

Dealing with Burdened Past: The Case of Indonesia*

Take the Cold War, for instance. Growing evidence indicates that some human rights abuses in Indonesia since 1945 had close connection with the Cold War tension between the Capitalist bloc led by the United States and the Communist side under the leadership of the Soviet Union. Fear of the United States and its allies of the spread of communism compelled Washington to get involved in the suppression of communism in Indonesia. As a result, human rights abuses occurred. United States' support for the regional rebellion of the PRRI and Permesta against the Indonesian central government in the 1950s was an obvious example. During this period, many cases of human rights abuses took place due to the American involvement, such as the bombing of civilians. The reason for US support for the rebels was an assumption that the Indonesian central government was communist. Similar abuses occurred when the U.S. reversed its position and supported the Indonesian government after realizing that it was communist. (d)32hat itunisno4(s)-14t.

military) that were ready to collaborate and to serve the interests of the West, and with it serving their own interests.

It is important to note that along with the marginalization of Soviet influence and the suppression

in carrying out the order. He was even able to set up a better government that eventually replaced the “incompetent” government of President Sukarno. This version of the story also gives impression that due to Sukarno’s multiple “sins” (along with the sins of his supporters)

sadistic villains were civilian. For the New Order government this kind of monument is necessary at least for some several reasons: (a) that there is a close association between the word “hero” (*pahlawan*) and military personnel; (b) that in the October 1, 1965 military operation launched by the “September 30th Movement” the Army was merely a

past, but also to practices of violence and human rights abuses that took place more recent time, such as those that took place since the fall of the Soeharto government in 1998. Many Indonesians tend to disregard the background of those events, the motives and identity of the key perpetrators, or even the suffering of the victims. In almost all of such cases, even if there are perpetrators that are brought to justice, usually they are military personnel or police officers from the lower rank.

It is very rare (not to say never) that persons from high level positions are being held responsible in a fair system of justice for acts of violence that they had caused or within their responsibility. This kind of situation was upsetting, but after a while it seems that people get used to it and think of it as something “normal”. Consequently, it is not difficult to understand why nobody has ever been held responsible for the mass killings and detention that occurred in 1965 and after. As we all know, almost no one from high government position or high military command that was put on trial for all kinds of atrocities done to the people of Timor Leste (East Timor) when it was under Indonesian occupation from 1975 to 1999. Neither was anybody from a prominent position charged for the countless human lives that were lost in the mass violence in Tanjung Priok (1984), the Moluccas (1999-2002), Aceh (1992-2004), or more recently in West Papua. And this could mean that if today or tomorrow similar acts of violence or human right abuses happen again there is no guarantee that someone will be prosecuted or held responsible. This especially applies to violence that has some religious or military element, or a combination of both.

It is important to note that the collective memories that are partial and manipulated are still being used even today, years after President Soeharto’s New Order officially ended in May of 1998. During the national election of 2004 and local election of 2005 in some places people still could see public display of banners warning the people of “the latent danger of communism”—forty years after the PKIn

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Further impact of the amnesia of history is the lack of seriousness in the part of the government in dealing with the country's burdened past. Justifying itself as being "future-oriented", the government put little attention and effort to discuss openly problems of the past that still have great impact to the present. Thanks to pressure from the public commissions nt.

created. The list of selected candidates has been in the hand of the President for a long time, but announcement of final list of the commission's members was never made.

Just and Democratic

Looking at the political and economic uncertainties of Indonesia today—marred with rampant corruption, collusion and nepotism—the country needs a system of government that is based on the principals of political ethics. This could be done by promoting political practices that pay real attention to the need and welfare of the people. For this the people themselves need to understand their own history as a nation. Understanding history is an important starting point for a political life that is not merely submissive to the will of the government or power elite. This understanding of history is necessary