QUICK, CHEAP AND EFFICIENT

Revisiting the Indonesian Mass Killings of 1965-1966

ENGLISH DRAFT translated and published in a Norwegian Anthology.

Olle Törnquist

Abstract

The Indonesian mass killings of 1965-1966 should be revisited as a contribution to two discussions: one international on mass violence and one more Indonesian on whether they are still important or not. While long term fact-finding goes on, we may start by drawing on relevant typologies of massacres and existing research on the politics, the killings and the historical roots of violence. None of the standard explanations for massacres make full sense. In this essay it is argued instead that the Indonesian case was one of quick, cheap and efficient political violence. It was made possible by the decay of the state and the employment of top-down orchestration of localised form of modern indirect rule through local bosses and communities. They turned against a unifying enemy that had been hard to contain within the system. This, in turn, was not unique for 1965-1966. It was part of a wave-like historical pattern. But that pattern was fully institutionalised and legitimised by 1965-1966 – and so it remains. Just like after the holocaust in Germany, therefore, fighting the political violence and supporting human rights based democratisation presupposes that the key role of the massacres is fully recognised, both in Indonesia itself and in the West that once contributed to them.

Main text (6828 words + endnotes)

Why should we revisit disgusting matters like the Indonesian mass killings of 1965-1966? My own notes, for instance, remained shelved for long. In the West nobody cared. In Indonesia everybody tried to forget. Recently, two factors have changed the picture. One is the new interest of concerned 'global citizens' in mass violence. The heart of darkness in black Rwanda as well as white former Yugoslavia slipped into the TV rooms. Genocides, apparently, did not disappear with the holocaust or even the fall of the wall in Berlin. Committed scholars urge us to revisit history, search for general patterns and learn from what have been concealed. Some ask questions even of Indonesia.¹
The other factor is the growing interest within Indonesia itself in the roots of the persistent political violence and in whether or not the killings of 1965-1966 were formative. The answer depends on how they are characterised. If the massacres were mainly due to the cold war or other historically specific conflicts or just Suharto and his officers, for instance, then one may not have to return to 1965-1966 in order to understand the current problems. Scholars and human rights campaigners can focus instead on getting hold of new historical facts; supporting thus the descendents who like to know where the victims were buried, and the innocent survivors who should be rehabilitated. However, if the killings were part of a longer historical pattern of political violence, which by 1965-1966 was legitimised and turned into established state policy, then the massacres may also be a vital background factor for why the violence continues even after Suharto as well as for the current problems of democratisation. Moreover, if the latter is true, even the fragile recent initiative within Indonesia's own National Human Rights Commission to consider looking into the massacres may be a significant opening with an immense potential for the fledgling third largest democracy in the world. And if so, the official West should have a special responsibility to provide support, given its dubious reactions to the killings in 1965-1966 and its backing of the regime that thus emerged.

Both the international question on what one can learn from Indonesia and the more domestic issue about the relevance of 1965-1966 call, thus, for a renewed discussion about the character of the killings. Given its immediate importance, such a discussion may start on the basis of existing research, while vital but more long term historical documentation continues.² Let me contribute by revisiting my old notes on the Indonesian communists in conjunction with others' more fresh studies of the murders and the roots of violence. Hence, an historical introduction of the forces at play and
what we know of the very massacres will be followed by an attempt to understand what happened: first with the help of relevant typologies of mass killings, second on the basis of new research on the historical roots of violence in the country. The conclusion, finally, also includes a discussion of the implications for human rights based democratisation.\(^3\)

**The context**

To begin with, thus, there is a need to contextualise the discussion (and give some basic introduction to the younger generation and to non-indonesianists) by turning back almost 40 years in time and try to recall, form memory or readings, the mid-late 1965. A very cold war was going on. The United States was losing ground in Vietnam and extreme Maoists were advancing in China. In Indonesia – just to the South and one of the most populous, resource-rich and strategically situated countries in the world – the anti-imperialist nation-state project was in crisis: Economically, with hyper inflation and a virtual western blockade (to which Sukarno had recently responded that the US could go to hell with its aid); with drought and invasion of rats in the paddy fields; and with some people even starving. Administratively, with bureaucrats and military abusing their, since six years, almost permanent state of emergency. Politically, with President Sukarno being increasingly pressed by his western oriented opponents among the middle class and modernist Muslims – mainly in the socialist PSI\(^4\) and the Muslim *Masjumi*\(^5\) parties – as well as the officially supportive but in reality increasingly conservative military camp. On the one hand Sukarno and the central military leadership had since 1957 developed a pact, which in 1959 was formalised as ‘guided democracy’. On the other hand, however, the U.S then managed to de-link the military from close relations with Eastern Europe. So once the PSI and *Masjumi* had lost a CIA-sponsored attempt at regional rebellion
from 1956 till 1958, they rallied behind the military. Moreover, the core of the military, the army, was organised territorially. Hence it was present in almost every village and at least its various commanders were in control of not just the repressive organs of the state, and supervising the civil administration, but also much of the economy; almost like the communist party in China or the colonial administrators during the Dutch period.

Consequently, Sukarno had become more and more eager to contain the army by using support from the increasingly dependent and vulnerable but also potentially powerful third largest communist party in the world and the first in Asia, Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI. Since the early 1950s, PKI had advanced successfully within the framework of parliamentary democracy and elections and emerged as the country’s most ‘modern’ political and social movement (in terms of comparatively democratic aims and mass based organisation with a clear basis in collective issues and interests plus a secular ideology). With the crisis in the democratic system after the mid-1950s, however, the party gave priority to the anti-imperialist policies and adjusted to Sukarno’s populist and increasingly authoritarian politics. The expansion continued. In the early 1960s, according to their military opponents, the hard core was some 300,000 cadres and 2 million active party members. If one adds the extensive trade union movement plus peasant and women and student and teachers and all kinds of associated popular organisations and institutions – and adjust for double membership – the organised left movement enrolled some 15 to 20 million people, or about one sixth of Indonesia’s entire population at the time, young and old: some 110 million.

The obvious risk from the point of view of Sukarno's and the PKI, therefore, was that the forces in-between would also feel threatened and link up with the army-related
opposition, including because the PKI was eating into their support bases. These centrist groups consisted mainly of the politically pragmatic traditional Muslims in the socio-religious *Nahdatul Ulama* movement, NU, which also acted as a party, and the secular oriented nominal Muslims and Christian nationalists with the Nationalist Party, PNI. Hence the situation and the dynamics was somewhat more complicated than that which is usually presented in terms of a triangular relationship between Sukarno, the PKI and the Army and may rather be illustrated as follows.

![Diagram of major actors and dimensions of the Indonesian political situation in the early 1960s.](image)

*Sukarno was at the apex, trying to balance it all. Neither the army nor the PKI was able to really present an alternative. By August 1965 there were rumours that Sukarno had fallen ill and that a group of generals were preparing a coup. Less conservative lower ranking officers prepared counter measures. Of course, sections of the PKI leadership knew about these aspirations. Anything else would have been politically ignorant. But apparently nothing was done to try to prevent them. (According to one reliable and well-placed source, for instance, the PKI chairman Aidit probably analysed the party's possibilities in view of the then recent ousting of Ben Bella in Algeria by radical nationalists who needed mass support that could have been exploited by popular organisations.)*
During the night between 30 September and 1 October 1965, the group of radical nationalist officers and some civilians made an attempt to pre-empt an, in their view, most likely conservative coup. The officers tried to arrest the leading generals allegedly involved in planning such a coup. Some PKI-related activists were engaged and a few top-leaders were informed but otherwise the entire communist movement knew nothing. The idea was obviously to disclose the generals in front of Sukarno to thus gain influence. However, the actions failed. Six of the generals were killed, including the chief of the army General Yani. Only General Nasution escaped. He was the country’s most senior military leader but at the time 'only' minister of defence and thus beyond direct command of troops.

Sukarno appointed a General Pranoto as new chief of the army. He was immediately ignored and overtaken by the senior neglected chief of the strategic reserve, General Suharto. The young officers had not targeted Suharto. One of them, Col. Latief, claims to rather have informed him of the plans. Suharto, anyway, cracked down on the dissident officers and tried to gain total command of his own, including against the extensively involved air force, President Sukarno, and the senior-most General Nasution (who had accused Suharto of corruption). The strategy was to 'restore unity' by putting the blame on the communists.

The massacres

From then on a massive propaganda-campaign with fabricated lies (including of communist women having sexually humiliated the murdered army generals) was used to portray the communist movement as a major threat against law and order and peace and security in the country. The message was that ‘good Indonesians’ had to choose between being subordinated to and at worst killed by the communists or simply
disempowering and eliminating them. The conclusion was that Indonesia had to be cleansed from such evil and unlawful elements.

This campaign was immediately accepted and often also supported by the West, especially by the British and the US but also, more or less explicitly, by most of the other liberal democratic governments plus organisations and media.¹¹ Neither did the then Soviet Union, USSR, react strongly. Sukarno and PKI had become increasingly critical of Moscow and begun flirting with China. China, though, was in a weak position in Indonesia (given the economically influential but vulnerable Chinese minority) and fully busy with its own emerging cultural revolution.

Within a few days a special command for the restoration of security and order (KOPKAMTIB) was formed under Suharto’s command. This top-command issued orders to all units of the armed forces down to the village level to uproot the communists. But the armed forces were not unified. There was a need for spearheading operational units. The main ones were Suharto’s 'own' strategic reserve (KOSTRAD) and the army’s para-commando unit RPKAD under Col. Sarwo Edhie. The latter became particularly notorious for carrying out and instigating the arresting, torturing and killing of perceived and real communists.

The massive killings started around the second half of October 1965. We still know very little about them, particularly with regard to the different local dynamics. Much of the murdering was carried out by the army. In many cases, however, they mainly instigated, authorised, legitimated and directed the violence, which was then carried out by various local militias and vigilantes as well as by militant activists related to political and religious youth organisations. (In some cases, even heads of families were giving the option of either eliminating alleged communist members or the entire
family would face the consequences, whereafter they either followed the ‘advice’ or engaged others to handle it.)

Hence, nobody really knows how many people were arrested, tortured and killed.\textsuperscript{12} Let us begin with those detained. By 1970 it was officially estimated that some 600-750,000 had ever been interned. Amnesty spoke of about 1 million. By the 1980s, when most of the surviving prisoners had finally been released from prisons and concentration camps, the government said that 1.5-1.7 million former prisoners were ‘at large’. And many more people, of course, including families and relatives, were regarded as unreliable and directly or indirectly registered as such. Then the number of killed. A state fact-finding commission from late 1965 said 78,000 people; a member of the same commission later said 780,000; in 1966 the command for the restoration of security and order (KOPKAMTIB) said 1 million, which may have been inflated, but as late as 1976, when it was less opportune to exaggerate, its then commander Sudomo said 450-500,000. I have limited myself to conservative sources.\textsuperscript{13} The usual estimate is between ½ and 1 million people. Nobody knows. But residents in Surabaya had to clear clogged canals from dead bodies, orphaned children huddled in market places, even Col. Sarowo Eddie said he had to calm down the excesses in Bali that he himself had instigated, and when the worst was over in the country as a whole, large numbers of certain occupational groups such as teachers were missing.

The killings were most intensive in parts of Central Java (mainly in the Solo-Klaten-Boyolali triangle, and in Pati and Banyumas) and in most parts of East Java (including in Banyuwangi, Blitar, Jember, Kediri, Lamongan, Probolingo/Pasuruan, Tuban, Situbondo, and Wlingi) in eastern Bali and Lombok among other places in
East Nusa Tenggara, in North Sumatra, Lampung and in several places in West Nusa Tenggara. There were also cases elsewhere but apparently not as massive and excessive. In West Kalimantan, finally, the killings came later, in 1967, and for partially different reasons related to attempts at getting rid of volunteers from Sukarno’s campaign against “neo-colonialism” in Malaysia and the new instigated conflicts between local Chinese and Dayaks to facilitate this.14

**Comparative enabling factors**

How shall we understand the actual character of the killings? To what extent do the standard explanations of genocide and massacres help us? Let us discuss the most important theses one by one.15

To begin with the atrocities were clearly not based on *extremist and totalitarian mass-oriented ideology* like Fascism or Stalinism or Maoism. The communists (who by coincidence were quite peaceful and reformist) were rather the victims. And aside from some leaders related to NU’s Banser militia (who, I am told by reliable sources, claim to have been impressed by Nazism and Fascism), most perpetrators did not even pretend to have a consistent collective ideology; that was fabricated later on.16

Neither were the killings because a *big and strong state* cracked down on some of its subjects. Certainly the state was involved. But the state apparatuses were in a serious stage of deterioration. In addition to corrupt bureaucrats and politicians, sections of the armed forces had penetrated and abused various organs of the state with particular skill. In fact, most of the armed forces were obviously not even able (or willing) to uphold the state’s monopoly of violence.
This, however, does not mean that the killings were due instead to the armed forces. Sections of the army were certainly crucial, but there were splits and factions and this was not a major operation with huge numbers of sophisticated weapons or organisation. Rather, quite separate and highly dispersed thugs, militias, and militant and often religious youth groups did much of the dirty work locally.

This is not to say that the massacres were almost ‘accidental’; that the state and the army were bystanders and that we should rather talk of communal violence, like, some would say, during the partition of India? First one may doubt how ‘accidental’ the Indian violence really was and is. I would rather agree with those like Paul Brass who argue that it is usually instead quite political and instigated. Second that is even truer for Indonesia. Much of the killings were certainly localised and carried out by others. But they all seem to have rested with the deliberate approval and support of top-down directed special and mobile military units. More than that: where such armed units did not offer support there was much less killing and mainly detentions. This, most interestingly, was the case in major parts of West Java, in the very centre of the country. Here sections of the armed forces were not closely related to Suharto but rather to his senior, General Nasution (who escaped the coup-attempts in Jakarta). I am not sure to what extent Nasution’s own argument makes sense – that ‘his’ old troops were just as anti-communist but more disciplined and loyal to the unitary nation-state. But they had nevertheless spent years and years to pacify and uproot the extremist Darul Islam militia in the area and did not want to have their work undone by suddenly relating to similar militias and local thugs.

Neither was the killings mainly related to religious and ethnic communities. It is true that there were some aspects of anti-Chinese violence, but rarely very substantial and
primarily in Kalimantan 1967 and then, as we have seen, mainly for other reasons. Of course there were anti-Javanese sentiments in Lampung, for instance, and anti-Balinese sentiments in Lombok, and defence of Hinduism in Bali. But such feelings are hard to isolate from other and more basic social and economic and political factors. Extremist Muslim groups and militias did indeed play a devastating role, especially in East Java. But they did not mainly try to promote Islam, ‘only’ to defend their religion as well as their leaders’ properties, powers and authority against more or less real threats from radical popular forces.

Similarly, the killings do not simply boil down to clear-cut class conflicts. It is true that many of the religious leaders (and the boarding schools) were substantial landowners. The communists had taken the lead in trying to implement a land reform. Various issues over land, tenancy, money lending and so on had become increasingly tense and politicised. There were also disputes on plantations and other workplaces. In other words, there were definitely a lot of conflicts over material resources. But class conflicts are anyway not a very convincing over-all characterisation of the mass killings, for three reasons. Firstly, while the party as well as organised labour were on the offensive in terms of propaganda, the communists had in reality been rather domesticated by the army and by the fact that it would have been politically impossible to cause too much trouble within nationalised companies in times of severe economic crisis. Secondly, the radical struggle for land reform had actually backfired by way of generating unproductive conflicts between different sections of poor people that were lead by various patrons (or less benevolent bosses) and political and religious leaders. The PKI, in fact, seems to have failed in much of its rather rigid class analysis. At least according to my own research, one crucial problem for the party was to make full sense of how politics and economy were intertwined in the
primitive accumulation of capital. The party was thus trapped into dominant patron-client (or boss-subject) relations and communal patterns of local organisation. It was not able to select, combine and transform vital conflicts into politically viable alliances that could unify the masses, irrespective of their ‘traditional’ leaders. So by 1964 the communists retreated. Thirdly, therefore, it is quite possible that those conflicts spilled over and came up to the surface again about a year later, in 1965. But at first hand, then, these conflicts were not between socially constituted classes but primarily between different patron client (or boss-subject) factions of the population over privileged control of resources.

Neither is, finally, sufficient to refer to a particularly violent Indonesian culture or historical background, beyond its often soft and polite surface. There is a rather wide scholarly agreement that culturalist explanations of people running amok or otherwise killing each other because of what is told in shadow plays etc. have proved to be of little value. And even if devoted Muslims (santri) had less problems of religion with the nominally Muslim Javanese plebeians (abangan) than fear of some perceived black magic among them, it remains to be proved when and why this was an independent explanatory factor. On the other hand, however, it is a fact that history matters in the sense that the local militias and vigilantes and the militant youth groups that did much of the dirty job were far from new inventions of the military units that toured around and instigated, legitimised and co-ordinated violence. These kinds of violent groups and their culture have deep historical roots. First from the indirect rule of the Dutch, who also made used of local thugs and used them to divide and rule. Second from the very dispersed anti-colonial movement, particularly in the final struggles against the Dutch but also during several years to come, despite the attempts by president Sukarno, general Nasution, the PKI and others at forming a unitary
nation state. Yet it is important to repeat that (at least to my knowledge) it has not yet been convincingly proven that these historical roots of violent local organisations were confined to the cases and places where the 1965-66 killings were most intensive.

**Comparative preventive factors**

In conclusion so far, none of the conventional explanations are thus sufficient. It was neither a matter of an extremist ideology, a big-strong state, a major armed forces operation, ‘accidental’ or outright ethnic and religious communalism, clear-cut class struggle or a particularly violent culture and historical background in the major killing fields. Some of these factors were indeed vital, but only partly and in different combinations.

Equally important: several of the factors that are usually assumed to prevent massive terror and outright mass killings rather seem to have promoted them. The most obvious one is the apparent *support for the crackdown by the West*, with its liberal-capitalist-democratic base and its aspiration to teach the world as a whole about human rights and democracy. Another factor is the *sympathies for the crackdown on the communists by crucial sections of the Indonesian middle classes*, especially among the students and experts who had been trained in the US (the elite among whom were coined the ‘Berkeley Mafia’) as well as other Western countries that identified themselves as supporters of liberal capitalism and democracy.

To some extent this pattern is still there. While the events in 1965-1966 were swift, visible and dramatic, it took long to break the silence about the very obvious systematic persecutions, detentions, torture, and outright killings – or the massive terror, to use a concept currently in vogue – of a large section of the population that
shared a common vision and as a collective had done absolutely nothing wrong or harmful, either with respect to the Indonesian law or general principles of human rights. One may argue that this was still under the cold war. Today we are so much wiser. But while reporting and commenting on the recent Bali bombing, for instance, even senior BBC journalists and scholars of peace and conflict and terrorism have repeated without qualifications the statement by the Indonesia's police chief, General Da'i Bachtiar, that the Bali bombing is "the worst act of terror in Indonesia's history". Of course the Bali bombing was awful, but the statement is nevertheless instructive of the still prevailing disproportionate interpretations of Indonesia's history of terrorising people.

Neither is the contemporary very positive view of general privatisation, deregulation, and decentralisation supported by the extent to which the Indonesian killings were related to the disintegration of the comparatively strong state and as well as to the fact that much of the orders and operations and actual violence were privatised and decentralised. The current support of civil society in terms of almost anything that relates to citizen self-management, co-operation and organising “in between state and family” also seem to be in need of qualifications given the extent to which the killings were nourished among and sub-contracted to actually existing civil society organisations. Of course we may add that these were ‘uncivil’ civil society organisations that did not include people with all kind of good beliefs and ideologies and interests or only limited themselves to charity and bird watching. But aside from the simple fact that it is hard to think of any country or region where people in general (beyond idealised middle classes) would not group in accordance to their interests, ideas and conflicts, the major complication is that the pro-civil society thesis does not help us to explain and predict when, for instance, a Muslim Youth
organisation like *Ansor*, for instance, is murderous as in 1965 and partly democratic as in 1989 (when turning against Suharto).

**Towards an alternative characterisation: Quick, Cheep and Efficient**

The real puzzle, therefore, is both that the standard explanations for what causes massacres do not make full sense in Indonesia and that the most prominent recipes against mass killings seem to have been involved in supporting them. While this in itself may be a good explanation for why not just mainstream politicians and journalists but also the scholarly establishment have neither been neither eager nor successful in explaining what happened in Indonesia, the main question is if there is a better way of characterising the massacres. Where they mainly due to historically specific factors or to long term trends that were institutionalised in 1965-1966 and remain decisive? If we review how the Indonesian reality corresponds to the above universal theses, five enabling factors and one result stand out.

(1) There was an actively generated and widespread feeling within the military as well as the western-oriented middle class and the western powers themselves that the Indonesian part of the cold war called for outright *political cleansing* of the increasingly many people who wanted radical change, could be branded communists, and had proved difficult to contain, first within first the democratic parliamentary system and then even the ‘guided democracy’ pact between Sukarno and the army. Moreover, as the framework for political cleansing was transformed to the local contexts, the leftists were almost projected and perceived of as a deadly disease.

(2) *The state was in decay*. It seemed to be powerful under Sukarno but was in reality in a serious stage of deterioration and often dominated by factions of the army.
One implication was that *modern forms of indirect rule* became increasingly important. While centralised military units carried out the terror and killings themselves where the communists where rather few and not well embedded, there was a need to also apply modern forms of localised indirect rule where the communists were powerful and widespread. This, as we know, was done by way of top-down spearheaded decentralisation and sub-contracting of control and violence to allies among local bosses, patrons, religious leaders and the actually existing civil society. At times (and particularly later on) the violence was also de facto privatised. Simultaneously, various appropriate militias, vigilantes and militant youth groups were instigated, sponsored, legitimated and co-ordinated. These local rulers and organisations were no new inventions but potentially available. They were rooted in a long history of coercive indirect rule and associated with the need to employ extra economic force to expropriate surplus.

By necessity, therefore, these indirect forms of terror and killings were also related to various local conflicts and most often patron client-like forms of loyalties and organisation. *But this did only come about where the communists were comparatively strong and where the army units instigated and nourished the terror.*

These conflicts and forms of non-class based loyalties and organisation where the leftist where strong also signals *internal communist problems with regard to politics and strategy.* Sometimes the communists had unintentionally even nourished such non-class based loyalties. Firstly by giving up the defence of parliamentary democracy and conceding instead to Sukarno and his 'guided democracy' pact with the army. Secondly by stressing certain misconceived conflicts in relation to which it was difficult to rally sufficiently many people against dominating groups. At times it
was rather easy thus to project the communists as troublemakers who only hit at ‘unfriendly’ bosses and constituted a threat against law and order and peace and security

Taken together, these factors generated a characteristic form of mass political violence: *quick, cheap and efficient cleansing* of people who wanted radical change but had not been possible for the dominating groups to marginalise by use of the official system. It was *quick* in the sense that most was over in five months. In Bali, for instance, it took only about three months to get rid of some 80,000 leftists. It was *cheap* if we consider that the special army para-commandos lost only two men in Java/Bali; that there was no need of a major and grand military operation since much of the job was subcontracted; and since the military involved did not have to use sophisticated weapons and expensive gear – old Soviet weapons could be used to kill communists and the new equipment in the form of U.S provided walkie-talkies should not have been more costly than one day’s pocket money for the soldiers in Vietnam. It was *efficient* by way of silently doing away with the third largest communist and generally left oriented movement in the world, preventing the Vietnam war from spreading, blocking the expansion of radical nationalist and socialist movements in the entire Southeast Asia and thus paving the way for the authoritarian but celebrated Economic Miracles in the region – only one of which finally collapsed, Indonesia.

Our first conclusion, therefore, is that the quick, cheap and efficient mass-political violence has made possible by the deterioration of centralised and comparatively coherent governance and its substitution by selective top-down spearheading and coordination of more localised forms of modern indirect rule through the sub-
contracting of various tasks and powers to fragmented patrons, bosses, clans, and communities – who were up against a unifying, threatening and radical force that they had been unable to get rid of.

**Structural historical pattern**

Our second conclusion is that this was not unique for 1965-1966. The massacres were extraordinary and devastating, but even a brief historical review based on fresh research on the roots of violence indicates that they were part of a wave-like structural pattern.\(^{21}\)

The fundamentals may be traced back to the centralised forms of Dutch' indirect rule. Its deterioration was partly due to a loosely co-ordinated nationalist movement of various parties, militias, and communities under different local patrons (*bapaks*) and bosses; at times even gangsters.\(^{22}\) The process was violent; mainly against the unifying Dutch enemy but also in relation to the divisive Japanese invaders and at times between Indonesian groups and factions. This was especially when revolutionary socialist and communist groups served as a common enemy, as in the late 1920s and 1940s.

This colonial as well as anti-colonial dynamics was partially replaced by the unitary and democratically oriented nation-state project. Much of the political violence petered out, aside from the *Darul Islam* movement. The 1955 national and the 1957 local elections were the most free, fair and substantial in terms of issues and enlightened debate that the country has ever experienced. With the partial major exception of the 'modern' communist movement, however, most political groups and state apparatuses rested with institutions and loyalties from the colonial period.
Within a few years the new democratic elements within the system did not make sense to powerful sections of the opposition, including liberal socialist democrats who proved unable to win elections but also wide sections of the modernist Muslim organisations and powerful groups in the outer islands. These forces instead opted for localised and often undemocratic forms of resistance – with the help of the West and the CIA. Again, political violence increased.

This was temporarily contained by the unholy alliance of nation state builders (such as Sukarno, the PKI and the central army leadership) and by the absence of a major and threatening unifying enemy. But the consequences were devastating. While the liberal democracy was replaced by the top-down and increasingly authoritarian ‘guided democracy’, the military harboured most of the dissidents and gained its own economic powers through nationalised companies.

Despite this, as we have seen, it proved difficult to contain the further expansion of the communists. In 1965 the Suharto-led sections of the army deserted the alliance with Sukarno and utilised, instead, the familiar strategy of selectively co-ordinated localised resistance and violent cleansing by patrons, bosses and their militias, thugs and militant youth groups. And now that the communists served as a unifying enemy, which, moreover, had not been able to distance itself from the clientelistic system, it all turned into the ugly massive cleansing.

Beyond the massacres and the elimination of the entire left movement, Suharto returned to and 'improved' the centralised indirect rule. Step by step, relatively independent civil and military bosses and even most religious leaders and U.S. trained intellectuals and technocrats were subordinated to his statist regime. Semi-
independent politics and popular organising were prohibited, especially on the local level, and dissidents were repressed. This extreme central control, however, was also combined with remnants of the top-down co-ordinated but localised and subcontracted indirect rule of 1965-1966. When, for instance, the relations between the underworld of local thugs and bosses (including rival military leaders) grew out of control in the early 1980s, Suharto preferred to bypass his own legal system and instructed the central security forces to practice, in his own words, 'shock therapy' by anonymously killing off the 'criminal elements', that the regime itself had nourished, and to publicly display their bodies. Similar methods – including death squads, supplemented by more extensive subcontracting to local militias and vigilantes – were employed against popular resistance, for instance in East Timor and against the Indonesian democracy movement.

After the fall of Suharto and the massive disintegration of the state, the centrally controlled indirect rule is now undermined again – while more or less top-down co-ordinated localised forms of subcontracted violence has increased. The latter is not confined to the larger 'hotspots' from Papua via the Moluccas and Kalimantan and so many other places to Aceh. Now it is generalised and practiced even under quite 'normal' circumstances within the framework of a more privatised economy and the infant democratic system where elected politicians on various levels have gained some of the earlier powers of the bureaucracy, which in turn is decentralised. Most neighbourhoods seem to have established vigilantes. Most companies buy protection from thugs and militias. Most parties run their own militias. Sections of the police and the army sell protection and at times fight each other (quite violently) over separate deals. The list could be made long and increasingly complicated.
Conclusion on the character of the killings

To sum up so far, the character of the mass violence is neither compatible with any of the conventional explanations for massacres and genocides nor limited to historically specific conflicts. The 1965-1966 killings were rather a case of quick, cheap and efficient political cleansing that was possible when the centralised 'guided democracy' of 1959 by President Sukarno and the army deteriorated and was undermined and captured in 1965 by general Suharto's top-down spearheading of localised forms of modern indirect rule. The latter was characterised by the subcontracting of fragmented bosses, youth groups, thugs and militias; actors which were up against a threatening, radical force that they had been unable to contain by other means. In 1965-1966 those threatening and successful radicals were the communists, and the context was the cold war. However, this general pattern is a reappearing and wave-like pattern in Indonesia’s history, primarily between centralised and localised forms of indirect rule. This explains why the violence continues, both beyond the cold war and Suharto.

It is true that the current tendency to employ localised violence is unlikely to take the same massive proportions as in 1965-1966. There is no sufficiently unifying and threatening factor like the Dutch or the PKI. The violence is rather fragmented and, fortunately, not as well co-ordinated and 'quick, cheap and efficient'. However, this does not mean that one should let the old disgusting matters rest in peace. In addition to the fact that the victims and victimised deserve their humans rights, 1965-1966 combined and turned the previous practices of centralist as well as top-down localised forms of indirect rule and violence into institutionalised, legitimised and often even legalised forms of rule by terror. And most powerful groups in the country still rest with this. Consequently, any serious attempt to come to terms with both the current
problems of political violence and democratisation presupposes that one addresses the mass killings of 1965-1966. With them, the entire state-apparatus, the constitution, the legal system, the political society, and the citizen’s association and co-operation were impregnated by institutionalised forms of eliminating the once democratic nation state project and the popular based political action, ideology and interest organisations (with close links to civil society) that the current democracy movement is suffering so much from.\textsuperscript{26}

The purging of those historical conditions for democracy has given rise to two arguments on what should be given priority to: rebuilding the popular movements or focus on the rule of law. One the one hand, however, one should not romanticise the old popular movements. Indeed it was the Communists who suffered and very few of them had any pre-knowledge of the 30\textsuperscript{th} of September affair. But just like Suharto and many others, the socialist oriented nationalists and the PKI were part of the game at the time and made mistakes that one may still learn from. One, for instance, was their inability to understand the full importance of the role of the state and other extra-economic forces in Indonesia’s primitive accumulation of capital; something which contributed to the party’s problems of breaking out of the dominating political clientelism. Another was that while the radicals successfully gave up armed struggle in the early 1950s, they half a decade later on also gave up the defence of the parliamentary democracy that had served the party and the mass movements so well. When the crisis became acute in 1965, some of the leaders even substituted undemocratic elitist manipulations for troublesome mass struggles.\textsuperscript{27}

On the other hand, moreover, it is also not sufficient to counter the contemporary human rights abuses and fragmentation of the nation state only by rebuilding some
coherent central authority and administration, emphasise the rule of law and give priority to anti-corruption schemes. This kind of policy has now been captured by the forces around Megawati, including the military and police and vital parts of Golkar. These actors are deeply and intimately linked with similar interests, perspectives and practices as those which characterised the old ‘guided democracy’ pact, which in turn formed the basis of the Suharto regime, once the PKI had been eliminated and Sukarno dethroned. The present Mega-Golkar-military alliance signals a retreat from the localised to the centralist wave of coercion and outright violence. At the time of writing, the best illustration is the reliance on central state repression in Aceh. And in face of the 2004 elections, it is hard to understand that major presidential contenders like Amien Rais or even Nurcholish Madjid, Cak Nur, would be able to muster a more genuine crowd for a change, as long as they are serious in trying to win.

Everything suggests, therefore, that the only option is more substantial democratisation – given the stalemated reformation of the old system, the dominating bossist political organisations, and the weak popular movements. Substantial democratisation, that is, not in the form of guaranteed benefits for the people but in terms of equal changes for them (and not just for the elite) to really make use of liberal human and democratic rights and institutions (not just in principle but also in practice) to alter the balance of power and thus, for instance, resist corruption by fighting for rule of law (plus, of course, for the kind of development policies that they may prefer). The crux of the matter, however, is that this in turn requires that the massive hindrances against democratisation that were cemented by 1965-1966 are identified and fought.
In brief, substantial human rights based democratisation in Indonesia presupposes that the key role and character of the massacres is fully recognised and realised by the foreign supporters as well as enlightened parts of the domestic elite and reflective people at large – just like after the holocaust in Germany or the fall of the statist regime in eastern Germany. This is not primarily a question of justice and reconciliation but of re-reading the history and of establishing some basic truth and preconditions for human rights based democrats to move ahead.

This in turn is why the new initiatives such as those of the Indonesian Human Rights Commission to at least consider whether it should look into the massacres may be, as stated in the beginning of the essay, a significant opening with an immense potential for the fledgling third largest democracy in the world. It is essential that the efforts can continue, despite powerful resistance and several roadblocks ahead. The responsibility does not just rest with the Indonesians. The West was also involved. In the name of the democracy that it likes to promote, it should recognise its role and take the consequences. Such a gesture would greatly enhance the possibilities within and around the human rights commission to rediscover history, establish vital parts of the truth and thus open up for a discussion of how to handle the remaining dynamics of violence in order to move ahead with democratisation.

(20/7/03)

---

1 This is a revised version of my November 8, 2002 contribution to Professor Bernt Hagtvet’s public lecture series on “Genocide and Political Mass-violence in the 20th Century” at the Oslo University Department of Political Science in co-operation with Kavlis Almennyttige fond and the Norwegian Holocaust-centre. In turning it into an article, I am particularly thankful for valuable comments from
Professors Robert Cribb, Australian National University, and Henk Schulte Nordholt, Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology, Leiden.

2 Personally, I have little to contribute to the new fact-finding, being a student of the fate of the old radical politics at a time (the 1970s and early 80s) when primary sources were largely unavailable.


4 *Partai Sosialis Indonesia*; a small but highly influential cader-intellectual party from the late 40s, when it broke away from a considerably more radical socialit party (PS).

5 *Madjelis Sjuro Muslimin Indonesia*, a political party-umbrella organisation for several Muslim organisations. After NU (see below) had broken away in the early 50s, it was regarded as religiously more modernistic but politically less pragmatic and pro-West with its main bases, aside from West Java, on the outer islands.
9 Partai Nasional Indonesia, originally founded in 1927, including by Sukarno; reconstituted after the independence in 1945 when Sukarno acted as politically independent president of the country.

7 The arrows indicate how actors were moving. For instance, in contrast to the relationship between the PKI and Sukarno, where the former rallied behind Sukarno while the latter was not coming much closer to the PKI, the relationship between the Sukarno and the army, as well as that between Sukarno and NU/PNI, was much more symbiotic. Further, the West is with bold font as it was more active than China and the increasingly marginalised then Soviet Union, USSR.

8 Later on (November 22, 1980) Nasution told me that he almost immediately after his own escape felt that Suharto tried to sidetrack him.

9 This is not the place to penetrate deeper into the more or less speculative discourse on what actually happened in relation to the 30th of September affair. Let me just mention that one argument that it was all a Suharto manipulated conspiracy, possibly with the backing of the U.S and CIA. As should be clear from the brief analysis above, my own position is, firstly, that it is more realistic and fruitful to assume that the complicated and contradictory events did not unfold according to any of the involved parties' and actors' clear-cut strategies; secondly that Suharto seems to have had some information of some kind of actions against the other generals (I still hold to be more likely conclusion than what R.E. Elson does in his Suharto, A political biography, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp.115-118); and thirdly, thus, that Suharto did not have to initiate any kind of conspiracy. Rather he only had to be wise and rational enough to simply wait and see, either having the chance of emerging as the new Sukarno-appointed chief of the armed forces or, as it turned out, rising to power on his own by cracking down on the dissidents, ‘saving the nation’ and putting the blame on the communists. (Törnquist, Dilemmas…op.cit. 1984, pp. 230-231)


12 The figures below are mainly based on the various collected estimates in Cribb (ed) 1990 op.cit. pp. 7ff and Cribb (2002) op.cit.

13 One well informed source, for instance, claims that Sarwo Edhi has estimated the number of victims to something like 2,5 million people.

14 For a recent analysis, see Davidson, Jamie, S. and Kammen, Douglas, “Indonesia’s Unknown War and the Lineages of Violence in West Kalimantan”, Indonesia No. 73, April 2002.

15 One initial source of inspiration for this kind of categorisation is that by Robert Cribb (2002) op.cit; another is the factors mentioned in other parts of the same lecture series as where a draft version of my
own analysis was originally presented, such as by Ben Kiernan in his talk on *Twentieth Century Genocides: Underlying Ideological Themes from Armenia to East Timor*, Manuscript 2002. For a useful overview, see Chalk, Frank and Jonassohn, Kurt, *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

16 And phrased in terms of stability to provide for non-divisive and non-political technocratically engineered modern development.


18 Interview with Nasution November 22, 1980. Cf. Cribb 1990 p. 26 op.cit. Similar experiences are also reported from West Sumatra by Prof. Henk Schulte Nordholt (personal communication).

19 See fn. 11!

20 E.g. BBC 14/10/02

21 See for instance Robinson’s op.cit. fine and partly pioneering study of this dynamics. Probably the best general and comparatively brief analysis of the historical roots of violence is Henk Schulte Nordholts’s “A genealogy of violence” in Colombijn and Lindblad (Eds.) op.cit.


23 See e.g. Siegel op.cit. and Cribb, Robert, “From Petrus to Ninja: Death Squads in Indonesia”, in Campbell, Bruce B. and Brenner, Arthur D. (Eds.) *Death Squads in Global Perspective*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. (Cf. for a fine analysis of one of the most talked about groups, Ryter, Loren “Pemuda Pancasila: The Last Loyalist Free Men of Suharto’s Order?” in Anderson (Ed.) op.cit.


25 For a fine recent discussion, see the thematic issue “a militarised society” of *Inside Indonesia*, No, 73, 2003.
