

**RECALLING AND RE-PRESENTING THE 1965/1966 ANTI-COMMUNIST VIOLENCE
IN INDONESIA**

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The ongoing trauma

In terms of ‘Terror, Political Violence and Cultural Trauma in Asia’, the topic of the conference panel where this paper was given,¹ the killings and imprisonments in 1965-66 of many hundreds of thousands of Indonesian people for membership of or association with the communist movement,² present an extreme and infamous example. The horror of the killings, for both victims and their families, and communities as a whole, was intensified by the fact that in most cases the violence was perpetrated by fellow citizens, not state forces. Moreover the ongoing, many-sided trauma - the shock of the massacres, the sufferings of political prisoners and the economic deprivation and social isolation experienced by their relatives – had to be endured in silence. Victims and their families, branded arch-enemies of the state by the new regime, had no

¹ The attached paper was presented at the 16th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia in Wollongong 26-29 June 2006. It has been peer-reviewed and appears on the Conference Proceedings website by permission of the author who retains copyright. The paper may be downloaded for fair use under the Copyright Act (1954), its later amendments and other relevant legislation.

² The exact number of those killed and imprisoned is notoriously difficult to calculate. Robert Cribb reviews the vastly differing estimates from different sources of the number of deaths, including official Indonesian military figures of 500,000. (Cribb 1990: 9-14) While acknowledging such difficulties of calculation Ariel Heryanto states “ It is safe to speculate that we are talking about the plight of several million people directly or less indirectly affected by the anti-Communist purge, pogrom and continued degradation”. (Heryanto 2006: 17-18).

rights to speak; in expressing sympathy with them one ran the risk of being labelled similarly. For the Suharto regime not only justified its rise to power in terms of suppression of the Communist movement, but deliberately maintained a sense of danger, and fuelled fears of the recurrence of the events of 1965-66, as a mechanism of social control. The term “Communist”, as Ariel Heryanto explains, became a “floating signifier” which could become attached to anyone or anything, undermining the legitimacy of their existence. (Heryanto 2006) Citizens set up hyper-obedient practices, reproducing the fear of Communist threat and reflecting it back to state authorities. In this sense the trauma affected the entire society, and lasted for 30 years, right throughout the life of the New Order regime.

With the Suharto’s resignation in 1998 and the dismantling of his regime, the events of 1965-66 and their aftermath could finally be spoken of once more. Yet even then the space opened up for discussion and restoration was limited and partial. There has been no official investigation of the massacres, no public accounting or apology. A proposal to parliament by then President Abdurrachman Wahid in 2001 to rescind the ban on the Communist Party was greeted with such fierce opposition from his own political party and others that it was quickly dropped. When a group of former political detainees and supporters dug up the remains of 1965 victims from a mass grave in Temanggung and prepared to rebury them, their plans were thwarted by violent attacks by local residents, rejecting the presence of Communist bones in their cemetery. (Heryanto 2006: 1-2) The legacy of New Order ideological branding and societal terror of Communism remains strong.

Contesting hegemony, recovering history

Nevertheless, a number of non-government organisations have taken up the tasks of investigation, documentation and advocacy on behalf of the 1965 victims and their families. For some this is part of a broader concern with the abuse of human rights by the New Order regime; other groups have formed specifically for this purpose. YPKP (*Yayasan Penelitian Korban Pembunuhan 1965-66* – Institute for the Investigation of the Victims of the Killings of 1965-1966), the group involved in exhuming graves mentioned above, focuses on documenting and investigation cases of violence. Others have a variety of aims, including prosecution of the perpetrators and reparation to victims, although all recognise the difficulty of legal action, given the fact that groups implicated in the violence continue to hold powerful state positions.

Syarikat (*Masyarakat Santri untuk Advokasi Rakyat* – Community of Muslims Advocating for the People) was founded among youthful human rights activists from the Nahdatul Ulama Muslim organisation. They wished to make reparation in some way for the reputedly widespread involvement of NU youth in the 1965 anti-Communist violence by working for reconciliation between victims and perpetrators. Their methods include research on the causes and consequences of the conflict in particular areas, mediation between the victims and community groups, and organisation of discussions on ways to overcome differences and implement cooperation. Such activities have as their aim “to re-evaluate historical constructions of the tragedy of 1965 and its ensuing conflicts, to eliminate the stigmatisation of followers of the PKI and their descendants, and to build bridges between communities who used to exclude one another” (Wajidi 2004 p.81). Based in Yogya, Syarikat has branches in 18 other cities in Java..

Another group in Yogyakarta working towards similar goals is the *Pusat Sejarah dan Etika Politik (PUSDEP)*, the Centre for History and Political Ethics at the Catholic Sanata Dharma University in Yogyakarta. PUSDEP focuses attention on instances of political violence, the politics of their historical construction and efforts at reconciliation. It aims ‘to re-investigate and represent history and social processes from more comprehensive, integrative perspectives.’ (Bulletin PUSDEP April 2006 p.19) While PUSDEP holds frequent academic seminars and book discussions, and Syarikat’s major work is more community-based, both organisations have an interest in cultural forms – in films, performances and art and photographic exhibitions. On various occasions they have worked together to organise and promote such activities.

The roles of cultural forms.

Various factors motivate this emphasis. Cultural media allow the transmission to a wider public, beyond the circles of victims and those involved in reconciliation activities, of a picture of what really happened in 1965 and its impact on individual lives. The medium of film played a powerful role in the New Order era in instilling the regime’s version of this history. The infamous film *Pengkhianatan G30S /PKI* “The Treachery of the 30th September Movement/PKI”, depicting in grisly detail the kidnapping, torture and killing of a group of army generals by vicious communists in the September 30th attempted coup, was shown constantly to groups of school children, and broadcast yearly on television. Performances, exhibitions and locally-made films provide a medium, albeit far more limited in reach, to refute this still powerfully influential propaganda in telling a different story.

Live performances, moreover, play a special role in Javanese society in bringing communities together in shared witness and celebration of significant events. A lavish shadow play marking a wedding in a prominent family, performed by a famous puppeteer before crowds of delighted neighbours; a community concert for Independence day with contributions from each social group - toddlers dancing, housewives singing, teenagers rapping - represent variations on this principle. In this context, bringing social groups together for a cultural performance re-telling contested history and promoting reconciliation has deep resonance. Where different groups have the chance to perform their identity within a single, unified event the effect is particularly powerful. An impressive example, described by Farid Wajidi quoting an account by Asvi Adam (Wajidi 2004: 83-84) occurred in South Blitar, formerly a site of strong communist activity, NU youth involvement in killings, and heavy New Order indoctrination, including the building of the Trisula monument commemorating the extinction of the PKI. In 2002 a big ceremonial event was held at the Trisula monument, ostensibly to commemorate the migration of the prophet Muhamad from Mecca to Medina. Former PKI and NU communities came together, each presenting its own art form - NU villagers staging *kentrung*; *campursari*³ for the ex PKI group. Discussions preceding the event had revealed the role of the military in promoting conflict between the groups. Now they performed together before the monument created by the military, asserting a new-found independence of its narrative of terror.

Another reason for the prominence of cultural activities in the recovery of the history of 1965 in Yogya is the fact that artists and performers were strongly represented among the victims. Many actors, writers and visual artists before 1965 were associated with the communist-linked cultural organisation LEKRA, and Yogya was the base of a famous leftist troupe Krido Mardi, performing *ketoprak*, Javanese language historical melodrama. After Suharto's departure, several writers and visual artists became active again. Of the legendary pre-1965 actors, many had passed away and others were too old to perform. However in Yogya several children of PKI victims are prominent actor/directors, and one, Bondan Nusantara, has taken lead in recuperative activities.

It was my own interest in cultural activities in Yogyakarta, and contacts with practitioners, which drew my attention to the work of Syarikat and PUSDEP, and the emergence into public representation of the theme of the 1965-1966 anti-Communist violence.⁴ I heard of a performance of *ketoprak*

³ *Kentrung* is a narrative by a story teller, accompanying himself with drum music; *campursari* is a mixture of traditional Javanese gamelan with Western musical instruments.

⁴ I express great gratitude to Bondan Nusantara and Yustinus Tri Subagyo, for providing much information, and most of the materials on which this paper is based

at a gathering of women political prisoners in July 2005, then of a much grander, spectacular *ketoprak* show playing out the political events of September 1965, held to celebrate the founding of the region of Bantul and sponsored by the bupati, the regional head. Later I gained access to documentation of other performances, art exhibitions and films, dealing in various ways with the events of 1965-66 and their aftermath. In this paper I look at various examples of films and performances, analysing the way the 1965 theme is represented in each, and how differences of form and style might connect with particular aims and factors of social context. The review is partial and impressionistic, drawing only on a few texts to hand, making no pretence to a comprehensive study. But of these few examples I try to suggest how such cultural expression addresses the experiences of victims of the violence, combats stereotypical assumptions about the past and attempts to indicate new directions for the future.

Documentary and fictional films

Syarikat has produced two films on the 1965 events and the victims, the documentary *Kado untuk Ibu* “Present for Mother” and a very brief feature film *Jejak Darah* “Trail of Blood”. *Kado untuk Ibu* focuses on the prison at Plantungan in the Ungaran highland area near Semarang where women accused of PKI involvement were held. It opens with accounts by two women of the activities of a women’s organisation, presumably Gerwani, and the ideals they were striving for. One describes her concern that, amidst all the progressive change brought about by the achievement of Independence for Indonesia, conditions for women were still so bad she felt challenged, called. “While women were still suffering like that how could I not get involved?” Then a voiceover recounts how the high hopes of women such as these were overturned by the events of September 1965. Stills of reports from newspapers of the time, and shots of sections of the commemorative Pancasila monument erected by the military, illustrate an account of vilification of Gerwani as politically subversive and wantonly immoral. Several former prisoners recount the events of their capture, the confusion and hardship of those days, sessions of interrogation, abuse and torture and the privations of prison life. The history of the Plantungan prison is recounted – from military hospital in the late 1800s to leper colony in 1929, a youth detention centre in the 1950s and finally an internment camp for women in 1971. The camera returns to the woman who spoke earlier of her ideals. She now recalls, in restrained tones belied by the emotional stress revealed in her face and body language, experiences of repeated sexual violation justified as appropriate treatment for women whose political deviance equated them with prostitutes. On one occasion she had been forced to perform oral sex on a group of

interrogators, sitting in line, her head forced down on to their genitals. “ They were the people exalted by the New Order” she remarks bitterly. “They said they were upholders of the law, they said they were religious people”. But can we believe that, she asks, after behaviour like this? The film ends with this powerful indictment of the sexual abuse of women political prisoners (other accounts indicate the practice was indeed widespread, and often brutal⁵) exposing the hypocrisy of the New Order military’s portrayal of themselves as saviours of the nation from the threatened moral disorder of communism. The filmic approach and technology of the film is simple and unsophisticated, its scope limited⁶, while the message comes through strongly. Its key aim has been to provide a factual account of the events of 1965 and their impact on women imprisoned as Communists, which counters and refutes hegemonic representations of this topic, and to give long-silenced victims a chance to speak.

Jejak Darah is a more ambitious work, incorporating fragments of music and sung poetry, filmic effects such as flashbacks, and subtitles in English, in representing the fictional experience of a young *ketoprak* performer, seized from his home as a suspected Communist sympathiser and brutally dragged away for “interrogation”. The young man is seen writing a letter to his sweetheart, the daughter of a village *ketoprak* director, glancing fondly at her framed photo. He had been actor in this troupe before coming to the city to join a larger troupe and perfect his skills. The words of the letter, conveyed in voiceover by the young man in Javanese and Indonesian, reveal that the events of the 1965 coup have taken place; generals have been killed and the Communists have been blamed. At the local level killings have occurred and many people have fled. He ponders whether the Communists were really at fault. He also describes the aim of his performance, developed under the guidance of the director of the city *ketoprak* troupe, Pak Gito, that of not merely distracting people from their hunger but firing them up to do something about it. Is this the same as that of the PKI? He doesn’t know. A commotion is heard outside the house; a friend rushes in, reporting that Pak Gito has been seized, along with others, and “they” are coming. A second friend appears, urging the young man to flee. But insisting he knows nothing, has done nothing wrong, he stays. As a group of men, some villagers, some in

⁵ Annie Pohlgrén, who has researched the experiences of former Gerwani political prisoners for her PhD thesis, reports that accounts of sexual violence are very common and some say that every Gerwani prisoner was raped. Often the news that a former fellow-prisoner has borne a child is greeted with surprise, given the severity of injuries inflicted on the woman’s reproductive system during incarceration. (Annie Pohlgrén, personal communication.)

⁶ One limitation is the number of stories told - only four women appear on screen. While this is not necessarily a problem in filmic terms, it may indicate some selectivity on the part of the interviewees. One

army uniform, one wearing a Muslim fez marking his membership of an Islamic group, burst into the house, shout questions and assault the young man, his voiceover is heard insisting that he knows nothing, has no connections with Communism and is not a member of the party. While he groans under their blows and kicks the voiceover state “God will decide what is true.” Pools of blood left on the floor as his body is dragged away, and the imprint in blood of an army boot, constitute the *jejak darah* the trail or footprint of blood (the word *jejak* can have both meanings) of the title.

With its consciously artistic effects and English subtitles *Jejak Darah* is clearly intended for showing to varied audiences, at events such as national and even international festivals. It works on an imaginative, emotional level, inviting viewers to think about the young man’s stated ideals, and their possible similarity to Communist thought, to engage with the question as to whether he (and Communism?) has done anything wrong. The violence with which he is treated by his captors, using graphic slow motion shots, and the trail of blood left behind evoke strong parallels with the scenes depicting the kidnapping of the generals by the communists in the film *Pengkhianatan G30S /PKI*. Where *Kado untuk Ibu* tells a factual story through the voices of actual victims, *Jejak Darah* writes back to the ideological constructs of New Order media.

Stage performances

Temu Rindu, Menggugat Senyap “Come together in longing, challenge loneliness”

These words, emblazoned on a cloth banner, greeted participants arriving at an historic event held in Yogya in July 2005, a reunion of women victims of the 1965/66 violence. Two elderly former women prisoners, who gained comfort and support from one another’s company, developed the idea of holding the gathering to create a sense of solidarity and strength among fellow women survivors. Several NGOs including Syarikat and PUSDEP provided logistical assistance, and on the day over 500 women from cities and towns throughout Central Java came together. PUSDEP researcher Yustinus Tri Subagyo, who was present at the event, describes emotional encounters between women who had not seen each other since their release from prison 20-25 years earlier, who didn’t know their friends were still alive, who had been too fearful to socialise during New Order times. They talked and ate together, spoke publicly about their experiences, and sat on the floor around a “stage” area where those who wished came forward to read a poem, dance or sing. The peak of the program was a short ketoprak performance. Its presentation, analysed below,

of the interviewees is reported as saying that the accounts of a number of the women interviewed were unsuitable for inclusion as they had cohabited with guards. (Adrian Vickers, personal communication).

illustrates tellingly the capacity of performances in such contexts to celebrate and strengthen the shared sense of identity of actors and audience members. (Tri Subagy 2005: 3-6)

The show was directed by Kadariyah, the legendary prima donna of the Communist-linked ketoprak group Krido Mardi, who had directed numerous all-female ketoprak plays in prison, with other former women prisoners as actors. Kadariyah also played the main role, that of a woman whose young daughter has been made pregnant by a rich, elderly, polygamous official. As Kadariyah berated and ridiculed the official for his immoral, self-indulgent, exploitative behaviour, audience members responded with delighted laughter. Tri Subagy reports that the woman sitting to him confirmed the reality of this picture of men of the aristocratic *priyayi* class exerting their power over social inferiors. A king in his own household, he could indulge himself sexually outside the home without sanction. Then she went on to speak of her experiences when she was arrested 30 years ago for membership of Gerwani: she had been fondled and groped by interrogators, and forced to appear naked with other detainees. This woman's reaction suggests that for audience members generally the performance may have provided shared validation of their own experiences of sexual violation years ago, even a degree of cathartic release. The show also displayed the acting abilities of group members, among other skills they are still able to contribute to society. Directed very much to its specific audience and context, it seems to have succeeded admirably as a celebration of shared identity.

Bang-bang Sumirat

In contrast to this modest, internally-focussed performance, a few weeks later, on 11 August 2005, a grand theatrical spectacle was staged, *Bang-bang Sumirat* "The Red Light of Dawn" playing out in allegorical form the events of the so-called communist coup of September 1965 and its aftermath. Celebrating the anniversary of the founding of the regency of Bantul, south of Yogyakarta, it was performed on Bantul town square before about 1000 people, and later broadcast on Yogya state television. Ketoprak script writer and director Bondan Nusantara, son of Kadariyah, had been invited by the regent, *bupati*, of Bantul to organise the show, which involved 300 local actors, dancers and musicians. The play is set in the fictional kingdom of Bantala Warih⁷, where conditions parallel to those experienced by Indonesia in 1965.

⁷ The term Banatala Warih in old Javanese translates into Indonesian as *tanah air*, literally "water and earth" the term used for the Indonesian native land or homeland. One wonders if a similarity in sound with Bantul, the local regency whose anniversary the performance was celebrating, also influenced the choice of name.

The performance commences with loud, dramatic gamelan music and clouds of pink smoke as soldiers in knee-length pants, with bare torsos, move rhythmically across the stage in formation, stopping occasionally to practice fighting manoeuvres. Two young women leaders inform the troops they are soon to receive important instructions: then their king, the monarch of Malaya Bumi (Malaysia) enters with his ally Prabu Singa-singa (the CIA), The latter speaks of the danger represented to their country and others by Bantala Warih, and enlists their help staging an attack. Action shifts to the court of Bantala Warih; assembled courtiers bow in homage as their king, Prabu Tuk Gunung (President Sukarno) enters the stage. Played by veteran actor Widayat, a former member of the youth wing of Sukarno's nationalist party, the monarch, resplendent in glittering robes, gold necklace and jewelled epaulets, is accompanied by two beautiful consorts and a troop of young female guards. Officials and military leaders, including foreign minister Subandrio, head of the PKI Aidit and generals Nasution and Yani, debate how to deal with the CIA, and the king reaffirms his policy of independence from any outside forces. Then a messenger arrives with news of the attack from Malaysia and the king instructs the military leaders to fight back. A lengthy scene of battle preparation follows: male troops drill and practice combat in pairs, female cavalry dance with hobby horses and a troop of women archers parades with miniature bows. After a brief opening skirmish, the women troops of Malaya Bumi and Bantala Warih confront one another, exchanging challenges. A Bantala Warih female leader asserts dramatically, arms outstretched "This is my country, the land of my birth. Right or wrong I am prepared to die for it!" then the battle begins in earnest. First male and female pairs fight one another, then the battle becomes a general struggle, all against all.

Bantala Warih may have won the battle against Malaya Bumi⁸ but there are other problems. A dispute within the military has resulted in the deaths of several top generals. Prabu Tuk Gunung/Sukarno reprimands Subandrio and other leaders for allowing this to happen, and is advised to seek safety. A high-ranking military officer Haryo Tratatap (Suharto) announces that there has been a coup and Karno Tanding (Aidit) is to blame. Different groups of soldiers fight one another. Haryo Tratatap (Suharto) appears on high at the back of the stage as crowds of ordinary people mill about in confusion watched by soldiers. He gives an order; ordinary people start attacking one another and soldiers drape a huge red cloth over them, creating a seething red mass. When the melee quietens bodies lay stewn across the stage. A madman appears, singing and dancing. He announces that the world is in total disarray. "No-one remembers anything. Not the

⁸ In the videorecording of the performance the outcome is somewhat unclear

good, not the bad....not their relatives or their families.”⁹ Then he points to the Suharto figure, now facing the back of the stage. “Those who portrayed themselves as heroes (literally “warrior knights”) have transformed into monsters”.¹⁰ Suharto turns around, his face a hideous demonic mask with fangs and wild hair. “Wake up!” says the madman, “Learn from what has happened!”¹¹ The bodies stir and people come to consciousness. Taking revenge will bring only ongoing suffering, the madman asserts. Look to the south, he advises, to the bright light of dawn – the *bang-bang sumirat* of the title. “A new time has come, a time full of glorious hope.”¹² Actors flood onto the stage as the performance comes to an end.

It is hard to tell how widely the allegory of the performance was appreciated. Actors surely understood the reference of the characters and events they were representing, and the bupati of Bantul, a politically-astute former newspaper editor, clearly knew and approved. Many with connections in artist and activist circles would have heard in advance about the content of the show. Journalists would have known, although they made only oblique reference to a social lesson about reconciliation. Some analytically-minded viewers perhaps picked up the suggestion of the names.

But uninitiated, unsophisticated audience members might not have grasped these clues. Indeed it might have been hard for them to see the awesome, richly-attired monarch Prabu Tuk Gunung as their first president Bung Karno. Scenes of courtly grandeur and displays of homage possibly conveyed a sense of class difference and awe for high status at odds with the populist values espoused by Sukarno himself and the play’s director. Similarly, as an example of *ketoprak kolossal*, a genre developed in New Order times, requiring great directorial skill, coordination and generous funding, the show might be seen by some as consumerist spectacle, in place of the participatory people’s art once represented by *ketoprak*. Yet some of the subversive, progressive content of the show surely came through loud and clear. All viewers would have shocked to the sight of the noble warrior transformed to a monster, with accompanying commentary from the madman underlining the damning implications for Suharto and the military. Similarly the final words of the performance about the need to embrace reconciliation and look to the future were powerfully direct. Another distinctive feature of the show, distinguishing it from standard

⁹ *Kabeh ora eling. Ora eling benere, ora eling lupute. Ora eling sanak lan keluargane.*

¹⁰ *Sing maune ngaku satriya malik dadi buta babrah.*

¹¹ *Ayo, toh, tangia, tangia! Sinauna marang lelakon.*

¹² *Bangkit jaman anyar, jaman sing kebak pengarep-arep mulya*

ketoprak performance and other accounts of the events of 1965, was the prominence of **women** as defenders of the nation, both voicing patriotic commitment and actively fighting.

Jaran Sungsang

Intriguingly, a performance on the theme of the 1965 anti-Communist violence which did actively embrace a populist aesthetic, together with a focus on the experiences of ordinary villagers, was staged by a theatre group with no personal connection to victims of the events, nor organisational role in their support. Moreover the character within the play identified as having PKI connections, through his deceased parents, is a vilified outsider, a mentally-disturbed young man eventually killed by his fellow villagers. It is the abhorrent tragedy of this action, as the climax of the play, which forms its core theme.

Gati Andoko, director of Teater Gajah Mada, a theatre group comprised of students at Gajah Mada university, reports that the inspiration for the play *Jaran Sungsang*¹³ was a real-life story of a young man deranged by the killing of his parents in the 1965 violence, who was murdered in order to get access to his land. The play is presented as *ketoprak lesung*, a style named after the original ketoprak form, which used rhythmic beating on a wooden rice-pounding trough (*lesung*) as musical accompaniment. As developed by Teater Gajah Mada it involves also much Javanese sung poetry, *tembang* and vigorous athletic movement by the actors. While in some contexts the effect may be folksy intimacy, here the loud, frenetic beating underlines the theme of violence of the performance, and the *lesung* forms the physical site of the final, climactic murder. As the play opens a group of young villagers, males in black knee length pants and bare torsos, girls in t-shirts and pants, are pounding vigorously with long poles on a small *lesung* in the centre of the stage. One young man, clearly disturbed, strikes at his face intermittently, flinches and howls, as he clutches to his chest a rattan hobby horse. A quarrel erupts as a young man tells his fiance to go home to prepare for their marriage, while she wants to stay. Other group members argue about how to deal with the disturbed man, Sugeng. Disagreements are not simply verbal but involve physical aggression – there is much pushing, slapping and kicking, and gymnastic leaps, somersaults and handstands in response. Sugeng goes berserk, screaming hysterically, at the comment *dasar PKI* “that’s expected for a Communist”. He is **not** a Communist, he insists - his father was a member of BTI, the farm labourers union, and his mother an Islamic teacher, *guru*

¹³ The term means literally a horse born in an unnatural position, a breach birth. Figuratively it suggests in various ways the situation of the young man Sugeng, as a misfit in his community who derives a sense of pleasure and identity through performing the hobby horse dance *jaran kepang*. Gati Andoko mentioned the origin of the play to me in conversation in July 2005.

ngaji. “ Same thing! “others yell, since BTI was controlled by the PKI. There is much argument and speculation about these issues, so one young man sits the others down in a row on the lesung and recounts to them what actually happened. As a relative of Sugeng’s and the son of a military man **he** knows the story. “So your father killed Sugeng’s parents?” someone suggests. No, no, it wasn’t like that he replies hastily and shakily.

Sugeng’s mother and father were both killed by a crowd of villagers and their severed heads placed on bamboo poles in front of his house. Sugeng could only stare from one to the other in horror and grief. There is talk of others being beheaded for minor offences – even a goat which had eaten grass on a PKI member’s land. In order to find out the full story the group summons Bu Lurah, the wife of the village headman. She is more interested in plans to develop the village as a *desa budaya* a cultural village, featuring their horse dance troupe with Sugeng as star performer, than in talking about the past. One of group denounces her failure to speak out about the horrific events, accusing her, in English, of the “crime of silence”. As she sits, head bowed with shame, Sugeng speaks up, endorsing the need to forget rather than recall the horrors of the past, and moves to comfort her. After much loud altercation the group agrees to play the lesung while Sugeng performs a stunningly wild, acrobatic dance with the hobby horse. He becomes entranced, a standard part of the performance, but things get out of control – he eats flower and vegetable offerings and staggers wildly through the audience. When he finally falls in an exhausted heap onto the lesung, one member of the group, now sporting a safari suit jacket connoting the status of government official, suggests that Sugeng must be “dealt with”, must be killed. One girl resists but the others listen, mesmerised. A young man, sleeping in exhaustion, is roused by safari jacket. “Look, watch out, there’s a snake!” he says pointing in Sugeng’s direction. The dazed youth strikes at Sugeng with one of the lesung poles, and the others join in, to chaotic yelling and beating sounds. When they come to their senses the group is grief stricken but it is too late. One young man cradles Sugeng, crying and pleading *Jangan mati, kang* “Don’t die brother!” Another races from one to another saying “Sugeng has been killed. Why isn’t anyone saying anything?”¹⁴ The performance concludes with the words of a young girl, her face smeared with her own tears and the blood of the murdered Sugeng, “ All events have witnesses. What I regret is that I witnessed **this** event”.¹⁵

¹⁴ *Sugeng dibunuh. Kenapa tidak ada yang bicara?*

¹⁵ *Semua peristiwa ada saksi. Yang aku sesali peristiwa ini mesti kusaksikan*

Tumultuous applause greets this ending. Audience members at the performance, held in the Gedung Socity Militaire, the theatre of the Yogya arts centre in April 2005, had presumably been impressed by the powerful drama of the performance and the skill of the actors. These viewers were presumably largely young and well- educated, like standard audiences at modern plays in theatre buildings - students, artists, NGO workers and young professionals. Some would have appreciated the complexity of themes addressed within the simple, spare setting of the show – the horror of the 1965 violence, the suffering of its victims, but also the pain of remembering, and contestation and confusion about the past among later generations, leading to the danger of repeating its inhuman cruelty. They might have been impressed by the populist aesthetic, fitting the village setting and the image of socialist/populist politics; also the way harsh clashes between actors conveyed a sense of pervasive violence in society, and set the mood for recollection of the 1965 killings. For many youthful, urban audience members, the discussion of the conditions and events of 1965 in villages may have been eye-opening.

One wonders at the reaction of actual participants in such events if they had seen the performance. Would they have enjoyed and identified with the populist atmosphere, the lesung beating and horse dancing and tembang singing? Or would they have seen the well-built, muscled bodies and gymnastic feats of the young actors as impressive but distant, and resisted the portrayal of village social life as unrelievedly harsh and violent? How would survivors of the 1965 violence regard the figure Sugeng, mentally-deranged, permanently damaged, as representative of suffering of victims?

Conclusion

Such questions connect with the issue indicated earlier, of differences of purpose and context between specific presentations of cultural forms. Some, like the ketoprak performance at the reunion of women political prisoners, are directed specifically to victims, or better survivors, of the 1965 violence, aimed at restoration of their sense of personal and social identity. The term frequently used is *diwongke*, from *wong* meaning person – being made human again. The film *Kado untuk Ibu* combines this function for prison survivors, with the wider aim of extending awareness of the experiences to the rest of society. *Jejak Darah* attempts to do the same thing in a more ambitious, fictional mode; its florid style, paralleling Suharto era filmic representation of Communist terror, may work well with younger people steeped in *sinetron*, Indonesian television melodramas. Various contextual factors and influences worked together to shape the ketoprak spectacle *Bang-bang Sumirat* - the role of the performance as a grand open-air celebration of the

region of Bantul, concluding a week-long expo fair, sponsorship from the bupati of Bantul and the state television station, the involvement of hundreds of local dancers, actors and musicians. Artfully the director, Bondan, managed to work within these parameters to tell an allegorical story about the perfidy of Suharto and his destructive effects on Indonesian society, with a message of hope for all survivors. A diverse range of viewers, standing crowded together in the town square of Bantul watching the performance live, or seeing it broadcast on television some days later, would have taken from it different messages. The performance *Jaran Sungsang* seems to have been developed to convey, through a highly-constructed yet “realistic”-seeming aesthetic, a sense of the danger of repetition today of the inhumane violence of 40 years ago. Those most likely to hear and hopefully heed the message, given the context of the performance, are young people who grew up in Suharto’s Indonesia, who know little of the actuality of the events of 1965, for whom the story of Sugeng is a scary revelation and sobering warning.

Each of these presentations has its place, contributes to the process of recovering the suppressed past. The enterprise is not even-handed; the focus so far has been on conveying the stories of the victims of the 1965 violence and its implications, rather than representing the perspectives of both sides of the conflict. But more stories will surely be told, now that the task of recalling and moving beyond the trauma has at last begun.

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