

Women and the Indonesian Killings of 1965-1966: Gender Variables and Possible Directions for Research¹

Annie Pohlman
University of Queensland

There has not, to the best of my knowledge, ever been an academic attempt to incorporate a gender variable into an analysis of the Indonesian massacres of 1965-1966.² Nor does there appear to be any attempt to ascertain whether or not such an analysis is possible given the paucity of data and academic discussion on the killings.³ Certainly there have been those who have analysed some of the long-simmering antagonisms and political pressures⁴ which help to explain in part the deeper causes of the massacres⁵, but it appears that no study has examined whether or not the massacres affected men and women differently, whether men were more likely to have been killed than women, whether the perpetrators were entirely men and whether the ways in which men and women were murdered differed.

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² This paper is a revised version of a chapter from my Honours thesis, 'The Demonisation of Gerwani and the Repression of its Members Under the New Order in Indonesia,' unpublished thesis, University of Queensland, 2003.

³ Few studies have dealt with the massacres with the most notable exception of Robert Cribb, 'Introduction: Problems in the Historiography of the Killings in Indonesia,' in *The Indonesian Killings: 1965-1966*, ed. Robert Cribb, Clayton: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, pp. 1-44 and 'The Indonesian Massacres,' in *Century of Genocide: Eyewitness Accounts and Critical Views*, eds. Israel W. Charney, William S. Parsons and Samuel Totten, London and New York: Garland, pp. 236-263. This point will be discussed later in the paper.

⁴ Some of these antagonisms have been analysed quite extensively by various academics. These antagonisms include tensions in Indonesia over the PKI's involvement in land reform issues (Rex Mortimer, *The Indonesian Communist Party and Land Reform, 1959-1965*, Clayton: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1972; Ken Young, 'Local and National Influences in the Violence of 1965,' in *The Indonesian Killings: 1965-1966*, ed. Robert Cribb, Clayton: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 63-100; Geoffrey Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), the failing health of President Sukarno during the mid-1960s, and Sukarno's increasingly close relationship with the PKI and China and the conflict it aroused between various political parties and the Indonesian Armed Forces among others (Cribb, 'The Indonesian Massacres'; John Hughes, *Indonesian Upheaval*, New York: McKay, 1967).

⁵ Sri Suharti, Sulami and W.F. Wertheim, *Kebenaran Tentang Gerwani: Aspek Gender Rezim Suharto*, Jakarta: Cipta Lestari, 2002, p. 8.

The purpose of this paper is to attempt to understand how women experienced the massacres. To do this, we must first question whether the killings produced a set of experiences, responses and memories for women victims and survivors that did not always parallel those of men. By doing so, such a gender analysis creates a two-fold inquiry; firstly, to recover the experiences of women, and secondly, to re-evaluate our understanding of the massacres themselves.

To accomplish this, I will examine how a gender analysis may be applied to a study of the Indonesian killings and discuss some of the accounts given by survivors and eyewitnesses in order to discover how these accounts reveal the various ways in which women victims experienced the killings. These accounts have been collected from both primary and secondary sources as well as from information given by informants and respondents during my preliminary fieldwork in Indonesia.⁶ I will then conclude with a brief description of the possible directions for research which may open up ways of examining women's experiences during mass killings.

Women and Mass Killings

Thus the question becomes: was every suspected communist in Indonesia equally a victim in the mass killings? Was being a suspected communist, regardless of age, profession, gender, ethnicity, or class, what Joan Ringelheim calls a "victim equaliser"?⁷ More precisely, in this analysis, were male and female suspected communists equally targets for death?

Analyses of the Indonesian massacres to date do not make any clear differentiations between victims, in the sense that although they may recount certain instances where a particular group were victimised at a particular instance⁸, they generally present data as if the only category were that of communists, members of the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) or associated organisations or, more simply, "persons".⁹ Viewed critically this could mean that all victims, whether young or old, male or female, rich or poor, peasant, merchant, teacher, mother, child, experienced the massacres in the same way.

As Joan Kelly points out, women's history has "disabused us of the notion that the history of women is the same as the history of men, and that the significant turning points in history have the same impact for one sex as for another."¹⁰ If gender is such an important factor in understanding human experience, would it not also be essential in understanding inhumane experiences? Expanding our understanding of the massacres can be achieved by reclaiming

⁶ These interviews and questionnaires were conducted as part of my Honour's research, 2002 – 2003. Further discussion may be found in my Honours thesis, 'The Demonisation of Gerwani and the Repression of its Members Under the New Order Regime in Indonesia'.

⁷ Joan Ringelheim, 'The Unethical and the Unspeakable: Women and the Holocaust,' in *The Simon Wiesenthal Center*, 1, (1997): 69-87, p. 81.

⁸ Instances include how workers at a rubber plantation with strong ties to the BTI were singled out by Muslim youth gangs, see Patrick Flanagan and Julie Southwood, *Indonesia: Law, Propaganda, and Terror*, London: Zed Books, 1983, p. 77.

⁹ For example, Cribb, 'Introduction,'; Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise*; and Hughes, *Indonesian Upheaval*.

¹⁰ Joan Kelly, 'The Social Relations of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History,' in *Signs* 1 (4) (1976): 810-830, p. 812, quoted in Ringelheim, 'The Unethical and the Unspeakable,' p. 3.

women's experiences, resulting in the need for a feminist re-evaluation of all that we know of the killings. All generalisations and gender-neutral statements made must be reappraised to incorporate this gender perspective. It is worthwhile to ponder how our knowledge of the massacres might change if they were told from the perspectives of women. This focus on women's experiences will perhaps yield new questions and new data, all of it adding to our understanding of the Indonesian massacres of 1965-1966.

The field of studying genocide/mass killings from a gender perspective is relatively young, appearing only in the mid-1980s.¹¹ Yet even earlier studies elicited accusatory responses from researchers who saw the attempt to interpret such actions from a gender approach as inherently problematic. It appears that this criticism arose from two main concerns; firstly, the apprehension that a focus on women or upon gender would in some way seek to "eclipse" the killings, subverting or minimizing the inherent horror of mass killings and distorting the material to fit a feminist political "agenda"; and secondly, the concern that a gender analysis would inevitably lead to a study in "competitive suffering", or an attempt to hypothesise whether men or women suffered more or behaved "better" under persecution.¹² These are neither the aims nor nature of gender analysis. Ultimately, gender studies, as with all other theoretical perspectives, claims its legitimacy by the fact that it brings a new insight to studies of mass killings, posing questions that will contribute to the understanding of the phenomena and therefore possesses the ability to transform that understanding.

One focus of gender analysis is upon women's particular vulnerabilities during a process of mass killing. These predominantly centre around women's being especially at risk to abuses of their sexuality, namely rape, pregnancy, abortion and sexual humiliation and of their gender-defined roles of maternal responsibility, especially their vulnerability through their children.¹³ As victims during mass killings, women experience not only persecution as a result of their membership within a certain group, but also suffering associated with these gender-based crimes. As Rhonda Copelon argues, "Rape and [mass killings] are each atrocities. [Mass killing] is an effort to debilitate or destroy a people based on its identity as a people, while rape seeks to degrade and

¹¹ Earlier articles on gender and genocide include those by Joan Ringelheim, 'Women and the Holocaust,' in *Signs* 10 (4) (1985): 741-761; Vera Laska, *Women in the Resistance and in the Holocaust*, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983; Carol Rittner and John K. Roth (eds), *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust*, New York: Paragon House, 1993, and more recently Sara Horowitz, 'Gender, Genocide and Jewish Memory,' in *A Journal of Jewish Literary History* Winter-Spring (2000): 158-171; Ronit Lentin, 'Introduction: (En)gendering Genocide,' in *Gender and Catastrophe*, ed. Ronit Lentin, London and New York: Zed Books, pp. 2-17; Joan Ringelheim, 'Preface to the Study of Women and the Holocaust,' in *Holocaust Education*, (1996), URL: <http://www.interlog.com/~mighty/preface.html>, site accessed 3 September 2003; Joan Ringelheim, 'Genocide and Gender: A Split Memory,' in *Gender and Catastrophe*, ed. Ronit Lentin, London and New York: Zed Books, pp. 18-33; Ringelheim, 'The Unethical and the Unspeakable: Women and the Holocaust' and Adam Jones, 'Genocide and Humanitarian Intervention: Incorporating the Gender Variable,' in *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, (2002), URL: <http://www.jha.ac/articles/a080.htm>, site accessed 15 September 2003.

¹² Horowitz, 'Gender, Genocide, and Jewish Memory,' pp. 17-18. See here also for further discussion on resistance to the inclusion of gender as a viable tool for genocide analysis.

¹³ Ringelheim, 'Women and the Holocaust,' p. 743. Ringelheim notes here that although men are also at risk to these kinds of abuses, women are particularly vulnerable to them.

destroy a woman based on her identity as a woman. Both are grounded in total contempt for and dehumanization of the victim.”¹⁴ As will be detailed later in the paper, these crimes are some of those carried out against women victims during the Indonesian massacres.

Some scholars, such as Cynthia Ozick¹⁵, think it inappropriate to discuss women’s sexual abuse during genocide and mass killings; considering these crimes trivial when compared to other atrocities perpetrated against an entire group identity.¹⁶ If researchers are to re-assess and enlarge their understanding of massacres, then women’s experiences of trauma both as members of a group and as women must not be discounted as insignificant. Rather, they can be used to point to the inadequacy of existing research. To ask what happened to women, to use their perspectives and experiences, generates new processes for the study of such mass atrocities.¹⁷

The Massacres - Getting the Numbers Straight.

The mass killings of alleged communists during the latter part of 1965 and the first few months of 1966 is one of the blackest and bloodiest historical events in modern Indonesian history. The man who organised the killings in Java and Bali, General Sarwo Edhie, once boasted that some three million people had been killed in the Indonesian massacres.¹⁸ Although this figure is generally agreed to be too high, it may reflect how very horrific and widespread the killings are in Indonesian memory.¹⁹ Whatever the estimated number of the murdered, the reduction of massacres to a discussion of raw numbers to describe the magnitude of events is wholly inadequate when attempting to understand the impact the killings had upon those who witnessed these atrocities.

The first official estimate issued by a Fact Finding Commission under Major-General Sumarmo in 1965 was that of 78,500.²⁰ This figure, however, was deemed, even by members of the Commission, as far too low; one of the commissioners who was interviewed saying that he believed the number killed to be “about ten times as many people.”²¹ A second set of official numbers was ascertained by a survey conducted by KOPKAMTIB (The Operational Command for the Restoration of Security and Order) in 1966 using 150 “university graduates and academics.” The survey concluded that approximately one million people had been killed, 800,000 in Central

¹⁴ Rhonda Copelon, ‘Gendered War Crimes: Reconceptualising Rape in Times of War,’ in *Women’s Rights, Human Rights: International Feminist Perspectives*, eds. Julie Peters and Andrea Wolper, New York and London: Routledge, p. 199, quoted in Rose Lindsey, ‘From Atrocity to Data: Historiographies of Rape in Former Yugoslavia and the Gendering of Genocide,’ in *Patterns of Prejudice* 36 (4) (2002): 59-78, p. 69.

¹⁵ Cynthia Ozick, *Metaphor and Memory: Essays*, New York: Vintage Books, 1991.

¹⁶ According to Ringelheim, ‘The Unethical and the Unspeakable,’ p. 745.

¹⁷ Ringelheim, ‘The Unethical and the Unspeakable,’ p. 8.

¹⁸ Manai Sophian, ‘Kehormatan Bagi Yang Berhak: Bung Karno Tidak Terlibat G30S/PKI,’ cited in Saskia Wieringa, *Sexual Politics in Indonesia*, New York: Palgrave and MacMillan, 2002, p. 344.

¹⁹ The estimates of how many people were murdered during the massacre will be presently discussed.

Interestingly, this figure of three million was quoted to me on a number of occasions by former members of Gerwani with whom I discussed the matter and by a member of the YPKP – The Foundation for the Study of the 1965-66 Massacre. How they arrived at this number, however, is uncertain.

²⁰ John Hughes, *Indonesian Upheaval*, p. 185; Harold Crouch, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia*, Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, p. 155, cited in Robert Cribb, ‘Introduction,’ p. 7.

²¹ Quoted in Hughes, *Indonesian Upheaval*, pp. 185-6.

and East Java, 100,000 in Bali and another 100,000 in Sumatra.²² This figure of one million is also considered too high²³; the estimated number of people killed is generally agreed to be 500,000.²⁴

The basic outline of the massacres which took place primarily within Central and East Java, Bali and Northern Sumatra is fairly clear. They began shortly after the 1 October 1965 coup²⁵ and were over by March 1966, though there were the occasional flare-ups until 1969.²⁶ Details about who perpetrated the murders, who was murdered, where, when and how the murders took place, however, are less certain. In general, after the coup there was a period of relative calm, the killing only beginning after anti-communist troops arrived within a certain area.²⁷ At the same time as RPKAD (Army Paracommando Regiment) units began carrying out their mission in Central Java to “restore order and crush the remnants of the 30 September Movement”, gangs of mostly Islamic or Christian anti-communist youths in Central and East Java began mass killings of alleged “communists” throughout the countryside. These vigilante type groups operated largely with military protection and encouragement.²⁸ Sarwo Edhie, the leader of the military force charged with crushing the 30 September Movement, once stated, “we gathered together the youth, the nationalist groups, the religious organisations. We gave them two or three days training, then sent them out to kill the communists.”²⁹ The military also provided logistical support for these vigilante gangs by way of weapons, ammunition, trucks with which to transport the victims, communication devices and even detention facilities in which victims were held.³⁰ In one case, the troops aided the gangs by rounding up victims into large “holding pens” and then releasing Muslim youths armed with knives upon them.³¹

The killings mostly took place at night and people were most often killed with a bayonet or *parang*, a kind of machete.³² In some cases, entire communities which had had close ties to the PKI were wiped out, although it was more common for gangs and the military to compile “blacklists” of alleged communists who were then taken from their homes and murdered somewhere nearby³³;

²² Cited in Cribb, ‘Introduction,’ p. 8. Cribb here makes the point that this report on which various articles were based (such as Frank Palmos, ‘One Million Dead?’, *The Economist* 20 August 1966, and Bruce Cleland, ‘Greatest Bloodbath in Indonesia’s History,’ *Dawn* 2 August 1966) was never published, but was made available to various Western journalists and academics in 1966.

²³ For various reasons as to why one million appears too high, including the possibilities of over-reporting and inflation of deaths, see Cribb, ‘Introduction,’ pp. 8-9. See Cribb also for further comparison and discussion of various estimates.

²⁴ Cribb, ‘The Indonesian Massacres,’ p. 241 and Flanagan and Southwood, *Indonesia: Law*, p. 73.

²⁵ Flanagan and Southwood, *Indonesia: Law*, p. 77, dates the beginning of the massacres from the 1 October in Aceh.

²⁶ Cribb, ‘Introduction,’ p. 3.

²⁷ Cribb, ‘The Indonesian Massacres,’ p. 239. There were exceptions to this, however, most notably in Northern Sumatra and Aceh where the killings began in early October.

²⁸ Robert Cribb, ‘From Petrus to Ninja: Death Squads in Indonesia,’ in *Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability*, eds. Bruce B. Campbell and Arthur D. Brenner, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000, p. 184.

²⁹ Hughes, *Indonesian Upheaval*, p. 151.

³⁰ Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise*, p. 297.

³¹ Raymond Bonner, ‘The New Order – Indonesia’, p. 54, quoted in Asia Watch, *Human Rights in Indonesia and East Timor*, New York: Human Rights Watch, 1988, p. 58.

³² Cribb, ‘The Indonesian Massacres,’ p. 239.

³³ Cribb, ‘The Indonesian Massacres,’ p. 239.

usually in quieter areas, such as cemeteries, secluded river banks and plantations.³⁴ Bodies were also dumped in caves³⁵ and in rivers, a particularly gruesome example being the river Brantas in East Java. In his account, Pipit Rochijat recounts that he, "... always saw corpses of communists floating in the River Brantas... usually the corpses were no longer recognisable as human. Headless. Stomachs torn open. The smell was unbelievable. To make sure they didn't sink, the carcasses were deliberately tied to, or impaled on, bamboo stakes. And the departure of corpses from the Kediri region down the Brantas achieved its golden age when the bodies were stacked together on rafts over which the PKI banner proudly flew."³⁶

Paucity of Data about the Massacres

One of the questions posed at the beginning of this paper was can a gender analysis be applied to the study of the 1965-1966 massacres in Indonesia? The greatest obstacle in answering this question lies in the fact that there is very little data available about either the victims or perpetrators of the massacre.³⁷ As outlined previously, the broad outline of events and groups participating in the killings is relatively clear. There is not, however, any available detailed information about who was killed, by whom, when, where or why.³⁸

There are a number of reasons for this paucity of available data. Firstly, the number of Western journalists or academics in Indonesia at the time was relatively small and those who were covering the massacres often had to negotiate with the military for access to sources.³⁹ In addition to this, many of Western journalists were focusing more upon the political events at a national level.⁴⁰ Their accounts, nevertheless, are some of the very few available on the massacres and are thus of great value.⁴¹ The Indonesian press were likewise hindered, their access to sources outside the main cities greatly limited⁴² which makes the story reported by Maskun Iskandar in 1969 about the killings in the region of Purwodadi one of the few available.⁴³

A second reason for this lack of data lies in the fact that Indonesians as a whole have been reluctant to speak about the massacres and, as a result, have produced very few testimonies as

³⁴ Anonymous, 'Additional Data on Counter-Revolutionary Cruelty in Indonesia, Especially East Java,' in *The Indonesian Killings, 1965-1966*, ed. Robert Cribb, Clayton: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, pp. 169-176, p. 175. Forests were also often the sights of mass graves, such as one uncovered in Central Java by one of the founders of the Foundation for Research into the Killings of 1965-66, Sulami with an SBS TV team while making a documentary about the killings.

³⁵ Caves were often used as make-shift mass graves, such as the one recently excavated at Luweng Tikus, East Java by the Kasut Perdamaian Foundation, see 'Foundation Probes Blitar Massacre,' *Jakarta Post*, 15 August 2002, p. 4.

³⁶ Extracted from Pipit Rochijat, 'Am I PKI or non-PKI?' in *Indonesia* 40 (1985): 37-52. Quoted in Cribb, 'The Indonesian Massacres,' pp. 252-258.

³⁷ Cribb, 'Introduction,' p. 3.

³⁸ Cribb, 'Introduction,' p. 3.

³⁹ Cribb, 'Introduction,' p. 3.

⁴⁰ Cribb, 'The Indonesian Massacres,' p. 241.

⁴¹ Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise*, p. 275.

⁴² Cribb, 'Introduction,' p. 3. Here, Cribb also discusses the fact that the investigative qualities of the domestic press had also been greatly weakened during Guided Democracy.

⁴³ A translation of Maskun's report can be found in Cribb, 'Introduction,' pp. 203-213. See Cribb, 'The Indonesian Massacres,' pp. 248-49, for a commentary on this account.

survivors or as participants.⁴⁴ This dearth of first-hand accounts can be attributed to a number of factors, such as survivors not having the means to record their testimonies.⁴⁵ A main cause, however, is that both survivors and perpetrators of the massacre lived under the very regime that was behind the killings, namely Suharto's New Order. Many Indonesians were afraid to discuss the massacres. To do so was to risk retribution from the regime.⁴⁶ Despite very few biographical accounts, there has been a small number of Indonesian literary works that deal with the massacres.⁴⁷

An added factor in the dearth of knowledge about the massacres stems from the fact that no effective records of the killings were kept as they happened.⁴⁸ There were various other factors which led to the scarcity of information available about the massacres. These factors included that there has been little outside interest for the collection of eyewitness and survivor accounts. Robert Cribb writes that, from the start, there appeared to be something of an absence of international outrage at the killings, *Time* magazine going so far as to call the destruction of the PKI, "the West's best news in years in Asia".⁴⁹ Yet there appears to be hope for uncovering some of what has been lost. Since the fall of Suharto, various groups, most notably the YPKP (Foundation for the Study of the 1965-66 Killings) have been making a concerted effort to uncover mass graves and interview survivors.⁵⁰ Their work is essential at this time because many of the survivors are already old and it is incumbent upon researchers to collect their testimonies, for not to do so will leave the historical record of these events bereft of what may prove invaluable data.⁵¹ Hopefully their efforts will result in a greater understanding of the massacres.

Women and the 1965-1966 Massacres

Given the scarce number of available accounts, is it possible to analyse how women were persecuted during the 1965-1966 massacres? Without more extensive data available, it is only

⁴⁴ Cribb, 'The Indonesian Massacres,' p. 248.

⁴⁵ William S. Parsons and Samuel Totten, 'Introduction,' in *Century of Genocide: Eyewitness Accounts and Critical Views*, eds. Israel W. Charney, William S. Parsons and Samuel Totten, London and New York: Garland, pp. xxi-xxxix, p. xxvii. Here, Parsons and Totten also discuss a number of other reasons for the lack of eyewitness accounts to genocides in general. These reasons include that the survivors may not have been literate, and thus did not have the means to develop a written record; in the aftermath of the killings the survivors may have been simply trying to survive, thus documenting their experiences was not of primary importance to them; and the survivors may not have had the financial means to take the time to record and collect accounts.

⁴⁶ Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise*, p. 275.

⁴⁷ For example, some short stories were written in the late 1960s in which the authors discussed a range of aspects of the killings collected and translated by Harry Aveling (ed.), *GESTAPU: Indonesian Short Stories on the Abortive Communist Coup of 30th September 1965*, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i, 1975. Poems about the massacres include that by Rendra, 'Twilight View,' cited in Wieringa, *Sexual Politics*, p. 280.

⁴⁸ Cribb, 'Introduction,' p. 7.

⁴⁹ 'Vengeance with a Smile,' *Time*, 15 July 1966, p. 26, quoted in Cribb, 'Introduction,' p. 3.

⁵⁰ YPKP, 'A Campaigner Against Disappearances Honoured,' YPKP (2000), URL: http://www.wirantaprawira.de/ypkp/award_engl.htm, site accessed 30 September 2001. Another institution which has been involved in recovering survivor's testimonies is the Jakarta based Lontar Foundation.

⁵¹ Parsons and Totten, 'Introduction,' p. xxx.

possible to analyse the few accounts of incidences in which women, mostly members of the Communist-aligned women's organization Gerwani (Indonesian Women's Movement), were abused and murdered. These accounts are few; often women victims are only mentioned briefly within larger testimonies or else the testimonies which deal solely with women are no longer than a few lines. They are, however, all that is presently available.

It is known that Gerwani members became the target of anti-communist fervour directly following the Coup and the military's media campaign.⁵² The almost pornographic nature of the campaign's depiction of the organisation's members and the hatred that it provoked against them are evident in one account, in this case a short story written by an eyewitness to the killings. "It was said that the Gerwani had been involved in Lubang Buaya; the people showed them no mercy. I found some of their bodies on the side of the river south of Kuta. Their guts hung out; their backs full of knife wounds, carvings of open-mouthed crocodiles."⁵³

One account, first reported by John Hughes, tells of an incident in which a group of women, allegedly members of Gerwani, from a village which was threatening to resist the Army's crushing of 30 September Movement remnants were brutally gunned down having "danced out into the road, turned around and bared their posteriors to the troops in a gesture of insult." The commander of the troops, Sarwo Edhie himself, did not hesitate and ordered that the women be shot.⁵⁴ How it could have been ascertained that these women were or were not members of Gerwani is not mentioned. The fact that they were supposedly Gerwani women appears to justify such brutal treatment.

A perhaps not so startling similarity existing among accounts that mention women is the use of sexual torture or rape by gangs. Given the scarcity of these reports, it may be difficult to conclude whether or not women victims often experienced these types of abuses during the massacres. Of these accounts, many mention that female victims were raped/gang-raped before being killed. One eyewitness recounts,

The Anzor⁵⁵ youth gangs were terrible. They raped most women before killing them. My husband John was head of the screening team of the plantation and the sugar factory near Madiun where we then lived. He decided who had to be killed or not. I was so disgusted. I wanted a divorce and to leave him with my children. But he didn't want to let me go and threatened to tell the Anzor team he was leading that I was a member of Gerwani. I saw so many women being killed. Once they had rounded up a group of women labourers who they said were all Gerwani members. The

⁵² Amnesty International, *Indonesia: An Amnesty International Report*, London: Amnesty International, 1977, p. 103.

⁵³ From Kipandjikusmin's short story, 'Star of Death,' in *GESTAPU*, ed. Harry Aveling, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i, p. 30. For a discussion of the alleged events which took place at Lubang Buaya on the night of 30 September 1965, see Jacques Leclerc, 'Girls, Girls, Girls, and Crocodiles,' in *Outward Appearances: Dressing State and Society in Indonesia*, ed. Henk Schulte Nordholt, Leiden: KITLIV Press, pp. 291-305; Wieringa, *Sexual Politics*; as well as a number of sources published in Indonesia during the New Order, such as: Arswendo Atmowiloto, *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI*, Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan; Djanwar, *Mengungkap Pengkhianatan/Pemberontakan G30S/PKI: Dalam Rangka Mengumumkan Pancasila dan UUD 1945*, Bandung: Yrama; KOPKAMTIB, *G.30.S./PKI*, Jakarta: KOPKAMTIB.

⁵⁴ Hughes, *Indonesian Upheaval*, p. 150.

⁵⁵ Anzor was one of the Islamic youth groups which commonly participated in the killings.

leader, a single woman of around forty-five, had her head shaved, a cob of maize was pushed into her vagina and then her throat was cut.⁵⁶

The above account also shows not only the singling out of Gerwani members during the killings but also one example of the kinds of sexual torture perpetrated against women. From other available reports, it appears that a common form of torture was to insert different objects into the woman's vagina, such as "a sharpened bamboo pole"⁵⁷, "long knives until their stomachs were pierced"⁵⁸ or iron rods.⁵⁹

The other forms of sexual torture carried out against women victims included cutting off their breasts/nipples⁶⁰, after having been "raped many times... [the woman's] body [being] slit open from her breasts to her vulva"⁶¹, and a case where a woman, before being killed "was ordered to take all her clothes off. Her body and her honour (*kehormatannya*)⁶² were then subjected to fire. She was then tied up, taken to the village of Sentong in Lawang, when a noose was put around her neck and she was hacked to death."⁶³ Two more disturbing accounts depict incidents when pregnant women were subjected to torture. The first about "Ny. Djajus, a woman who was *lurah* of the village of Tawang Sari in Garum and a member of Gerwani, was pregnant at the time of the coup. Her body was cut open before she was killed."⁶⁴ In the second account, a man and his wife "nine months pregnant... were stopped and taken prisoners by an Ansor gang... The man's head was cut off and his wife's stomach was cut open, the baby taken out and cut to pieces."⁶⁵

I have not included in this paper a discussion of the roles women played as perpetrators during the massacres. My reason for not doing so is that I have not found any indication that women aided in the killings at any point during my readings nor from information given by my informants and respondents. In descriptions of the civilian vigilante groups, the perpetrators are most often depicted as gangs of a particular type, such as a group of nationalists or Christian or Muslim youths. Rarely have I encountered a description of the killers in which their gender was mentioned; those that do only affirming that the perpetrators were men. This does not mean that women did not take part in the killings, only that there is no available data that can describe murders carried out by women – or even that they became members of these vigilante gangs.

⁵⁶ This account is cited in Wieringa, *Sexual Politics*, p. 300. Another mention of women being victims of rape because of being accused as Gerwani members can be found in Soe Hok Gie's account, in Robert Cribb and Soe Hok Gie et al., 'The Mass Killings in Bali,' in *The Indonesian Killings, 1965-1966*, ed. Robert Cribb, Clayton: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, pp. 241-260, p. 256.

⁵⁷ From an account by Pipit Rochijat, 'Am I PKI or non-PKI?' in *Indonesia* 40 (1985): 44-5, quoted in Wieringa, *Sexual Politics*, p. 301.

⁵⁸ Anonymous, 'Additional Data,' p. 175.

⁵⁹ Wieringa, *Sexual Politics*, p. 336.

⁶⁰ Geoff Simons, *Indonesia: The Long Oppression*, London: MacMillan, p. 177 and Wieringa, *Sexual Politics*, p. 336.

⁶¹ Anonymous, 'Additional Data,' p. 172.

⁶² "Kehormatannya", literally translated, "her honour," may be a metaphor for something the witness did not feel comfortable describing directly, perhaps some part of the victim's body.

⁶³ Anonymous, 'Additional Data,' p. 171.

⁶⁴ Anonymous, 'Additional Data,' p. 172.

⁶⁵ Anonymous, 'Additional Data,' p. 173.

Lastly, it is beneficial to discuss some of the avenues for research which may provide possible theoretical and methodological frameworks with which to trace the experiences of women during the Indonesian killings. These draw mostly upon cross-cultural and historical studies carried out into the investigation of violence against women during various conflict situations, but most noticeably from analyses of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and from Central and Latin America.

Although it is not possible within the confines of this paper to include a discussion of all relevant theories of mass violence against women during conflict, it is beneficial to give a brief overview of some of the currently identified possible symbolic and strategic “uses” of this violence and, in particular, rape. Firstly, rape has been shown to be a tactic of war in three principal ways; as means for men in the process of conquering other men to express their victory, as a means of retaliation, vengeance and reprisal (as was the case when Soviet Red Army troops swept through Germany, raping in supposed retaliation for the German army’s raping of Soviet women during their invasion of Russia) and thirdly, as a tool for propaganda (as was the case in parts of Serbia).⁶⁶ Rape is also seen as a method for troop mollification, or as a “just reward for war weary” soldiers, as worryingly evidenced by incidences of women being forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese army during the Second World War.⁶⁷ Another and disturbing use of rape during conflict which has arisen over the last fifteen years is that of rape as a strategy of genocide or the use of rape, enforced prostitution, and forced pregnancy as a systematic means of destroying a group.⁶⁸

Rape is also considered the symbolic expression of one male group’s humiliation of and power over another. The rape of a woman, within the paradigm of her body and “honour” being the property of her male kin, is not only an act of violence against her, it also mediates the disempowerment of her male relatives, their having failed to protect “their woman”. Raping the others’ women is also a violation of territorial integrity (again, inscribed upon women’s bodies); the territory/property of one group of males occupied by the “conquering” of their female relatives by another group of men. In this sense, rape “at once pollutes and occupies the territory of the [group], transgresses its boundaries, defeats its protectors”.⁶⁹

The question must be posed, how can theories of rape during conflict, some of which were outlined above, be applied to an understanding of the Indonesian killings? The situation in Indonesia does not easily parallel any previously discussed. It does not fall under conflicts of racial or ethnic tension, nor is it an example of police repression of political opponents. As briefly shown in an analysis of the types of sexualised violence carried out against women during the killings, the

⁶⁶ See Tamara L. Tompkins, ‘Prosecuting Rape as a War Crime: Speaking the Unspeakable,’ in *Notre Dame Law Review* 70 (4) (1994): 845-890, pp. 859-863. See also Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Wills: Men, Women and Rape*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975, pp. 30-35.

⁶⁷ See George Hicks, *The Comfort Women*, St. Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1995 and Sangmie Choi Schellstede, ed. *Comfort Women Speak: Testimony by Sex Slaves of the Japanese Military*, New York: Holmes Meier, 2000.

⁶⁸ See Kathleen A. Cavanaugh, ‘Forced Impregnation and Rape as a Means of Genocide,’ in *Journal of International and Comparative Law* 8(2) (2002): 1-21.

⁶⁹ Indira Kajosevic, ‘Understanding War Rape: Bosnia 1992,’ paper presented at the IV European Feminist Research Conference, 2000, p. 4.

violence itself is strikingly similar to that committed against women in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and a number of other conflicts. If we are to reject the notion that rape and other forms of gender violence are not natural by-products of conflict, how then can it be explained? And why, more specifically, are women so frequently attacked through their sexuality and gender? When reading testimonies and accounts given by those who survived such attacks not only in Indonesia but also in Bosnia, Rwanda, Somalia, Peru and by others in a very long list of incidences of mass rape around the world, women are attacked frequently through the destruction or mutilation of their sexuality.⁷⁰ They are raped, have sharp objects and instruments forced into their vaginas, have their breasts cut off, their genital organs mutilated and their stomachs sliced open. Therefore, the question must be posed whether violence against women during conflict, for whatever “use” it may serve, symbolically or otherwise, is simply a variation on a macabre theme?

Upon reflection of the various theories developed from other conflict situations, I am left with more questions than answers as to why violence against women occurred during the Indonesian killings and to why it occurred in the forms that it did. In the hope of avoiding essentialising this violence as a natural and therefore unavoidable occurrence during conflict, any theorizing of mass rape and other forms of gendered violence during the Indonesian killings must take into account the political, ethnic, and, indeed, gender constructions brought to bear during the massacres. In addition to this, any theories promulgated must also consider the effects the propaganda campaign executed by the Indonesian military to incite anti-Communist sentiment may have had upon not only instigating the killings but also upon the forms of violence which occurred, including those carried out against women.⁷¹

Instead of proposing a model as to why gendered violence occurred during the killings, I have offered an analysis of the experiences of women as the effects of this violence. This investigation of the effects upon women may not explain the reasons for its occurrence but it may clarify our understanding of what and how it occurred, perhaps paving the way for theories to be put forward for analysis.

The massacres which swept predominantly across Java, Bali and Northern Sumatra for six months in 1965-1966 claimed the lives of approximately 500,000 men, women and children. Despite the sheer number of victims and widespread upheaval in Indonesian society, very little is known about the mass killings of suspected communists by anti-Communist army units and civilian vigilante groups. By examining the phenomenon of the forms of violence carried out against women during the Indonesian killings, it has allowed for the inclusion of the consideration of

⁷⁰ See, for examples, Alexandra Stiglmayer, *Mass Rape: The War Against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, pp. ix-xiii; Brownmiller, *Against Our Wills*; Julie Philips, ‘Crossfire’s Targets: Women in Peru Fight Violence from Both Sides,’ in *The Village Voice*, 13 July 1993, pp. 28-9; Cynthia Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarisation of Women’s Lives*, London: Pluto Press, 1988.

⁷¹ For analyses of the Indonesian military’s anti-Communist propaganda, see Ben Anderson, ‘How Did the Generals Die?’ in *Indonesia* 43 (1987): 109-134; Crouch, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia*; W.F. Wertheim, ‘Whose Plot? – New Light on the 1965 Events,’ in *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 9 (2) (1979): 197-215; Michael R.J. Vatikiotis, *Indonesian Politics Under Suharto: Order, Development, and Pressure for Change*, London and New York: Routledge, 1993.

gender as one of the many contextualising factors at work during the killings. By considering the various theories about violence against women, in particular rape, which have arisen from diverse cross-cultural studies, this may open the way for a greater understanding of why and how violence was perpetrated against women during the Indonesian killings. Bringing a gender perspective to the study of these massacres and attempting to recover and analyse women's experiences may also add to our understanding of the killings. In addition to this, a gender analysis aids in the attempt to discover how Gerwani and female members of other Communist-aligned organisations were persecuted during the slaughter by identifying the kinds of abuses particular to women. But most importantly, a discussion of women's experiences during the killings is a recognition of those experiences; experiences which must be central to any discourse on the subject of the 1965 killings.