

## CHAPTER 7

## The Indonesian Massacres

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During the six-month period from October 1965 to March 1966, approximately half a million people were killed in a series of massacres in Indonesia. The victims were largely members of the Indonesian Communist Party (*Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI*) which until that time had been the largest Communist Party in the non-Communist world. By 1965 it appeared to many observers inside and outside Indonesia that the Party was well-placed to come to power after President Sukarno's departure. The massacres followed an attempted coup d'état in the Indonesian capital, Jakarta, in which the PKI was implicated, at least in the public mind, by circumstance and vigorous military propaganda, and resulted in the Party's destruction. These massacres paved the way for the accession to power of a business-oriented and military-dominated government under General Suharto.

**Who Committed the Genocide?**

The Indonesian killings were the work of anti-Communist army units and civilian vigilantes, drawn especially, but by no means exclusively, from religious political parties. Both groups brought to the killing a long-standing hatred of Communism.

The army's hostility dated from the years of armed struggle against the Dutch (1945–1949), when Communist influence had been strong both within army units and among independent irregular troops, or *lasykar*. The professional soldiers who soon struggled through and up into the top military positions resented both Party influence in the junior ranks and the independent Communist units that challenged their monopoly of armed force. Resentment had become alarm when the crypto-Communist Defense Minister Amir Syarifuddin attempted to introduce political commissars into army units in 1946. With bitter disgust, moreover, senior officers recalled the so-called Madiun Affair of 1948, when Communist army units had declared a Soviet Republic in the East Java town of

Madiun. At that time, the Indonesian Republic had been reduced by Dutch offensives to a constricted area in Central and East Java and was girding itself to resist an expected final onslaught. The uprising had been a complex affair, the product, at least in part, of anti-Communist provocation of the Communist troops, but the incident lived on in the memories of the army leadership as proof of Communist treachery (Sundhaussen, 1982).

Religious opposition to the PKI came mainly from orthodox Islam. Although Islam was statistically the religion of just under 90 percent of the population, approximately half the Muslim population belonged to a distinctive Javanese form of the religion, often called *Kejawen*, which was strongly mystical and blended with pre-Islamic beliefs. Whereas the followers of *Kejawen* often saw little to fear in Communism, pious orthodox Muslims feared that the Communists would install an atheist state, anathema to Islam, if they came to power. The Indonesian Republic had adopted belief in God, but not Islam, as one of its guiding principles in 1945, and for many Muslims even this was a barely tolerable compromise. This religious antagonism was compounded by memories of the Madiun affair, when Communist forces, briefly in control of parts of East Java, had massacred several hundred Muslims who resisted them. Among Indonesia's Christian communities, attitudes toward the PKI were more divided: Some Christians shared the Muslim anathemization of Communist atheism, while others were sympathetic to the Party's goal of social justice and indeed backed the Party's campaigns on land and other issues in some regions.

A third pole of opposition to the PKI came from the conservative wing of the secular Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI). Although sections of the PNI were sympathetic to the left, the Party establishment was generally conservative, representing the interests of the entrenched bureaucratic elite. The PNI's electoral support had depended especially on the traditional loyalty of peasants to this elite, and the Party was threatened more than any other by the rise of PKI support in the countryside.

It, thus, provided a rallying point for civilians who were opposed to the PKI but suspicious of organized Islam.

Hostility between the army and organized Islam had been strong during the years after independence, with the army taking 15 years to suppress a fundamentalist Muslim uprising called *Darul Islam*. The two, however, found themselves gradually drawn closer by their shared hostility to the prospect of the PKI coming to power. In Indonesia's first fully free elections in 1955, the Communist Party had won 16.4 percent of the national vote, making it the fourth largest party, but its influence was growing rapidly and it maintained by far the best disciplined and organized party structure in the country. Sukarno drew it into his orbit as he consolidated his political power in a system he called Guided Democracy (1959–1965), declaring communism to be part of the state ideology and sponsoring a gradual penetration of state institutions by the Party (Mortimer, 1974). In early 1965 it appeared likely that workers and peasants would be armed and trained to make up a "Fifth Force" alongside the army, navy, air force, and police, thus creating a militia that would give the PKI direct access to armed force for the first time since the revolution.

The anti-Communist coalition was broadened by a widespread and more general hostility to the PKI. This hostility stemmed partly from the Party's energetic efforts to recruit support throughout society that saw it take sides on a wide variety of issues. For each issue that won it allies, it acquired a set of enemies, and on some issues, such as the redistribution of farm land in East Java, social violence had reached high levels even before the massacres began (Walkin, 1969). In East Java, the PKI supported Hindu revivalists against the local Muslim establishment; in Hindu Bali, however, the Party vigorously denounced Hinduism and disrupted religious practice (Hefner, 1990, pp. 193–215; Cribb, 1990, pp. 241–48). The immediate reason for hatred between Communists and non-Communists, therefore, varied enormously over the breadth of the Indonesian archipelago and for

many years formed one of the important obstacles to a better understanding of the massacres as a whole.

Hostility to the Party also stemmed from what were widely believed to be the circumstances of the 1965 attempted coup in Jakarta. The coup itself was an ambiguous affair that may never be fully understood. Army units from the presidential palace guard, headed by Lieutenant-Colonel Untung, abducted six senior anti-Communist generals from their homes early on the morning of October 1. This action was ostensibly an attempt to thwart a rumored right-wing coup d'état by the generals. The generals were probably to be kidnapped, intimidated, and humiliated into abandoning their alleged coup plans. A clandestine bureau of the PKI was probably involved with the kidnapers, though the rest of the Party, except for a few leaders, was certainly unaware of the plot. The targeted generals, however, were killed, and the kidnapers announced, from Halim air force base near Jakarta, that a new Revolutionary Council had seized power. It is probable that the announcement was a panicked response to the botched kidnappings, but it was widely perceived in Indonesia, including by PKI members themselves, as the Party's attempt to seize power (Crouch, 1978, pp. 97–134).

The coup appeared to be a cynical grab for power, upsetting the uneasy balance of Guided Democracy. The killings of the generals, moreover, were the first significant political assassinations since the chaos of the war of independence; the young daughter of another general was fatally injured in cross fire. Rumors then emerged that a number of the generals had been tortured and mutilated before death by frenzied Communist women who celebrated their achievement with an orgy involving Party cadres and left-wing air force officers. (For definitive disproof of these rumors, see Anderson, 1987.) Word quickly spread, too, that Communists throughout the country had planned a similar fate for their other enemies and that holes had been dug in every district to accommodate the bodies of their victims. The stories of torture and mutilation, and those of the preparation of holes, have now been shown to be false, but they contributed greatly to the anti-Communist determination to kill.

### How Was the Genocide Committed?

Although the motives driving the killers varied greatly, there was a common pattern to much of the killing itself. In each region, typically, news of the attempted coup in Jakarta was followed by a period of tense relative calm in which both sides attempted to assess what had happened. In most cases, the killings did not begin until the arrival of anti-Communist troops from outside, though there were some exceptions to this. In strongly Muslim Aceh, in northern Sumatra, and in parts of East Java, local Muslim leaders took the initiative to kill Communists within days of the coup attempt. Knowledge that the killing of Communists was sanctioned by the armed forces was enough to set the massacres off in some areas, but the army often intervened to give weapons and rudimentary training to anti-Communist vigilantes. In a few regions, the army itself conducted most of the killings, while here and there it felt obliged to dragoon unwilling local communities to help in the slaughter.

The actual killing followed two distinct patterns. In some places, the army and vigilantes organized raids on houses or villages suspected of harboring Communists. The killing was carried out mostly at night and commonly with bayonet or *parang*, the single-bladed machete of the Indonesian peasant. In some cases, entire communities closely associated with the PKI were killed, but more commonly the army and vigilantes took with them blacklists of intended victims who were taken from their villages and killed nearby. The bodies were generally dumped in rivers or caves or were buried in shallow graves. The sites of some of these graves are still known locally and avoided. Often, however, victims were first detained for weeks or months in prisons, barracks, or detention camps before being taken some distance from their homes and killed more or less secretly. At times, the bodies of the victims were mutilated. Some killers may have wished to avenge the alleged mutilation of the generals or to conceal the identity of the victims, but in some cases they had a more spiritual motive: In local belief, influenced by Islamic practice, to damage a body immediately before or after death is also to damage

the soul, condemning it to lesser existence in the hereafter and limiting its capacity to return to earth to afflict its tormentors (Gittings, 1990).

Few of the victims offered significant resistance. The vast majority of Party members were as unprepared for violent conflict as their anti-Communist enemies. Indeed, some of the victims were strikingly passive. In North Sumatra victims were reported to have formed long, compliant lines at the river bank as they waited for methodical executioners to behead them and tumble the head and body into the water. There are reports from Bali that Party members went calmly to their deaths wearing white funeral clothes (Hughes, 1967, pp. 160, 181). One reason for this passivity seems to have been that Party members hoped initially that not resisting would show that they had not been involved in the Jakarta coup and they remained committed to seeking a legal path to power. In parts of Central Java, where the PKI had been strongest, there was some attempt to set up stockades in defense of Communist villages, but this was largely futile against the army. After most of the killings were over, remnants of the PKI attempted to establish a guerrilla base in the countryside of southern East Java, but this too was soon suppressed.

### **Why Was the Genocide Committed?**

Discussion of the reasons for the Indonesian massacres, aside from considering the motives mentioned above, has focused on the unexpected ferocity of the killings in a country whose people had something of a reputation for gentleness. Most authors have argued that the killings involved something more than the political elimination of the PKI. Because it is likely that the destruction of the Party as a political force could have been achieved with many fewer deaths than actually occurred, observers have sought additional explanations for the scale of the massacre.

This issue raises questions of national psychology that are both difficult and delicate, and most attempts to explicate the event have not been convincing. Some scholars have suggested that the massacre represented a kind of collective running *amok* (*amok* being, after all, an Indonesian word).

*Amok*, however, almost invariably takes place in response to projected imminent defeat and humiliation. It normally ends in the death of the *amokker* and has many of the hallmarks of an indirect form of suicide (Spores, 1988). Others have suggested that the Javanese shadow puppet play, or *wayang*, portrays the characters on the left of the puppeteer as both wrong and doomed to violent destruction, and, so, inclined Indonesians to expect the PKI to perish in a welter of blood, but this theory fails to do justice to the complexity of *wayang* philosophy (see Anderson, 1965). Other scholars have emphasized the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty that gripped Indonesia at the time, arguing that the killings were a product of panic in an environment of intense political conflict. There is evidence, too, that many of the vigilantes were drawn from the criminal underworld. They were men of violence in any case and were given the freedom to exercise violence on a massive scale during the killings. Nonetheless, it is also worth remembering that the military forces around General Suharto felt entirely uncertain of success when they launched the massacres. Communist influence had deeply pervaded Indonesian society and politics. It was so unclear who was to be trusted that the Suharto group seems to have relied on lists prepared by the United States Central Intelligence Agency to identify the senior leftists who were to be removed. In these circumstances, the scale of the killing may partly reflect the army's determination to make sure that it would prevail.

More promising is our growing knowledge of the role of the men of violence (rural and urban gangsters, enforcers, and the like) in Indonesian society and the special role that terror plays in consolidating their authority (Cribb, 1991, pp. 52–55). In the discussion below — under “Who Was Involved?” — however, we shall see that there are formidable obstacles to developing this line of analysis. However, first let us consider briefly who the victims were.

### **Who Were the Victims?**

The killings were directed primarily against members and associates of the PKI and its affiliated organizations. The Party claimed a membership of 3 million and its affiliates another 20 million,

though both figures were probably exaggerated. In the course of the killings, many private quarrels were also settled, and a significant number of non-Communists perished because of mistaken identity or association with Communists. In the politically charged atmosphere of the mid-1960s, however, many private quarrels had taken on a political dimension, and the distinction between private and political was correspondingly vague.

Few records of any kind were made or kept of the killings as they took place. The few foreign journalists who were in the country found access to the countryside very difficult and were, in any case, kept busy reporting the complex political changes taking place in national politics.

Under the long Suharto era (1966–1998), Indonesians, on the whole, remained reluctant to speak about the killings, except in very general terms. This reluctance probably stemmed from a sense of shame at the magnitude of the massacres and an unwillingness to discuss what was still a sensitive topic in a country dominated by the military (who presided over the killings in the first place).

This lack of information makes it impossible to say for certain how many people perished during the killings of 1965–1966. The death toll certainly included most of the Party leadership, including the General-Secretary D.N. Aidit. Estimates have ranged from a low of 78,000 to a high of 2 million. Today, most scholars accept a figure of between 200,000 and 500,000. The Indonesian Suharto government itself, which considered the killings to have been a necessary purge of Communist influence from society, has never seriously denied that the killings took place and indeed has publicly inclined to the higher figure (Cribb, 1990, p. 12). As we shall see in “Historical Forces and Trends” below, the Indonesian Suharto government drew some political advantage from cultivating the memory of massive killing.

The intensity of the killing varied dramatically from region to region. It was most ferocious in areas where the PKI had been on the ascendant, in the countryside of Central and East Java, in Bali, and in the plantation belt of North Sumatra; it was least prevalent in the cities, and in places such as Aceh,

West Sumatra, and Madura where overwhelming community hostility to the Party had made it a minor part of the political landscape.

At the time, it was reported that Indonesia's substantial Chinese community were especially targeted as victims. The Chinese were and are deeply resented in Indonesia for their relative success in business since colonial times, and they were further encumbered in 1965 by their perceived association with the People's Republic of China. In 1959, however, Chinese traders had been expelled from rural areas, thus removing them from the regions where the heaviest killing took place. The PKI had been more tolerant of Indonesian Chinese than most other groups, and there were thus many Chinese among the Party activists who perished, but there is no evidence that the Chinese suffered disproportionately on this occasion.

### **Who Was Involved?**

Only in a few instances does the available information permit us to identify individual killers. This is partly because those involved often kept their identities secret by wearing masks and acting at night. But it is also a result of a strong sense of communal responsibility for the massacres. This communal responsibility rests on traditional village notions of justice in which crime was seen as committed both by and against whole communities, regardless of the individual who may have carried it out or who may be charged with avenging it. Even those whose hands were never physically bloodied have consequently felt a shared responsibility for the killings.

This sense of mass responsibility was also deliberately encouraged by the army, which aimed to ensure that it did not carry the burden of blood alone. Until the massacres were well advanced, many observers inside and outside Indonesia were uncertain whether the PKI could be effectively eliminated as a political force. The army was, therefore, keen to recruit irrevocably to its side as many groups as possible, knowing that those who had joined in the bloodshed could never change sides. As the killing proceeded, participation became something of a test of anti-Communist credentials. Those

who had made compromises with the leftist elements in Guided Democracy often felt that they could prove themselves only by joining with especial enthusiasm in the anti-Communist witch-hunt. This was especially so on the island of Bali (Soe, 1990).

### **Historical Forces and Trends**

The massacres of 1965–1966 played a key role in the long-term destruction of political parties as a significant force in Indonesian public life. The nationalist movement during the closing decades of Dutch rule in the first half of the 20th century had formed itself into a series of political parties, and at independence it had seemed natural that one or more political parties should take the lead in determining the country's future. The resilience of local Party organizations was strengthened by the self-reliance they developed during the war of independence when central control was at a minimum. At a national level, however, the parties were for the most part fragile and even coincidental alliances of politicians whose power bases lay in regional, social, ethnic, or religious groups. Only in the PKI did the Party organization have a powerful base in its own right. Independent Indonesia adopted a parliamentary system in which governments were created by coalition on the floor of parliament, but this political form proved to be profoundly disappointing to many Indonesians. Coalitions were unstable, few lasting longer than a year, and politicians in general appeared to be obsessed with peddling influence and favors, rather than with determining policy in the national interest.

Sukarno's suspension of the parliamentary system and declaration of martial law in 1957, therefore, were greeted favorably by many Indonesians in the hope that an authoritarian government less beholden to sectional political interests would rule the country better. Guided Democracy's economic performance was dismal, but most observers attributed this to Sukarno's concentration on ideology and foreign affairs and to the growing influence of the PKI rather than to his authoritarian political structures. The forces who marshaled against the PKI in 1965, therefore, included many who were determined to prevent parties from ever again exercising a decisive role in Indonesian politics.

In this perspective, the massacres were less important for their elimination of one particular party than for the curse they cast on party politics in general. While believing firmly that the PKI had to be exterminated, many conservatives deeply regretted that Indonesian politics had reached such a point and they blamed the hatreds that underlay the killings not simply on the PKI but on the freedom that all parties had used to pursue their own sectional interests. In Suharto's Indonesia, therefore, the killings became a horrible warning of what might happen if populist politics were permitted. At each carefully managed national election, when the government electoral organization, called *Golkar*, won handsomely against the two permitted alternative parties, the specter of the violence of 1965–1966 was one of the forces that shepherded voters into support for the government.

### **Long-Range Impact**

The killings eliminated the PKI as a significant political force in Indonesia. The Party has been formally illegal since March 1966, and aside from two or three attempts during the late 1960s to establish rural guerrilla bases on a Maoist model, there has been no clear sign of any PKI activity within Indonesia since that time. The Indonesian Suharto government regularly warned the public against the “latent danger” of the Party, and from time to time unexplained incidents, such as fires in public buildings, were blamed on a putative PKI underground, but it is most probable that the PKI was simply being used as a convenient scapegoat in these cases. A somewhat factionalized Party-in-exile continues to exist, based originally on Party members who happened to be abroad in October 1965 or who subsequently escaped the killings, and drawing more recently on exiled Indonesian dissidents, but it appears to have little impact in Indonesia itself.

The psychological impact of the killings on both survivors and perpetrators is difficult to assess. As mentioned above, Indonesian autobiographical writing about the killings is exceptionally sparse. In the late 1960s, a number of short stories appeared in which authors tackled various aspects of the killings (Aveling, 1975), but the topic failed to develop even as a genre in Indonesian literature. One

or two anecdotes exist that describe killers who suffered horribly in later life as a consequence of their participation, but these are balanced by accounts of killers who live easily with their memories (Young, 1990, p. 80).

The memory of the killings, moreover, appears to have relatively little significance for those one might regard as survivors. This is partly because the killings appear to have been remarkably effective in eliminating those whom they targeted; that is, the active cadre of the PKI. More important, however, the relative disregard of the killings is a consequence of the fact that an even larger number of leftists were punished by detention during the years after the coup. The Indonesian government itself has put the number of detainees at one and a half million. Not all these people were held at once, and some were released after a few months, but many were kept for years, and large numbers were exiled to the isolated prison island of Buru in eastern Indonesia. Virtually all shared the experience of hunger, humiliation, and mistreatment during their detention, and they suffered from harassment and discrimination for decades after their release. It appears that this experience of suffering has overshadowed — for most of them — the briefer and more distant terror of the killing months.

The impact of the killings is perhaps seen most strongly today in the changed religious geography of parts of Java, Timor, and North Sumatra, where an estimated 2.8 million people converted to Christianity in the years immediately after 1965. These conversions were partly a consequence of the military government's insistence that all Indonesians should profess a religion. Although some Christian vigilantes were as brutal in the killings as their Muslim counterparts, the Christian churches in general took a much more active pastoral role among the families of victims and were rewarded with many converts. Conversion was also perhaps a consequence of a general spiritual crisis that the appalling level of violence presented to Indonesian society.

## Responses

News of the killings reached the international press soon after they began, and, although the obstacles to effective reporting were formidable, a thin stream of news and feature articles (Kirk, 1966; King, 1966; Palmos, 1966; Turner, 1966) made available to the world community the fact that a massacre of enormous proportions was under way in Indonesia. The international response was muted — partly because attention focused on the growing power of the military in Jakarta, and partly because the non-Communist world had no wish to make an issue of events it regarded favorably. Without specifically commending the Indonesian army for its actions, the world preferred not to know the details of what was happening, though *Time* came close to commendation when it described the PKI's suppression as "The West's best news for years in Asia" ("Vengeance," 1966, p. 26).

Leftists outside Indonesia for their part were reluctant for many years to investigate the details of the killing. This was probably true for two reasons. First, leftist critics of the Suharto government, as well as other organizations such as churches and human rights organizations, generally focused on what they saw as its shortcomings — restrictions on political activity, corruption, regressive development policies, and the like — rather than on what they would regard as historical crimes. Second, the left was aware that the PKI created many enemies in Indonesian society by its vigorous espousal of contentious issues such as land reform. PKI activists were, according to circumstance, unyielding, unreasonable, and even inconsistent. Their enemies had many grudges one might regard as legitimate, even if the response was unnecessarily violent. The left, therefore, has found its analysis of the killings to be most effective when they were simply interpreted as a general "white terror" or violent conservative reaction to Communism, and the precise details of each killing were not explored.

### Scholarly Interpretation

No significant observer had predicted the extent of the violence in Indonesia in 1965–1966 on the basis of a scholarly understanding of Indonesian society. For many years afterwards, scholars did not treat the massacres as a major event in Indonesian history. This was partly a consequence of the lack of information, but it reflected also a broader historiographical difficulty in blending the separate courses of local and national history into a single coherent narrative. Because the national significance of the killings cannot be explained without reference to local conditions, any more than the local significance could be discussed without reference to national events, the killings had an elusive character that has militated against close analysis.

The circumstances of Suharto's fall, however, increased the willingness of scholars to pay attention to the massacres of 1965–1966. Throughout the long years of Suharto's New Order, scholars had debated whether the spectacular economic achievements of the government — Indonesia went from being one of the poorest countries in the world to being one of the celebrated Asian economic “tigers” — justified the high levels of corruption and the continuing political repression of the military-dominated government. In 1997, however, the Indonesian economy collapsed as part of a more general Southeast Asian economic crisis, and the severity of the collapse was widely attributed to shortcomings in Suharto's policies. With the old president's economic credentials in tatters, scholars became more inclined to examine his political shortcomings and to identify the 1965–1966 massacres as the beginning of the New Order — that is, the first act in a long story of political repression — rather than as the end of Sukarno's Guided Democracy — that is, the working out of tensions generated in the struggle for independence and in the attempt to shape a workable democratic system for Indonesia.

Disregard for the killings may also be related to the character of the scholarly community that studies Indonesia. At least until recently, this community tended to be dominated by scholars who had

made the study of Indonesia their life's work and who brought to their studies a deep familiarity with Indonesia and an affection for its people. Perhaps because it is hard to reconcile such widespread killings with affection for Indonesians, scholars with the experience that would enable them to examine the killings in detail have tended to look for other research topics and to focus their discussion of the events of 1965 on the attempted coup of September 30, 1965. The circumstances of the coup are themselves shrouded in uncertainty, but they at least permit scholars to identify innocent parties in a way in which the killings do not.

Insofar as historical debate exists, it focuses on the relative responsibility of the armed forces and of the vigilantes in initiating and sustaining the killings. The left on the whole gives greater emphasis to the role of the military, the right to the vigilantes, but this disagreement has never reached the level of controversy.

### **Current Attitudes**

Interest in the Indonesian massacres revived in the late 1980s and early 1990s after two decades of neglect. A small number of previously little-known personal accounts appeared (see "Eyewitness Accounts"), and a collection of essays on the killings attempted to restore the topic to the scholarly agenda (Cribb, 1990). An important reason for this interest seemed to be a growing awareness that the survivors on both sides of the massacres were reaching old age and within a short span of time might not be around to add their testimony to the record. President Suharto, moreover, had his 70th birthday in 1991, and it was widely accepted that his period of dominance in Indonesian politics was coming to an end. Furthermore, four important local studies of the killings (Hefner, 1990; Sudjatmiko, 1992; Robinson, 1995; Sulistyono, 1997) made it possible to analyze the killings in a way that was less dependent on scattered anecdotes.

Many observers expected an upsurge of Indonesian interest in the killings after the fall of President Suharto in 1998. Indeed a number of groups did begin to investigate the killings — collecting

testimonies and even excavating mass graves. The activities of these groups, however, met widespread hostility and obstruction both from the authorities and from Muslim groups. Although one might expect that the hostility would stem from fear of exposure and perhaps punishment, the resistance to opening the case of the 1965–1966 massacres seems to be driven above all by a remarkably persistent anti-Communism. Important sections of Indonesian society are deeply reluctant to allow any actions that might be seen to rehabilitate the PKI, which had been excoriated for more than three decades as Indonesia's most important source of evil. A suggestion by Indonesia's fourth president, Abdurrachman Wahid, that the ban on the Communist Party might be lifted in the name of national reconciliation met such vehement resistance that he was forced to drop the idea. In addition to those who actively reject the need for any investigation of the massacres, there is also a strong feeling in parts of Indonesian society that the country is already beset with violence and social conflict and that little good would be done by raising such an old issue.

As scholarly assessment of Suharto's impact on Indonesia takes shape, a deeper understanding of the circumstances that brought him to power becomes increasingly important.

### **Lessons from the Indonesian Massacres**

The Indonesian killings share with those in Cambodia (see Chapter 12) an overwhelmingly political, rather than racial, orientation that distinguishes them from the other racially or ethnically motivated genocides discussed in this volume. They were an extreme example of the violence that is a part of the political process throughout much of the world. However, political motives are also not absent in many other massacres. In any case, the predominance of political considerations in the Indonesian killings reminds us that genocide does not simply occur because of racism but rather is a consequence of deep human antagonisms.

**Eyewitness Accounts: The Indonesian Massacres**

Three eyewitness accounts of the Indonesian killings are included herein. As the analysis above explained, the Indonesian killings have produced remarkably few direct testimonies by survivors or participants, and the first two accounts reproduced here are unique for the detail they provide: Other accounts, published and unpublished, tend to be secondhand or fragmentary.

The first account was written by an anonymous author who was a member of a left-wing youth organization in Kedurus, near Surabaya, the main city of East Java. The Brantas is Java's longest river and it enters the sea near Surabaya. The author makes clear that he would have become a victim himself had he been caught. The account was written in 1989, over 20 years after the events it describes.

The second account describes the killings in Kediri, also in East Java, from the point of view of a young man whose family was not on the Communist side but who nonetheless viewed the fate of the PKI with concern. The author, Pipit Rochijat, describes himself throughout the account as "Kartawidjaja's Son No. 2." This is due to the fact that Indonesians are often reluctant to use personal pronouns, because this can seem forward; thus, names are commonly used as a polite substitute.

Both testimonies highlight the contrast between the clandestine nature of the actual killings and the public knowledge that they were taking place. The author of the first account witnessed the murder of his old teacher and others only because he happened to be hiding near the secluded abattoir where the killings took place. The killers whom he watched took some care to conceal the identity of their victims but none at all to conceal the bodies, which were simply flung into the river. Pipit Rochijat, too, describes the way in which victims were often taken away to some secluded spot to be killed, yet bodies and parts of bodies were widely displayed. This phenomenon (contrasting with the public executions and the secret disposal of bodies employed by some repressive regimes) highlights the extent to which the killings were intended to create terror, as well as eliminating political opponents.

Uncertainty about who had been killed and where and why kept the Communists and the left in general off balance, encouraging rumor and uncertainty. Unable to be sure just what the scope of the killings would be, the Communists could not judge whether it was best to fight, to flee, or to confess.

This uncertainty also emerges powerfully in the final testimony. This account is the work of an Indonesian journalist sent by his newspaper to investigate one of the last outbreaks of killing associated with the suppression of the PKI. The poverty-stricken Purwodadi region of Central Java was one of a small number of rural areas where the PKI began to develop a guerrilla strategy, and the suppression of the Party's incipient military campaign was reportedly accompanied in late 1966 and early 1969 by a wave of killings of civilians by army and home guard forces. Maskun Iskandar visited the region in early 1969 at the invitation of the Indonesian army, which denied the killings had taken place. His report was published serially in the independent newspaper *Indonesia Raya*.

Iskandar's testimony is in many ways unsatisfactory. He saw no bodies, heard little testimony except from official sources, and draws no conclusions. His account leaves the reader hanging and the fact that he visited the region as a guest of the Indonesian army would seem to cast further doubt on his credibility and on the figures he cites. To a Western reader, his report seems almost inconsequential; to an Indonesian reader, however, aware of the constraints of official censorship and unofficial controls on journalism, his report leaves little doubt that a significant massacre took place. His diffident reference to the "camps of death" at Kuwu and the "left-overs" in the camps elsewhere, for instance, would give the censor little to object to, but draw the reader's attention to ominous nomenclature. He dismisses as "useless" his questions to children about their missing parents, but reports faithfully that their eyes brim with tears. He describes the sergeant known as "007" (licensed to kill) as if he disbelieves the story, but his readers will draw their own conclusions from the nickname. When he talks casually about the risk of "losing" his notes, his Indonesian readers know immediately that he is referring to the risk of confiscation by the authorities.

Maskun's report does not tell us what happened in Purwodadi, but his writing reminds us powerfully that not all victims of genocide are able to leave oral or written testimony as their memorial. There are times in human history when neither victims, nor survivors, nor perpetrators, have preserved more than a fragmentary record of genocide. The victims at Purwodadi, whose fate is faintly recorded in Iskandar's account, stand for a much larger group, not only in Indonesia, whose destruction remains largely unrecorded.

### *Account 1*

"By the Banks of the Brantas" was first published in *Injustice, Persecution, Eviction: A Human Rights Update on Indonesia and East Timor* (New York: Asia Watch, 1990), pp. 87–90. Reprinted by permission of Asia Watch.

Some people spoke of Pak<sup>Pak</sup>: an honorific meaning "father," used to address older men. Mataim, the bicycle repairman, one of whose eyes was white. His house had been used as the local PKI secretariat, and they said he was the first person in the village to be arrested. He had been frightened out of his wits. He was taken to the police station and later detained in Mlaten.

Mlaten? Where was there a prison in Mlaten? There wasn't. That night I went to Mlaten to see for myself. In fact it was a warehouse that had become a detention center. Now the building was surrounded with a thick fence of woven bamboo, so that you couldn't see it from the outside. The police station I passed seemed empty. I kept going south, past the subdistrict military headquarters. It was guarded not just by the army but by members of the Banser.<sup>One</sup> of the Muslim vigilante groups active in East Java. Banser was also guarding the subdistrict government offices — they were everywhere.

Now every night, raids took place. Four members of my organization were arrested. They were all able to escape or perhaps they were deliberately let go. They were asked about me, and it was clear I was already on the list of those to be arrested. After that I no longer slept at home at night. More often

I became a wanderer on the banks of the Brantas. I didn't have to exhaust myself finding a place to hide because there was an abattoir, surrounded by high grasses, which was completely deserted. My younger brothers knew about my hiding place, and one day brought a schoolmate to see me and warn me to get out of the city. She said I didn't need to go back to school, especially since the school was being searched and one of the people they were looking for was me.

Politics forced my transformation from student to fisherman. There were many others on the Brantas, fishing with nets or rods. Unfortunately for me, the fish I caught didn't bring in any money; I couldn't sell one.

In November, the rains began to come. The river ran muddy and fast with weeds, leaves, human limbs, and headless corpses. Fishermen vanished from the banks. I was the only one left, not to fish but to save my life. At night it was the same as before, only now I was on my own. One night I heard a rustling coming from the abattoir. I got closer and lay prone in the bushes like a snail. When I heard voices, I got frightened, but I still wanted to know what was going on. A few seconds later, I heard the engine of a car. Several Banser members got down from a Willis jeep. Some of them wore black and carried a piece of rattan about half a meter long in their left hands, while in the right they carried machetes. Then came a truck which I recognized as belonging to Pak Abu, the owner of a textile mill in Jarsongo . . . .

Among those wearing black were several people I knew. Pak Harun wore glasses, had a paunch, and always wore a black fez when he went out. He had a small mustache and dark skin. He was the number one man in *Nahdatul Ulama* [the national Islamic organization] in the Karangpilang subdistrict. Rejo, still young, was a member of *Ansor*, the *Nahdatul Ulama* youth wing, in Wiyung, a village to the west of Kedurus. He was large and tall, also mustached, and wore a seaweed bracelet around his right wrist. He often frequented bars.

“Is the sack ready?” Harun asked. The others said everything was ready. An oil lamp flickered over my head and forced me to lie flat, hoping that the tall grasses would obstruct their view. I didn’t dare move, ignoring the ants and mosquitoes.

A man was hauled off the truck, his feet and hands bound. A plump man, he was dragged around like a banana stalk. It took three people to do it. They were only ten meters in front of me when, reaching the abattoir, they untied his feet. He was wearing a white cotton shirt with brown stripes. He looked disheveled, as though he hadn’t changed clothes in days. He seemed weak — maybe he hadn’t been getting enough to eat. The Petromax lamp suddenly illuminated his face, and I got a shock. It was Pak Mukdar, the elementary school principal in Kedurus. His head was bare (usually he wore a fez), and his eyeglasses were gone. Weak as he was, he was forced to stand. There were a few uniformed army sergeants and other military men, but it wasn’t clear what rank the others held or what unit they were from. They asked Pak Mukdar questions, and I strained my ears to hear. I just heard murmurs; it wasn’t clear whether he had answered.

“If you don’t answer what we ask,” said one of the military, “say your last prayers. We’re going to send you to meet your maker.”

The old man didn’t say anything. Instead, he began to sing the song so frequently sung by PKI members, the *Internationale*. Before he could finish, he was shoved from behind by a man in black and fell flat. Maybe he fainted. With his hands still tied, his neck was hacked by Rejo, the youth from Wiyung. He finished off the unconscious, weak old man, whose hands were still tied. My teacher — such a meaningless death, in an abattoir meant for slaughtering cattle. His head was removed and put in the sack. Then they dragged his body to the river and tossed it in. It washed away slowly in front of me . . . .

Another body was also thrown in, also headless. I couldn’t count how many headless corpses passed by me. Every time, the head was put in the gunny sack. Then I heard a shout from a voice I

recognized and froze; it was Pak Mataim, our bicycle repairman who I think was illiterate. He seemed very thin, and he too was dragged along like a banana stalk. He moaned, begging for mercy, for his life to be spared. They laughed, mocking him. He was terrified. The rope around his feet was taken off, leaving his hands still tied. He cried, and because he couldn't keep quiet, they plugged up his mouth with a clump of earth.

Rejo went into action, and like lightning, his machete cut through the neck of his victim, the one-eyed, powerless, bicycle repairman. His head went into the sack. Then his hands were untied, so that it looked as though he died without first being bound. At first, his headless body disappeared beneath the surface of the water, then eventually it floated up. The next person killed was a woman; I don't know who she was.

At midday when my brother came, he told of seeing a corpse caught against a tree on the edge of the river. From the clothes and certain features of his body, they discovered it was Pak Muktar. I didn't say a word of what I'd seen. The news caused my mother to fall ill, but such news came every day from the Brantas. Our house was finally raided but I managed to slip away. Following the suggestion of a friend from school, I left the Surabaya area for Lawang, but there too the murderers were roaming around. Suheri, a young killer from the village of Bambang, invited me to join in helping herd a young man he wanted to kill to the Purwasari forest. He was one of Suheri's own group, not a member of any organization. But Suheri wanted his wife, then a beautiful woman. He didn't get his way, though. When he went to claim his victim's spouse, the woman concerned had disappeared.

Forgive me if I don't include pictures of the places I have described here. At the very least, I hope this little account of the last moments of the many victims can become a kind of explanation for their children, wives, and even grandchildren. Because one thing is clear, not a single person has taken responsibility for all those murders, let alone officially informed the families of those killed.

*Account 2*

Extracted from Pipit Rochijat's "Am I PKI or non-PKI?" *Indonesia*, 40(1985). pp. 37–52. Reprinted by permission of the Cornell University Modern Indonesia Project.

***The Situation during G30S1965***

Up to 1965, the [national] front was divided in two: on the one side the Communist Front, and on the other the United Nationalist-Religious Front. And their respective strengths were about evenly balanced. For some reason or other, PKI strength in the region of Kediri, Tulungagung and Blitar was especially conspicuous. Maybe there was some kind of spillover from Madiun towards Kediri.

The events of October 1, 1965, are something difficult, impossible to forget. The atmosphere was so tense, as though everyone was expecting something [catastrophic] once the takeover of power in Jakarta had been broadcast. All Kartawidjaja said to his family was: "Watch out, be very careful. Something's gone very wrong in Jakarta." Usually the doors and windows of the house were shut around 10:00 P.M., but on October 1 they were closed at 7:00. Fear seized the Kartawidjaja family, for the rumor that the PKI had made a coup and murdered the generals was already spreading. The PKI's own aggressive attitude and the way in which the generals had been killed strengthened the suspicion of PKI involvement. "Such brutal murders could only be the work of *kafirs*, i.e., the Communists," was the kind of comment that one then heard. At the same time, the Kartawidjaja family felt very thankful that General Nasution<sup>General</sup> A. H. Nasution was at the time Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces and Minister of Defense had escaped with his life. The only pity was that his little daughter was beyond rescue. For almost two weeks, everything was quiet in the Kediri region. People merely stayed on the alert and tensely watchful. In State High School No. 1, too, the atmosphere was very heated. Reports that it was the PKI that had gone into rebellion spread rapidly. At every opportunity the Nationalist and Religious groups vilified the students involved with the IPPI.<sup>The</sup> League of Indonesian High School Students, affiliated with the PKI. For its part, IPPI took evasive action and

rejected all “accusations.” They claimed to know nothing about what had happened. They said that the events in Jakarta were a matter of the Council of Generals.

About two weeks after the events of October 1, the NU<sup>Nahdatul</sup> *Ulam* (especially their Ansor Youth) began to move, holding demonstrations which were joined by the *santri* [Orthodox Muslims] masses from the *pondok* and *pesantren* [Islamic dormitories and schools] around Kediri. They demanded the dissolution of the PKI, and that the death of each general be paid for with those of 100,000 Communists. Offices and other buildings owned by the PKI were attacked and reduced to rubble by the demonstrators. It was said that about 11 Communists died for nothing, simply because they were foolish enough to feel bound to defend PKI property. In an atmosphere of crisis suffused with so much hatred for the PKI, everything became permissible. After all, wasn’t it everyone’s responsibility to fight the *kafir*? And vengeance against the PKI seemed only right, since people felt that the Party had gone beyond the pale. So, the fact that only 11 Communists had [so far] died was regarded as completely inadequate. This kind of thinking also infected Kartawidjaja’s Son No. 2.

Yet there was a [strange] episode which is worth mentioning here. To the east of the Kediri municipal bus station there was a certain PKI office. Actually, it was really only an ordinary house. But in front of it there was a signboard bearing all those names smelling of the PKI; from the PKI itself through the BTI,<sup>The</sup> Indonesian Peasants’ Front, affiliated with the PKI. Gerwani<sup>The</sup> Indonesian Women’s Front, affiliated with the PKI. and IPPI, to the People’s Youth. It so happened that when the demonstrators arrived in front of that house, they found an old man out in front getting a bit of fresh air. They asked him whether he was a member of the PKI. “No,” he answered, “I’m a member of the BTI.” “Same thing!” yelled a number of the demonstrators as they started beating him. He toppled over, moaning with pain. He was lucky not to be killed. But the house was demolished as a result of the rage of the masses. And, as usual, before carrying out their task, the NU masses roared “*Allahu*

*Akbar* [Allah is Great]!” After this bloody demonstration, Kediri became calm once more. Only the atmosphere stayed tense. And this went on for about 3–4 weeks.

***Wanted:*** <sup>The</sup> word “*Wanted*” is in English in the original text. *Communists*

Once the mesmerizing calm had ended, the massacres began. Not only the NU masses, but also those of the PNI joined in. The army didn’t get much involved. First to be raided were workers’ quarters at the sugar factory. Usually at night ... to eliminate the Communist elements. It was done like this: a particular village would be surrounded by squads of Nationalist and Religious Youth (Muslim and Christian [Protestant], for example in Pare). A mass of Ansor Youth would be brought in from the various *pondok* and *pesantren* in the Kediri region. On average, about 3000 people would be involved. The expectation was that, with the village surrounded, no Communist elements would be able to escape.

It was pretty effective too. Each day, as Kartawidjaja’s Son No. 2 went to, or returned from, State Senior High School No. 1, he always saw corpses of Communists floating in the River Brantas. The thing was that the school was located to the *kulon* [west] of the river. And usually the corpses were no longer recognizable as human. Headless. Stomachs torn open. The smell was unbelievable. To make sure they didn’t sink, the carcasses were deliberately tied to, or impaled on, bamboo stakes. And the departure of corpses from the Kediri region down the Brantas achieved its golden age when bodies were stacked together on rafts over which the PKI banner proudly flew.

In those areas through which the Brantas did not wind, the corpses were, as you’d expect, buried in mass graves — as, for example, around Pare. There the Christian [Protestant] masses were very active. But then, the export of corpses down the Brantas began to bother the city of Surabaya. The rumor went round that the drinking water was filtered out of the river. And by the time they reached Surabaya, the corpses were in complete decay. After protests from Surabaya, PKI were no longer

flung into the Brantas, but were disposed of in mass graves. The prepared holes were dug pretty big, and were thus capable of handling dozens of Communists at a time.

Furthermore, at one time the road leading up to Mount Klotok (to the west of Kediri city) was decorated with PKI heads.

About 1 kilometer to the north of the Ngadirejo sugar factory, you'd find a lot of houses of prostitution. Once the purge of Communist elements got under way, clients stopped coming for sexual satisfaction. The reason: Most clients — and prostitutes — were too frightened, for, hanging up in front of the houses, there were a lot of male Communist genitals — like bananas hung out for sale.

Naturally, such mass killings were welcomed by the Nationalist and Religious groups. Indeed [they felt,] the target of 100,000 Communist lives for one general's had to be achieved. It was the same for Kartawidjaja's Son No. 2 and his family. Specially when they got the word that for the Kartawidjaja family a Crocodile Hole<sup>Lubang</sup> *Buay* had been prepared, for use if the PKI were victorious.

This atmosphere of vengeance spread everywhere. Not merely in the outside world, but even into the schools, for example State High School No. 1. There the atmosphere was all the more ripe in that for all practical purposes the school broke down, and classes did not continue as usual. Many students did not come to school at all — like Syom, for example, a friend of Kartawidjaja's Son No. 2, who had to spend most of his time going round helping purge the Kediri region of Communist elements. Kartawidjaja's Son No. 2 saw many cases where teachers and student members of IPPI at State High School No. 1 were held up at knife point by their Nationalist and Religious comrades. With the knives at their throats they were threatened with death. They wept, begging forgiveness and expressing regret for what they had done while members of the IPPI. In the end, all the secrets came out (or maybe false confessions). Each person tried to save himself at another's expense. After all, they were human beings too, and thus still wished to enjoy life.

It was evident that the Kediri area was unsafe for Communists (strangely enough, except in one instance, they made no move to offer any resistance). So most of them tried to flee to Surabaya or sought protection at the Kediri City *Kodim* [District Military Command]. But even in jail they were not safe. Too many of them sought safety there, and the jail could not take them all in. In the end, the army often trucked them off to Mt. Klotok (the road there passed by State High School No. 1). Who knows what the army did with them there — what was clear was that the trucks went off fully loaded and came back empty. Furthermore, the *Kodim* had no objections at all if people from the Nationalist or Religious groups came to ask for [certain] Communists they needed. The *Kodim* was prepared to turn over Communist prisoners, provided those who needed them brought their own transportation (not including motorbikes, of course).

At State High School No. 1 student activity proceeded calmly. It was practically like long vacation except for continuing to assemble at school. On one occasion a teacher asked Syom, the friend of Kartawidjaja's Son No. 2, where he'd been all this time, never coming to school. And indeed, he had seldom showed up. He answered: "On tour [of inspection], sir." And people understood what he meant by "on tour." For aside from being an acronym of *туру kana-туру кене* (sleeping there, sleeping here), it also meant "busy eliminating Communists." Syom was one of the executioners. And the fame of an executioner was measured by the number of victims whose lives he succeeded in taking.

Usually, those Communists whom people had managed to round up were turned over to an executioner, so that he could despatch their souls to another world. Not everyone is capable of killing (though there are some exceptions). According to what a number of executioners themselves claimed (for Kartawidjaja's Son No. 2 had many friends among them), killing isn't easy. After despatching the first victim, one's body usually feels feverish and one can't sleep. But once one has sent off a lot of souls to another world, one gets used to killing. "It's just like butchering a goat," they'd claim. And the fact is that Kartawidjaja's Son No. 2 often stole out of the house, either to help guard the [local]

PNI headquarters located in the home of Pak Salim (the driver of the school bus in the area around Ngadirejo) or to watch the despatch of human souls. This, too, made sleeping difficult. Remembering the moans of the victims as they begged for mercy, the sound of the blood bursting from the victims' bodies, or the spouting of fresh blood when a victim was beheaded. All of this pretty much made one's hair stand on end. To say nothing of the screams of a Gerwani leader as her vagina was pierced with a sharpened bamboo pole. Many of the corpses lay sprawled like chickens after decapitation.

But even though such events were pretty horrifying, the participants felt thankful to have been given the chance to join in destroying infidels. Not to mention the stories brought back by Maha, a friend of Kartawidjaja's Son No. 2, who participated in eliminating the Communists in the Pare area. He was a Christian. What he said was that the victims were taken off by truck and then set down in front of holes prepared in advance. Then their heads were lopped off with a Samurai [sword] that had been left behind by a Japanese soldier in the past. When the mission was accomplished, the holes were filled in with earth.

And among so many incidents, naturally there were a few which still remain a "beautiful" memory for Kartawidjaja's Son No. 2. For example, when the Ansor Youth surrounded a particular village to the east of the sugar factory, they went into a number of houses to clean out the Communist elements. In one house, as it happened, there were two kids living there who were listed as activists in the People's Youth. When the Ansor people knocked at the door, it was the parents of the two hunted boys who answered. "Where are your sons?" "If it's possible, please don't let my boys be killed" — such was the request of the old couple. They offered to give up their lives in their children's stead. Not merely was this offer accepted, but the exterminators also killed their two children.

Even though Kartawidjaja was hated by the PKI, on one occasion he told Kartawidjaja's Son No. 2 to go to the home of Pak Haryo, an employee who lived next door and was an activist in the SBG. Kartawidjaja told him to fetch Pak Haryo to the house and have him sleep there, bringing with him

whatever clothes he needed. But since it was then pretty late at night, when Kartawidjaja's Son No. 2 knocked at the door, Pak Haryo's family made no response. Maybe they were afraid that it might be the Angel of Death come visiting. The next morning, Kartawidjaja came himself to pick up Pak Haryo. Subsequently, he was taken by Kartawidjaja to Surabaya, to be hidden there.

Naturally, helping Communists wasn't at all in line with the ideas of Kartawidjaja's Son No. 2. So he asked: "Dad, why are you of all people protecting Pak Haryo?" "Pak Haryo doesn't know a thing, and besides it would be a shame with all his kids."

Kartawidjaja was fortunate in that he was always informed about "who and who" was to lose his life. And many Communists who had once vilified Kartawidjaja now came to his house to ask for protection. On one occasion he set aside a special space in the meeting hall where people asking for his protection could overnight.

All through the purges, the mosques were packed with Communists visitors. Even the Worker's Hall was specially made over into a place for Friday prayers. As a result, many people judged that the PKI people had now become *sadar* [aware: of their past errors, of Allah's truth]. And hopes for survival became increasingly widespread. And at one of these Friday prayers, Kartawidjaja was asked to make a speech in front of all the assembled worshippers. He told them that "praying isn't compulsory. Don't force people to do it. Let those who want to pray pray. And if people don't want to, then they don't have to."

### *Account 3*

Extracted from Maskun Iskandar's "Purwodadi: Area of death." In Robert Cribb (Ed.) *The Indonesian Killings of 1965–66*, 1990, pp. 203–13. Reprinted by permission of the Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University.

My hair, clothes, my bag were all dusty. It was a bad road from Purwodadi to Kuwu. In a few places the asphalt could still be seen, but for the rest the road was paved only with brittle stones which

crushed easily. “Hard river stones are like gold in this area,”<sup>H</sup> the collection of river stones for the paving of roads was one of the traditional obligations la said the military man who escorted us in the jeep. We proceeded slowly, seldom meeting another vehicle. I had been told that the only public transport available was an old train which ran the 62 kilometres from Semarang to Purwodadi. So here was one piece of Princen’s<sup>H</sup> J. Princen, an Indonesian of Dutch descent, was and is a major human rights activist wh information confirmed: communications were difficult. But was the rest true? Had there been mass killings? Were conditions in the Kuwu area tense? Now that I was on my way to the area, I had to find answers to these riddles.

Before we left Purwodadi for the Kuwu area, which had been identified in press reports as the centre of the killing, the KODIM commander gave us a briefing. PKI membership in Purwodadi was estimated at 200,000, out of a population of 700,000 in 18 *kecamatan*.<sup>District:</sup> an administrative division. Two hundred of the 285 *lurah* [village heads] were PKI, he told us. Out of this number, only about a thousand had been “finished off,” and those were only the leaders. “If we arrested everyone who was PKI,” the commander told us, “we would not know what to do with them. We do not have space to detain them and we could not simply release them because the rest of the population would not have them back.” The commander of KODAM VII regional military command for Central Java plans to transmigrate them.

On the afternoon of March 5, I visited 4 of the 14 prison camps in Purwodadi *kabupaten*. the administrative division above kecamatan. I saw 987 prisoners and it would be dishonest if I were to say that they were either fat or the reverse. The camps themselves, I was told, included former store houses which the military had borrowed from local people. So there were no terrifying iron bars, but they were secure enough. Let us take Camps I and II in Kuwu as examples. Local people call them *kamp maut*, camps of death. It is not clear to me, however, just what they mean by this. Is there some connection with those reports about Kuwu being in the grip of fear? I don’t know.

Stories passing from mouth to mouth tend to get bigger. This was why my editor had sent me to get firsthand accounts. Had killings taken place without due legal process? Was it true that each *desa* [village] had to supply 75 victims a night? Was it true, as we heard, that the victims were tied up in groups of five before being shot, struck with iron bars or slaughtered without mercy? I had no success in checking these details and I got tired of hearing the same words: “I don’t know,” and “Perhaps.” My readers, I know, want positive confirmation, not inferences from lack of information. I remembered the instructions of my editor before I left: “When you are doing this job,” he said, “remember that all we are interested in is the truth. Truth may be bitter, but we are not aiming to discredit anyone or damage anyone, we have no hidden agenda, as people are inclined to allege these days.”

Little children surrounded the jeep, but they did not dare come close, not like the children at the army barracks. They seemed to wonder why so many outsiders were visiting their village lately. I approached one of them and asked in low Javanese, “Do you have a sister?” He was silent. “Where is your mother?” I asked again. He remained silent, making circles in the sand with his big toe. “Is your father here?” I asked at random. The child raised his eyes. They were brimming over. Then he ran away into the narrow streets of the *kampung*. I deeply regretted asking those “useless” questions.

Back in my hotel, I attempted to sort my confused notes. The very figures I had written down of numbers killed seemed to be shaking. The names of villagers where the killings had taken place seemed to cry out. Perhaps the light in the room was too dim. The other guests in the hotel were all asleep; I had come back rather late. It was 8:00 P.M. when we left Purwodadi for Semarang accompanied by our military escort.

I noted once again what I had heard from an official source who wanted to remain anonymous. Three hundred prisoners, he said, had been killed in the *desa* Simo. Two hundred and fifty in Cerewek, two hundred in Kalisari, one hundred in Kuwu, two hundred in Tanjungsari. Was this true?

“Did this really happen?” I had asked him. “It’s no secret any more,” he told me. “All the locals know about it. No honest man will deny it. The graves of the victims are witness to it.” I asked the same questions to all those who gave me information, people who wanted to crush the PKI but did not want it done in this way. What they said was, “This kind of thing will not solve anything, not for the people who do it, not for those it is done to.” When the army took me through those areas which were said to be tense, I tried to find proof. Was it true that there was a grave behind Cerewek railway station which had recently been planted with banana trees? Was there a grave in the rice fields at Banjarsari? Someone told me there were graves along the river in Tanjungsari, but our escort did not let us see any of these things. I got tired of writing down the names of villages where there were supposed to have been executions and burials. In Pakis, so my official source said, there were 100 victims; in Grobogan, 50. Outside this area my source did not have specific information, but he named villages: Toroh, Kedungglundung, Sambongbangi, Telogo, Mbogo, Banjardowo, Plosorejo, Monggot, Gundik and so on. Could any of this be proven?

Almost the whole night long, I sorted at my notes on the Purwodadi affair. I made a simple map, marking important places, places with reported killings, reported burial places, areas where there was a majority of women. I was also told that in Cerewek, Gabus and Sulus 70 percent of the population are widows. Some people even said that in Banjardowo it was hard to find a single adult male. Where could they have gone to? It was very late and water in the bathroom was dripping constantly. Some of my notes were hard to find. “It would be terrible to lose them,” I thought. “After they took so much effort to compile.” I thought of all the time I had spent, asking here and there, officials only, of course, and only from the KODAM and KODIM. I had even managed to talk directly to people who took active part in crushing the PKI.

I had a lot of information about the operations in Purwodadi, right from when they began, but that would take too much space. Let us start with April 5, 1968, just under a year ago. The police in

Purwodadi had just arrested Sugeng, a former PKI member who conducted raids in the area. Under interrogation, he told the police that the PKI was putting together an underground organization called the People's Liberation Army [*Tentara Pembebasan Rakyat, TPR*], led by Suratin, who was still at large. Level I of the *TPR* (equivalent to the PKI's old *Comite Daerah Besar*, regional committees) was based first in Semarang, at Jl Dr. Cipto 280 and 298 [a street address]. Government forces then took over these buildings and began breaking up PKI operations with increasing success. The PKI kept up its operations, but it was shadowed ever more closely and had to change its operatives frequently. "When did the large-scale arrests begin?" I asked one of those involved. "June 27, 1968," he answered.

Hearing that date reminded me that responsibility for operations had been transferred to KODIM 0717 Purwodadi. If I am not mistaken, the headquarters had then been in Grobogan, about 4 kilometres from Purwodadi, while the investigating team had been first at Kradenan and then at Kuwu, about 5 kilometres away. I stopped writing, and tried to remember what I had noted down about Corporal S and Sergeant S. From what I had been told, both men were much feared in Kuwu. Perhaps there was some connection with the story I heard from Kuwu residents in Semarang that the sergeant was known as Agent 007. Ian Fleming's James Bond. Licensed to kill. I was surprised people could be so loose in their use of terminology. James Bond was on the side of good, but was this man? People told me that he used to summon the authorities to a ritual meal before he went out on his operations. One time he got drunk and shouted, "I am Agent 007. I have killed hundreds of people." Fortunately, an official who happened to be sitting next to him was able to stop his mouth and prevent him from saying any more.

Again I rummaged through my notes on the arrests. There was an official who told me that the arrests had gone on for a month from July 27. When the prisoners had been collected, they took 75

away each night, in two lots. Later this became less and they only took away 75 prisoners every Saturday night.

Someone walked past my room. I quickly hid the papers under the mattress and switched off the light. Then everything fell quiet again, except for the constant short cough of the night watchman. It reminded me of an incident before I had met the KODIM commander in Purwodadi the previous night, but I might come back to that. I still had not finished transcribing my notes on the arrests and killings.

According to the earliest information from Princen, two to three thousand people had been killed. This seemed very high, out of a total population of 8000 in Purwodadi *kabupaten*.<sup>Eight</sup> thousand is, of course, far too low. Earlier Iskandar gives the So I began to count. Seventy-five people at night for, say, two months, how much would that be? Now, there are 285 *desa* in Purwodadi. There cannot have been killing in all of them, so let us assume just ten, and that the killings took place once a week, not every night. This would make 8 (weeks) \* 10 (*desa*) \* 75 people = 6000 people. Impossible! What if I make it just one *desa*? That is still hundreds, still mass killings. I folded up my notes. I would return them in due course to the authorities in the form of questions.

I saw no beggars in Purwodadi. They say the *kabupaten* was once full of them, but there was now no sign of them. I asked my escort. They had been pulled in during the searches, he said; there were 43 in the camps now. Were they PKI people hiding as beggars, I wondered, or just ordinary non-Communist beggars? Another thing drew my attention. There were said to be five mad people in the camp, and none had been sent to a mental hospital. Even one mad person is a lot for a small *kabupaten*, but five? Perhaps Purwodadi is an exception. It was not clear whether these people were mad when they went into the camp or whether they became mad there. I do not know.

There are 14 women among the prisoners, perhaps Gerwani, perhaps not. I did not get a chance to ask them. But let me give details of the prison camps as I know them. There are 14 camps in

Purwodadi. In the town itself, there are 411 prisoners, in Toroh 51, in Gundik 40. Ah yes, and before I forget, the total includes 127 prisoners left over from the arrests in 1965. In Godong there are 9 prisoners; in Kradenan two camps, the first with 55, the second with 67. Fifty in Sulur, seventy-two in Grobogan. The total number of prisoners, including beggars, lunatics, and women, is 987 in 14 camps. In Wirosari there are 79 prisoners, in Ngaringan 64, in Tawangharjo 36, in Pulokulon 47, in Grubug 5, in Tewoganu 33, in Kedungjati 1. In January there were four cases of illness, in February two. Some people said these were all recent arrivals, others called them “left-overs” (*sisa*). It was not altogether clear to me what the term *sisa* meant, so I did not pay much attention to it.

I put all my notes and the materials I had not yet transcribed back in my bag and closed it with a large question mark. I hope that an investigation team dedicated to upholding the law will open it.

## Notes

1. Pak: an honorific meaning “father,” used to address older men.
2. One of the Muslim vigilante groups active in East Java.
3. General A. H. Nasution was at the time Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces and Minister of Defense. When the *Untung* group attacked his home on the morning of October 1, the general’s daughter was killed by a stray bullet.
4. The League of Indonesian High School Students, affiliated with the PKI.
5. *Nahdatul Ulama*, the main Muslim political party.
6. The Indonesian Peasants’ Front, affiliated with the PKI.
7. The Indonesian Women’s Front, affiliated with the PKI.
8. The word “Wanted” is in English in the original text.

9. *Lubang Buaya* (Crocodile Hole) was the name for the area, within the Halim Perdanakusumah Air Base perimeter, where the bodies of the assassinated generals were disposed of (down a disused well).
10. The collection of river stones for the paving of roads was one of the traditional obligations laid on the rural population in Java.
11. H. J. Princen, an Indonesian of Dutch descent, was and is a major human rights activist who pursued humanitarian issues both under Sukarno's Guided Democracy and under Suharto's New Order. It was he who broke news of the alleged massacres in Purwodadi.
12. District; an administrative division.
13. The regional military command for Central Java.
14. Regency; the administrative division above kecamatan.
15. Eight thousand is, of course, far too low. Earlier Iskandar gives the *kabupaten* population as 700,000.

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