



WOMEN, SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND THE INDONESIAN KILLINGS OF 1965–66

Annie Pohlman

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First published 2015

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Pohlman, Annie, author.

Women, sexual violence and the Indonesian killings of 1965-66 /

Annie Pohlman.

pages cm. -- (Asian Studies Association of Australia women in Asia series ; 36)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Women--Violence against--Indonesia. 2. Women political prisoners--Abuse of--Indonesia. 3. Political violence--Indonesia.

4. Indonesia--History--Coup d'état, 1965. I. Title.

HV6250.4.W65P62 2014

959.803'5--dc23

2014009967

ISBN: 978-0-415-83887-0 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-81879-5 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman

by Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.



Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

Women, Sexual Violence and the Indonesian Killings of 1965–66

The Indonesian massacres of 1965–66 claimed the lives of an estimated half a million men, women and children. Histories of this period of mass violence in Indonesia's past have focused almost exclusively on top-level political and military actors, their roles in the violence, and their movements and mobilisation of perpetrators. Based on extensive interviews with women survivors of the massacres and detention camps, this book provides the first in-depth analysis of sexualised forms of violence perpetrated against women and girl victims during this period. It looks at the stories of individual women caught up in the massacres and mass arrests, focusing on their testimonies and their experiences of violence and survival. The book aims not only to redress the lack of scholarly attention but also to provide significant new analysis on the gendered and gendering effects of sexual violence against women and girls in situations of genocidal violence.

Annie Pohlman teaches in the School of Languages and Comparative Cultural Studies at the University of Queensland, Australia.

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*To my family, for their support.
And for Ibu Lia, RIP.*

Acknowledgements

Many people have helped me over the last decade in many different ways. First, my deepest and sincerest thanks go to my mentor, Helen Creese, who has been a constant source of encouragement and guidance for many years. My thanks also go to Lenore Lyons, editor of the *Women in Asia* series, for her help and patience throughout this process. To Bob Elson and Robert Cribb, thank you for your encouragement and advice on many occasions.

I am grateful to the publishers of Robert Cribb's *Historical Atlas of Indonesia* (NIAS Press, 2000) and A. Gumelar Demokrasno's *Dari Kalong Sampai Pulau Buru: Kisah Tapol Dalam Sketsa* (PUSdEP, 2005) for allowing the reproduction of maps and images in this book.

To my friends, thank you for help, patience and support. Special mention goes to Sam, Ange, Deborah, Ben, Suzanne, Helen, Odette, Sally, Deanne, Upik, Lara, Laura, Shirin, Lauren, Sol, Trevor and Noreen. To Mum, Dad and my sister, Catherine, thank you for coming with me on this journey; we got there in the end.

To Ibu Lia (a pseudonym), who passed away before the completion of this research, and to the many other former political prisoners who helped me along the way, thank you for allowing me briefly into your lives and for sharing your stories with me. I hope I have helped. Thank you.

Abbreviations and terms

ABRI	'Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia' or 'Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia'.
<i>Aksi sepihak</i>	Literally, 'unilateral action'. The term used by the PKI to describe its campaigns to take over land for use by poor and landless people (1963–65).
Ansor	Young men's association of the Muslim organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU).
Banser	'Barisan Serba Guna Ansor' or 'Mutlipurpose Ansor Brigade'. A para-military militia formed within Ansor in the early 1960s.
BTI	'Barisan Tani Indonesia' or 'Indonesian Farmers' Front'. A mass organisation aligned with the Indonesian Communist Party.
DPR-GR	'Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat-Gotong Royong' or 'Gotong Royong People's Representative Council'. The national parliament set up by President Sukarno in mid-1960.
G.30.S.	An acronym for 'Gerakan 30 September', the 30th September Movement, the name given to Untung and Latief's group of mostly middle-ranking armed forces' personnel who kidnapped and killed six generals and one general's aide in the early morning of 1 October 1965 as part of an attempted coup. Often written as 'G30S/PKI'.
Gerwani	'Gerakan Wanita Indonesia' or 'Indonesian Women's Movement'. The Communist-aligned women's mass organisation originally set up in 1950 (then known as Gerwis) whose members were accused by the military of playing a central role in the 1 October attempted coup.
Gestapu	'Gerakan September Tiga Puluh' or 'Thirtieth of September Movement'. An acronym created by the Indonesian military for the movement responsible for the attempted 1965 coup which deliberately played upon the name of the Nazi-era secret police.

IPPI	'Ikatan Pemuda Pelajar Indonesia' or 'Indonesian Students' Youth Organisation'. A Leftist youth organisation whose members were persecuted after the coup.
Kabupaten	Regency; the tier of government below the provincial level and above the kecamatan (district) level.
Kecamatan	District; the tier of government below the Kabupaten (regency) level and above the desa (village) level.
KKR	'Komisi Kebenaran dan Rekonsiliasi' or 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission'.
KODAM	'Komando Daerah Militer' or 'Regional Military Command'.
KODIM	'Komando Distrik Militer' or 'District Military Command'.
KOPKAMTIB	'Komando Operasi Pemulihan Keamanan dan Ketertiban' or 'Operational Command for the Resoration of Security and Order'. The military organisation/agency with various special powers created by Suharto shortly after the 1 October 1965 coup which oversaw much of the killings and which remained in various forms throughout the New Order.
LEKRA	'Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat' or 'Institute of People's Culture'. A cultural organisation aligned with the Indonesian Communist Party.
Lubang Buaya	Literally 'crocodile hole'. The name given to the well in which the seven victims of the 1 October 1965 coup were thrown.
Nahdlatul Ulama	'Revival of the Religious Scholars'. A mass Muslim social organisation.
Pemuda Rakyat	'People's Youth'. A youth wing of the Indonesian Communist Party.
PKI	'Partai Komunis Indonesia' or 'Indonesian Communist Party'.
PNI	'Partai Nasionalis Indonesia' or 'Indonesian Nationalist Party'.
SOBSI	'Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia' or 'All-Indonesia Organisation of Labour Unions'. Closely aligned with the PKI.
Tapol	An abbreviation for 'Tahanan Politik' or 'Political Prisoner'. Also 'E/T' which stood for 'ex-tapol' was stamped on former political prisoners' identity cards after release.

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1 Women and violence following the 1965 coup

It's bitter to remember, very bitter. My memories taste bitter in my mouth. But people must know what happened to us. They must know what happened.

(Ibu Lia, Jakarta, December 2005)

Of the many conversations we had, these words stand out in my memories of Ibu Lia, a true revolutionary, former Communist Party leader and long-term political prisoner, who passed away in 2007. Sitting across from me in the small guest room of my boarding house, her unusually hard words startled me. It was hot as it almost always is in the late afternoons in Jakarta and we were both tired. As had become our habit over the past few months since Ibu Lia had begun helping me, we were sitting down at the end of the day to go over what we had done and to plan our next day's activities. Three or four times a week, we would meet in the morning then go by bus or taxi to interview one of Ibu Lia's many contacts. These interviews seemed to tire me more than Ibu Lia, in spite of the almost sixty years that separated us. It was Ibu Lia who was always ready to go on, to do another interview, to find more information. The men and women she took me to meet were her friends and former colleagues. Like her, many were former members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and, like her, many had been persecuted because of it.

Over the previous two months, Ibu Lia had gradually told me parts of her story. She had been born during the Dutch colonial period and had been involved in the Revolution for independence in the late 1940s. During the first fifteen years of the Indonesian republic, she and her husband raised their family and became heavily involved in the Communist Party, rising to positions of leadership in the 1950s. An attempted coup in Jakarta on the night of 30 September 1965, however, changed their lives and the lives of millions of others.

In the aftermath of that coup, the Indonesian military embarked upon a campaign to eradicate its mass-supported political rival, the PKI. An estimated half a million people were murdered and a further one million imprisoned, most of whom were persecuted for their association with the PKI. The regime which came to power during the massacres was General Suharto's 'New Order', an authoritarian, militarist government which lasted until 1998.

Throughout the New Order, those associated with the Left and their descendants were subject to numerous formal and informal restraints on their rights, stigmatised and marginalised, all in the name of social inoculation against the dangers of a Communist resurgence.

Ibu Lia survived the killings and managed to remain on the run from the military for over a year before she was finally captured. As a former Communist Party leader, she spent more than twenty years in jails on Sumatra and Java. When she was finally released in the early 1980s, she had to rebuild her life and family connections. When I met her in 2005, she was in her early eighties but remained an activist and continued to campaign for the rights of all Indonesians. When I told her that I had come to Indonesia to interview women survivors of the violence of 1965–66, she quickly surmised that I needed help to find these women. Within a few days, she had become my guide and teacher and together we interviewed scores of women about their experiences following the 1965 coup.

Ibu Lia was one amongst millions who were adversely affected by the violence of 1965–66. She was also one of the many survivors who, with the end of the New Order in 1998, spoke out about the atrocities perpetrated during the decades of the regime. Fifty years after the 1965 coup, those who survived are telling their own stories, bearing witness to a violent and mostly forgotten history of Indonesia.

This book examines the testimonies of women survivors of the violence that followed the 1965 coup. It does so, to use Ronit Lentin's words, 'to re-occupy the territories of silence' that surround their stories (1999a: 47). It does so because their stories refuse to yield to and actively work 'against a forgetfulness that too easily goes along with and justifies what is forgotten' (Adorno 1986: 115). It does so because these women and their memories, their stories and their lives are not simply the human residue of a mass murder gone almost unnoticed on the world stage. And it does so because, as Ibu Lia said, 'people must know what happened'.

Investigating women's experiences of violence

Half a century after the mass violence and social upheaval that followed the 1965 coup, there remains much unknown about the dynamics of the killings and mass political detentions which had such a profound effect on millions of Indonesians as well as on Indonesian political and social life. As Mahmood Mamdani explained in his analysis of the Rwandan genocide, 'atrocities cannot be its own explanation. Violence cannot be allowed to speak for itself, for violence is not its own meaning. To be made thinkable, it needs to be *historicised*' (2001: 228–29, emphasis in original).

When I began this research in 2002, I had one, essential question: what happened to the women caught up in the violence after 1965? As such, this research began with an historiographical objective – to collect, document and analyse the testimonies of women survivors of the massacres and political

arrests that followed the 1965 coup. As I began interviewing women, however, a second, explicitly political and personal objective arose – to present the testimonies of women survivors in order that those who hear their stories are empathetically motivated to respond, to become engaged, and to recognise their struggles to have their stories heard. In a political context where previous attempts for transitional justice measures and reconciliation have been stymied, my hope is that this project contributes to the many efforts for honest and open acknowledgement of past atrocities in Indonesia (see ICTJ and KontraS 2011).

Both objectives seek to address an apparent absence of discourse, in Foucauldian terms, an archaeology of silence, about the Indonesian killings of 1965–66 and the mass detention of Indonesian citizens by the state responsible for their protection. The testimonies of women survivors in this book are examined in terms of two main themes: women's experiences of violence, and the material forms of violence perpetrated against women victims, with a specific focus on sexualised violence. The women whose testimonies are recounted here survived, when many others did not, systematic attacks against them because they were regarded as responsible for, or sympathetic to, the 1965 coup. Although their experiences are privately remembered, they have been silenced and forgotten publicly. This book is a testimony to these women and their experiences.

Women's experiences and testimonies

At its core, this research echoes Ranajit Guha's question (1996: 11): 'But suppose there were a historiography that regarded "what women were saying" as integral to its project, what kind of history would it write?' I approach each woman's testimony from the particularities and singularities of her experience and take, as my starting point, the urgency to include these testimonies in an analysis of the violence perpetrated after the coup. This focus on women's experiences, women's lives and women's testimonies attests that although the massacres in Indonesia were intended to wipe out all those associated with the Left, 'the road to annihilation was marked by events that specifically affected men as men and women as women' (Hilberg 1992: 126).

This research draws upon the testimonies of around 150 women survivors out of the millions of women who were adversely affected by these events, as well as testimonies by some of their family members who also took part in this project.¹ Each of these women, just as each of the men and children caught up in the violence of 1965–66, experienced these events in both unique and common ways. As will be shown throughout the book, commonalities amongst women's experiences only emerge when balanced by numerous, individual stories of great exceptions, unexpected consequences and moments in which situations changed in an instant. In short, while patterns of how women experienced the aftermath of the coup do emerge, these cannot be essentialised in any way. While it was more likely for women and girls to experience certain types of violence – such as the sexualised forms of violence discussed at length in this

book – women's experiences cannot be reduced to their sexuality nor to what might be seen as patterns of gendered vulnerability. This study underlines the multifaceted ways in which women experienced these events by showing the various ways in which they both participated in and became targets of the process of eradicating the Left in Indonesia.

This book also shows that during the months and years that followed the coup, women were neither helpless nor powerless, despite often being made vulnerable to violence, exploitation and degradation. Women made choices where and when they could, coped when they had to, and made plans and devised strategies to overcome problems. The women survivors' testimonies that lie at the heart of this study attest that at no time were women peripheral to the events that followed the coup. Overall, this research places 'what women were saying' at the centre of the analysis of the violence perpetrated in 1965–66. By doing so, it examines the gendered and gendering effects of violence against women and girls in a situation of genocidal violence against Communists and their alleged sympathisers.

More broadly, this study fits within a wider research paradigm of women's experiences during mass violence. By examining gendered experiences of violence and in particular by focusing on sexualised forms of violence against women and girls, this research contributes to feminist approaches to studying individual experiences and agency during conflicts. Throughout the book, I draw on feminist interpretations of women's roles and women's bodies during mass violence. The groundbreaking work of researchers such as R. Charli Carpenter (2002), Cynthia Enloe (2000), Susan Brownmiller (1975) and Ronit Lentin (1999b) offers critical insights into the intersections between constructions of gender and forms of sexual violence against women during conflict. In my analysis of women survivors' testimonies, these and other feminist works on gender and violence are essential for examining how gendered bodies and subjectivities are performed and constructed during the mass violence which followed the coup in Indonesia. Furthermore, this study into sexual violence against women and girls within the Indonesian context contributes to feminist understandings of women's experiences during mass violence as well as interpretations of the effects of this violence.

Women's testimonies of violence

The analysis presented in this book on sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls following the 1965 coup is based primarily on the testimonies of women survivors of this violence. I conducted interviews with women survivors and some of their family members in regions of Java and Sumatra between 2002 and 2009, principally with former political prisoners between July 2005 and January 2006. Added to these oral testimonies were the transcripts of interviews with former political prisoners obtained from a number of Indonesian non-government organisations which have conducted their own historical memory and reconciliation projects.² While the focus of this research