion shots, and the trail of blood left behind evoke strong parallels with the scenes depicting the kidnapping of the generals by the communists in the film *PKI*.'

In the final shot, the filmmakers leave their signature for the audience in the form of a close-up image of a pool of the protagonist's blood on the floor and the imprint in blood of an army boot (hence the title of the film). I share Hatley's view that precisely replicating the New Order framework, but turning it upside down or inside out, is one of several ways to radically confront and subvert the constructs of New Order media.'

The last film from the third category I wish to consider is Lexy Rambadeta's *Mass Grave* (2002). Produced in 2000–01 and released in 2002, it was one of the first documentary films focusing on the sensitive topic. Despite its extremely low budget, the work achieves the highest standard among the post-New Order short and documentary works. What distinguishes this film from any other documentary discussed earlier is its content, namely the live recording of two events directly relevant to the topic rather than the narrative recollections of eyewitnesses as talking heads that dominate most of the other documentaries. The first of the two events shown is the exhumation of mass graves of the 1965 victims. The second is the communal reaction from local people – with some physical assaults and threats of further killings – to the intention of the families of the deceased to bury the skeletons. Having these materials, and having mastered the skills of filmmaking, Lexy also inserted highly selective archival clips from various sources, both domestic and foreign. In place of the usual talking heads these clips appear on the screen as testimonies and commentaries running through the film. The outcome is a powerful message with rich materials in terms of sound, image and action.

Lexy's *Mass Grave* also outdoes its peers for two additional reasons. First, it achieves a good balance in terms of the three dilemmas outlined above, between (a) background information relating to the past and the political confrontations of the present that should appeal to the poorly informed audience; (b) the top political elite's struggle for state power in Jakarta and the massacres in various regions; and (c) information about the global context (the Cold War) and recollections of individual victims of 1965. Secondly, the documentary is unique for having included a substantial number of original shots of anti-Communist forces (including one carrying a machete and threatening someone who was a victim of the 1965 murders) and their voices. Unlike the top military officers who reaped the benefits of the 1965 violence and its aftermath, here the local militias can in fact be further analysed as victimised in the national tragedy as the families of the political prisoners they wished to attack. Such confronting images are missing from most of the documentaries produced in the subsequent years, rendering most of these films repetitively monological.

Taken together, the films discussed above represent the small in size but nonetheless strong desire in post-New Order Indonesia to revisit the murky history of 1965 and explore alternative narratives to the official propaganda that outlived the New Order in the form of film. Indonesian art workers have produced a wide variety of products along these lines, both before and more after the fall of the New Order. Some of these works refer to the bloody history of 1965 as a setting or background, while others only make a passing reference. With several exceptions, the majority of the literary works and the few cinematic works with this theme affirm rather than challenge the New Order's master narrative of communist brutality, even when they depict the plight of the 1965 victims. Typical in the literary depictions (and in the film *Gie*) is the sufferings of ordinary Indonesians who were misled by the communist ideology, or who were related by marriage to those so misled. In other words, even where compassion and sympa-
thy for innocent victims is strong in these artistic works, the blame falls squarely on the already massacred communists. What is conspicuously absent in many of these works is the role of the Indonesian military and civilian perpetrators of the 1965 killings.

Short and documentary filmmaking in Indonesia appears to have passed its initial phase as a fashionable trend. Many of the earlier filmmakers have been confronted by a wide variety of problems with resources, management, networking and distribution. Beyond the large-scale appearance of short and documentary filmmaking in Indonesia and beyond the internally divided and restless activity of filmmaking, there is no sign of any major film industry with both the interest and the capacity to produce a full feature film that would confront the nation with the long overdue challenge of coming to terms with the historical facts and moral questions of the 1965 events. The case of the aborted production of Lastri vividly illuminates why.

Lastri was prevented from being produced by a mob in the village of Colomadu, Karanganyar, Central Java in November 2008. The film was to be directed by the acclaimed director Eros Djarot. The much-feared Front Pembela Islam (Islam Defender Front) and Hizbullah Bulet Bintang (Moon and Crescent Party of God) were the first two social groups that protested the making of the film, alleging that the film would 'spread communism'. The protest was launched in a meeting hosted by the local police office. Although no violence was reported, the threat of forced cancellation was imminent as declared by Khoirul Rus Suparjo, Head of the Front Pembela Islam. A week later, more social groups joined the protest. According to the director, the film was meant to be a melodramatic romance between two young lovers set in the troubled years of 1965. The Indonesian Police Headquarters had issued a permit for the film production, and so had the Colomadu Sugar Factory for the shooting sites. Shooting had initially been scheduled to take place in Klaten, a neighboring town, but was cancelled due to similar threats. The incident was condemned by the Association of Independent Journalists as well as editors of the nation's major newspapers. A counter-rally took to the streets to show support for the production of Lastri, but the filmmakers decided not to proceed with the plan.

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF HISTORY?

Moral imperatives often lead us, the analysts, to hold the conviction (either naively or by intent) that truth and justice must ultimately be available to victims of past gross violations of human rights. Hence the optimistic urge for taking a part, no matter how small, in the struggle to attain these goals sooner rather than later. A cursory review of literature in Indonesia under the New Order would suffice to show the common assumption of many analysts that state repression necessarily generates either acquiescence or resentment, even if muted, among the general population. Conversely, the removal of such top-down repression supposedly opens the way for the release of voices and previously repressed emotions into the open. Such a view was strong in the discourse of 'transition to democracy' worldwide from the 1960s. Closer to Indonesia's present, the same sentiment is implicit in the title of an otherwise excellent documentary film that looks at the trauma of four victims of the 1965 violence: 40 Years of Silence: An Indonesian Tragedy (2009). As I have shown elsewhere, even at the height of the New Order's authoritarian rule one could find audaciously dissenting voices from the population, as well as significant gaps, in consistencies and contradictions on the part of the state apparatuses. As suggested above, and as theorised eloquently by others, there is no easy and linear progression towards self-expression in direct correlation with freedom of speech. Despite a title that can be misconstrued to imply a similar hopeful conviction, Mary Zurubuch's Beginning to Remember: The Past in the Indonesian Present (2005) presents extremely important insights, precisely for problematising such conviction. In her introductory chapter, she demonstrates persuasively how difficult, complex and risky the attempt to remember the violent past can be in the present.

This is not a matter of time (i.e. the familiar notion that healing takes time and with the passage of time things will necessarily be easier or better), as Zurubuch briefly contemplates. Instead, as she perceptively notes elsewhere in the same chapter, those 'who have survived traumatic experiences may be unable or unwilling to express themselves', even in the ideal circumstances of liberalism. One might add that there is also the possibility that these victims may prefer not to obtain either assistance to help them articulate their memory or indeed any representation to speak of their experience on their behalf. Some of the 1965 victims may have had forty years of silence; for other fellow victims, four years was enough. Other victims may opt for total silence for life. The situation is complicated further by the limited capacity of language and memory to represent the experience. Citing Edith Wyschogrod, Zurubuch considers the 'impossibility of recovering or representing the past completely' and asks 'what are the responsibilities of researching or bringing forward questions of the past, such as mass killing, if we can never really be certain of knowing what actually happened?' Citing Walter Benjamin, Sarah Lincoln notes that 'to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it as it really was'. It means to seize hold of a memory; it ultimately implies 'construct[ing] a fiction of a coherence history out of the fragmentary narratives'.
In an unpublished conference paper Adrian Vickers remarks, correctly I believe, on the near impossibility of engaging in a public debate on the history of 1965 and a few other related topics in present-day Indonesia with Indonesians. The reason, according to Vickers, is that Indonesians are either unwilling or unable to have an ‘interchange between positions’ where each party ‘is really listening to the other’ in a sober manner. What he observes in Indonesia is the general practice of contest where ‘statements are not made to persuade through logic and evidence, but to affirm absolute “truths” that are already known. Persuasion comes from actually making a statement, from its form rather than detailed content.’ This leads Vickers to question the merits of the various scholarly works on ‘history’ and ‘memory’ for analysis of cases in Indonesia. These are a good starting point for further enquiry, and can be explored in greater depth outside this essay. However, I beg to differ from Vickers when he makes his next argument: that the general inability or unwillingness to have a rational debate is the effect of the ‘persuasive power [of] the continued workings New Order rhetoric’. I wish to propose two alternative arguments on this point.

First, as I have elaborated elsewhere, underlying the power of any long-running domination in history is physical violence on a large scale and a sustained threat of its potential occurrence. In the case of the New Order regime, the basis of its power was a combination of the mass killings in 1965–66, threats of the potential return of the communists, and continuing state terror with impunity. All of these provided conditions of possibility for the New Order’s excessive power in various forms and genres, including rhetoric. Whatever power of rhetoric the New Order might have commanded (as alluded to by Vickers), that magic rhetoric did not simply come into existence because some clever New Order official or institution invented it. Rhetoric never occupies an autonomous space in history. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron contended that ‘every power which might have commanded (as alluded to by Vickers), that magic rhetoric’ did not simply come into existence because some clever New Order official or institution invented it. Rhetoric never occupies an autonomous space in history. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron contended that ‘every power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force, adds its own specifically symbolic force to those power relations’. This is not to suggest that the 1965 violence was the sole origin and cause of all that came afterwards. Rather, in turn it can be connected to the ‘persuasive power [of] the continued workings New Order rhetoric’. I wish to propose two alternative arguments on this point.

Second, Vickers has given the New Order more credit than is warranted. While there is no space for an adequate counter-argument here, suffice it to suggest that the New Order regime was no less subject to the ‘absolutist logic’ than its dissenters who adopted the same logic and rhetoric to attack the regime. This logic predated the New Order, and its genealogy deserves an examination beyond the scope of this essay. This logic was responsible for the growth of a massive sense of ‘fatally belonging’ that severely divided the nation, with or without the instigation of the state apparatuses. The actual entity to which that ‘fatal belongingness’ is devoted or embedded varies across time and space: nationhood in one moment, one’s religion and God in another, or ethnicity or even one’s sports fan club. Many aspects of the widespread sense of fatal belongingness remain in question: for me, but in my provisional understanding this has something to do with a mode of living where oral communication is predominant. This is a world where signs and the world they represent were believed to be inseparable.

What has slightly altered the situation and captured the imagination of the millions of Indonesian youths is the charms of digital technology. Unfortunately, this new development does not help much to prepare them or their elders any better to deal with the murky history of the 1965 violence. There are no homogenous effects of the technology across time and space that would warrant generalisation. Social media may be instrumental in mass mobilisation leading to the overthrow of dictators in some societies. In contemporary Indonesia the affordable and user-friendly digital gadgets have not empowered youths in order to simply do what their elders have been doing, but this time only with greater speed, accuracy or ease. Rather, the new media has transformed young people into new identities in a new world that provides them with the pleasures of accessing an unprecedented speed, scale and ease with which they can record, edit, comment on and share globally their day-to-day life experiences, anywhere and anytime. This is a world of fast exchanges, sights and activities enter into a hall of mirrors on a global scale in real time.

Hence the paradox: as their network expands globally with the single press of a button, their day-to-day perspectives shrink to the size of their Facebook Wall pages or the screen of their mobile phone. While from a technical point of view mobile phones and Facebook can store, edit and transmit a lengthy and deeply layered story of social events and practices that rendered 1965 increasingly irrelevant or possibly irreconcilable, the working of this technology compels its users indiscriminately towards the opposite: incessant but short, disconnected and hasty exchanges of codes for brief moments of fragmented consciousness. This is well attested by the dominant formats and themes that appear in the majority of short and documentary films in contemporary Indonesia, and possibly elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

By the time the New Order regime collapsed and its repressive apparatuses weakened, the momentum for launching a counter-memory and counter-narrative was there. However, it dissipated very quickly, and not because the ghost of New Order returned and reigned. What impeded the potential surge of counter-narratives of 1965 violence was no longer state censorship and terror, but the layers of social events and practices that rendered 1965 increasingly irrelevant or
a non-issue to many of those who dominated the public space. As many of the victims of the 1965 violence died, it was increasingly difficult for the surviving few, their descendants and their sympathisers to find the capacity to represent the victims in ways that would compel an attentive audience and sustain this audience’s interest for a considerable period. An increasing number of young people not only have little or no knowledge of that past, but can also find no reason why they should.

Today, youths in Indonesia have been affected by a new global environment, which is remarkably different from that of the Cold War years. Unlike the preceding generations, who were conditioned to be conversant in romantic heroism and narratives of revolutions, most urban middle-class Indonesians today have neither the pressure nor the incentive to engage themselves passionately in any big political movements and confront the major questions that face the world, with the exception of the Islamist political movements. For the majority who are more secular minded and moderately religious, engagement with global issues has been narrowly directed towards the consumption of entertainment commodities following the global trends.

Here is the irony. Decades of the New Order’s mega-investment in anti-communist propaganda had the ironic impact of keeping the counter-propaganda alive and leading the romanticisation of the left among disenchanted members of the population. Those living under the military dictatorship of the New Order, with or without personally experienced victimisation, would not need special education to know and resent the regime’s brutality and the sinister quality of the regime’s propaganda. For every five Indonesians who might have been susceptible to the New Order’s propaganda regarding ‘the imminent danger of communism’, there was one for whom the same propaganda would immediately imply the opposite. Each incident of censorship, ban and act of propaganda led the few critically minded citizens to imagine, investigate or suspect the reverse: what the New Order might have deliberately concealed or twisted underneath the official pronouncements, the museums, laws and films. The demise of the New Order brought with it the instigation for a counter narrative. Dominance both invents and denies resistance.

NOTES
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2 In the first few years of its release, school students were required to pay to attend screenings at regular movie theatres during school hours. The state television network, TVRI, broadcast the film annually on 30 September. Private television stations were required to follow suit.

3 The second perceived threat to the nation for all the respondents was ‘corruption’ (18.42 per cent), a response amounting to slightly more than half of those who perceived communists as the most dangerous threat (33.65 per cent). Interestingly in retrospect, ‘radical Islam’ occupied the second to last place in the list of potential threats, with barely one per cent of the total number of answers; see Tempo, ‘Suara arakayat seletel 40 Tahun’, 25 August 1985.


5 Respondents in this poll were invited to give more than one answer to the question. At top of the list was ‘teachers and text books’ (97 per cent); ‘film’ came second; see Tempo, ‘Tandatanya untuk G30S versi remaja’, 25 September 2000.

6 Those who had seen it once: 13 per cent; twice: 29 per cent; three times: 18 per cent; more than three times: 38 per cent.


KILLER IMAGES

11 I am indebted to the generous assistance of Helen Kathering of AGB Nielsen Media Research (private communication 2009) for the mobile phone and internet access figures as well as the figures for television broadcasts and consumption.
13 The term ‘indy’ (independent) was widely used in the early 2000s for the new trend. However, as in other places, the term progressively lost its appeal. In part, this was due to the large diversity of works that were classified within it. The term also lost its popularity following a long and unresolved series of debates in the 2000s about what exactly the ideologically loaded term should mean. Those who were initially categorised as independent filmmakers have been found at the forefront of the mainstream film industry, while others have moved to and fro between the mainstream film industry and underground and low-budget filmmaking. The term ‘short and documentary films’ is widely acceptable because of their largely descriptive nature, purged of the political connotations embedded in the term ‘indy’.
14 When the SCTV network opened its first competition in 2002, more than one thousand titles were submitted, although only about 800 were accepted as eligible; see van Heeren (2002: 17). In the years that followed, the number of contestants in the SCTV and a few other competitions stayed around 800 plus.
15 Focusing narrowly on the post-New Order works of alternative Indonesian filmmakers (in terms of both citizenship and residence) with a thematic focus on the 1965 violence or its aftermath, this chapter will not examine several other sets of creative works that are otherwise related or relevant to the concerns of this essay. Excluded in this discussion are (i) films where the setting of 1965 remains only in the background, such as Gie (2005) which I have discussed elsewhere; see A. Heryanto (2008) ‘Citizenship and Indonesian ethnicity Chinese in post-1998 films’, in A. Heryanto (ed.) Popular Culture in Indonesia: Fluid Identities in Post-authoritarian Politics. New York: Routledge, 70–92; (ii) films that address issues of political violence in Indonesia in other periods; (iii) a wide variety of creative works that address the 1965 issues in different media (visual arts, dance, theatre or literature) and genres (video art and animation); and (iv) foreign films with a focus on the 1965 political turmoil and its aftermath, such as The Year of Living Dangerously (1983), The Shadow Play (2001), Tertena: Breaking of a Nation (2004), 40 Years of Silence: An Indonesian Tragedy (2009), and most importantly The Act of Killing (2012).
16 I acknowledge this assessment is open to debate. Several of the better-known filmmakers on the topic expressed separately a sense of satisfaction of the extent to which their work have been received.
17 Although the LKK can be considered an NGO, it is a special kind of NGO. Most members of an NGO can join or leave any time, subject to administrative procedure, while retaining membership they can usually, and in principle, claim an equal status. In contrast, the founding and continuously leading members in the LKK are distinguished by involuntary status as political victims of serious crime perpetrated under the New Order.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., 7.
24 According to Lexy, it cost him 4 million rupiah (roughly US$400) out of his own purse (personal communication 2010).
26 One contrast can be found in the visual arts, such as the works of Dostang Christiano, or FX Harsono that challenges the master narratives on those violent years in a most direct fashion. For more discussion on Christianto’s works see C. Turner (2007) ‘Wounds in our Hearts: identity and social justice in the arts of Dostang Christiano’, in K. Robinson (ed.) Asian and Pacific Cosmopolitans: Self and Subject in Motion. London: Palgrave, 77-99.
28 Raymond Williams noted: ‘If our social and political and cultural ideas and assumptions and habits were merely the result of specific manipulation ... then the society would be very much easier to move and to change than in practice its has ever been or is’ – R. Williams (1980) Problems in Materialism and Culture. London: Verso, 37; see also comments from Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers on the paradoxical combination of extreme media servility and minimal state control of those media in the US – J. Cohen and J. Rogers (1991) ‘Knowledge, morality and hope: The social thought of Noam Chomsky’, New Left Review, 187, 17,
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5-27.
30 For more general discussion on the subject, see A. Kaplan and B. Wang (eds) Trauma and Cinema. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
32 Ibid., 7.
33 Ibid., 6.
36 Ibid., 7.
37 Ibid., 9.
41 Ibid., 32.
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