



FORBIDDEN MEMORIES

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF
1965 IN EASTERN INDONESIA

Edited by Mery Kolimon, Liliya Wetangterah and Karen Campbell-Nelson

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We hope that the publication of this book in the English language will be another contribution to the international understanding of the humanitarian evil that happened half a century ago in Indonesia, information about which was stifled, in all kinds of ways. At least, in learning from this cruel history, together we will have the commitment to build a world civilization with more love of peace and justice.

Kupang, December 2014

Mery Kolimon

About the Herb Feith Translation Series

The Herb Feith Translation Series publishes high-quality non-fiction manuscripts not yet available in English, which enhance scholarship and teaching about Indonesia. Published by the Herb Feith Foundation in conjunction with Monash University, the books are available 'open access' or for free download.

The Herb Feith Foundation was established in 2003 to commemorate the life and work of Herb Feith (1930–2001), volunteer, scholar, teacher and peace activist. Its mission is to promote and support work of the kind to which Herb Feith devoted his life, including the study of Indonesia, through a range of educational activities including research and teaching and in the publication and promotion of such work.

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Translating accounts of the 1965–66 mass violence in Indonesia

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Until recently there have been very few accounts available in Indonesian or English of the 1965–66 mass violence as told by witnesses, survivors or perpetrators. Today an increasing number of memoirs and short testimony collections are available in Indonesian, however, very few are yet available in English language. This has prevented a greater understanding outside Indonesia of how this violence continues to impact on Indonesians and of how they now understand this traumatic period of their nation's history.

These translated works are valuable resources for all who seek to understand Indonesia today, and especially for undergraduate students of Asian history and the history of mass violence and genocide. This book is the second in this series of translated accounts of the 1965–66 mass violence in Indonesia.

About the Editors

Mery Kolimon was born in SoE, South Central Timor. She began serving as a pastor with the congregation in Bijeli, East Mollo Presbytery, South Central Timor (1997–99). After completing her doctoral studies at the Protestant Theological University in Holland in 2008, she worked as a lecturer at her alma mater, the Faculty of Theology at Artha Wacana Christian University (UKAW) Kupang. Apart from acting as Director of the Postgraduate program at UKAW, Mery is also coordinator of the Women's Network of East Indonesia (Jaringan Perempuan Indonesia Timur, JPIT). Mery wrote the story of her father's role as a perpetrator in the book *Memecah Pembisuan*, ed. Putu Oka Sukanta (2011), published in English as *Breaking the Silence* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing 2014).

Liliya Wetangterab was born in Kupang. She completed her theological studies at the Faculty of Theology at UKAW in 2007 and served with the Ebenhezer-Oeba Congregation in Kupang. The following year, she began further study of church law at the Jakarta Theology College (Sekolah Tinggi Teologi/STT Jakarta), and graduated in March 2011. In November 2011, Lia joined the JPIT research team, assisting in particular with editing. In the same month she had the opportunity to attend a conference on church law in Holland. While she was there she carried out some interviews to assist the report of the Sumba research team, and also managed to gather some relevant documentation. Now Lia is teaching at Sekolah Tinggi Agama Negeri (STAKN) Kupang.

Karen Campbell-Nelson, Ed.D., works as a professor on the Theology Faculty and with the Graduate Program of Artha Wacana Christian University (UKAW) in Kupang, NTT, Indonesia. She has experience with human rights documentation and gender issues, including gender- and sexual-based violence, at local, national, and international levels. She served as a consultant with the Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation of Timor-Leste (CAVR), the American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative, UNIFEM (now UN Women), and the International Center for Transitional Justice in Indonesia. Besides teaching, she joins others in the Women's Network of Eastern Indonesia (JPIT), Asian Justice and Rights (AJAR), and the Alliance Against Human Trafficking (AMPERA) in research, training, and advocacy efforts on behalf of gender justice.

The Women's Network of East Indonesia for the Study of Women in Religion and Culture (Jaringan Perempuan Indonesia Timur, JPIT) comprises more than forty women from different religions across eastern Indonesia (NTT, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku, Halmahera and Papua). Formed in August 2009, the network, agreed to focus its activities on research and publication in three areas: women, religion, and culture. In their meeting in March 2010, the organising committee agreed to make the 1965 tragedy one focus of study. JPIT began its research into the 1965 tragedy by taking NTT as a pilot project. It was hoped that the research would soon spread to other areas in Eastern Indonesia, taking lessons learned from the first stage in NTT.

Foreword

**Rev. Dr. Andreas A. Yewangoe,
Head of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI)**

There is an episode in the history of our nation which to this day remains dark. Many interpretations have arisen around it. This is what came to be labeled the 'G30S/PKI Incident', or more usually 'Gestapu', a word that reminds us of Gestapo, Hitler's kind of secret police during World War II. The event was preceded by the kidnapping of six generals and one high-ranking officer, who later came to be called 'Heroes of the Revolution'. They were taken from their homes on the night of 30 September-1 October 1965. They were taken – alive or dead – to a place within the Halim Perdana Kusuma airport precincts where their bodies were later found in a well called the Crocodile Hole. The situation was extremely tense and confusing on that day. Nothing was clear. I myself was in Jakarta at the time as a third-year student at Jakarta Theological Seminary. I witnessed the unusual movement of the army. Army convoys were going here and there. Some soldiers wore red armbands on their right arms. Some did not. We did not know what was going on because communications were extremely limited. The only source of information was the national radio, RRI, which not everyone could listen to, as not everyone owned a radio.

Early in the afternoon things became a little 'clearer'. It began with the declaration by Lieutenant Colonel Untung representing the group calling itself the Revolutionary Council. He dismissed the Dwikora Cabinet under President Sukarno. He proclaimed that the highest military rank was Lieutenant Colonel, so those with the rank of General had to accommodate themselves to this. Then he formed the 'Revolutionary Council', which was headed by Lieutenant Colonel Untung himself. But who was Untung? No one had heard of him before this. Where did he stand in terms of national direction and ideology? And what was the fate of the revolution that Bung Karno had always said was 'unfinished'? And where was Bung Karno? Had he been murdered, even though it was said that he was in a safe place? It was all very confusing.

Things became even more confused later in the afternoon after an announcement by Major General Soeharto that Untung's *coup d'état* had been broken. The national radio station's studio was retaken. Then the names of the generals and the high-ranking officers who were missing were announced. The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) was alleged to have been the mastermind of everything that had happened. But where was Bung Karno? It was a mystery. Towards midnight, at last Bung Karno's voice was heard. He sounded tired. He said that he was well. The reins of the state were in his hands. For the meantime, he had taken control of the army. And so forth. But the even more confusing days were yet to come.

We got to know the story as it continued because it is written in books. But not everything written tells things as they really happened. There still remain so many questions. Was this really the treacherous deed of the Communist Party, as the official version has always claimed? Or was there an internal struggle within the army, as many foreign scholars have said? We remember, for instance, the different version presented in what came to be called the 'Cornell Paper'. And the statements of Prof. Utrecht in the Netherlands make it clear that the Communist Party was the 'scapegoat' for everything that happened.

We do not want to go into that complicated discussion now. Nor is this the place for it. What we want to say is that so many people became victims in that turmoil. The period after the 30th September Movement saw the deaths of thousands, even millions of people who were alleged to have been part of the Communist Party or affiliated with it. After the party was banned throughout Indonesia, hunts and massacres happened everywhere. Only God knows the exact numbers. The people arrested were given no due legal process. Many of them had no idea why they were arrested, because no fair trial was ever carried out. What we know is that these unfortunate people were grouped into three categories: Group A was the most serious. They were usually summarily executed. Group B were those who had to regularly report to the authorities. Those in group C were released, but with certain qualifications that led to them living under constant suspicion. The stigma placed upon them became a life-long burden, not only for themselves, but also for their children and grandchildren. This stigma has still not completely disappeared today.

Our nation has still not been able to emerge from this oppressive burden of history. Recently, there have been a number of publications that explain what really happened. Books like *Aku Bangga Menjadi Anak PKI* (I am proud to be the child of a communist), for instance, show how injustice

and obliteration of our humanitarian dignity occurred and will continue to do so as long as we do not have the courage to free our nation from this burden of the past.¹ The writings of Pramoedya Ananta Toer from Buru Island (where he was held as a political prisoner from c.1969 to 1979) are another example of an effort to free our nation from this burden. The issue is this; does our nation have the courage to go down that path, and to truly strive for healing?

* * *

In the midst of this struggle to make peace with the past, the writing collected by a group of women from the Theology Faculty at Artha Wacana Christian University in Kupang is extremely significant. Thus far, we have heard only stories passed orally about all the things that happened in East Nusa Tenggara after the 30th September Movement. I myself heard various stories about what happened in Sumba and Timor from various informants. But what was heard was never published, and can be easily lost. This documentation invites us not only to look at the past and learn from it, but also to dare to enter our history and strive to carry out healing. These are *memoria passionis*, memories of suffering, which, as many other nations have experienced, can give the strength to continue to move forward. But its conditions are not easy. There must be a confession of sin. Only with confession is true forgiveness possible, and only then can our nation be healed. If not, we will remain burdened by the heavy past.

We deeply sympathize with the victims, who largely had no idea of what wrong they were supposed to have done. We especially feel for the women and children who had to carry the burden from their husbands and fathers. When I was staying in the Netherlands, my friend Pastor H.J. van Oostrum told me about what he did in Sumba to help those accused of being Communist Party members. He accompanied them to the execution site. When they were executed on Mamboru Beach, Pastor H.J. van Oostrum knelt behind the firing squad, begging them not to prolong the victims 'suffering'. Evidently, when he talked to the victims, he fortified them by saying, 'Be calm, it will feel like being bitten by an ant, and then it will end.' End? Certainly not. He strengthened their faith as followers of Christ, and publicly declared that they were members of the Christian Church of

1 *Aku Bangsa Menjadi Anak PKI* Ribka Tjiptaning Proletariyati. Jakarta: Cipta Lestari 2002.

Sumba. In those last moments, Pastor van Oostrum gave them communion as a sign of their union in Christ.

It makes us deeply sad when apparently the church also participated in judging them. But we should not then judge the church here. We also know that in that critical time of confusion, even the church needed courage to truly state that it must not neglect its pastoral role. The resolutions of the GKS Synod in Tenggara (1957), for instance, were the church's effort to prevent its members from being easily influenced by various Communist Party 'propaganda and campaigns' that were indeed extraordinary at that time. The heat of the propaganda and campaigns was felt all over Indonesia. The incident at the Bandara Betsy plantation in North Sumatra in the 1960s, when an army lieutenant was killed over a land dispute, was a huge issue at the time. It was not strange that the Communist Party was alleged to be the provocateur, firing up the people to carry out 'revolutionary' acts. Not long before the 30 September Movement, the Communist Party celebrated its 40th anniversary in Jakarta. The capital city looked like an ocean of red. The hammer and sickle was in every corner of the city. This memory is still vivid to most people.

But this does not mean that the Communist Party can be blamed without any open legal process for its leaders to defend themselves. After all, the Communist Party was at the time a legal organization under the protection of the law. Sadly, no open trials were ever held, so to this day the whole thing remains a burden of history.

The church did indeed have difficulty with statements denying the existence of God, as in Communist Party propaganda, although to understand Marxist teaching, proper philosophical training is needed to really understand the intention of Marx's statement, 'religion is the opium of the people'. This statement cannot be separated from its historical context, when the church paid no heed to the dreadful conditions of the workers in Europe, even giving the impression of turning religion into an opiate. When this statement is taken out of its context and casually applied to a society that has, in historical terms, not experienced similar conditions, misunderstanding is likely. This is why, when what was called 'liberation theology' took off in Latin America in the 1990s, it was seen as the church's fulfillment of an obligation that had been long ignored in Europe. The churches in Latin America (at least in their theology) were considered to have rediscovered that obligation. Those who had been marginalized by poverty because of a social structure of oppression (the oppressor-oppressed axis) were returned to their place as subjects of history. When this happened the church could overcome

its stagnation by returning its diaconal function to its rightful place. The church participates in, and even pioneers change to social structure to make it more fair and prosperous.

Statements of concern about atheist propaganda should therefore be made alongside the church's true role of improving society. In saying this, I am not belittling the situation back in the 1960s, which was indeed extremely difficult for society and the church, and not only in East Nusa Tenggara. However, today when we face the future, our churches can make those past events a valuable lesson for the true performance of ministry to our society.

This book, even though it is somewhat incomplete because it omits Flores [and Rote, ed.], is now in your hands, dear reader. Various living narratives are presented here. Suffering and misery. But also hope and optimism. I am sure that readers will take away many useful things from this book. With God's blessing.

Jakarta 13 March, 2012

Foreword

Rev. Elga Sarapung, Director Interfidei

*They have taken away my Lord,
and I know not where they have laid him.*

(John 20:13)

*Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him,
and I will take him away.*

(John 20:15)

The two Biblical quotes above are the expressions of a woman named Mary Magdalene in a state of grief and confusion when she found the tomb of Jesus empty. Mary was one of a few women who witnessed – although from a distance – the events of Jesus's arrest, crucifixion and burial, with no opportunity for defence. After all, the actors in that scene were men who were submissive to an unjust government that was preoccupied with the political interests of power, both in the state and religion. The deception between 'religion and state' in the interest of power is truly evident in this incident.

This profound expression of grief and confusion, when carried into the 'time frame' of 1965 to the present – with the arrest, kidnapping, imprisonment, torture and murder of thousands of Indonesian people without any due process of the law, and with their families, wives, children, relatives having no knowledge of where their husbands, brothers, fathers or sons had been taken never to return – is deeply meaningful when listening to the victims' grievances and hopes. Where was truth and justice? Is there still truth and justice in Indonesia? Is there any sympathy, attention and demand for justice among people, among officials of this Republic of Indonesia, for the victims of injustice and deviation from truth?

The hymn 'Berserah kepada Tuhan' (Surrender to God) which one family sang at a church service, was not an expression of despair, nor was it merely for consolation, but it was a heartfelt cry about the injustice inflicted by the

state and the church that was felt then and continues to be felt, and at the same time a lament of hope. They no longer believed in other people, and did not even believe in themselves. Their husbands were dead, but the memory of injustice gave them the valuable lesson that this experience was not the end of their lives, not the end of their hopes, but was an expression of their faith that God would surely declare His justice and truth.

On the night before the killing, I met my husband at the door of the Seba prison. We knelt together, prayed and sang the hymn, 'Surrender to Jesus, my body, spirit and soul.' That was the last night we met. Gad'i. (Report from Sabu)

Ironically, religions become weak when faced with problems like this – weak because the 'prophetic voice about truth and justice' is virtually silent. There are a whole range of humanitarian tragedies that get virtually no attention from religions, including those linked with violence and murder. There are two reasons: first, religions in Indonesia are afraid of authorities/the state/the government, and secondly, the religious institutions are so strong they are unable to carry out the critical, deep theological reflection needed to confront problems like these. They are more afraid of the authorities and the state that carry out injustice and falsify truth, than of justice and truth that God clearly mandates to people and religions, including the church. Both these reasons weaken the church's resolve and power to act in the name of truth and justice.

When we enter into the space and time of this book, into the stories, that is – the living witness of eyes, consciences, reflections presented here – various questions arise for the church. Where was the church's defence of the victims? Where did the church carry out truth and justice? Did the church raise its voice or do anything on behalf of the victims? And why the church? Because it turns out that the church also participated in this 'scene', directly or indirectly, and continues to do so today. The church, in particular the Christian Church of Sumba (GKS) and the Timor Evangelical Christian Church (GMIT), as the research in this book shows, has still not undertaken any significant change in its position on the 1965 humanitarian tragedy. Victims are still not completely received in the church, because they have 'sinned'.

This reminds me of what the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh once said in his book *Going Home, Jesus and Buddha as Brothers*, when talking about love, forgiveness and reconciliation: