

ACTIVIST ARCHIVES

YOUTH CULTURE and the POLITICAL
PAST in INDONESIA DOREEN LEE



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Youth Culture and the Political Past in Indonesia **DOREEN LEE**

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| For my parents.

PREFACE

This book is about young people inhabiting a radical position in time and space, breaking up the malignant calm of an authoritarian regime in small and massive ways. It is mostly about university students, but other youth and social types are present as well. It takes place in Indonesia, an archipelago of more than nineteen thousand islands, the fourth largest country in the world, with the largest Muslim population. It takes place against Suharto's New Order regime, which lasted from 1966 to 1998. Most important, it takes place in the shadow of violence, structural, epistemological, and physical.

Indonesia's transition to democracy was marked by a series of unresolved acts of violence, martyrdoms, and popular push-back. These pages give the dates and events that formed the context of violence for activist lives and decisions during a particularly intense period of confrontation between the state and civilians. My book was never going to be an exhaustive history of Reformasi or of the various groups that composed the movement itself; others have done it better than I could. Nor do I take a hardboiled, whodunnit approach to confront the conspiracy theories that follow whenever violence occurs in Indonesia. Yet I think it important to show readers what regime change looks like, and how the cumulative effect of violence begets the traces of fear, memory, and adrenaline that lurk in the smallest spaces and in the most ordinary event.

The events in the list that follows serve as a historical primer for the violence that shaped the student movement's experience of the Indonesian state and gave youth a vocabulary to talk about injustice. The list is select, as most

of these events occurred in the capital city, Jakarta. And it begins with a foundational violence that foreshadows the treatment of leftist students three decades later.

OCTOBER 1965–MARCH 1966:

THE BIRTH OF THE NEW ORDER AND ANTI-COMMUNISM IN INDONESIA

These dates correspond to the period of organized mass killings of an estimated 1 million alleged leftists in Indonesia, led by the army. It was also the period during which General Suharto came to power, stripping the nation's founding father, Soekarno, of his powers. The "New Order" state created the specter of communism as the nation's greatest enemy and maintained its anti-communist propaganda to the very end, effectively silencing dissidents and stamping out protest among the peasantry, workers, and urban intelligentsia.

JULY 27, 1996: THE JULY 27 INCIDENT

The forcible removal of Megawati from the chair position of the opposition Indonesian Democratic Party came to a head in a violent attack by troops and armed militias on the party's Jakarta headquarters. Hundreds were injured and arrested; more than twenty people disappeared. Students were among the attacked supporters of the party, yet they were accused by the state of being communists and of fomenting violence. Left-leaning activists and Megawati supporters fled Jakarta to avoid arrest.

1997–1998

Over the span of a year, twenty-three activists were kidnapped by the army, and thirteen were disappeared. At the same time, the Asian Financial Crisis swept through Southeast Asia, and Indonesia's currency, the rupiah, tanked. "Total Crisis" followed, and nationwide student demonstrations calling for Suharto's resignation increased rapidly from March 1998 onward.

MAY 12, 1998: THE TRISAKTI TRAGEDY

The first of the Reform-era tragedies, the killings of four students and two other civilians at Trisakti University, sparked major protests around the country.

MAY 13–14, 1998: THE MAY RIOTS

Jakarta became a city under siege following the Trisakti Tragedy. Angry mobs looted and burned Chinese-owned commercial areas and property. The most frightening acts of violence took place against women and girls of Chinese de-

scent or Chinese appearance who were gang-raped, mutilated, and burned to death. More than a thousand residents of Jakarta, many of them looters from urban poor communities, died trapped in burning malls. Investigations by independent researchers and by the National Commission of Human Rights have strongly suggested that the riots were organized rather than spontaneous acts.

MAY 17–19, 1998

Students occupied the parliament building in a show of force, with tacit support from political leaders that they would have safe passage from the compound.

MAY 21, 1998

Suharto's resignation was read aloud on national television. Vice President B. J. Habibie succeeded Suharto to become the third president of Indonesia.

NOVEMBER 13, 1998: THE FIRST SEMANGGI TRAGEDY

Students amassed on the streets of Jakarta to protest the Extraordinary Parliamentary Session amid heavy security by the armed forces. Provocations by progovernment militia groups led to violence on the streets. The army opened fire, killing thirteen people, including four students.

SEPTEMBER 23–24, 1999: THE SECOND SEMANGGI TRAGEDY

As parliament moved to debate an emergency bill that would increase the powers of the army, demonstrators mobilized in Jakarta to protest the return of militarism. Six people were killed when the security forces opened fire.



It was a difficult thing to title this book. “We live in the roundness of life,” as Gaston Bachelard wrote. It is this very quality of fullness, roundness, that I see in the political lives of activist youth in Indonesia and that seemed to reject each naming as flatly partial, not quite right. This book means to give you a sense of why that was so.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book encompassed three stages of my academic life: graduate school at Cornell University, my visiting post at Amherst College, and my present job at Northeastern University. As a result, I have many people to thank and intellectual debts to pay. It is my pleasure to thank the following for their contributions to this book.

Field research for this project was supported by a Fulbright-Hays grant, the Milton Barnett grant, with follow-up trips sponsored by the Dean's Office at Amherst College. I thank Benny Widyono for his help in locating Indonesian sponsorship for my research, and the CSDs at Atma Jaya Catholic University for hosting me. The Karl Lowenstein fellowship at Amherst College enabled me to work on chapter 2 and chapter 3 of this book. An IIAS fellowship at the International Institute for Asian Studies at the University of Leiden gave me the time and space to carry out archival research at the International Institute for Social History (IISG), and to write the introduction and chapter 1. At the IIAS I thank Philippe Peycam, Bernardo Brown, and Jenna Grant. At the IISG I thank Emile Schwidder, Eef Vermeij, and the staff at the circulation desk for their help. At the KITLV I thank Henk Schulte Nordholt and Gerry van Klinken for their indefatigable support for Indonesian studies. I thank Patsy Spyer for finding time for me in her busy schedule while I was in the Netherlands. I am forever grateful to Leonard Retel-Helmrich for being my extra-institutional host in Amsterdam.

I have presented chapters and ideas from this project at UC Santa Cruz, the University of Indonesia, the National University of Singapore, Cornell

University, Colgate University, Amherst College, Northwestern University, Yale University, Boston University, the IISG, the IISAS, the Inter-Asia Faculty Seminar at the Five Colleges, Harvard University, the University of Toronto, and ANU. Some ideas loosely connected to chapter 2 were first developed in a working paper series at the University of Sydney, and in an article in the *Journal of Urban History*. An earlier version of chapter 3 appeared as “Images of Youth: On the Iconography of Protest in Indonesia” in the journal *History and Anthropology*. I thank the journal for allowing me the use of that material. A small essay on the activist, the key figure in my book, appeared in a multi-authored volume edited by Joshua Barker, Johan Lindquist, and Erik Harms. I thank Joshua and Johan for their invitation to join the edited volume.

At Cornell University I learned from the anthropology department and the Southeast Asia Program, and consequently enjoyed the best of both worlds. Andrew Willford introduced me to the great anthropological debates about globalization and postcoloniality that were taking place in the discipline and taught by example how to be an anthropologist of grace, patience, and depth. Jim Siegel gave me a singular education and a powerful way to see the world. Eric Tagliacozzo encouraged my interest in history and trained me to be a committed Southeast Asianist. I was fortunate to take Ben Anderson’s famed “Nationalisms” course, which shaped my scholarship irrevocably as it has so many scholars before me. Thak Chaloemtiarana and Nancy J. Loncto supported my research throughout graduate school and made the Southeast Asia Program a home to return to time and again. Ben Abel’s immense knowledge about Indonesia enlivened my visits to the Kroch Asia Library. Keith Hjortshoj shared his fieldnotes with me and helped me write when I was stuck. I am thankful for my grad school comrades Dan Reichman, Tyrell Haberkorn, Nina Hien, Richard Ruth, Jane Ferguson, Aaron Moore, Sheetal Majithia, Allison Truitt, Erik Harms, Ivan Small, and Samson Lim. Chris Brown came to Cornell for a conference and fit right in. Tyrell Haberkorn has been my first reader and fast friend since the beginning and deserves credit for what is good in my early work.

From 2007 to 2010 I resided in the “Happy Valley” in western Massachusetts, where I taught in the Political Science Department at Amherst College and got to know the Five Colleges community. I cotaught with Amrita Basu, whose superior intellect, teaching skills, and warm friendship made our shared classroom a wonderful learning space. Across the college I thank Uday Mehta, Tom Dumm, Theresa Laizer, Chris Dole, Marisa Parham, and John Drabinski. Dale Hudson’s friendship sustained me for the two years we shared a campus (and lunch). Sheetal Majithia’s presence at Hampshire College for a

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I arrived in Boston in the fall of 2010 and was warmly welcomed by friends and colleagues in the Northeastern University community and beyond. I would like to thank my colleagues in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, especially Alan Klein, Steve Vallas, and Matt Hunt. Nina Sylvanus was a frequent writing and discussion partner in my mad rush to finish the book. I could not have done so without her genuine good faith and intellectual support. Mike Brown and Rob Weller read my book prospectus before it went out to the presses. Kate Luongo and Charissa Threat introduced me to the cultural and gustatory attractions of the South End. Kimberly Brown brought together an amazing group of women for the study of race and visual culture in the Dark Room. Friends in Cambridge remind me to cross the river more often. Kerry Chance, Clapperton Mavhunga, and JuYon Kim are among those friends. I am thankful to Mary Steedly at Harvard for including me in all things related to Indonesia and anthropology, and to Stefan Helmreich at MIT for his kindness and practical advice. In life and work Nicholas Harkness is always nearby.

Peter Agree is a gentleman of the first order, and renewed my confidence in this book. I thank Beth Drexler for introducing him to me, and for blazing a trail with her own work on violence in Indonesia. My utmost thanks go to my manuscript readers, whose theoretical insights, regional knowledge, and writerly instincts contributed to a better book. Ed Aspinall is the foremost authority on student movements and contentious politics in Indonesia, and I benefited from his swift and sharp review of my manuscript. Karen Strassler's groundbreaking work on documentation and visibility in Indonesia has stimulated my thinking over the years. I am grateful that she read my manuscript with a sympathetic eye and engaged deeply with its arguments. An anonymous reviewer at Duke University Press reminded me of the importance of history and paid me a compliment by attending to the small details of my ethnography. At Duke University Press I have been fortunate to work with Ken Wissoker and to be swept up in his enthusiasm for new ideas and the forms that they take. Jade Brooks led me through the entire process of submission and revisions. I thank Heather Hensley for her cover design, and Daniel Rudi Haryanto for allowing me the use of his artwork for the cover.

In Indonesia I have many people to thank, especially the men and women who are Generation 98. I can only mention some of them by name. I must

thank Yasmin Purba, Simon, Reinhardt Sirait, Veronica Iswihnyayu, Agnes Gurning, Seli Woyla, Rulas "Carlos" Lebarido, "Jemi" Irwansyah, Jopie "Red-Jopi" Peranginangin (alm.), Ady Mulyana, Savic Alielha, Wilson, Margiyono, Rahardjo Waluyo Djati, Nezar Patria, Mugiyo, Daniel Hutagalung, Tri L. Astraatmadja, Yeri Wirawan, Zaenal Muttaqin, Daniel Rudi Haryanto, Nona Fatima Astuti, Alex Supartono, Dolorosa Sinaga, Ardjuna Hutagalung, Fadjoel Rachman, Eli Salomo, Ricky Tamba, Hidayat Wijaya Kusuma, Oka Dwi Candra, Irine Gayatri, Muridan Widjojo (alm.), Munir (alm.), Beka Ulung Hapsara, and Nelly Paliama. Sadly, Jopie Peranginangin was killed in the spring of 2015. His death is a great loss to the environmental and indigenous rights movement in Indonesia.

Lastly, I thank my family in Indonesia. My father, Bobby Lee, is a dedicated reader and thinker. He has imparted to me the importance of doing work with a social conscience. I hope this book answers that call. My mother, Darmawaty Yioda, is the smartest and most resilient woman I know. She has supported this project endlessly. My sister Peggy Lee and her children Zara Lee Hassan and Noah Zein Hassan make every trip to the field a happy one.

A NOTE ABOUT NAMES

I refer to individuals by their nickname or first name, and in some cases their only name, as is common practice in Indonesia. I have also adhered to anthropological convention by using pseudonyms for most of the individuals in this book in order to protect their identities. However, in the instances where I rely upon archival sources, media sources, and select activist sources to discuss aspects of state violence and injustice, I refer to activists by their real name. Certain personalities from Generation 98 have achieved acclaim, status, and recognizability in Indonesia as a result of their activism and they too appear by name. My ethnography retains a contemporaneous relationship with work done in the fields of history, sociology, and political science, where the same individuals I discuss have already appeared in print as themselves. I consider the act of naming them a historicizing act of recognition for the efforts of individuals who continue to work in the public domain of Indonesian human rights, cultural politics, and democracy.

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Introduction | PEMUDA FEVER

AN ACTIVIST'S DIARY

Today Jakarta is really terrifying following the "Trisakti Tragedy" that killed 6 university students and made them into Reformasi Heroes.¹ After-effects rippled, riots breaking out from crowds gone amok all over Jakarta. . . . I witnessed a tragedy, moving, saddening, [I was] understanding, angry, anxious, agitated, even afraid! From Sabang to Merauke, the archipelago grieves . . . Jakarta, 14 May 1998.

Jakarta is crippled. . . .

On the evening of the 15th at the Museum of Struggle '45 the Work Forum [Forum Kerja] held a press conference. Arby Sanit and some other intellectuals attended.² I was only there briefly, I didn't know what a Work Forum was. An Assembly of the People's Will has also been founded, and who knows what else with what name? Jakarta, 16 May 1998.

The political temperature is rising. . . . Jakarta, 19 May 1998.

Today launches a new history. At 9:05–9:06 AM this morning Soeharto resigned from his presidency . . . The Reform struggle will never end. The Reform struggle will always come and will always be. Today is a new history. And in the future we will still push back against all challenges. Jakarta, 21 May 1998.³

In May 1998, the events and efforts that unseated the dictator Suharto escalated very quickly. Student-led mass demonstrations across the nation, months of economic instability since the Asian Economic Crisis had hit in 1997, elite desertion, public backlash against state killings of students, and the violence of the May Riots in Jakarta (May 13–14) shook the foundations of the once undefeated New Order military regime (1966–1998). The movement that toppled Suharto on May 21, 1998, was called “Reformasi” (Reformation). This book is concerned with the role and repercussions of the Indonesian student movement that claimed a special responsibility for Reformasi, becoming the *de facto* representative and mediator of Indonesia’s transition to democracy.

Students were at the forefront of Reformasi. Those killed in violent protests became martyrs and Reform heroes (*pahlawan Reformasi*), and those who survived became pioneers (*pelopor*) of Indonesian democracy. Over the course of a decade, I met many youth who had participated in, witnessed, or were inspired by the student movement that took over the streets of Indonesia in 1998, launching the movement that heralded Indonesia’s entry into the “third wave” of democracy. Some identified themselves as *mahasiswa*, university students, while others identified themselves as *pemuda*, youth. They were united under the term *aktivis* (activist), a term made popular by Reformasi.⁴ Before 1998, activists forged underground networks within and without the country, communicating with sympathetic foreign groups, finding compatriots at other university campuses, securing patrons, and becoming advocates for politically sensitive environmental, peasant, labor, and indigenous rights movements that often met with state-sponsored violence. After 1998, activists became adept at being seen and heard, organizing media spectacles and large-scale demonstrations, and making use of the divergent careers of friends, former activists, and sympathizers who now populated civil society and media structures. Activists were democracy’s subjects par excellence. I was fascinated by the cultural creativity and political machinations of the loud and often fragmented *pro-dem* (prodemocracy) groups who were marginal to power yet maintained a disproportionate visibility in national politics. My anthropological interest in street politics and student activism began in earnest in 2002, and in 2003–2005 I carried out an eighteen-month stretch of fieldwork in Jakarta and other major cities, walking and talking with former and present university students and activists. Much of this ethnography centers on the capital city of Jakarta, yet what I describe will resonate in some way or another with other university towns and cities drawn into the street politics and mass movements of Reform.

Subsequent visits to the field each year allowed me to observe the long-term political involvement of Reformasi-era youth amid Indonesia's democratic growths and setbacks.

This book is about the lifeworld of the activist and the political implications of being young in Indonesia. It gestures toward youthful idealism at the same time that it describes the contradictions of “actually existing democracy” (Brenner and Theodore 2002). For sociological reasons of habitus, education, economy, and life-stage, youth have found a place in Indonesian politics and social movements. For historical and cultural reasons, youth pursue a populist claim on the nation, a claim that is strengthened by the “magic of the state”—the talismans, rituals, and elements of political efficacy that repeat and validate their claim (Taussig 1997). Unlike studies that have viewed democracy through the study of electoral politics, political institutions, mass organizations, and demonstrations in public space, thus overly emphasizing the demarcation between public and private, this book traces Indonesia's youthful culture of democracy through its concentrated, spatial, sensuous, ephemeral, and material forms. I present activism as lived experience to show how the intensity of political life bridges public and private domains, and individual and collective memories. The intertwining of history and memory plays a large part in fueling nationally inflected social movements in Indonesia. I name the invocation of youth spirit in the present age “pemuda fever” to describe how historical legacies infuse the present with urgency and legitimacy, naturalizing what often appear to be radical and disruptive thoughts and actions. However, activists are only one part of a broader set of political phenomena. Their creative and adaptive techniques of resistance world the world of the activist with lasting political outcomes, chief among which is the longevity of youth politics in Indonesia. In this book, I explore why and how social movements endure, how political identifications between individuals and the collective are achieved, and how contentious politics tap into rich veins of existing political tradition without veering into tradition for its own sake. As Asef Bayat argues in his study of youth “nonmovements” in the Middle East, revolutions are not planned; rather, they arise out of the alignment of youth resistance and already existing collective sentiment, often in urban centers (Bayat 2013a).

What produces and sustains youth activism? In what ways can our understanding of social movements be deepened by a turn to historical memory? Reformasi-style activism has been remarkably long lasting, despite the emergence of what Jessica Greenberg calls the “politics of disappointment” that often befall revolutionaries after the revolution is over (Greenberg 2014). I considered myself lucky that my research on the memories of 1998 took place