

# The Contestation of Social Memory in the New Media: A Case Study of the 1965 Killings in Indonesia

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While today's Indonesian democratic government remains committed to the New Order orthodoxy about the mass killings of 1965, new counter-narratives challenging official history are emerging in the new media. Applying mixed-methods and multi-sited ethnography, this study aims to extend our collaborative understanding of the most recent developments in this situation by identifying multiple online interpersonal stories, deliberations, and debates related to the case as well as offline field studies in Java and Bali. Practically and theoretically, we ask how the tragedy of the 1965 killings is contested in the new media and how social memory plays out in this contestation. The study finds that new media potentially act as emancipatory sites channeling and liberating the voices of those that the nation has stigmatized as 'objectively guilty'. We argue that the arena of contestation is threefold: individual, public vs. state narrative, and theoretical. As such, the transborder space of the new media strongly mediates corrective new voices to fill missing gaps in the convoluted history of this central event of modern Indonesian history.

**Keywords:** 1965 Killings; Master vs. Counter Narratives; Memory Studies; New Media; Southeast Asia



## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia experienced one of the 20th century's worst mass killings. Responding to what is commonly known as the September 30th, 1965 Movement, it is estimated to have caused between at least five hundred thousand and more than a million deaths, not to mention the imprisonment and ongoing stigmatization of many victims (Cribb, 1990, p. 14; Marching, 2017). The 1965-66 mass killings preceded Indonesia's transition to 32 years of authoritarian rule known as the New Order era. However, unlike other countries, where governments have issued national apologies for their past wrongs, there has been no systematic attempt to modify the discourse around the 1965 massacres in Indonesia.<sup>1</sup> Although new evidence from both survivors and perpetrators has enabled more

1 Other countries issued national apologies for actions taken against their own citizens. Germany is the most prominent example of systemic government action after mass killings with an international criminal court to address the crimes of the Nazi regime between 1933 and 1945. Australia officially apologized in 2008 for the wrongs that the Australian government had inflicted on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Buenos Aires apologized in 2004 for those who were killed and victimized by the state during Argentina's dirty war (1974-1983).

scholars to identify systematic patterns of violence across the Indonesian archipelago (Hearman, 2018; McGregor, Melvin, & Pohlman, 2018, p. 4), the official history of the tragedy remains dominant. Hence, Indonesia has a long way to go before it issues a national apology, let alone dispels the myths surrounding the event and its aftermath.

Important insights on the social memory of such historical events may come from memory studies. Emerging in the early 1970s, Maurice Halbwachs' early work of *The Social Frameworks of Memory* (1925/1992) is often considered a seminal book on memory studies as it coined the notion of collective memory. Building on Halbwachs' sociological theory, Assmann and Assmann (in van Dijk, 2007, p. 12) split the notion of collective memory into cultural memory and communicative memory, and positioned cultural memory at one end of a complex structure which also involves individual, social, and political memory. In this study, we use the notion of *social memory* to share a strong affinity with Assmann's cultural memory while still highlighting the dynamic dimension of memory both at the individual and the collective level.

At the same time, there has been an astonishing switch to virtually free and instant electronic communication, which has become massively popular and transformed societies in countries throughout the world (Lengauer, 2016). Since its introduction in the 1980s, it has been used by the public to archive and share information and to mediatize artefacts through time and space (Boyd, 2010). Combining memory and media studies, recent research has focused on contemporary memories of current occurrences and described how 'netizens' utilize digital media to archive, witness, share, and remember events (Allen & Bryan, 2011; Hess, 2007; Smit, Heinrich, & Broersma, 2017; Recuber, 2012). Furthermore, research investigated the use of digital media to portray current events commemorating past events or memorializing death (Blackburn, 2013; Döveling, Harju, & Shavit, 2015). Markhotyrkh (2017), for example, has analyzed how digital media is used to remember events that occurred far before the emergence of digital media but have remained contentious and caused ongoing conflict. He emphasized utopian and dystopian views on YouTube, including whether the platform is able to propel unbiased and tolerant perspectives of past events, in (t)his case related to the Kyiv War.

In the case of Indonesia, several researchers have revealed how conventional media were used to propagate anti-communist messages during the New Order (Wieringa & Katjasungkana, 2019), and how movies and news reports have tried to deconstruct the official memory of the 1965-66 killings (Paramaditha, 2013). Little attention has been given to the new media, in this case the video sharing site YouTube, and how it has become a new space for contesting official and alternative memories of the killings. Rather than studying the 'hard facts', this article focuses on exploring these representations and contestations of social memory in the new media. In doing so, we investigate the contestation of the narratives about the 1965-1966 killings as represented in videos uploaded to YouTube, as well as grounded empirical data gathered from intensive offline fieldwork in Java and Bali. Our study, conducted between March and December 2018, applies a mixed methods approach, combining descriptive content analysis and narrative analysis of selected videos related to the tragedy and multi-sited ethnography conducted online and offline at sites in Java and Bali (Marcus, 1995; Yulianto, 2015, pp. 69-92). It aims to serve as a nexus between

narratives of memory and the new media. Owing to the flexibility and rewritability of digital media, narratives of memory in online media are infinite and diverse. As such, this research discusses counter and master narratives of the killings through the lens of memory and media studies. It draws on new popular narratives of the tragedy and analyses how the new media are helping to shape knowledge of the past.

### MASTER VERSUS COUNTER NARRATIVE OF THE 1965 KILLINGS

The official master narrative of the 1965 tragedy sconced in concealing vast amounts of information on a dark chapter of Indonesia's past through at least two main instruments. The first was the book *Tragedi Nasional Percobaan Kup G30S/PKI di Indonesia*, written by Nugroho Notosusanto and Ismail Saleh in 1968. This book, published only three years after the event, was the first written document on the issue. The second instrument is a propaganda film entitled *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI*, which roughly translates to "The Betrayal of the Communists". Directed by Arifin C. Noer and the most expensive film ever made in Indonesia at that time, this film was a mandatory viewing for all students of the New Order.

Neither the book nor the cinematic narrative is historically accurate. Nonetheless, these instruments have proven very effective in shaping the social memory of the event and produced profound political consequences until today (Heryanto, 2006). According to John Roosa's (2006) *Pretext for Mass Murder*, the master narrative holds that in the early morning hours of 1 October 1965 a group calling itself the September 30th Movement kidnapped and executed six generals of the Indonesian army, including its highest commander. The group, affiliated to the Communist Party of Indonesia (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, PKI), claimed that it was attempting to pre-empt a military coup (Roosa, 2006, p. 3). In this narrative, members of Gerwani (*Gerakan Wanita Indonesia*, Indonesian Women's Movement) have a central role, being the depraved and sexually licentious murderers of those six army generals (and one lieutenant), who danced naked in front of those generals before slashing them with razors, gouging out their eyes, cutting off their penises, and throwing their dead bodies into the well at Lubang Buaya (crocodile hole) (Wieringa, 2002, p. 201). The Suharto regime used this event as evidence for the massive and ruthless offensive by the PKI against all non-communist forces and presented itself as the savior of the Indonesian nation after defeating the movement (Roosa, 2006, p. 7).

Scholarly articles, however, have questioned this master narrative. As shown by Robert Cribb (1990), Ariel Heryanto (2006), Douglas Kammen and Katherine E. McGregor (2012), and Annie Pohlman (2019), a military movement in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta led to the murder of seven military generals and three army officers in the night of 30 September 1965, which came to be known as the September 30th Movement (G30S). Although the official state narrative named the event 'G30S/PKI', the killing actually happened at dawn of the following day (1 October 1965). In *A Preliminary Analysis of the October 1, 1965, Coup in Indonesia*, widely known as the 'Cornell Paper', historians Benedict Anderson and Ruth McVey (2009) argued that the G30S was essentially an internal army affair. Harold Crouch (2007) identified three actors that may have been involved in the coup. First, the coup may have been committed by military officers who were dissatisfied with the army leadership. Second,

it may have been masterminded by the PKI, as espoused by the army. Third, the coup may have been a collaborative effort between dissident officers and PKI leaders. Debate has also centered on Suharto's connection with the movement. Many studies have regarded Suharto as the initiator of the killings, as no other actor stood to gain more political power than him. A book by Colonel Abdul Latief (1999), titled *Pledoi Kolonel A. Latief: Soeharto Terlibat G30S*, stated that Latief had reported the planned movement to Suharto on 28 September 1965, two days before the killings. He again issued a report to Suharto four hours before the generals were killed. Suharto, according to Latief, did nothing to prevent the attack. He did not even pass the reports on to General Ahmad Yani and General AH. Nasution, who were at the top of the military command structure. Latief's book has stirred speculation that Suharto was somehow involved in and part of the conspiracy.

Last but not least, speculation has also revolved around the role of the United States' Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) during the heightening ideological rivalry between that country and its allies and the Eastern Bloc in the Cold War (Scott, 1985; Wardaya, 2006). Finding the true mastermind of the 30 September Movement is nearly impossible (Cribb, 1990; Ricklefs, 2001; Roosa, 2006). However, recent developments have shown that discourse on the PKI and communism in general continues to be broadly used to stigmatize individuals or groups that do not conform with mainstream political views; these are not just members of PKI and affiliated organizations, but may be individuals of any political party in Indonesia. As a consequence, during the 32 years of Suharto's authoritarian regime and even today, the dominant memory of the event has referred to the official history and its resulting stigmatization and political genocide of people allegedly affiliated with the PKI.

### MASTER AND COUNTER NARRATIVE IN THE NEW MEDIA

As both dominant and resistant memories are widely and simultaneously shared in society (Adam, 2018), digital reconstructions of memories about the events of 1965 are also diverse. This notwithstanding, it should be highlighted that the crux of digital memory of the 1965-66 events center around the film *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI*. Due to YouTube's algorithm, users' behavior, and the cultural context of Indonesia, this film can be searched, watched, and remediated, so that it remains far from obsolescence. Before reaching this conclusion, we took several steps. We inserted the keywords *peristiwa 1965*, *G30S-PKI*, *G30S/PKI*, and *kommunisme* into YouTube's search engine, and identified 39 videos with at least 300,000 viewers. The keyword *peristiwa 1965* was chosen because the phrase is commonly used to refer to the genocide of 1965 and has a more 'neutral' tone than *genocide* or *mass killing*. The keywords *G30S-PKI* and *G30S/PKI* are widely used in Indonesian society. Unlike *peristiwa 1965*, the hegemonic narrative is embedded in these keywords. *Kommunisme* is an umbrella term referring to all issues and perspectives related to communism, but most commonly linked to the genocide of 1965.

After the keywords were entered into the YouTube search bar, we compiled all videos, ordered them using the "most views" filter, and selected those videos that had more than 300,000 views on the day we searched for them (September 1-10, 2018). Videos that were the same, but uploaded by different accounts, we considered

different videos. However, this rarely happened. We retrieved and watched 39 videos. We found that most (29) of these videos amplify the hegemonic social memory of the 1965 killings. Many individual users (not related to formal institutions like mainstream media companies) have uploaded *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* either in its entirety or in part. This may be related to the political economy of YouTube, as the propaganda movie has become a popular commodity that offers financial benefits for uploaders (Reading, 2014). In addition, the high number of viewers attracted to the propaganda movie might indicate that, within the cultural context of Indonesia, it will not easily become obsolete. The film *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* that was uploaded by the YouTube account of Usep Kartawibawa has gained nine million views.

Meanwhile, non-institutional or personal users have created new videos by taking photographs of the killed generals or other historical scenes – which are widely available online – and rearranging them into new narratives. For instance, self-produced videos include photographic stories of the killed generals and the Lubang Buaya Museum’s dioramas, accompanied by the song *Gugur Bunga*, created by Nusantara TV. Videos or pictures showing the dioramas in the Lubang Buaya Museum, indicating that the museum provides opportunities for YouTube users to reproduce and perpetuate the dominant narrative of the event by using the dioramas as illustrations. Interestingly, another self-produced video titled *DN Aidit Setelah G30-S* (DN Aidit after the September 30 Movement) contains a historical photographic collage and uses a computer-generated voice as its narrator. This might indicate that the uploaders have tried to distance themselves from their own creations, imitating the official memorials and museums that instill a sensation of distance in their audiences by scaling up the buildings and diminishing the size of the audience (Haskins, 2007, p. 403). Worth mentioning here is the fact that these popular videos were uploaded around September 2017. This was a period when Indonesian discourse included strong debate, especially between Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) and the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia (Kemendikbud) about whether the film *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* should be screened in schools (Akbar, 2017).

An authoritative tone has also been used by institutional users who are mainly content providers (Visual TV, Anshori TV, City Network) or the official YouTube accounts of mainstream media companies. Videos created by institutional users (iNews by MNC Group, TVOneNews by TVOne) usually include new content on their topics. They may feature the children of killed generals or retired members of Indonesia’s military. For example, *Eksklusif! Kesaksian Anak Ahmad Yani atas Kejamnya G30S/PKI* (Exclusive! The Testimony of the Son of Ahmad Yani on the Cruelty of G30S/PKI) by Visual TV takes the form of a field report and asserts the truth of the propaganda by including the testimony of Ahmad Yani’s son, Eddy Yani, as well as scenes from the propaganda film and the song *Gugur Bunga*.

Having watched the 29 YouTube videos, we found that the main themes of these videos and their dominant versions of historical memory included the killing of the generals, the lifting of the generals’ bodies from the hole (Lubang Buaya), and the suffering endured by the children of the generals. The narratives are constructed by having the descendants of killed generals give testimony, simulating the deadly event at the Lubang Buaya Museum and the Sasmita Loka Pahlawan Revolusi Museum, inserting clips of the song *Gugur Bunga*, clips of the propaganda film, or fully

uploading the film. Some videos, rather than using *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* as it is, remix the film to deconstruct the sanctity of the official memory it represents. This shows that YouTube's algorithms (tags, titles) also play a role in films with alternative memories having (less) popularity. The same rule applies to Joshua Oppenheimer's films on YouTube (*The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence*), which have been seen by some 500,000 to 1.5 million viewers but did not appear in our list as they were uploaded under their original titles, rather than using clickbait or provocative titles.

While ignoring the rules for gaining popularity on YouTube, some 22 other videos have successfully countered the power of the official history of 1965, as seen in our discussion below.

### THE VOICES OF SILENCE AND THE EMANCIPATORY ROLE OF THE NEW MEDIA

From our online and offline fieldwork in Java and Bali, we found large segments of untold stories and numerous testimonies using multimedialities, that is, the simultaneous use of media formats including text, graphics, animations, pictures, videos, and sounds to present information related to our case study (Van Dijk, 2007, p. 175). We identified 22 different online multimedialities of interpersonal stories, deliberations, and debates on YouTube related to our case study (see Table 1).

Looking at these 22 titles, only a few directly reflect the killings of 1965 and their aftermath. It was not easy for us to find and identify these videos on the internet because most gave the impression that they differed from the theme we were looking for. Take the first video, *Mwathirika*, as an example. The title of this puppet performance by Papermoon Puppet Theatre (PPT) is taken from the Swahili word for victim and provides no clue or indication of its subject matter. As such, viewers may have no idea of its subject matter unless they watch the film. The artistic narrative presents a non-verbal theatrical performance that recounts the genocide of 1965 through the eyes of those who were victimized, those whom the country has tried to forget.<sup>2</sup> During a 2011 show in Yogyakarta, Maria and Iwan – the initiator and director of Papermoon Puppet Theatre (PPT) – said:

Although there have been hundreds of titles and films responding to the controversy of this gray history, how many young boys and young girls in our homeland know, watch, or read it? That is why we were moved to produce *Mwathirika*.

The narrative of *Mwathirika* is based on the life experiences of Maria and Iwan's family who faced discrimination for years, not only on the part of the state, but also on the part of their neighbors, friends, and even relatives. They had accepted their fates and kept silent. Their political voice had been eradicated, and they continued to be considered by the New Order regime to be proponents of the PKI. As a result, they were situated differently in their political identities, economic, and social living conditions, and faced multiple forms of discrimination. A good number of victims were

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2 See, for example, *Penumpasan Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* (1984), *The Act of Killing* (2012), *Noda Lelaki di Dada Mona* (2008), *Mwathirika* (2010), *Setjangkir Kopi dari Playa* (2011), or *Surat dari Praha* (2017).

NO	TITLE	DIRECTOR/PRODUCER	GENRE
1	Mwathirika	Papermoon Puppet Theater	Puppet theater
2	r.i.	Kotak Hitam Forum	Documentary
3	Yang Bertanah Air, Tidak Bertanah	Kartika Pratiwi	Documentary
4	Mia Bustam	Kotak Hitam Forum	Documentary
5	Memori tentang Buru	Kotak Hitam Forum	Documentary
6	Dance of Missing Body	Kotak Hitam Forum	Documentary
7	Lekra: Gerakkan Kebudayaan	Kotak Hitam Forum	Documentary
8	Pelukis Rakyat, Lekra dan Tragedi	Kotak Hitam Forum	Documentary
9	Jembatan Bacem	Yayasan Wiludiharta/ELSAM	Documentary
10	Masean's Message	Dwitra T Aryana	Documentary
11	The Look of Silence	Joshua Oppenheimer	Documentary
12	The Act of Killing	Joshua Oppenheimer	Documentary
13	Para Korban Membongkar Sejarah	Asian Calling/TempoTV/KBR 68H	Documentary
14	Daulat Petani Ala Mbah Suko	Asian Calling/TempoTV/KBR 68H	Documentary
15	Perempuan Bekas Tahanan 1965 Melawan Lupa	Asian Calling/TempoTV/KBR 68H	Documentary
16	Api Kartini	Kotak Hitam Forum	Documentary
17	Mass Grave	Lexy Rambadetta	Documentary
18	Road to Justice	Lexy Rambadetta	Documentary
19	Efek Teror Pembunuhan Massal 1965	Hilmar Farid/ Javin TV	Documentary
20	Noda Lelaki di Dada Mona	Papermoon Puppet Theater	Puppet theater
21	Setjangkir Kopi dari Playa	Papermoon Puppet Theater	Puppet theater
22	Surat dari Praha	Angga D Sasongko	Film

Table 1. List of multimedia counter narratives on YouTube (own compilation).

burdened by poverty, largely the consequence of the legacy of discrimination and stigmatization they and their families faced. At this point, we understand that this tragedy is not only about the killings but also about the millions that were effectively deprived of their rights as citizens.

Going through PPT's videos on YouTube, we noted that the conversations between the performance groups are marked by gibberish. To communicate their messages to the audience, the group instead relies on puppets, gestures, music, videos, and special effects. The only words spoken clearly are the names of the characters. These symbolic representations are meant to destabilize the very idea of the propaganda film *Penumpasan Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI*. *Mwathirika* consists of nine scenes, each of which tells Maria and Iwan's experiences as truly as possible. Both offline and online performances of this narrative were aimed to provide them with alternative voices. For them, and for other survivors and their descendants, this representation is apparently a way of healing, of rejecting the injustice they have continued to face. The new media – and art – are helping

them break their silence and giving them a voice (Marching, 2017; see Yulianto, 2017, and Bieleki, 2018, for more information on the role of art in memory studies).

Another film, titled *Masean's Message*, deals with the killings in Bali after more than 50 years of silence. This remarkable work, produced by the young Balinese filmmaker Dwitra J. Ariana, is worthy of special mention in our study. It is a documentary video of the socio-cultural reconciliation between the victims and perpetrators of violence in Batu Agung, a village in Jembrana Regency, Bali, where an estimated 8,000 alleged PKI members were killed between 1965 and 1966 (Allen & Pallermo, 2005). Conflict resolution is presented as the main storyline by the film's director and producer. It shows the audience that interpersonal or socio-cultural reconciliation has apparently been achieved by those involved in the mass killings in Bali.

As narrated in this 77-minute documentary, socio-cultural reconciliation did not begin or end with trials as survivors had no choice but to put aside their desire for revenge and start living side by side with those who murdered their loved ones. The filmmaker compiled the stories of perpetrators, victims' families, traditional village communities, police officers, local soldiers, the head of Jembrana Regency's local parliament, and residents outside Bali, then transformed it into a message. In our offline meeting with Dwitra, he told us:

So, I was told by some locals here that there were always people who committed suicide every year. Always . . . and the number was increasing. Many people also saw a hideous head ghost intimidating them . . . at any rate, village life is not peaceful . . . many disturbances . . . and we Balinese, we believe that there must be something wrong . . . finally an old man of 70 told us about a mass grave that he believed was the reason why village life had been destabilized. I hope this film can be a bridge to help us better understand that we are all actually victims; both those who have been killed and those who have killed.

The uncovering of the mass grave and the presentation of this regional narrative, both offline and online, is a highly relevant example of how Indonesians have coped with the legacy of mass killing that has also been contested. For example, while not blaming this local initiative, the Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy (ELSAM) mentioned in an offline interview that the exhumation of mass graves has in fact endangered the process of forensic identification as there was no autopsy for the exhumed bones. The mass graves were primarily exhumed to safeguard Balinese cosmology – in this case, all those who died had to be cremated following the Ngaben ritual, for their souls may be sent to the next life in peace. At this point, although we may see that both sides have a strong argument, the exhumation may definitely have deterred future examinations of this issue.

ELSAM itself has produced a documentary film on the story/history/memory of *Jembatan Bacem*, also known as *Kretek Bacem* or *Bacem Bridge*. This bridge is located in the southern part of Solo, Central Java, and is associated with the brutal murder of (suspected) PKI members, whose bodies were dumped in the river in 1965. The documentary includes interviews with local people and their extended families, who have kept silent for more than 40 years because they were still haunted by fear. However, with the new media, current and subsequent generations may recall the past through

what Ong (1982) identifies as memory's technologization. Without having to conduct academic research or physically visit Solo, as we did in late June 2017, all people may learn from the media that local people broke their silence and held a spiritual ceremony called *Sadranan* to remember and honor family members and relatives of the victims. From the video, as well as our interview with an old woman who lived next to the river, hope is evident that *Jembatan Bacem* may become a place to honor those who did not return.

*Dance of the Missing Body*, produced by Kotak Hitam Forum, is a film that tells the story of traditional dancers in Java who went 'missing' in 1965 after the government alleged them to be affiliated with the PKI. The video was narrated by Dyah Larasi, an Indonesian professor based at the University of Minnesota. Her grandmother, who was a Javanese dancer, told her the story of her once fellow dancers. Although the dance *Gandrung Banyuwangi* is still performed, Dyah says that it is not the same, as its historical links have been cut. As Dyah said: "The bodies that are removed from the missing dancers are replaced by charming bodies who conspire with the state through education institutions and local governments" (Hartiningsih, 2008). "This helps and supports the state's amnesia project", she added.

*Api Kartini*, on the other hand, tells the story of former political prisoners who revisit their prison camp in Plantungan, Central Java. After the events of 1965, they were arrested and imprisoned as they were alleged to have been linked to or members of the PKI. In the film, they tell the story of their lives behind bars, of their suffering in silence, of their memories of the government's power, of their unspeakable trauma, and of their awareness of the need to remember past violence (for more information on this video see [www.kotakhitamforum.org](http://www.kotakhitamforum.org)).

*C'est La Vie* is the title given to a short semi-fiction film directed by a 32-year-old man from Jakarta who studied at a broadcasting academy. The movie recounts the memory of the filmmaker's father who was jailed on Buru Island for many years. Apart from the story of his father, however, the film also reflects on the young man's struggle to cope with his family's story, as he confessed offline:

Throughout my life, I was told hundreds of stories by my father. All of them are bitter stories. He told them flatly, without emotion, seemingly without hatred. Many [stories] are fragmented and hard to believe . . . they may be true, they may be not . . . but what can I do? I recorded everything. I tried to find justification for what my father has told me, what I have found, what I have been looking for.

Both the film and the statement above clearly reflect the deep inner torment and struggle of those who the state has judged to be guilty. At this point, understanding the storyline of both the movie as well as the filmmaker's memory of his father's story is not easy. It is like peeling an onion with its many layers. Being labeled a *penyintas* or survivor of 1965 left the filmmaker's father, as well as his descendants, with an eternal burden. In fact, the filmmaker himself sometimes doubted what his father – who had been a political detainee for years during the biggest wave of the anti-communist campaign in late 1960s – had told him. In an offline meeting, he desperately told us of his deep inner sadness.

If I was not the child of a former prisoner, I would have been able to live a normal life like other people. I would have had opportunities that only ordinary people have. Sometimes, I deny this fact and long for the opposite . . . I do not want my children to experience insecurities like I did.

We empathized with his experiences and memories. His decision to share his private memories with the public mediated between the private and the public. Mediated memories, in this digital age, are as much creative reconstructions as they are documentary scenarios of what actually happened (Van Dijk, 2007, p. 173). The above cases demonstrate that individual – the intricacies of people’s own life histories – and social narratives are entangled with contextual factors, both those in the past and those in the present. Furthermore, we may see two important points from the social memories above. First, memories are potentially contested in themselves. Second, memories may also reflect significant dynamics in their evocative role to fill the gap of what has been ignored, forgotten, absent, or possibly manipulated by the official history, which in turn may shape how the history of the genocide of 1965 will be remembered.

#### MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE 1965 COUNTER NARRATIVES

As an old proverb says, all rivers lead to the ocean: We believe that the goal and major motivation of all attempts to counter official narratives, no matter their approach, is ultimately justice. The methods or strategies that characterize how new counter narratives are presented is one important element of our research findings. We identified two main characteristics of such counter narratives. *First*, unlike the language and words of the official narrative, which are propagandistic and confrontative (e.g., fight (*lawan*), anti/opposition (*tolak*), the counter narratives have deliberately avoided the use of binary opposition in their diction. As we can see from the list above, producers tend to use soberly grounded narratives from the perspectives of the people themselves (i.e., an emic perspective). At this point, we note that language is not a neutral faculty, but conveys a particular meaning and association, and even a political statement. Using a particular *word*, thus, might promote a particular meaning and association. For instance, Dwitra, the Balinese producer, chose to entitle his documentary *Massean Massage* to connect the excavation of the mass grave with Balinese cosmology. This title is designed to strategically send a modest message, thereby promoting socio-cultural reconciliation – like that done in the village – over hopelessly waiting for justice from the state.

*Second*, although a number of films and documentaries have attempted to alter the official narrative, they have not been designed to be confrontative. Survivors and human rights activists have instead countered the master narrative indirectly. Content producers, as we confirmed through offline interviews, were clear that the production of digital narratives was not meant to intentionally fight against the official narrative of the New Order. Nor was content produced for profit. Most said that they mainly wanted to keep their memories alive and to share their life histories with a broad audience, making them as widely available as possible.

## CONCLUSION

Findings from this new media analysis of the genocide of 1965 indicate that social memory is contested on three-levels, covering the individual familial level, the public vs. state level, and the theoretical level. The individual, familial level is evident, for example, in the film *C'est La Vie*, in which the filmmaker recounts the sad narratives of his father, who was banished to Buru Island for years. These narratives remain 'unbelievable', as the director of the film puts it, highlighting his numerous questions and skepticism about his father's stories and his family's tragedy.

The second level covers the official state narrative versus public counter narratives. Whereas during the authoritarian New Order, almost all alleged communists and their descendants were silenced, forced to bury their grief, and reconcile with the pain, residual bitterness, injustice, and total exclusion they experienced, this study finds that there are striking counter narratives freely available on the new media. These new counter narratives are arguably important in framing and reframing knowledge and understanding of Indonesia's dark past. Although such new narratives undeniably retain a tense relationship with the dominant and official New Order history, through the use of new media's multimediality they have powerfully driven emancipatory goals, channeling the strength of survivors and the post-memory generation, while offering hope for emancipation and democratization to those whom the state has victimized. However, because YouTube's algorithm allows certain content to top the trending list, videos promoting the status quo tend to be more widely watched than videos promoting counter narratives, especially when they do not use the titles or keywords that are commonly used by dominant narratives.

Third, on the theoretical level, the article reveals that memory is concerned with the past, but is not something that is locked in the past. It is definitely omnipresent, a big part of our daily experiences, and is interwoven, intertwined with history. Memory and history are closely linked. What differentiates memory from history is that it deals with emotion, with human feelings. Further, as explained by Lowenthal (1997, p. 32), while realizing that the past can never be retrieved unaltered, historians still strive for impartial, checkable accuracy, minimizing bias as inescapable but deplorable. Others, though, see bias and error as normal and necessary. However, although historians realize that history always attenuates truth, beyond academia this deficiency is little known or largely denied. In most school texts, history remains one-dimensional, even where controversy is rampant (Lowenthal, 1997, pp. 36-37). For example, Indonesian textbooks on the events of 1965 continue to reproduce the New Order's official narrative and lead younger Indonesians to be fixed and fixated on this narrative as the one true official history. The core issue is localized to the killing of six generals by the PKI. A larger spectrum of untold facts, such as mass killings, civil unrest, sexual abuse, and the past and present mistreatments experienced by thousands of Indonesian civilians in 1965/1966 as well as subsequent generations – has been deliberately marginalized or even silenced by those in power.

However, dealing with social memory in oral culture (Hirsch 2008) differs from today's digital era. Recent scholarship, as well as new social movements, have demonstrated how the recent advent of digital technology has brought fundamental changes in the way we remember the past and, in particular, how we deal with memories of

the past. As vividly demonstrated above, narratives of social memory may play a role in countering the propagandistic master narrative and even possibly promote real improvements for national reconciliation in Indonesia.



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