

HOW THE ANTI-COMMUNIST NARRATIVE MARGINALIZED THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN INDONESIA

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This paper traces how the women's movement was marginalized after the 1965 communist purge in Indonesia. Under the leadership of General Suharto, the military used a sexual campaign to destroy Gerwani (Indonesian Women's Movement) and other women's movements in Indonesia. Gerwani was one of the largest communist women's organizations in Indonesia. The Indonesian Army tried to spread libel information through the media about Gerwani conducting sexual activities during the murders of six army generals. This false information continues to reproduce from generation to generation through the media, film, and school curriculums in Indonesia. Such propaganda gives people the impression that all Gerwani members were immoral. The frightening depiction of Gerwani is still stuck in people's minds.

Keywords: Women Movement, Indonesia Women Movement, Indonesia Genocide, Indonesia mass killings, Indonesian communist purge.

After more than 50 years, the 1965 mass killing event in Indonesia remains highly disputed in Indonesian society. The attempted coup on September 30, 1965 led to the death of seven senior army officers and a lieutenant. The right-wing Indonesian Army blamed the PKI (Indonesia Communist Party) for the murders. Suharto, who was the major general of Indonesian army, used strong political language by calling the attempted coup "Gestapu" (Gerakan September 30 or September 30 Movement) to associate it with the Gestapo – Nazi Germany's political police force. The propaganda from the right-wing Indonesian military led members of the Indonesian communist party members to engage in mass killings, stirring civil unrest in Indonesia. Suharto's first two broadcasts reaffirmed the army's constant loyalty to "Bung Karno the Great Leader," and also blamed the deaths of the six generals on PKI youth and women, plus "elements of the Air Force" based on no evidence other than the site of the well where the corpses were found (Scott, 1985). Suharto not only targeted PKI members, but also eliminated all Sukarno sympathizers, Gerwani members, ethnic Chinese, and alleged leftists. As a result, 500 000 to 1 million people were killed in Indonesia. The number of political prisoners reached over 20,000 people, with only 800 of them undergoing trial.

This coup resulted not only in the mass killings and Sukarno's overthrow but also the marginalization of the women's movement. The biggest and the most radical Indonesian women's organization

affiliated with the PKI -the Gerwani - became one of the main targets of the anti-Communist campaign (Farid, 2007). Saskia E Wieringa states that the Indonesian army under Soeharto used a sexual slander campaign to destroy the women's movement that was affiliated with communism (Wieringa, 2010). Gerwani's movement to stand up for women empowerment and equal rights was also inspired by Raden Adjeng Kartini's movement.

Raden Adjeng Kartini (1879-1904) is one of the Indonesian activists who fought for women emancipation in the pre-independence era. In that era, Javanese girls did not have the opportunity to get education like Dutch girls. Because of that she opened the first primary school for Javanese girls. Following Kartini's idea, the First Women's Congress (1928) included education for girls and efforts to protect women in marriage as their program (Sondarika, 2017).

In the 1950s, women organizations participated in democratic politics. The biggest women's organization in Indonesia, Gerwani (founded on 4 June 1950 by S.K. Trimurti [1] and several women activists who fought in the Dutch Military Aggression II), aimed to achieve a society that is free from slavery and oppression, between among different people, groups, and nations. In 1955, Gerwani focused on the rape issue and the struggle for a more democratic marriage law. They also focused on the first Indonesian election to be held that year. Gerwani supported the PKI because they had the same idea of fighting for women's rights and women's emancipation. There were 23,480 Gerwani members active in campaigning. As a result, PKI gained a lot of female voters and managed to rank fourth in the election with 16.4 percent of the vote. Six Gerwani members were elected to the parliament representing the PKI (Lestariningsih, 2011).

After Sukarno established Demokrasi Terpimpin (Guided Democracy) as Indonesian political system on 5 July 1959, Gerwani showed even more support for Sukarno. Gerwani's Fourth Congress in December 1961 resolution supported the struggle for West Irian's liberation and the implementation of land divisions. At the fifth congress in 1964, Gerwani decided to join PKI. The decision caused internal conflict within Gerwani. This change led to the founder of Gerwani, Trimurti, leaving the movement in 1965.

Sexual Slander

To destroy the women's movement that was affiliated with communism, the army under Suharto used a sexual slander campaign. Through the army-controlled media, the army spread slanderous information about Gerwani. Using various newspapers published between October 1, 1965, and early 1966, information was spread that the communist women were involved in the Lubang Buaya (Crocodile Pit) event. They were accused of torturing seven senior army officers in Lubang Buaya [2], including six generals. The accusations were that they stabbed the army officers with knives and cut off their genitals. They were also accused of doing a seductive naked dance called Tarian Bunga Harum as a ritual. This propaganda has passed from generation to generation during Suharto's tenure until 1998.

In Bali Island, the mass massacre occurred later in Java. The army spread the rumor that Gerwani members and women who were affiliated with the communist party were instructed to prostitute themselves to the army to get the army's weapons (Wieringa, 439-440). They were also said to castrate and kill the soldiers who were persuaded. All rumors point out that communist women are

cruel and anti-religious. The propaganda describes the communist women as immoral, indulging their sexual desires in deprived and terrible ways, and committing unspeakable cruel acts (Wieringa, 451). "They have left our personality because they have damaged the personality of Indonesian women. Women as mothers have a special role in educating children. Our young generation must be saved so that they do not fall into the moral decay of the counterrevolutionaries," Suharto said as quoted from Berita Yudha, Nov 9, 1965 (Yuliawati, et. al, 2016). For Suharto, communism causes women to become disloyal wives bad good mothers, which go against Indonesia's state ideology "Pancasila" and religious values. They were even active in politics and immorality, indulged their sexual desires in deprived and terrible ways, and committed unspeakable cruel acts.

In Wireinga's interviews with some victims and witnesses, several women from Pemuda Rakyat and Gerwani were at Lubang Buaya. However, Gerwani as an organization was not involved in the coup, even though this organization was associated with the PKI at that time. They came to the site for the Dwikora training program. Siti Arifah, one of the Dwikora training program [3] volunteers who was a member of Pemuda Rakyat, became a witness when people's bodies were put into the pit.

"I saw the soldiers kill some generals; then I ran home. I was arrested at nine in the morning and imprisoned for two weeks. I was interrogated and whipped. They forced us to be naked, dance in front of them, take pictures and let me free. Then I was arrested again, then free again. I was arrested five times before they finally put me in prison. It happened in November 1965. I was released in December 1982." said Siti (Wieringa, 2010).

Apart from spreading fake news, the army also made several false witnesses. They arrested several prostitutes in the Lubang Buaya area, tortured them to admit to being Gerwani, and made false statements to the public and on trial about the incident. The propaganda has shaped people's minds about Gerwani. Many people believe that Gerwani was a women's organization that used torture while performing sexual rituals. People nicknamed Gerwani "Kuntilanak di siang bolong" or Kuntilanak in the Middle of the Day. Kuntilanak is one of the female ghosts in Indonesia. Society nicknamed Gerwani as Kuntilanak to associate to make the movement seem terrible, sadistic, cruel, wild, and thirsty for sex, like a haunting ghost. Hence, they deserve to be exterminated and killed.

To perpetuate Suharto's version of the Crocodile Pit event, the sexual slander, and at the same time to celebrate his heroism, the New Order government built the Pancasila Sakti (Sacred Pancasila) monument. The monument has statues of the seven military high rank who died in that incident. At the base of the statues, there are inscriptions describing how brutal the murders were. The women were portrayed dancing naked, while the men of the Indonesia Communist Party killed the generals and dumped their bodies in pits. Every year on October 1st, Indonesians commemorate the event through a ceremony in front of the statues of the seven revolutionary heroes. The monument became a sacred place for all the most important rituals of the Suharto regime. Every five years Suharto and his officials hold a ceremony in front of the monument to declare their undying pledge of allegiance to Indonesian state philosophy, Pancasila (Roosa: 7-8).

The New Order government also produced a four-hour length film about the kidnapping and murder of seven army officers in Jakarta. First aired in 1984, this film must be watched by school students and screened on television stations every September 30 during the years of the Suharto regime. In the film, women are only shown slashing the general's face and dancing "Tarian Bunga Harum". In

that scene, they were dancing when the generals were executed. They also sang “Genjer-Genjer”, a song often associated with the PKI.

Since then, women’s role related to the nation has changed. Susan Blackburn in *Women and the State in Modern Indonesia* points out that the New Order led by military men makes a distinction between men’s and women’s roles. Women as mothers are valued as a source of stability in society in the smallest and basic unit of the social order, the family (Blackburn, 2004). Julia Suryakusuma in *State Ibuism* linked women’s domestication under the Indonesian military state bureaucracy with the process of *priyayization* (bourgeois). Julia sees the domestication of women as an effort to tame, segregate and depoliticize women. Julia argues that the New Order government stems and manipulates women’s power (socially, politically, and economically) to define women as wives. The state creates an organization such as Dharma Wanita and PKK (Pemberdayaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga) or Family Welfare Empowerment that must be followed by wives whose positions imitate the husband’s hierarchy. This is a picture of women being defined to serve their husbands, families, and countries (Jayakusuma, 2011).

The mass violence of 1965-66 diminished women’s will to resist patriarchal ideologies. Politically active women will be considered communists. The frightening depiction of communist women has stuck in people’s minds to this day. The New Order regime has shaped new norms in society, women were only seen as the second strata of society who are only responsible for educating children and households.

Since the mass killing happened, many Indonesians try to reveal the truth, but strict censorship imposed by the New Order government makes Indonesian people unable to talk about the 1965 event. But, after Soeharto fell from his position as President in 1998, the alternative stories about the 1965-66 bloodbath began to flourish. Many young generations from historians, writers, to filmmakers made a different version of the one that was told by the Suharto regime. They are continuing to speak out about impunity and denial of the incident.

These alternative stories are slowly gaining acceptance from Indonesian society. Through Indonesian acceptance of the narration from the victims’ side, it is possible reconciliation could happen between the victims and society. Reconciliation could connote forgiveness and forgetting, but this is a complicated process because each party has a different view of reconciliation. Time and context become important dimensions of the reconciliation debate (Villa-Vicencio, 2006). For the 1965 victims, reconciliation is about state recognition and apology. But for the state, reconciliation is the attempt to resolve past violations, but they refuse to apologize to the victims. The Indonesian government has made efforts to resolve the conflict by holding the 1965 Symposium in 2016 in Jakarta, but it ended up with many rejections from the community and civic organizations and until now has not been achieved.

Conclusion

To remove Sukarno’s influence, Suharto tried to eliminate all forces, including the power of women. Gerwani, the largest women’s organization, was destroyed by the right-wing army. Gerwani was considered loyal to Sukarno and had a large mass and power base. Sexual slander has been pinned on Gerwani through various platforms for 32 years.

Women who are active in politics will be seen in the same light as Gerwani. As a result, there was a decline in the role of women during the New Order era. Women were only seen as the second strata of society who were only responsible for educating children and households.

But after 1998, younger generations and also victims from the 1965 event started to speak again about what happened in the incident. These alternative stories are possible to open up every day reconciliation between Indonesian society and the victims, and also rip away the stigma that is attached to the victims .

Notes

1. Soerastrri Karma Trimurti was an Indonesian writer, activist, and journalist who took a role against colonialism. She also became the first Labor Minister under Prime Minister Amir Sjarifuddin.
2. Lubang Buaya (Crocodile Pit) is a location in the Jakarta suburb near the Halim Perdanakusumah Air Force Base. This place was also the scene of the assassination of seven Indonesian army officers during the 1st of October coup attempt.
3. Dwikora (Two Commands of People) was an Indonesia armed confrontation against Malaysia from 1963-1966. Sukarno opposed the Federation of Malaya's intention to merge Brunei, Sabah and Sarawak because he saw them as puppets of the British. This command contained two things: 1. Intensify the resilience of the Indonesian revolution and help the revolutionary struggle of the people of Malaya, Singapore, Sabah, Serawak, and Brunei.

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