

Impunity

Buru revisited

BBC, 27-12-2015

Buru Island in East Indonesia was once home to 12,000 political prisoners, suspected communist sympathisers sent to toil there during the rule of President Suharto from the late 1960s.

It became known as the prison island: it was where people were detained without charge, forced to do hard labour clearing the jungle with simple tools to make roads and farms.

They were not given adequate food or clothing. Hundreds died due to illness, worn down by the toll of physical labour. Some others committed suicide.

In the face of increasing global condemnation they were released by the end of the 1970s. They were free to leave the island but had to report regularly to the local authorities. This continued until President Suharto fell from power in 1998.

But for some of the prisoners, returning to everyday life was simply not possible because of the stigma surrounding their detention.

About 20 of them opted to stay on the island that imprisoned them. These are the settlers' stories.

Read the whole report and see the photographs at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35129415>.

Indonesia's identity war 50 years in the making

EastAsiaForum, 23 December 2015, Author: Robert Cribb, ANU¹

In October 2015, the Ubud Writers and Readers Festival cancelled the launch of three books containing testimonies collected from survivors of Indonesia's worst political genocide of the 20th century. Why is discussing history so controversial in Indonesia?



Members of the Youth Wing of the Indonesian Communist Party (Pemuda Rakjat) are guarded by soldiers as they are taken by open truck to prison in Jakarta, October 30 1965. (Photo: AAP).

50 years ago, some members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) attempted an unsuccessful coup in Jakarta. The vast majority of PKI members had no idea of the coup, but the PKI as a whole was accused of preparing for the wholesale torture and massacre of its enemies. Barely a dozen people, including six senior

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generals, died in the Jakarta coup and related events, but the Indonesian rumour market turned these casualties into portent for Red Terror. In a retaliatory atmosphere described as 'kill or be killed', the Indonesian army led non-communist Indonesians in massacres that peaked from November 1965 until March 1966.

The West largely ignored the killings, instead focusing on the power struggle in Jakarta. In 1966, Major-General Suharto had pushed aside President Sukarno and established a military-dominated regime known as the New Order.

Suharto held power until 1997. His regime was marked by sustained economic development and improved welfare, deepening corruption, environmental destruction and a highly managed travesty of democracy — regular elections gave no possibility of changing the government. The regime was repressive, but it drew legitimacy from its economic performance and from its claim to have saved the country from communism.

This claim required the regime to continue demonising the PKI. The image of communists forged in 1965 was inculcated in young Indonesians in sustained propaganda through the education system. The regime waged a shadow war on communism, banning the teaching of Marxism and limiting the civil rights of people with old communist links. There was no question of publicly challenging the official version of the events of 1965–66, let alone of bringing the perpetrators to account.

But during the final decade of Suharto's rule, the regime's anti-communist stance appeared increasingly outdated. The Soviet Union had collapsed and China had embarked unequivocally on a capitalist road. Many observers expected that Indonesia's anti-communist rhetoric would evaporate with Suharto's eventual departure. It seemed likely that the restrictions on Indonesians with communist links would be lifted and that a serious effort would be made to establish the truth of the five months of terror in 1965–66.

Yet, the retreat from anti-communism has been partial and hesitant. The few remaining prisoners were quickly released and the coordinated anti-communist propaganda was scaled back. Some civil rights were restored to alleged PKI associates. Activists began gathering testimony from survivors to ensure that there would be a record of the killings. They published books exploring unexplained aspects of the 1965 coup and detailing the experiences of survivors.

But the ban on Marxism remained in place and there was no question of an official acknowledgement of the genocide. School textbooks continue to identify the PKI as a whole as responsible for a plot to seize power, implicitly legitimising the killings as retaliation and precaution. Some, but not all, of the new books were banned.

In 2012, Indonesia's official Human Rights Commission issued a detailed report on the killings based on four years of research. The commission declared the killings to be a gross human rights violation and urged the Attorney General to initiate a formal investigation as prelude to the prosecution of the perpetrators. But the Attorney General described the material presented as 'inadequate' and declined to take action.

Anti-communist civil society groups have also rallied to discourage and intimidate activists. They occasionally 'sweep' through bookshops, removing pro-communist books and burning them in the street. They would show up en masse at activists' events trying to force them to disband. If the activists were stubborn, they threatened venue owners saying they would smash the property. For the most part, these anti-communist groups are Islamic and have been involved in other unilateral actions to uphold what they see as public morality.

In October 2015, the Ubud Writers and Readers Festival cancelled the launch of three books containing testimonies. The organisers of the festival — known as a defiant symbol of intellectual and artistic openness — were reportedly threatened by the powerful military intelligence agency that the whole festival

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would be shut down if the launch went ahead. To save the rest of the program, they agreed to cancel the 1965-related events.

Why is there such strong resistance in Indonesia to acknowledging the events of 1965 as a major crime? One important reason is the threat of prosecution. The killings were carried out mainly by young men, inside and outside the military. The possibility of being tried for their actions half a century ago is alarming and they are determined to stifle any movement in that direction.

Economic interests are also involved. Communists lost not only lives and freedom in the repression; they also lost property on a huge scale. During the killings, houses, agricultural land and businesses belonging to communists were expropriated. If the legitimacy of the killings were to be overthrown, then the legality of these expropriations would also be in doubt. Millions of dollars in assets is potentially at stake.

But above all, the killings have become iconic in the ongoing culture war over the identity of Indonesia. The moral authority of the army and that of Islam remain significant constants in the political process. Even without prosecutions or restitution, recognising the killings as genocide would be a huge moral defeat for the army that organised them and for the Muslim groups that took part. It would refute the army's notion of itself as defender of the nation and challenge the view of many Muslims that their religion is defined by justice and mercy.

The war over historical memory is a stalking horse for a thoroughly contemporary contest over the soul of Indonesia.

Freedom of Religion

RI observes peaceful Xmas despite blackouts, deadly incident

The Jakarta Post, 26-12-2015

Christmas celebrations across the nation on Friday went off relatively smoothly despite a number of disruptions, including blackouts, rallies and a deadly electrical accident. In Gorontalo, many Christians were forced to celebrate Christmas without power due to blackouts lasting for up to nine hours on Thursday and Friday in most parts of the province. Gorontalo regency resident Grace Pricilia said the power outage had disturbed her family's preparation for the religious holiday. "We had to cook dishes and finish putting Christmas decorations up at our house in the dark," she told The Jakarta Post on Friday.

Maranatha Church leader Deysi Derdanella, of Limboto, Gorontalo regency, said her church nearly had to cancel Christmas services due to the blackout. "Fortunately, a church congregation member lent us a generator," she said.

The North Sumatra Police's headquarters also reported that Christmas celebrations in the province, in which one third of the 12 million residents are Christians, went smoothly and peacefully. However, a policeman and a member of the Pramuka scout movement both of whom were manning the Christmas security post in Brandan, Langkat regency, North Sumatra died after being electrocuted on Thursday afternoon. "Both victims were installing a TV antenna at the post when the incident occurred. The antenna accidentally touched a high-voltage power cable and they were electrocuted," North Sumatra Police's spokesperson Sr. Comr. Helfi Assegaf said.

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In Surabaya, East Java, members of the Islam Defenders Front (FPI) held rallies in several locations in the city on Wednesday, urging companies not to force their Muslim employees to wear Santa Claus clothing during Christmas celebrations in the city. "It's a peaceful rally. We are reminding them not to force their Muslim employees to wear Santa Claus costumes because it is not in accordance with Islamic teachings," said East Java FPI head Andry Ermawan.

Local authorities in several regions, including Surabaya and Padang, West Sumatra, earlier issued an appeal to employers not to force their Muslim employees to wear Christmas paraphernalia. Christmas this year fell a day after the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, with both religious celebrations declared national holidays.

Christmas celebrations were also reportedly peaceful in a number of regions, such as in Bandung, West Java; Makassar, South Sulawesi; Pekanbaru, Riau; and Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara. In Kupang, around 200 Muslim youths affiliated with the East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) Anshor Youth Movement provided assistance to safeguard Christmas celebrations in the city, helping police personnel guard several churches.

In Central Java, 282 Christian inmates in various prisons also received sentence remissions on Friday. In Bali, 91 inmates at Kerobokan Penitentiary were also sentence reductions, including 14 foreigners, among them Heather Lois Mack and Tommy Schaefer, the US teen couple who murdered Mack's mother. Both Mack and Schaefer received one month remission. Mack, who is now taking care of her baby in the prison, was sentenced to 10 years, while Schaefer received 15 years.

President Heads to East Nusa Tenggara for Christmas Celebration

The Jakarta Globe, 27-12-2015

Jakarta. President Joko Widodo and the first lady, Iriana, are flying to East Nusa Tenggara on Sunday to join a high-profile belated Christmas celebration in the province's capital, Kupang.

"The president will attend the national Christmas celebration on Monday, Dec. 28 in Kupang," Bey Machmudin, a spokesman for the State Secretariat, said in a statement on Sunday.

The former Jakarta governor, better known as Jokowi, will also be conducting visits to a series of ongoing infrastructure development sites. The president will inaugurate of a new commercial terminal at Komodo Airport in Labuan Bajo, visit a 5 megawatt solar-powered generator in Oelpuah, a village near Kupang, and join the groundbreaking ceremony for the Rotiklot dam, the statement said.

Local authorities have prepared some 2,800 people to secure the area ahead of the president's visit, according to Kupang's regional military command chief, Brig. Gen. Heri Wiranto, as quoted by Tempo.co.

Last year, the president — known for his sudden inspection visits or "blusukan" — attended the national Christmas celebration in Papua, not long after security forces in the restive province shot and killed five protesters, sparking calls for the president to stay away. Jokowi didn't budge and promised he would get to the bottom of the shooting.

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For Indonesian Christians, the Most Fearful Time of the Year

The Jakarta Globe, 26-2-2015, by Johannes Nugroho

As Christians across Indonesia streamed into churches to attend Christmas masses and services this year, they couldn't possibly miss the heavy security presence. The sight may be surprising if not disconcerting for Christians elsewhere but heavy security at festivals held by religious minority groups has become the norm in Indonesia. The question remains why it is necessary at all.

There's no denying that the initiative to "secure" religious minority events is laudable. The media was filled with reports about how police officers conducted bomb sweeps in churches and how moderate Muslim youth groups such as Nahdlatul Ulama's Banser activists volunteered to stand guard to help ensure that Christians were able to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Indeed tales of heroism aren't in short supply, especially with regard to the voluntary brigade. In 2000, for example, a NU Banser member by the name of Riyanto perished while on duty at the Eben Haezer Church in Mojokerto, East Java. His bravery in volunteering to help guard a church was in no question as the year was precarious, witnessing multiple bomb attacks on churches in the country. It was doubly affirmed in his decision to dash out of the church carrying a bomb he had spotted inside. The bomb detonated outside, killing Riyanto in the process.

Fifteen years have passed since Riyanto's sacrifice and yet Christians still can't feel wholly safe when publicly celebrating their most important festivals such as Christmas and Easter without the "protection" of security personnel. While most Indonesian Christians who grew up in the Reformasi era may consider Christmas with guards as a run-of-the-mill thing, the older generations may still remember it wasn't always like that.

The 1998 Reformasi may have given birth to democracy for Indonesia but it also spawned an increased level of lawlessness that religious minorities have to face. The Jakarta-based Setara Institute chronicled a consistently worrying state of religious freedom in the country. In 2012 there were 145 cases of government abuse of religious freedom, with a total of 264 cases of attacks against religious minorities. The figures for 2013 didn't show much improvement.

In the run-up to Christmas this year, supporters of the hard-line vigilante group Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) paid visits to several shopping malls in Surabaya to warn businesses against "forcing" their Muslim employees to don Christmas paraphernalia in the line of duty. Interestingly, however, the malls under the FPI watch are traditionally viewed as those most frequented by middle-class non-Muslim Surabaya residents.

Even more noteworthy was the support given to the FPI by the Surabaya Police for these vigilante actions. The media liaison officer of the Surabaya Police, Adj. Sr. Comr. Lily Djafar, confirmed that all the district police headquarters in Surabaya had sent letters to businesses under their jurisdiction with advice to refrain from overt Christmas displays for their shops. She reasoned that it was important so as not to give reason for FPI to raid these businesses.

Prior to the FPI round-the-town patrol, the government-funded Indonesian Council of Ulema (MUI) issued a fatwa forbidding Muslims from participating in Christmas celebrations, though it later denied the fatwa meant that Muslims weren't allowed to convey Christmas good wishes to Christians. However, it certainly emboldened one Facebook commentator to warn Bandung Mayor Ridwan Kamil against entering any church during the Christmas season, which the latter rejected completely, in the name of pluralism.

Admittedly, not all Muslims were to be cowed by MUI's nannyish injunction. Twelve students from the Islamic State University (UIN) Walisongo in Semarang

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turned up at a Roman Catholic church to wish everyone a merry Christmas and even stayed to listen to mass.



The courage of these Muslim students was no doubt extraordinary. Their action would have elicited criticism from among the more orthodox sections of their own faith. These students were evidently more courageous than the police officers who, rather than standing firm in defense of pluralism, chose to counsel individual citizens to sacrifice their constitutionally guaranteed freedom in the face of bullies.

Given the information imparted Wikileaks cables that a number of former police generals were linked to the FPI, the blatant refusal by the police to defend minority rights is sinister. But after so many surreal breaches of trust, it becomes harder and harder to believe that police neglect of duty is not the norm in this country.

In a metaphor more suited to Easter, like Pontius Pilate, the police washed their hands of responsibility for allowing the FPI to conduct raids on businesses that overtly acknowledged the Christmas season. Like in all the cases of church

closures in the last decade, the police never worked up the courage or perhaps the will to protect minorities from unlawful acts.

Christians sometimes refer to Jesus Christ as the Prince of Peace. So it seems highly ironic that the celebration of his birth in Indonesia has been tainted with specters of unease, evident in the presence of armed guards. Noble volunteers from non-government bodies such as Banser aside, the permanent presence of police officers at Christmas becomes a hollow form of compensation by the state for allowing religious extremism to fester, even 15 years after the bold sacrifice of Riyanto, a private citizen who wanted to do something for his fellow human beings.

Papua

Three officers dead in attack on Papua police station

The Jakarta Post, 28-12-2015

A group of armed men attacked Sinak Police subprecinct in Puncak regency, Papua, on Sunday night, killing three police officers. Meanwhile, an aircraft carrying Papua Police chief Insp. Gen. Paulus Waterpauw was reportedly shot at on Monday.

The Twin Otter plane, owned by Trigana Air, was returning to Jayawijaya regency from Puncak.

As well as killing the three police officers – First Brig. Ridho, Second Brig. Arman and Second Brig. Ilham --, the attackers also stole weapons from the Sinak Police subprecinct.

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National Police chief Gen. Badrodin Haiti confirmed the attack, saying that the police were confident of the identities of the attackers, and were currently hunting for them.

“Given the area in which the incident took place, we can be fairly sure of who the attackers were,” Badrodin said as reported by [kompas.com](#) on Monday,

Paulus, meanwhile, told Antara news agency that the attack had occurred at 8:45 p.m. local time, and that a number of other officers had sustained gunshot wounds. According to Paulus, the attackers made off with seven weapons and various kinds of ammunition.

Meanwhile, National Police spokesman Sr. Comr. Suharsono denied that the aircraft carrying Paulus had been hit, but confirmed that the plane’s passengers had heard shots.

A number of police officers have fallen victim to shootings by unknown armed groups in Papua in recent years.

Jokowi not cancelling visit to Papua

The Jakarta Globe, 28-12-2015

President Joko Widodo will not cancel plans to visit the province of Papua after a police station in the restive province was attacked by armed assailants, killing three police officers, a senior government official confirmed on Monday.

“Despite the shooting, which led to the deaths of three police officers, the president has not changed his intentions to celebrate New Year in Papua,” Cabinet Secretary Pramono Anung said at the state palace, as quoted by Tempo.

The Indonesian Military [TNI] in Papua, which is handling the security detail of Joko's three-day visit, have deemed the towns Joko plans to visit — Merauke,

Wamena and Raja Ampat — safe and secure. “This [shooting] will be taken into consideration but the president is sure it will be dealt with and has confidence in the TNI's security assessment,” Pramono said.

He added that Joko is further convinced spending New Year's Eve in Papua would prove the government's commitment to developing the resource-rich but severely underdeveloped province.

Profile of Paul Mambrasar: defender of indigenous Papuans

by Lori Brumat in Geneva

OMCT, in its series "10 December - 10 Defenders", carried the story of Paul Mambrasar from West Papua, the least populous province of Indonesia, where is torture used to crush and silence. Home to the world's largest gold and third-largest copper mines, West Papua has abundant natural resources including timber and palm oil that make it a coveted region. This has generated continuing conflict and made it one of Asia's sorest spots in terms of human rights violations. From the 1960s on, Indonesia has maintained heavy military presence, resorting to extrajudicial killings, torture and abuse to crack down on activists in an attempt to crush the Papuan independence movement, whether peaceful or violent, leaving locals deeply resentful and suspicious of the national Government.

Indigenous Papuans marginalized in their homeland, suffer state violence and stigma, while their natural resources are exploited by others and compromise their ancestral way of living. The on-going conflict with separatists merely exacerbates discrimination against Papuans, who have been repressed by decades of institutional racism and Indonesian occupation. This is the vicious cycle of violence that Paul has to deal with in his daily fight for the respect of the human rights. “Torture worsens the distrust West Papuans have in the State

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which, by failing to uphold the rule of law, merely fuels more separatist sentiments,” sums up Paul, Secretary of the Institute of Human Rights Studies and Advocacy (Elsham), a non-governmental organization defending human rights in West Papua.

Paul’s challenging working environment is the result of decades of quasi-institutionalized abuses resulting in many layers of deep-felt and pervasive grievances of West Papuans against the Indonesian Government. He is, however, gradually managing to build networks in his country, also thanks to support from organizations such as OMCT, and gradually drawing attention to the regular violations committed.

Discrimination and marginalization of Papuan have therefore worsened the situation. Government policies have also contributed to the problem. The arrival of migrants, fostered by transmigration programmes, has upset the demographics and social and cultural heritage of the people of West Papua and exacerbated competition over land and resources. Compounded with the socially and environmentally destructive development projects pushed in the region by Indonesia, this has caused widespread social disruption and environmental damage, forcing Papuan tribal groups to relocate, according to researchers from Yale Law School cited by Elsham in a 2003 Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights session.

Unreported exactions keep occurring as foreign eyes and independent international observers are barred from West Papua. It is therefore only thanks to the work of local organizations and human rights defenders such as Paul, who runs Elsham’s office in West Papua and attends international advocacy meetings at the Human Rights Council in Geneva communicating regularly with donors, that the world can know what is happening there.

“Impunity has allowed the security force, the police and the army, free access to inflict fear and terror through torture and other physical abuses,” Paul explains

his motivation. “In order for torture to end the Indonesia State must take a strong action to punish those involved in its practice.”

Despite these odds and the many challenges of his job including being under Indonesian intelligence surveillance as an “independence sympathizer”, Paul, 51, trusts that the human rights conditions in West Papua will improve.

[When the Dutch Government granted independence to Indonesia in 1949, Papua was not part of it. At the end of the Dutch colonial rule, Papua was first administered, and then absorbed, by Indonesia in 1969, following a sham “referendum” requested by the United Nations. This so-called “Act of Free Choice” was in fact a vote by just over a thousand selected Papuans (out of a population of 800,000 at the time) who had been pressured to agree to integration within Indonesia. This vote has been the bone of contention between Papuans and the Republic of Indonesian. Papuans have ever since agitated for independence, and have been conducting a still ongoing, low-level guerrilla warfare against Indonesian forces, in turn engaged in bloody repression and unpunished human rights violations. Papuans – who are Melanesian and whose ancestors arrived in the New Guinea region tens of thousands of years ago – do not identify culturally with the Asians. They see their Papuan identity and indigenous culture based on customary subsistence-based agriculture threatened by the arrival of migrants who, in turn, see the traditional Papuan way of life as backward.]

In this context see also the CNN report on the closure of NGO offices: <http://freewestpapua.org/2015/12/13/indonesian-government-forces-all-ngos-to-leave-west-papua/>