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INTRODUCTION



1965 Today: Living with the Indonesian Massacres

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The year 1965 marked a dramatic turning point in Indonesian history. On 1 October, a shadowy group of left-wing military officers calling itself the 30 September Movement kidnapped and killed several right-wing generals. Surviving generals led by Suharto quickly suppressed the poorly organized group. Reading the movement's actions as a communist party (PKI) coup attempt, they then undertook a violent backlash against the entire political left. Civilian allies mainly belonging to anti-communist religious groups actively collaborated in the violence. Between 1965 and 1968, about half a million Indonesians were killed, perhaps another million detained without trial. The violence destroyed the social base of Sukarno's presidency and paved the way for the military regime of General Suharto, the New Order. Millions of survivors and their relatives lost their civil rights, whereas Indonesia reoriented itself towards the (pro-)western world. The nation was changed forever.

For decades in Indonesia, serious research on and open discussion about the shocking violence and its enduring effects have been suppressed by the state. Without any foundation, all communists in the country were depicted as the collective cruel masterminds behind the purported coup attempt. The anti-communist programme was described in euphemistic terms avoiding any mention of human suffering, such as "crushing communism." It was justified as a victory of the Indonesian people and their self-sacrificing army.¹ Suharto fell in 1998. Yet New Order perspectives on the mass violence remain dominant in contemporary post-authoritarian Indonesia. Democratic governments have brought much change to Indonesian society, but until the present day they have not acknowledged the historical wrongs committed by the Indonesian state with regard to the events of 1965. They have been hesitant to organize any kind of reconciliation, and those responsible for the violence have not been prosecuted. Not even a start has been made in officially naming the victims, much less compensating them, or in identifying and honouring burial sites. Fifty years later, the mass violence of 1965 transcends the perspectives and experiences of those directly involved in it. It has become part of an ongoing socio-political, legal and cultural saga.²

Against that backdrop, this special issue of the *Journal of Genocide Research* explores the many ways in which Indonesians are "living" with the Indonesian massacres.³ It examines the violent events themselves, the way people try to make sense of them today, and their enduring legacies in and beyond Indonesia. It brings together a selection of papers

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presented at the international conference "'1965' Today: Living with the Indonesian Massacres," organized in Amsterdam, 1–2 October 2015. The conference was jointly organized by the KITLV (Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies), the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies and UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles). Marking the fiftieth anniversary of the start of the violence, it brought together scholars from Indonesia and around the world (Australia, the United States, Canada, Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands). Some were specialists in Indonesian studies, others in comparative genocide studies. Our aim was to stimulate research and discussion, and to build networks around "1965" within and beyond Indonesian society.⁴

During the conference, we aimed to develop a better understanding of the way in which representations of the Indonesian massacres continue to be embedded in today's society, politics and culture, and how the 1965 violence connects with other types and moments of mass violence in and beyond Indonesia. We therefore focused on the so-called broad spectrum of mass violence. Alongside acts of imprisonment, torture, sexual crimes and killing, this also includes the defaming and dehumanizing of people and the looting and destruction of their property.⁵ The *longue durée* of the violence in its broad sense is likewise considered important as it includes denial, official history writing and the absence of justice.⁶ This approach allowed us to connect to more general insights into the origins, logic, patterns and consequences of mass violence and genocide in modern world history.⁷ As a result, the conference became truly interdisciplinary. Comparative genocide studies, transitional justice studies, Indonesian studies, social sciences, memory and heritage studies, political and cultural history, anthropology, gender studies and legal studies all contributed to developing new insights into the complex and enduring legacies of the Indonesian massacres.

The conference was organized around three interconnected themes, which manifest themselves in most of the contributions to this special issue as well. First, we looked at competing narratives in historical culture. Official narratives—in textbooks, museums, monuments and official commemorations—generally refrain from mentioning the violence and suffering experienced by the victims in the years after late 1965. But the silence is broken in many other places. "Competing narratives" refers to the ways in which official memory represses the memory of violence, and to how testimonies from victims and others contest this same official memory. Analysing them together can lead to important insights into the connections between the violence itself and its place in official history writing.⁸ Thus, memory formation is shaped to a large extent by denial and competition, stigmatization and marginalization. We were also keen to understand it as the outcome of an exchange among (aspects of) different narratives.⁹ For example, to what extent—and for what reason—do people, whose stories compete with the official narrative, at the same time (re)use certain aspects of the official narrative?¹⁰

The second aim of the conference was to examine the institutional legacies of the violence. Official perspectives on 1965 might be under challenge within civil society, but they continue to permeate state institutions throughout Indonesia today. Crucial in this context is that serving and retired military officers, both in public and evidently in the corridors of power, have since 1998 insisted that there will be no review of their predecessors' handling of the 1965 bloodshed. Yet the institutional situation is not as monolithic as it might seem. A good example is the decision by the Supreme Court in 2011 confirming that virtually all regulations limiting the citizenship rights of former political prisoners (*tapol*) had

lost their validity, while official bans on communist ideology remain as firmly in place as ever.¹¹

Thirdly, we examined actions for transitional justice now taking place in Indonesia. These are being initiated by grassroots activists, by some actors within the *local* state such as mayors, and by transnational activists. In our age of transitional justice, the analysis of the ways in which societies across the world redress legacies of human rights abuses has become highly topical. They range from criminal prosecutions, through truth and reconciliation commissions and amnesty regulations, to reparations programmes.¹² The Indonesian case provides additional insight into legal, socio-cultural and political ramifications of how people live with—or have to live with—the enduring legacies of historical massacres.

At our conference it became clear that the 1965 episode of mass violence has become socially constituted and institutionally internalized. A reversal will not be easy to accomplish. We can trace two leading communities rethinking the meanings of “1965” today. One is an active transnational research community. The rise of genocide studies has been particularly stimulating for this group. A very basic concern is that the level of knowledge about the 1965 mass violence desperately needs improvement. Restrictions on archives and on free research both within and even beyond Indonesia have meant that reliable documentation remains scarce. The second community, partly overlapping with the first, consists of civil society actors who have undertaken a wide range of (activist and legal) initiatives within Indonesia in regard to 1965.¹³ Resisting the prevailing climate of enforced silence and fear,¹⁴ they have created a thriving historical culture. For them, the main challenge is expanding the existing social space in which victims, with their relatives and their experiences, are acknowledged. Clearly that space has grown larger in recent years. Yet it remains uncertain precisely what role new generations of Indonesians will or can play in undertaking new initiatives aiming to give the violent past a solid place in their society’s social and cultural memory.¹⁵

In the following paragraphs, we sketch the state of play in these two communities. We do this by reviewing relevant literature and contemporary discussion, and by introducing the papers presented in this special issue.

Academic Research on 1965 and the Rise of the Genocide Concept

Both the violence against the left and the 30 September Movement episode that preceded it were for a long time surrounded by mystification and speculation. The alleged coup attempt and the massacres initiated soon afterwards by the military have nonetheless from the start been the subject of research, reports, documentation projects and discussion in and beyond academia. In many cases, these initiatives were primarily based outside Indonesia, but supported by informants within the country.¹⁶

The perspectives in these discussions were often marked by the political antagonisms of the Cold War era, in which the western world supported the Suharto regime. In the 1970s, two equally politicized perspectives on the mass violence can be discerned. A right-wing “horizontal” interpretation generally stressed the role of the people themselves, who were outraged and wanted to take revenge against the PKI for its treasonous coup attempt. A leftist-liberal “vertical” version, meanwhile, generally emphasized the manipulation of the masses by the military.¹⁷ A good example of the first perspective is the description of the violence by the famous Dutch (East Indies-born) writer Hella

S. Haasse in her 1970 novel *Krassen op een Rots: notities bij een reis op Java* [Carvings on a Rock: Notes on a Journey to Java]. Here she related her experiences during her first return to Indonesia in 1969. Haasse referred to the killings as an irrational destructiveness erupting out of the Indonesian people. The deportation of detainees to concentration camps on remote Buru Island she described as an important social experiment, deserving of financial support from abroad.¹⁸ This account echoed representations produced repeatedly by the New Order regime itself.¹⁹

At the other end of the spectrum stands the plea by Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman of 1973 for acknowledgement that “huge massacres” had taken place in Indonesia.²⁰ They sarcastically introduced the concept of “benign and constructive bloodbaths.” In 1998, Herman would write of “good genocide.”²¹ His point was that the western media paid little attention to mass violence carried out by “counter-revolutionary regimes” and even regarded the Indonesian massacres as “positive.”²²

Over the last two decades, a wide range of balanced and often detailed studies have increased understanding of the Indonesian massacres.²³ They range from concise overviews in handbooks of genocide studies,²⁴ through studies on certain regions such as Bali,²⁵ on organizations such as the leftist women’s movement Gerwani,²⁶ and on events such as Suharto’s coup d’état against Sukarno.²⁷ Others have focused on New Order history writing,²⁸ and on international relations during the Cold War.²⁹ Gradually these scholars have created a robust corpus of knowledge on the ways in which mass violence unfolded on both a micro and macro level.

A milestone publication was *The Contours of Mass Violence in Indonesia 1965–1968* in 2012, edited by Douglas Kammen and Katharine McGregor.³⁰ It succeeded for the first time in providing an overview of the violence against the political left in Indonesia in different parts of the country. Regional case studies contributed in particular to understanding the roles of the military and civilian groups in stimulating, organizing and perpetrating violence. Building on this approach, Geoffrey Robinson in his contribution to the present special issue, “Down to the Very Roots’: The Indonesian Army’s Role in the Mass Killings of 1965–66,” convincingly shows how temporal and geographical variations in the patterns of the mass killings corresponded closely to the varied political postures and capacities of army commanders in different locales. Mass violence everywhere depended on the army’s substantial logistical assets in those places.

Another contribution to this issue focusing on military institutions is Jess Melvin’s “Mechanics of Mass Murder: A Case for Understanding the Indonesian Killings as Genocide.” She suggests that the killings in the regions can only be understood as part of a centralized and national campaign. She makes this point on the basis of the so-called Indonesian genocide files, which she discovered when writing her doctoral thesis. These military documents reveal that killings in Aceh took place in four distinct phases, in step with orders issued by the military chain of command.

These are important insights, derived by combining micro and macro perspectives. Yet our overall knowledge remains severely circumscribed, even at the most general level of events. Most documentation remains inaccessible. Many new—comparative—questions are still difficult to answer. As a result, probably the most crucial question in this area remains open, namely the precise connection between the roles played by the military and by societal groups before, during and after the massacres.³¹ How and why did civilians participate in the social and political polarization before the killings took place, and in the

killings themselves? How did they help to build the myths surrounding the violence afterwards? Comparisons with anti-communist pogroms elsewhere only add to the puzzlement. Where anti-communist violence in, for example, Spain, El Salvador or Guatemala had followed significant communist violence, this had hardly been the case in Indonesia. Even more puzzlingly, where military violence against leftists in, for example, Argentina or Thailand took place with little popular support, many Indonesians seemed to endorse it.

Comparative genocide studies do promise valuable insights for future research. Whether or not the concept of “genocide” is applicable to the Indonesian massacres has become a topic of discussion among genocide scholars who do not necessarily specialize in Indonesia.³² The political scientist Ernesto Verdeja, for example, concluded in 2012 that the Indonesian massacres fell on the boundary.³³ The historian Uğur Ümit Üngör, by contrast, defines genocide in a generic way as the “process of systematic persecution and annihilation of a group of people by a government.”³⁴ This seems to fit the Indonesian massacres very well. In the epilogue to the present special edition, he and his co-author Nanci Adler have no difficulty using the term genocide throughout. In their contribution “Genocide Finally Enters Public Discourse: The International People’s Tribunal 1965,” Aboeprijadi Santoso and Gerry van Klinken describe and analyse the 1965 International People’s Tribunal (IPT), organized in 2016 in The Hague by a group of researchers, activists and survivors. They mention the surprise of the initiators of the IPT when the panel of judges in its final conclusions went beyond the prosecutors’ charge sheet and qualified the Indonesian massacres as having been directed against “a national group,” that is, as genocide.³⁵ This surprise must have been occasioned by the assumption that the victim group, which at the time was primarily defined politically by the perpetrators, did not fall under the definition of the 1948 Genocide Convention.

The convention defines genocide as specified acts “committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such.” It thus does not cover “political” murder. Several researchers had therefore referred to the Indonesian massacres as an “anti-communist politicide.”³⁶ However, Robert Cribb had already argued convincingly in 2001 that the narrow definition of genocide can be interpreted less strictly, in particular when considering the new academic “constructionist” consensus about ethnic identities that are often shaped by political and economic factors. From the start of the twentieth century, he noted, Indonesia had been a project of a political, rather than an ethnic, character.³⁷ All this is in line with the way in which western-based academia has long contested traditional essentialist explanations of ethnicity. Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* and Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s *Invention of Tradition* played key roles in this constructionist turn.³⁸ But most everyday Indonesian discourse sees it differently. There, ethnicity is fixed and inheritable.³⁹ This could explain why the Suharto regime’s propaganda chose to “racialize” communist political affiliation. It stigmatized children and family of former PKI members on the basis that they shared in a “sin of inheritance” (*dosa turunan*).⁴⁰ Ironically, this convergence of politicized notions of ethnicity in the West and ethnicized ideas of politics in Indonesia might make the IPT judges’ conclusion about genocide more readily comprehensible to all.

That genocide, to quote Aboeprijadi Santoso and Gerry van Klinken, “finally enters public discourse” means in the first place that it functioned as a tool in the IPT context for claiming recognition for victims and shaming perpetrators. It is important to emphasize

that in this special issue we try to think of genocide in a scientific, historical and sociological way, while seeking comparisons within and between different cases of mass violence.⁴¹ Thus, in their contribution here entitled “Indonesia in the Global Context of Genocide and Transitional Justice,” Uğur Ümit Üngör and Nanci Adler point out the problems inherent in a “legalistic gaze.” They stress instead the importance of formulating open questions: “To what extent, how, and why, was the campaign genocidal? Which aspects of the campaign were more genocidal in nature, and which ones were not? And why?” It is precisely this open-ended, inquisitive approach that enables us to scrutinize the way in which Indonesians tried and try to make sense of—or come to terms with—the mass violence of 1965. It allows us to analyse the genocidal violence in past and present Indonesia in its broadest sense as socially constituted and institutionally internalized, and thus contextualized by the values, beliefs, interests and behaviour of all those involved.⁴²

1965 in the Historical Culture of Post-Suharto Indonesia

In 2005, the Jakarta-based essayist and poet Goenawan Mohamad drew the rather poignant conclusion with regard to the massacres of 1965 that “silence produces legitimacy.”⁴³ Such silence is real and has many dimensions. Besides being a social and cultural phenomenon, silence is also an institutional legacy. When President Suharto was forced to resign in May 1998, his armed forces commander General Wiranto publicly pledged to protect him from prosecution. Now retired, Wiranto is still around. He is coordinating minister for politics and security under President Joko Widodo. Along with Wiranto, serving and retired military officers have since 1998 prevented any official legal review of their predecessors’ handling of the 1965 bloodshed. The democratic transition following the fall of Suharto was in reality a negotiated pact between New Order hardliners and democratizers. It left much of the pre-1998 era intact. All presidents since then have been surrounded by retired officers. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was himself a retired general.⁴⁴

Since 1998, civil society groups like Kontras, Elsam and Lebagas Bantuan Hukum Jakarta (LBH) have demanded prosecutions for a wide variety of past abuses, the massacres of 1965 among them.⁴⁵ But military intervention ensured their efforts were to no avail. Only in relation to East Timor in 1999—where international pressure was high—were ad hoc courts actually established. However, all the resulting convictions were later overturned on appeal.⁴⁶

Likewise, the civilian killers in 1965/68—members of anti-communist and religious militias—had the full backing of the military and were never prosecuted for the crimes they committed.⁴⁷ The military continue to cultivate such groups today. Still claiming to represent societal outrage at the “revival of communism,” these groups frequently disrupt or intimidate truth-seeking and reconciliation efforts in relation to 1965.⁴⁸ Occasionally, retired military patrons openly voice threats to unleash violence again. General Syahnakri, for example, said early in 2017 that there would be “fresh bloodshed” if activists insisted on a judicial reconciliation model.⁴⁹ Afterwards nobody censured him in public. It is never clear whether such talk actually represents settled policy within the senior officer corps, or bluster from ageing men frustrated that their brand of anti-communism no longer inspires the middle-class passion it once did.

Military figures hover over the ministries as well. Soon after 1998, there was widespread protest that the school history curriculum taught children “lies,” but all attempts to reform it have so far been sabotaged from within the system.⁵⁰ State archives related to the massacres remain almost entirely sealed. In this light it is not surprising that Jess Melvin, while researching her PhD about military involvement in the genocide in Aceh, had to engage in the tactics of a guerrilla historian to uncover fifty-year-old local military archives.⁵¹

Yet silence within Indonesian society has never been all encompassing. The years following 1998 brought significant signs of change. Indeed, critical discussions of anti-communist violence were beginning to appear even before that date.⁵² In the 2005 edited volume *Beginning to Remember: The Past in the Indonesian Present*, editor Mary S. Zurbuchen struck an optimistic note. Seven years after the fall of Suharto, she observed, Indonesian public intellectuals were beginning to address the way in which their society had formed and manipulated its memories of 1965.⁵³ An important impetus was given by President Abdurrahman Wahid (popularly referred to as Gus Dur). After his election in 1999, he publicly apologized for the killings of alleged communists committed by members of the Islamic mass organization Nahdlatul Ulama (whose leader he had been in the later Suharto years).⁵⁴ In 2004, the Indonesian parliament passed a law on a truth and reconciliation commission. However, in 2006, the Indonesian constitutional court struck it down again. It ruled that the article providing reparation for victims only after they agreed to an amnesty for the perpetrators was unconstitutional. Since then, attempts to pass a revised law have stalled.⁵⁵ In the same era, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local grassroots organizations started collecting interviews, while survivors started publishing memoirs and organizing themselves into officially registered bodies.⁵⁶ In 1999, Ibu Sulami, a woman who survived years of imprisonment without trial, founded the survivors organization YPKP (Yayasan Penelitian Korban Pembunuhan 1965–66/Institute for Research into the Victims of the 1965–66 Killings). It defined its task as collecting data about the killings.⁵⁷ However, anti-communist and religious paramilitary groups occasionally disturbed public gatherings in a violent way, protesting against any attempts to rehabilitate survivors and their families.⁵⁸

The last decade in particular witnessed some important new initiatives (though all were countered by the Indonesian state). In 2012, the Komnas HAM (National Commission on Human Rights), established in 1993, published an 850-page report on the grave violation of human rights during the events of 1965/66.⁵⁹ The report was based on 349 testimonies of witnesses and survivors. However, the attorney general’s office rejected it.⁶⁰ In November 2015, the 1965 International People’s Tribunal (IPT) was organized in The Hague. As stated above, the international panel of judges concluded that the concept of genocide was applicable on the “events of 1965.”⁶¹ In reaction to this initiative, in April 2016 the Indonesian state organized the “National Symposium: Dissecting the 1965 Tragedy, Historical Approach,” which seemed a breakthrough. But survivors and activists who attended said it focused too much on reconciliation, rather than on fact-finding or apology.⁶² Over the same period, the violence of 1965 has become the subject of representation in popular culture and media both inside and outside Indonesia. Novels that question stereotypes are sold throughout Indonesia.⁶³ The collection of the Royal Netherlands Institute of South-east Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) in Leiden gives a good indication of this development. Some years ago, one of us (Gerry van Klinken) counted the number of titles in the catalogue of this institute (the world’s largest collection on Indonesia) referring to

Indonesian communism and its suppression in 1965.⁶⁴ The total ran to 1,939, published anywhere in the world. Of these, 1,370 had been published in Indonesia, and of those, 766 appeared after democratization in 1998. This post-1998 Indonesian collection includes autobiographical books, novels, polemical and scholarly books, but also films, sound recordings, magazine and newspaper articles, and television documentaries. Important examples are the Indonesian *Tempo* magazine edition that in 2012 dedicated a special issue to 1965,⁶⁵ and the Oscar-nominated documentary *The Act of Killing* by Joshua Oppenheimer and his anonymous co-director of that same year, in which former perpetrators re-enact the killings. It is available online and invoked serious public debate both within and outside Indonesia.⁶⁶

These numbers indicate that, alongside those Indonesians who remain convinced that communism is a contemporary threat and who prefer to silence uncomfortable reminders of the past, more and more others are becoming interested in engaging with that past. The audiences may still be small. Books can be found in bookshops but not in classrooms; documentaries can be downloaded from the internet but are rarely screened on TV or in mainstream film theatres. Yet an Indonesian historical culture with regard to the massacres of 1965 undeniably exists.

The many oral history projects that have been initiated in Indonesia since the fall of Suharto are a case in point.⁶⁷ The 2013 book *Truth Will Out: Indonesian Accounts of the 1965 Mass Violence*, edited by Baskara T. Wardaya SJ, shows that survivors and witnesses of mass violence in Central Java feel a strong need to better understand what happened.⁶⁸ All interviewees in the book interpret their memories and give meaning to them. They show how inadequate and suppressive the official master narrative of the 1965 “tragedy” is, and offer convincing counter-narratives. For Baskara, oral history projects are a means to reach a certain level of peaceful co-existence, social interaction and cooperation between the survivors and other groups in society.⁶⁹

Yet this position, which can be described as thin reconciliation, is not uncontested. Others, such as Mery Kolimon who is doing memory work in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, stress the importance of “thick reconciliation.” They want to go beyond social co-existence to “expressing the truth and severing the chain of impunity.”⁷⁰ In order to achieve thick reconciliation in contemporary Indonesia, groups of activists, legal specialists and academics are working successfully together. Annie Pohlman shows this in her contribution to this special issue entitled “Sexual Violence as Torture: Crimes against Humanity during the 1965–66 Killings in Indonesia.” She describes how she assisted the prosecutor on sexual crimes at the International People’s Tribunal for 1965 to prove how widespread sexual violence had been in New Order detention facilities. She made extensive use of oral testimonies of mainly women survivors collected during the last two decades by Indonesian human rights organizations.⁷¹

Neither road to reconciliation is as isolated from its social context as might at first appear. Martijn Eickhoff, Donny Danardono, Tjahjono Rahardjo and Hotmauli Sidabalok in their contribution to this special issue, entitled “The Memory Landscapes of ‘1965’ in Semarang,” conclude that communism might have been “crushed” with success, but the state failed to eradicate the social memory of state-supported anti-communist violence. Particular sites of violence—related to the infrastructure of persecution—play an important role in evoking, shaping and communicating memories of 1965 through different generations. The false legitimacy produced by social silence to which Goenawan Mohamad referred is therefore continually undermined. Not only do the civil society

initiatives in and outside Indonesia that we have described in this introduction do this, but so do the very material traces of the violence left on the landscape itself.

The official narrative, which has been pervasive for so long it looked like a broad consensus, is today the subject of considerable contestation. One example of the fluidity of societal consensus appears in Vanessa Hearman's contribution to this special issue, entitled "Contesting Victimhood in the Indonesian Anti-Communist Violence and Its Implications for Justice for the Victims of the 1968 South Blitar Trisula Operation in East Java." As a result of local initiatives involving grassroots and transnational activists, and even members of the local state, the traditionally narrow definition of "victim" as a (former) communist is being redefined. Hearman recounts the history of a group of villagers in south Blitar (East Java) who were implicated in providing support for leftist fugitives based in that area. These people were not central to the experience of political persecution, yet they suffered as part of the government's and military's anti-communist strategy.

A new consensus also emerged at the local level around the inauguration in 2015 of a small memorial at the Mangkang mass grave near Semarang (Central Java), as described by Eickhoff and his co-authors in this edition. Many different actors—academics, historical activists, survivors and even various state organizations—collaborated to create a new social space where 1965 could be commemorated and discussed, yet, in this case, without mentioning the perpetrators. Such social spaces are also appearing outside Indonesia. Perpetrators certainly were named at the 2015 International People's Tribunal on 1965 held in The Hague, which was widely reported in Indonesia. The Tong-Tong Fair is a large and vibrant festival dedicated to European-Indonesian culture. It has been held annually in The Hague since 1959. In that same year, 2015, a discussion on 1965 was organized that attracted a lot of attention, also in the Indonesian press.⁷²

New, comparative approaches to researching memory are beginning to bear fruit. Digital media are used more and more often as tools in memory work to address new generations in regard to how they relate to a violent past. Collections of recorded stories⁷³ or documentaries that can be screened online⁷⁴ help to foster a broader discussion on the Indonesian massacres. This is not to say such initiatives cannot be critiqued. Some efforts at rehabilitation maintain such a strong focus on state persecution that societal persecution is marginalized.⁷⁵ We should ask, Christian Gerlach said at our 2015 Amsterdam conference, which groups (social, political, age) were represented in these collections of interviews and for what purpose the survivors participated in such projects.⁷⁶

Kate McGregor in her contribution to this special issue, entitled "Exposing Impunity: Memory and Human Rights Activism in Indonesia and Argentina," compares processes of memory formation and human rights activism in Indonesia with those around the "dirty war" in Argentina. She considers the potential for a new societal consensus to emerge on the need to redress the violent past. Addressing impunity and its consequences links concerns about crimes of the past with broader failures in the political and legal reforms of the post-Suharto era.

So what does the 1965 mass violence mean for contemporary Indonesians, living in a post-authoritarian society, with its dynamic economy, its political challenges between democracy and resurgent populism, and its religious tensions? An early post-New Order opinion survey appeared to show that most people still accepted the New Order narrative of gratitude for the elimination of an atheistic ideology.⁷⁷ That narrative continues to be reiterated on all official occasions, in schools, in numerous historical films, in mainstream

media during national commemorations, and during election campaigns. But reified propaganda over time loses its power. People who uncritically repeat a narrative do not necessarily lack feelings for victims. It would surprise us if most still shared the passionate conviction that 1965 was a moment of national treachery, with “kill or be killed” as the only option.⁷⁸ Instead, 1965 is now widely seen as a “tragedy” we must learn to accept.⁷⁹ Rather than confronting deep-seated outrage about the dangers of resurgent communism, activists face the more quotidian challenge of convincing people why they should bother. Perhaps new generations of Indonesians have little or no knowledge of the past because they simply see no reason why they should.⁸⁰ Conservatives close to the government, meanwhile, worry that Indonesians will lose faith in the state if the official narrative, in which it was exclusively “the others” who were guilty of wrongdoing, is discredited.⁸¹ What if telling the truth about the killings also requires telling the truth about lies that were told for two generations?⁸²

Concluding Remarks

Is it possible that one day the memory of the 1965 mass violence will be totally suppressed? Will Indonesia follow the Turkish scenario, where denial of the Armenian genocide remains unassailable even after a century? Official historical culture in Indonesia has indeed hardly changed since the end of the New Order. There are practically no monuments or rituals that confront ordinary citizens with the human cost of the crushing of communism. Efforts to suppress demands for justice continue actively, both as a matter of public policy and among shadowy civilian groups enjoying military protection. For that to change, Indonesians will have to do much more than simply remember 1965. They will have to confront the singular privilege that the military as an institution continues to enjoy at the highest levels of national politics. They will also have to come to grips with the bitter truth that some other social groups did and continue to benefit from the violence and the false narratives perpetrated about it.

Yet even in that subordinate position, memories of the genocidal violence of 1965 have become part of an ongoing socio-political, legal and cultural interaction. The steady trickle of books, films, art shows, seminars and small-scale reconciliation initiatives shows that there is an increasing audience for whom engagement with this dark episode is serious business. They do not only come from the ranks of victims. Some university history courses, once shunned as a choice for losers, are today oversubscribed with eager young students curious about officially forbidden pasts. Today’s middle-class intelligentsia no longer fears communism with the instinctual intensity that haunted their parents and grandparents. They approach the world with the carefree attitude of a “post-Indonesian generation.”⁸³ Communal acts of reconciliation and commemoration, often in defiance of threats, are taking place in many locations and are giving human faces to a group of victims long demonized as national traitors. Thus regarded, Indonesia might be more likely to follow the Serbian scenario, where nationalist denial of atrocities during the Yugoslav Wars has weakened in the face of pro-European cosmopolitanism.

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Notes

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- (October–December 2015), available at: <http://www.insideindonesia.org/1965-today-living-with-the-indonesian-massacres-3> (accessed May 10, 2017).
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 10. Compare with Soe Tjen Marching, *The End of Silence: Accounts of the 1965 Genocide in Indonesia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 18.
 11. Adriaan Bedner, “Citizenship Restored,” *Inside Indonesia*, no. 122 (October–December 2015), <http://www.insideindonesia.org/1965-today-living-with-the-indonesian-massacres-3> (accessed May 10, 2017).
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