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The Legacies of the Indonesian Counter-Revolution: New Insights and Remaining Issues

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ABSTRACT

The article reviews three recent, commendable and important books about the Indonesian counter-revolution and killings of the mid-1960s. Two case studies by Jess Melvin and Vanessa Hearman and a history by Geoffrey Robinson. Robinson has written the most comprehensive history available, Hearman details the combination of military and civilian repression and the fate of resistance in East Java and Melvin argues, on the basis of unique documents from Aceh, that the killings were a genocide. This article considers these findings with a view of the general scholarship on the counter-revolution. Three remaining issues are identified. First, what was the political economy and political agency that made possible the conspiracies in Jakarta in September–October 1965 and the subsequent suppression? Second, what enabled the combination of militarily-propelled violence and the participation of the militias and vigilantes? Third, what explains Indonesia's exceptionalism in terms of absence of a new leftist dimension in its contemporary politics, even when compared to other countries having faced severe repression? It is argued that these questions demand an extension of the historical perspective to consider the undermining of emancipatory struggle against the legacies of indirect rule and for equal and democratic citizenship in the 1950s and 1960s.

KEYWORDS

Indonesia; killings; genocide; Left; military; human rights

More than half a century ago, in the midst of the Cold War, on October 1, 1965, history changed during a few hours in Jakarta – and we still do not know quite why and how. It may be fruitful, therefore, to discuss two new crucial case studies of the regional dynamics, as well as the first comprehensive history, in the context of the wider scholarship on these dramatic and tragic events. The new case studies are Jess Melvin's book *The Army and the Indonesian Genocide: Mechanics of Mass Murder* (2018) and Vanessa Hearman's *Unmarked Graves: Death and Survival in the Anti-Communist Violence in East Java* (2018). The general analysis is Geoffrey Robinson's *The Killing Season: A History of the Indonesian Massacres, 1965–66*, (2018). These are also related to three useful collections: *Mass Violence Indonesia* edited by Douglas Kammen and Katharine Mc Gregor (2012), a thematic issue on the Indonesian massacre of the *Journal of Genocide Research*, edited by Martijn Eickhoff, Gerry van Klinken

and Geoffrey Robinson (2017) and *The Indonesian Genocide*, edited by Katharine McGregor, Jess Melvin and Annie Pohlman (2018).

With a debt of gratitude to John Roosa (2006), what we know is that the third largest communist party in the world, Indonesia's *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI), which in contrast to the Soviet and Chinese parties had advanced by democratic means, stumbled over its "democratic centralism." It had entrusted its Chairman D. N. Aidit to handle urgent issues related to the increasingly antagonistic military. The jury is still out on why Aidit and his confidants acted as they did, but it is clear they acted on their own without the party or the progressive popular movement being involved, only a few activists. Their secret plan was that a special bureau would nourish a so-called 30th September Movement of junior military officers, supported by the commander of the Air Force and a few communist activists. The Movement would arrest leading generals, including the commander of the army and the chief of staff of the armed forces, for conspiring against the nation and expose them to President Sukarno. Hence, the military would be put on the defensive and it would be possible for the communists to launch broader mass actions in favour of a more consistently radical national leadership behind Sukarno.

The plan failed, however, even before it was announced in the morning of October 1 on national radio. By then, most of the captured generals had already been slain, with one having escaped. In addition, the plotters could not get to Sukarno. Meanwhile, head of the strategic reserve General Suharto, who would stand in when the (now assassinated) army head was abroad, and who had not been targeted by the rebels, appointed himself as his replacement and began to respond. In the early afternoon, Suharto and his colleagues disregarded Sukarno's appointment of a different officer as new army commander and ignored their president's efforts to convince the 30th September Movement to suspend its actions, and, a few hours later, instructed Sukarno to leave its base and the negotiations to avoid becoming a casualty in an imminent attack by forces loyal to Suharto.

On the other side, at least some of the Movement's leaders had also ignored the president by announcing a revolutionary council.¹ Even though dysfunctional from the outset, this announcement meant their actions could be interpreted as an attempted coup. Hence, while Sukarno denounced the proclamation of the council as "crazy," Suharto and his colleagues could sweep their own disobedience of the president aside, and, most importantly, instruct military units to act with other state organs and civilians to annihilate the 30th September Movement and its supporters, with the military using a very wide definition. Even though the rebels had already given up by late October 1 and were on the run, a nationwide campaign was drummed up against the PKI and its mass organisations (which did not even know what was going on) and against like-minded people and even friends and family of mass organisation members. The exact timing as well as the causes for the varied patterns of local implementation and character of the mass killings that followed have been subject to considerable debate, and the new studies under review here offer important new insights. In any case, between 500,000 and one million people were murdered.² Large numbers were detained, many for almost two decades, or deprived of civil rights for an even longer period. The survivors and relatives suffer still. Moreover, the West and its allies in Indonesia were upbeat and supportive of the bloody military response.

The ill-fated hours in Jakarta on October 1 changed global history. Indonesia became a model for the West's struggle against the left throughout the Third World. A new argument was pioneered during the years ahead of the takeover in Jakarta by political scientist Samuel Huntington (1961) in work for the US government. This work became the highly influential *Political Order in Changing Societies* (Huntington 1968), arguing that in spite of economic and social modernisation, the middle class had not proven strong enough to win elections, create stable institutions and resist the left. Hence, it was necessary to impose a "politics of order," with military backing. This became the rationale for the support of the authoritarian regimes in not only Indonesia but also, for example, South Vietnam and for "middle-class coups" in Latin America. Augusto Pinochet's CIA-backed plan to overthrow Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973 was even named "Operation Jakarta." Echoes of Huntington were heard in Philippines President Duterte's call to his army to "destroy the Left" by learning from Indonesia in the 1960s (*Inquirer.net*, December 24, 2018).

In Indonesia itself, the largest reform-oriented leftist movement in the world was not only crushed but annihilated. Nothing of its kind re-emerged even after the fall of Suharto's regime in 1998, re-emphasising the importance of democracy, in contrast to, for example, Spain after the civil war and Franco's 35 years of suppression. Finding out why and how this Indonesian human and political catastrophe was possible, and why its effects have been so huge, remains, thus, fundamental for not only Indonesians but also progressives around the world.

Finding the truth through research has been especially difficult. With tight control of the media under Suharto, critical journalism was prevented from the outset. Sources were destroyed or classified, and many remain so. Survivors have not been able to speak up without endangering the lives of family and former political friends. In state-controlled universities, scholars could not do much until Suharto's rule collapsed. Scholars who did look at the events focused on: (i) the enabling politics and political economy in historical perspective; (ii) the conspiracies in late September and early October; and (iii) the killings, suppression and human rights. It is useful to outline this literature before turning to the books under review.

A Brief Discussion of Previous Studies

The first of three major sets of studies of the catastrophe focus on how it could have happened and have two different points of departure. First, various studies emphasise the remarkable growth of the communist movement until 1965. Even though Hindley (1962) had suggested that the PKI was being "domesticated" by Sukarno and the military around 1960, the conclusion by scholars such as Anderson and McVey (1971), Mortimer (1974) and Crouch (1978) was that the communist movement, along with progressive nationalists, had gained political strength, especially after 1963, at the expense of the military. Against this backdrop, it was thus unlikely that the party or its leaders would have had any great reason to engage in conspiracies. The conclusion was that the events leading to the PKI's destruction must rather rest with some activists' reckless adventurism or betrayal, along with the fact that the movement had not been informed and was therefore unable to defend itself, and, of course, that the enemy and its partners had access to immense power. The second point of departure

was the Maoist critique of several of the surviving leaders (PKI 1968; Sudisman 1975). This position is that the PKI's analysis of the class character of the state was naïve, that class struggles had been neglected and that clandestine organisation and the capacity to turn to armed struggle had been ignored. As will be discussed below, however, neither of these points of departure is entirely convincing. First, they do not consider the full importance of the undermining of democratic politics from 1959, when Sukarno introduced "Guided Democracy," along with the army and with the support of the communists. Second, they do not acknowledge that, from the early 1960s, it had proved difficult for the party to advance by way of mass-based campaigns and Maoist inspired actions.

Several other factors have added to the weakness of the existing studies of what generated and sustained the political disaster. First, the Maoist auto-critique has not been useful in explaining why leftists did not just lose out but have been unable to regain strength. The revolutionary Maoist alternative had already proved unviable by the survivors, who in 1967–1968 unsuccessfully tried to resume the struggle. We shall return to this in relation to Hearman's study. Second, critical analysis and discussion among the old activists were hampered by conflicts among the survivors as well as by new activists' focus after 1965 on single issues of international dependency, human rights and civil society at the expense of political conflicts and workplace struggle. Third, mainstream scholars were not very interested in examining the structural challenges of political change. Even the United Nations did not take notice of the Indonesian tragedy. Despite efforts by concerned scholars and Robinson's (1995) pioneering history of the roots of violence in Bali, research on the politics and political economy of the political and social catastrophe and the weakness of new leftist movements has been neglected.

A second set of studies has focused on elite struggles in late September and early October 1965. Who did what and why? Most facts were unrecorded, destroyed or hidden. The new rulers and their epigones constructed favourable narratives, primarily pointing to alleged communist cruelties and popular revenge against them. Yet more evidence is now available that tells a very different story. There is no doubt that the anti-communist generals received support from the West, both in the face of October 1 and the mass killings, most especially from the USA. De-classified diplomatic documents have enabled further elaboration of this; and, it is irresistible to quote the then US Ambassador in Jakarta, Howard Jones, in March 1965: "From our viewpoint, of course, an unsuccessful coup attempt by the PKI might be the most effective development to start a reversal of political trends in Indonesia" (cited in Roosa 2006, 193). However, there is no extant proof that the decisive conspiracies and mass murders were not, essentially, homemade. At the same time, Anderson and McVey (1971) refuted most of the propaganda about a wholesale communist party conspiracy. They suggested instead an alternative version about conflicts within the armed forces, which was more correct but incomplete. Others too pointed to inconsistencies in the official story. Wertheim (1970) even suggested that Suharto might have served as the mastermind.³

Meanwhile, survivors with information about why some communists had actually been involved shared this with concerned students. However, at least to my knowledge, their information from the late 1970s and early 1980s was off the record, mainly because so many were still in vulnerable positions. This made their information

incomplete and difficult to confirm. All of this meant that analyses at the time could only be put in general terms. It was only after Roosa's (2006) breakthrough study that the role of most actors, including Aidit, became reasonably clear. Similarly, it was becoming clear that the military had indeed directed the mass killings and that these were far from the spontaneous popular and religious anti-communist revolt that the regime and its followers claimed. Roosa's brilliant analysis was based on extensive oral history research and the written account of Brig-Gen. Supardjo, a major actor within the 30th September Movement. While many of the questions of why the devastating conspiracies occurred in the first place remain to be studied, the military's clear direction of the killings has been the subject of further research.

This takes us to the third field of prioritised studies: the campaigns, the pogroms, the arrests, the imprisonments, the killings and the persecution. How did this happen? How many were affected and for how long? The killings were mainly in 1965–1966, but there were crackdowns in the late 1960s too and even by the mid-1970s, some 600,000–700,000 people remained in prison or detained in camps. One of the most crucial questions within this field of studies is the extent to which the killings included civilians or were the result of a concerted military campaign. According to Hermawan Sulisty (1997), for example, extreme Muslim militias were crucial, in certain regions. Civilian participation would also explain why the killings commenced at different points of time. Others asked if the mass murders were really the kind of civil war or popular revenge against communists that even the military say they had to contain. Cribb's (1990) masterful studies, for example, pointed to the crucial role of the military.

Yet, Cribb also stressed the complexities. Behavioural and cultural approaches proved much less convincing than analyses of social, economic and political conflicts and of related movements and leaders. As already indicated, however, the latter approaches lagged behind for lack of evidence. Instead, the studies focusing on the victims and human rights made important advances. Viewed thus, additional questions were raised: for example, were the killings not only aimed at members of a specific political organisation but also at religious or ethnic groups or an otherwise defined larger group of people? The reason for giving attention to such questions had special significance because if a broader group was targeted as well as state direction of the killings being substantiated, the mass murders might qualify as genocide. While the Indonesian case has not been significant within studies of genocide and much could be gained by comparative insights, the main issue at stake was that a classification as genocide increased the chances of fighting the Indonesian politics of amnesia and impunity using international law. The breakthrough efforts in these regards have been regional studies pioneered by Cribb and Robinson (1995). Robinson pointed to the variations inside Bali related to conflicts over land and the strength of political parties and leaders in local governments. The important enquires by the Indonesian Human Rights Commission (Komnas Ham 2012) added more detailed knowledge of what had taken place in various parts of the country. Thematic enquires like Saskia Wieringa's (2002; 2011) analysis of gender and sex in the propaganda and repressive campaigns also added crucial insights.

Finally, scholars comparing their results from various regions and sectors, documented in Kammen and McGregor's anthology (2012) produced a clear analysis of how central campaigns and local variations combined. In brief, the killings were nationwide but there

were regional differences with many overlapping conflicts involved, including over land and religion. But such conflicts were not new and had been previously managed. They may have become more intense as democracy – a means to handle them – deteriorated (which we shall return to), but the common pattern that emerges from all of the regional and sectoral studies is of the military as instigator, legitimiser and facilitator of the violence. The military also sustained the ongoing repression that followed. Moreover, although the military's actions varied across the country, there was a pattern. This related to the capacity of the military. Where the military was solid – that is, not inclusive of important Sukarno and communist loyalists – and had access to sufficient troops, plus was reluctant to grant arms to previously rebellious Muslim militias, the repression and killings were swift and extensive (as in Aceh) or contained (as in West Java). Where the military was weakened by internal divisions and insufficient numbers of reliable troops, the suppression and killings were delayed but sparked off when anti-communists were provided with sufficient support (for example in North Sumatra). Where the military itself included significant Sukarno and communist loyalists, spearheading troops were sent from Jakarta (most typically in Central Java and Bali).

Among the books under review, Robinson's (2018) comprehensive historical analysis covers almost the entire spectrum of issues and previous scholarship discussed in the above, while Melvin (2018) and Hearman (2018) provide specific new insights regarding the regional differences in oppression and "pacification." Melvin focuses on the role of the military in Aceh and its contacts with the supreme command in Jakarta, thus making a case for classifying the killings as genocide, while Hearman addresses the combined work of the military and militias in East Java, the attempts of communists to survive and resist and the final crackdown and "pacification" of the area. Below, I shall discuss the case studies first and then return to the general history.

The Case for Genocide

Melvin's major question is why the mass killings commenced earlier in Aceh than elsewhere, well ahead of Suharto's formal appointment as commander of the army on October 14. Does this weaken the argument that the killings were firmly directed by the state and thus cast doubt on the description of the events as genocide?

Using important archival sources, Melvin's answer is a clear and resounding "no." The proof of state direction is primarily in two sets of unique documents. One is the complete 1965 yearly report for the Aceh military command (KODAM-I/Kohanda Atjeh) which includes stark reports on the annihilation campaign and a mapping of the local killings. A second set of documents consists of thousands of pages of classified local government records that detail the involvement of the local state in the killings and the establishment of death squads. Melvin also located a third set of documents on the state's role in the more general killings of Chinese in 1966. She supplements this documentary evidence with interviews of survivors, perpetrators and eyewitnesses.

The military prepared for its actions in Aceh by making use of Sukarno's campaign against the nearby new pro-Western state of Malaysia for its own purposes and as part of a military plan for Sumatra, initiated in April 1965 and internally labelled Operation Berdikari. Berdikari was Sukarno's acronym for self-reliance, but in this case it signified the military's plan to become self-reliant by gaining control of the state, when required.

The methods adopted included the imposition of extraordinary measures, equivalent to martial law, encouraging the development and activities of militias and the suppression of those the military considered adversaries. The Berdikari plan was activated already in the morning of October 1, in response to what was described as a coup attempt in Jakarta – even though by then the 30th September Movement had only “arrested” the leading generals, not yet proclaimed the Revolutionary Council, which could be interpreted as a coup attempt.

Melvin’s point of departure is her determination of two historical political trends in Aceh, one Islamist and provincial, another secular, leftist and pan-Indonesianist.⁴ Given that elections, through which the communists had made their main initial advances, had been postponed under Sukarno’s and the military’s “Guided Democracy,” supported by the PKI, the primary avenue for ordinary citizens to have their voices heard was mass and pressure politics. The PKI was weak in Aceh. However, it had gained some increased significance in the context of the “Crush Malaysia” campaign. Its general approach was to mobilise people against imperialism and to train party cadres. Meanwhile, military officers expected a civil war and also used the anti-Malaysia campaign to successfully regain powers equal to martial law. Melvin’s focus is the agency and character of the suppression and killings. The most remarkable achievement is her reconstruction of the course of events during October and beyond. She does not give much attention to the political economy and class bases of these struggles and priorities; this is a remaining research task.

It is clear that the military in Aceh could ignore the authority of President Sukarno because, ironically, Sukarno had approved plans related to the “Crush Malaysia” campaign. As noted above, this campaign had allowed the military to garner power and suppress its opponents. These preparations also meant that the military could spring into action and launch operations on October 1. Its first step was to coordinate and then mobilise the civil government and reliable citizens, directly as well as through public meetings. Civil engagement was declared mandatory and the ensuing suppression was rooted in the districts. Civil militias and other groups like night watch groups were engaged and given support. These groups mounted operations, prompting some of those targeted to report themselves to the authorities, hoping, in vain, for better treatment than being lynched by these vigilantes. Then followed the mass killings, directed from a “war room” set up by the Aceh military commander to carry out a so-called non-conventional war. The implementation of these actions was directed in similarly bureaucratic and standardised ways as those that Hanna Arendt described as rhetorically routinised in her analysis of the Holocaust. Finally followed a much more drawn out process that included the killings of Chinese and the consolidation of suppression into repression.

Melvin demonstrates that the targets of the repression and killings were wider than the 30th September Movement or even the organised communists. They also involved leftists and radical nationalists and their friends and families, often depicted as non-religious, as well as the Chinese. This confirms, as earlier suggested by Cribb (2001), that the essentialist definitions of ethnic and religious groups that have been prominent in standardised depictions of genocide need to be moderated and inclusive of other identity-based groups too, given the new scholarly insights about the *politics* of ethnic and religious identity. This targeting of a wider group in Aceh, along with the planning

and direction of the repression and killings by the state-cum-military, warrant Melvin's conclusion that the atrocities qualify as genocide.

The Aceh context of the military's involvement with the Crush Malaysia project raises an important question: Was Aceh special or do the conclusions drawn by Melvin hold for Indonesia in general? The author proceeds to answer this question in two steps. One is to refute the argument that the Aceh killings were relatively less extensive than elsewhere. About 10,000 people were killed in Aceh as compared, for example, to some 100,000 in Central Java. Yet, if the figures are adjusted to the populations at the time, this difference disappears. Second, the author acknowledges regional varieties and three different command structures (KOTI for Sumatra, Kopkamtib for Kalimantan and East Indonesia and RPKAD for Java and Bali). Despite this, the author argues, all were subordinated to Suharto who operated them simultaneously. Even so, it does appear that further studies are needed of how the commands related to the dynamics in the other regional contexts.

Melvin begins and concludes her book with references to the ongoing discussions on whether and how Indonesia could come to terms with the killings and if they qualify as genocide. The Indonesian government has long argued that there is no evidence of large numbers of people having been killed in 1965. It has indicated that it would be prepared to investigate mass graves if anyone could point to them. Melvin's response is clear: "I would like to present this book as evidence not only of the existence of mass graves, but as evidence the Indonesian State is fully aware that the genocide was implemented as deliberate state policy" (Melvin 2018, 16). Her book is indeed designed more like a thesis-driven study than an effort to solve a murder case by testing the most relevant hypotheses. At times, the prose reminds this reader of a fierce courtroom plea or Emile Zola's *J'accuse* than of a concerned seminar deliberation. But academic seminars, the Indonesian Human Rights Commission and the International People's Tribunal in 2015 have all been ignored by the Attorney General and the government (Santoso and van Klinken 2017). The International People's Tribunal even concluded that the term genocide applies to 1965. So there are legitimate reasons for the author's approach and there is a good case made. Additional studies elaborating on details about the struggles for truth have recently been published in the special issue of *Journal of Genocide Studies* (Eickhoff, van Klinken, and Robinson 2017) and the McGregor, Melvin, and Pohlman (2018) collection.

Death and Survival

Hearman's study of the 1965 repression, killings and resistance in East Java is, like Melvin, rooted in concerned scholarship but more descriptive and deliberative than thesis-driven. Unlike Aceh, there is no newly-found comprehensive archive material for a historian to make best possible use of and no correspondingly clear-cut thesis to be fought for. Hearman is certainly interested in the dynamics of the repression and killings, but, in my reading, her most exciting question is how people on the Left were affected and reacted to the events as they struggled to survive and resist. In her account, oral history is particularly important, based on her own interviews and those of others, while also using related documentation, including military and government sources. The author focuses on several particularly relevant areas in East Java, from Surabaya and Bangil in the north – strongholds of the PKI and its adversary Nahdlatul

Ulama (NU) respectively – to several PKI hotbeds further to the south, including Kediri, where killings were intense, and Blitar, where survivors resisted.

The politics and political economy of East Java are discussed in historical perspective. The author draws attention to the divisions between, on the one hand, the devoted Muslim community, mainly organised around the *pesantren* (boarding schools) and by NU along with its task forces, and, on the other hand, the nationalists (conservatives and progressives) and the left. In detailing this, Hearman also points to the three major bases of the leftists. One was in the urban areas, especially in Surabaya's industrial and harbour districts and related communities. Another base was around the plantations, where labourers and peasants who squatted on the land (that had been expropriated by planters) joined hands. A third base was among a group of intellectuals, including cultural workers and teachers. There were also impressive efforts by the party and its mass organisations to foster active and equal citizenship by way of organisation and education, not least among women. The communists made remarkable advances in the parliamentary and local elections in 1955 and 1957, gaining particularly strong influence in Madiun, Kediri, Surabaya and Blitar.

The author also draws attention to the efforts by the PKI and its mass organisations to broaden the movement beyond the previously mentioned strongholds among urban labour, plantation workers and intellectuals. This was often achieved by way of anti-imperialist campaigns supporting President Sukarno, including the nationalisation of Dutch and British enterprises. Equally important, the peasant organisation *Barisan Tani Indonesia* (BTI) in particular also, from the late 1950s, campaigned on the inequalities in villages and the uneven distribution of land, beyond the plantations. As a first step, the PKI and its mass organisations fought for the implementation of the Basic Agrarian Law of 1960. A major problem, then, was that even though large sections of the population were landless, most others had small plots and there were few big landlords whose "surplus land" could be claimed by the landless. Moreover, many small owners also engaged sharecroppers (in need of land of their own), and many of the landowners were intertwined with the Muslim boarding schools as well as the local governments. Essentially this meant that the landowners' power was not only based on their ownership of land but also on the support from the Muslim leaders and communities as well as the village leaders with crucial control of local resources and regulative powers.

These campaigns, problems and successes by the leftists were immensely important in the intensified conflicts of the 1960s. To her credit, Hearman has certainly used her historical accounting of them as a background for her interviews and related documents. Ideally, however, it could have been done more systematically and extensively by formulating research questions related to the scholarly and political discussions on possible explanatory factors for the 1965 catastrophe as well as the failure to resist and, later, to build new progressive movements. This raises questions regarding methodology. While the life stories of individuals are illuminating, this reader was left wondering about issue-related questions that might have been raised. Similarly, the analyses of the insights gained from conversations and related documents might have been made even sharper and more revealing by asking theoretical and comparative questions about social movements and political organising and strategy. This does not have to be done in the boring fashions of technocratic political "science" and sociology. Rather, I would suggest, it may be inspired by the way Anderson proceeded in *Imagined Communities*

(1983) and propagated in his memoir *A Life Beyond Borders* (2016) by asking questions about similar occurrences or puzzles from the point of view of different contexts. In some sections of her work, Hearman does move in this direction, particularly in what is arguably the strongest part of the book, the comparison of the “slaughter seasons” in Kediri and Bangil, PKI and NU strongholds respectively, by contrasting the districts so that they form a kind of commentary on each other.

Here, and more generally in her third chapter, the author also analyses carefully, by way of contrasting contexts and discussing differences over time, the dynamics of the interactions between the military (that was factionalised) and NU’s militarised task forces (*Ansor* and *Banser*) that pushed for and participated in the killings. Initially, the killings were demonstrative and open. Later, they became more routinised and less visible. It was only by late 1965 that the local military turned against civilian involvement in the slaughters, perhaps because they feared the Muslim actors were getting too powerful. In view of the intense debate that has raged about the extent to which the killings were driven by the military or militias, the answer with regard to East Java on the basis of the Hearman’s descriptive analysis is, it seems to me, “both.” Hence, the remaining question for further research is how to explain the inter-relationship between the civilian forces and the military.

Having analysed the killings, Hearman turns to her second pioneering account: of the attempts by victims to survive and resist. She identifies and studies three modes of “safety seeking”: getting to the cities and staying there with friends – Surabaya was particularly important in East Java; individuals leaving one’s place of living and activism and going underground; and collectively going underground, with fellow leftists. But by 1967 the military, along with militias and vigilantes, had hunted down many survivors among residents and refugees in the urban areas, so other escape routes were required. One major strategy among the remnants of the party leadership that subscribed to a Maoist perspective – a faction that Hearman focuses on – was to opt for a “long march,” developing bases in remote and relatively safe “old” strongholds of the party. One area chosen was the remote and poorly developed southern part of Blitar. Plans were drawn up and several leading activists were smuggled into the area where they were supported by and lived with locals, taking part in their daily work. Some leftist nationalists and dissenting soldiers joined them. Their attempts at peasant-based armed struggle, however, did not gain ground. Their main activity was to hide and survive. There were some robberies to get funds and attempts to clamp down on local enemies. Inevitably, rumours of what was going on spread and there were betrayals. Special military units were moved in by mid-1968. Militias and vigilantes participated, claiming to have identified the communist cells. However, this time the military was anxious to uphold strict command as there were doubts about the loyalty of a number of local officers. About 2,000 people were killed and many arrested, including one of the main leaders, Rewang, who survived the slaughter and passed away in 2011. An intense state-led programme to pacify and modernise the area followed the military crackdown, with the military continuing to monitor former political prisoners. The political impact of this repression was dire and it took until the fall of the Suharto regime before there were any signs of independent citizen action in the area.

From Hearman’s study it still remains a mystery why so few renewed or developed alternative progressive activities have emerged, even several decades after the

repression. Other countries such as Spain during and after Franco suggest different experiences. There must have been something exceptional about the Indonesian suppression and repression. Old leftist leaders I have talked with since the 1970s also have had little to say on this, with the exception of few “self-critics” of the deposition of democracy and related rights such as outstanding journalist Joesoef Isak (see Törnquist 2009). We shall return to this below.

A General History

At this point, we can conclude that the new case studies by Melvin and Hearman add much crucial knowledge to the previous body of scholarly work on 1965 and its aftermath, but three puzzles remain. First, what were the political economy, politics and political agency that made possible the conspiracies and suppression? Second, what was it – beyond official instructions – that enabled the combination of militarily-propelled violence and the participation of the militias and vigilantes? Third, what explains the failure of new left-oriented movements in politics and, instead, the return of authoritarian identity politics? These issues are better addressed by more general analysis such as Robinson’s history of the massacres. Having discussed Robinson’s book in general, the discussion that follows is of the three questions about political economy and agency, military and civil repression and absence of a new left.

Based on analyses of the historical conditions, Robinson’s book is organised chronologically. It commences with the conspiracies of September 30 and October 1 and the immediate scapegoating of the communists. It turns then to the arrests, detentions and killings and the role of the international human rights movement to finally end them by the early 1980s. It concludes with a discussion of the legacy of the violence and suppression and the need for truth.

Robinson’s book is an outstanding, comprehensive and, aside from some repetitions, readable overview of this period and its issues. Most of the perspectives and arguments put forward in the various debates over this period are identified and rigorously evaluated. In other words, this is the book for students and concerned readers. Its strongest contribution is that the violence is analysed in the historical context of both the Cold War and Indonesia’s political complexities, including regionalism. The general conclusion is that the military really did play a fundamental role in facilitating and directing the violence. In addition, the military was encouraged and supported by powerful international actors, and most especially by the USA. These conclusions may not be surprising to those who have followed the debates, but Robinson provides a solid basis for these conclusions in the form of careful consideration of most of the available research on the killings.

However, Robinson’s historical analysis in this book is not as crisp as his masterful study of Bali (Robinson 1995). In his new work, Robinson takes an important step forward by arguing that the broad participation in the killings was made possible by the militarisation of society, rooted in the struggle for independence in the 1940s. Yet, as I will suggest, the fate of the progressive movement in the mid-1960s and the roots of violence and character of suppression call for a more extended historical analysis. This kind of historical and political analysis is important for a broader understanding of why and how the catastrophe evolved and will assist in understanding why its legacies

remain so important today. It is also vital in the discussion of quite specific issues such as who took part in the conspiracies of September 30 and October 1.

Political Economy and Agency

One example of the need for extended historical analysis is that Robinson finds it hard to accept Roosa's thesis that only a few PKI leaders played an important role in the instigation of the 30th September Movement and the idea of a revolutionary council (Robinson 2018, 67, 71, 80). The reason for Robinson's hesitation is the conclusion in mainstream research that the PKI was quite successful at the time and was gaining ground (see Anderson and McVey 1971; Mortimer 1974; Crouch 1978). This should have meant there was no reason for adventurous secret actions. However, a more critical analysis of the challenges facing the communist leaders during the late 1950s and early 1960s suggests otherwise. The party wanted democracy but had supported the introduction of "Guided Democracy" and the postponement of elections. This meant that for the PKI to advance it had to be primarily by mass politics. Mass politics meant co-operation with Sukarno's anti-imperialist campaigns and nationalisations of foreign companies and actions in favour of his Basic Agrarian Reform as well as his formula of joint public governance by nationalist, religious and communist socio-political pillars (*Nasakom*) – including co-operation with the military. This provided some space for communist organising and pressure politics, but it did not undermine the progressives' political contenders. The military gained control (including by way of martial law) of the nationalised companies and much of the state apparatus and effectively blocked communist efforts to intensify labour struggles in 1960–1961. Not everything went the military's way. It lost ground for about a year after the successful inclusion of West Papua (Irian Barat) within Indonesia. This allowed the party to launch contentious Maoist-oriented campaigns against so-called bureaucratic capitalists and for the implementation of the Basic Agrarian Reform. However, the PKI's calculation that "bureaucratic capitalists" could be thoroughly undermined by intensified anti-imperialism was undermined by confrontation with Malaysia and with British companies. The military too claimed nationalist high ground in this Sukarno-initiated campaign, securing control of nationalised companies and through the establishment of *de facto* martial law. Similarly, militant actions to occupy land (*aksi sepihak*) had to be cancelled in December 1964 due to uncontrollable conflicts, including among small farmers who were supposed to unite. In short, with parliamentary democracy stalled and intensified mass actions not generating the expected results, the PKI was in a political bind. This means there *were* reasons to contemplate alternative ways of weakening the military by disclosing how they abused radical nationalism in their own interests, which might, then, give the progressives the upper hand (Törnquist 1984a; van Klinken 2019).

Military and Civil Repression

Another example of the need for extended historical analysis beyond Robinson's relates to the unresolved issue of the military's role in the killings versus that of militias, vigilantes and others. First a recollection of the issue at stake. As we know from Melvin, there can be no doubt that the military was directing the killings and suppression and

that more people were annihilated than the 30th September Movement or even the PKI. Therefore, the concept of genocide may well apply. However, the Indonesian genocide, with its co-ordination of central powers and local militias and vigilantes, combined with political, religious and ethnic identity politics, as analysed by Hearman and Robinson, differs obviously from the paradigmatic top-down Nazi Holocaust (see, for example, Friedlander 1997, 2007; and Cesarani 2016) that has served as the prime basis for the common definitions. Hence, the very combination of military direction and civilian participation remains to be explained.⁵ In addition, the dynamics of this combination, in turn, must have been important for why it was so difficult to resist and for leftist dimensions and movements to gain new ground.

To Robinson's credit he does not shy away from the question of how it was possible to develop a broad and widely accepted anti-leftist movement and participation in the violence. At the time, the state's capacity to design and implement policies was limited. In addition, the military did not have a popular base or a party, and there was no hardcore ethnic, religious or even utopian framework for the killings and repression. Robinson's account also gives due emphasis to the psychological warfare waged by the military, including propaganda and the closing down of independent media. Most importantly, his historical perspective leads him to conclude that the main "culprit" in the widespread violence is the militarisation of society, rooted in the struggles for national independence in the 1940s. The military itself was a product of militia groups and by the 1960s there was a strong legacy of the territorial organisation of the military, militias and vigilantes. During the war of independence, some of these militias were leftist or politically independent while others were supported and trained by the Japanese, in brutal techniques and ruthless practices, including torture methods from the 1940s, that were evident in the violence of 1965–1966.

But is this the full story? I would argue that Robinson's important focus on the legacy in 1965 of the militaristic freedom struggle needs to be extended. There were differences in the 1940s between the freedom fighters whose ideas of independence were rooted in patrimonial leadership and citizenship mediated through ethnic and religious communities and those, mainly the leftists, who aimed at a secular modern nation-state based on democratic citizenship mediated by parties and interest organisations. The former sustained many of their militarised task forces and communal organisations. Their legacy, Robinson convincingly argues, was important in the killings and suppression of the mid-1960s. Back in the late-1940s, however, there were also the primarily leftist freedom fighters in favour of a secular, modern and democratic state. Their militias were first defeated by the new Indonesian Republic's conservative-led national military and thereafter the members and sympathisers opted for peaceful and democratic means of struggle. These radical socialists and communists got together in the PKI and its mass organisations, as well as in leftist-nationalist groups. They advanced during the 1950s by combining class struggle with the modern nationalist idea of equal and democratic citizenship. Popular enlightenment towards this form of citizenship was as fundamental for the advances of the Indonesian Left in the 1950s, as for the possibly most successful case of a combined socialist and communist democratic movement in Asia in the Indian state of Kerala (see Harriss and Törnquist 2016). In contrast, the crucial factor in 1965, 15 years after the leftists opted for a peaceful combination of class struggle and efforts at democratic citizenship, was not, as argued by the Maoists survivors analysed by Hearman and mentioned by Robinson, the shortage of a leftist militia to put up a fight in resisting the military and its slaughter. Keeping a militia would have eroded the successful class and

citizenship politics in the 1950s and would also have been militarily senseless. The most significant point is that containing the conservative military tradition and communitarian militias and vigilantes through secularism and democratic citizenship via parties and interest organisations had been undermined by Guided Democracy, introduced in 1959. With Guided Democracy, President Sukarno's left-populism, supported by the PKI, sustained the idea of a modern national state with direct relations to citizens – but the democratic mediation of citizenship via independent parties, movements and elections was derailed. It is true that some military leaders who linked up with Sukarno under Guided Democracy supported the modern nation-state. They fostered a unitary central state against regional rebellions supported by the CIA and were at loggerheads with corrupt generals like Suharto. The anti-communist General Nasution even claimed to draw inspiration from Tito's international position and especially his way of holding together Yugoslavia. But Nasution was missing Tito's popular following and he was a staunch anti-communist. So when losing control in 1965, Nasution joined the less principled generals, with Suharto in the forefront. They returned to the basics of the conservative freedom fighters in the 1940s, whose ideas of independence were rooted in patrimonial leadership and citizenship mediated through the ethnic and religious communities that had been crucial for the Dutch indirect colonial rule.

Van Klinken's (2018) perceptive historical frame for analysing this vacillation between a centralist modern nation-state position and a conservative position based on the notion of indirect rule involves observing the similarities with the debates in the 1920s among senior Dutch colonial bureaucrats about the character of the state and how it would be governed. In the 1920s, Dutch modernisers wanted direct governance through a modern state which was not democratic but might pave the way for individual citizenship, resonating with the proposals of the supporters of Guided Democracy in the 1960s. Both the Dutch modernisers and the leftist-populist supporters of Guided Democracy lost out to those opting for indirect rule – in the general sense of complementing central despotism by affirming the position of local strongmen and ethnic, religious and local communities as supervisors of the subjects and as mediators between them and the state. The colonial regime found indirect rule to be most effective and the cheapest form of governance to hold back the emerging modern nationalist movement. And the Indonesian military found the same indirect rule to be the best way of annihilating the modern leftist nationalists, communists and like-minded friends and relatives.

Hence, I would argue that by extending Robinson's fruitful historical perspective on the killings and suppression we may best address the unresolved issue of what combines the military's role as directors and that of the militias, vigilantes and others. In short, it was a genocide drawing on the colonial type of governance, based on central despotism and indirect rule. To sense this synergy between the military and the "civilians" it may be useful to combine Joshua Oppenheimer's revelation of the military-directed violence in his films "The Act of Killing" and "The Look of Silence," with Fons Rademaker's earlier visualisation of indirect rule in his "Max Havelaar."

Absence of a New Leftist Dimension in Politics

The remaining third question from the case studies is: what explains the absence of a new leftist dimension in Indonesian politics? Robinson focuses on the importance of human

rights and seeks to break the silence on those tragic events of the mid-1960s. As he makes clear, *the Indonesian dilemma* is the continuing negation of history. Over the years, the silence has been deafening. Or to put it differently, Indonesia has become a stronghold of post-modernist relativism where factual knowledge is subordinated to everyone's right to their own interpretation, as long as they have money and good contacts. Yet, herein also lies hope for change. Perhaps the potentially most transformative democratic forces are the endangered critical historians and teachers who can, when sustaining their integrity, synthesise and disseminate critical knowledge of Indonesia's history – which the military is still repressing, including by confiscating scholarly books about this period (*The Jakarta Post*, January 10, 2019). Hence, the new studies discussed here, in the context of the broader enquiries of the Indonesian genocide and counter-revolution, are not just commendable from a scholarly point of view but also immensely important for Indonesia's future. Yet, there is also a final worry.

The problem is that Robinson's historical perspective with a focus on the human rights issues does not help us discussing Indonesia's exceptionalism. Why has no new leftist dimension emerged in Indonesian politics? Despite severe and long drawn out repression, this has happened in many other contexts, including Franco's Spain and several Latin American countries, but not in Indonesia. Why? It was important but hardly fundamental that the West was even less supportive of the pro-democratic efforts in Indonesia than in Spain and Latin America. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that there has been something special with the Indonesian suppression, not yet fully appreciated by scholars and younger activists.

In view of the previous discussion about the character of the suppression, it may be useful to go beyond the political economy, class analysis and strategy-oriented explanations of the Indonesian catastrophe by adding the weakening in the late 1950s of the combined struggle for popular class interests and democratic national citizenship against indirect rule. The equal and democratic citizenship part of that equation was marginalised with Guided Democracy. This was a crucial factor behind the catastrophe. As discussed above, the progressives could not draw on active citizenship and democracy, and the dominant actors returned to the pattern of indirect colonial governance when annihilating and suppressing leftist-oriented people.

Innovative analyses began to appear in the 1980s of how the Suharto's New Order promoted the rise of capital and consolidated itself by reversing from its indirect rule, genocide and suppression to elements of centralised modernism, at the expense of local strongmen and religious and ethnic communities, but, of course, without democratic citizenship (see Robison 1978, 1986; Törnquist 1984b; Budiman 1990). The essence of Suharto's governance was, then, that ordinary people were to be "floating," without any state-society mediation other than statist-corporatism and centrally subordinated religious communities. Dissident groups turned more political, focussing on radical democratisation against Suharto's state-facilitated capitalism. However, even though these activists, and later, their *Partai Rakyat Demokratik*, grasped the essence of politically facilitated capital accumulation, as well as the need to confront this by combining struggle for class interest and democracy, the popular masses did not come forward as expected. Obviously, the old radical and emancipatory struggle for independence of active democratic citizenship, which had lost out by the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s had to be reclaimed. Even old adversaries like Goenawan Mohamad and Joesoef

Isak along with Pramoedya Ananta Toer came together to make this point. And studies on and with the democracy movement, about democratisation, citizenship, populism and identity politics were made, and continue to be made, with similar ends in mind.⁶

Yet, there are not many references to these efforts in the literature on the killings and nor does this democratisation literature say much about the killings. The broader perspectives of how to understand and overcome the legacy of the genocide and the more specifically important issues of truth and rights remain to be combined.

Notes

1. This announcement was far too early – *if* it was in accordance with a possible original idea of a “progressive top down intervention” or even coup, such as against Ben Bella in Algeria in June 1965, which according to reliable information to this author in 1980 and Roosa in 2003 may have inspired Aidit. Aidit was to have attended a conference on Asia-Africa in Algeria only a week after the coup against Ben Bella, along with President Sukarno, who had thus acknowledged the transfer of power in Algeria; however, the conference was postponed. Perhaps, then, the early announcement of the Revolutionary Council in Jakarta was because the initial mutiny by the 30th September Movement, which was expected to create conditions for mobilising popular support, had failed (see Törnquist 1984a: Ch 18; Roosa 2006; and extracts from “Chairman Mao Meets the Delegation of the PKI,” in Chinese Communist Party Central Archives, August 5, 1965, quoted in Zhou 2013).
2. Infamous General Sarwo Edhie, who directed the mass murders in Central Java and Bali, claimed that even three million people had been killed, but he may have been boasting.
3. Even General Nasution, the chief of staff of the armed forces at the time, who escaped “arrest” by the conspirators, argued in a conversation with the author (November 22, 1980) that in spite of Wertheim’s Maoist inclinations there might be something to his thesis that Suharto had some prior knowledge and wavered. According to Nasution, Suharto initially hesitated to strike back at the 30th September Movement and had not followed Nasution’s advice to use the radio transmitter based in Bandung to refute the mutineers and call on troops from the Siliwangi Division to attack the mutineers. Rather, Nasution explained, Suharto only used his “own” troops, primarily the para-commando regiment RPKAD under Sarwo Edhie.
4. While acknowledging these distinctions as crucial at the time, there were overlaps, including Muslims deeming themselves to be leftists though not necessarily communists. We shall return to these cross-cutting dimensions of citizenship regimes while noting that things have indeed changed.
5. For a step in this direction, see Hammer (2013) for a study of the “interaction between state and society” in the killings in Central Java. Interestingly, this work is not quoted by the books under review.
6. To mention a few, see Prasetyo, Priyono, and Törnquist (2007); Priyono, Samadhi, and Törnquist (2007); Schulte Nordholt and van Klinken (2007); Lane (2008); van Klinken and Berenschot (2014); Priyono and Hamid (2014); Djani et al. (2016); Savirani and Törnquist (2016); and Hiarij and Stokke (2017).

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