

# Indonesian Feminist *Journal*

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# Sexual Slander Revealed: The Story of Jamilah/Jemilah and The Act of Killing

Saskia E. Wieringa

AISSR, University of Amsterdam

[sewieringa@xs4all.nl](mailto:sewieringa@xs4all.nl)

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## Abstract

Following the murder of six generals and one lieutenant in the night of October 1, 1965 by the G30S group, a military-organised psy war followed to incite rightwing militias to help murder probably one million people. At a global scale this genocide is one of the least known massacres after the Second World War. Nationally, it is still surrounded by silence, fear and stigma. A core element in this campaign of hate propaganda was the sexual slander against young women allegedly belonging to Gerwani. Though to most people the details are lost in the abyss of history, the association of the death of the generals with castrating and sexually promiscuous women that the girls were falsely accused of lingers on. In this article, I discuss first the account of Jemilah who was mistaken for Jamilah; her forged testimony proved most inflammatory. Then I analyse a modern-day echo of this story in the sexual and murderous nightmares of Anwar, the protagonist in Joshua Oppenheimer's film *The Act of Killing*.

Keywords: Jemilah, Gerwani, sexual slander, military.

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## Introduction

In the night of October 1, 1965 six generals and one lieutenant were abducted and killed, by a group that called itself G30S (Gerakan 30 September, 30 September Movement), composed of some army colonels and a few members of the Special Bureau of the PKI, Indonesian Communist Party). Nobody at the time could fathom the horrendous consequences this would have for millions of Indonesians, for the nation as a whole. The young Republic had dealt with worse crises. There had been inter-army clashes in the 1950s which had not resulted in wide public unrest.<sup>1</sup> Following the regional unrest in the 1950s some parties were banned and the

main insurgents were imprisoned. President Sukarno had always managed to keep the nation together. But this time hell would break loose.

The times were different, the economy was in a chaos, and the tensions between the army and the Communist Party (PKI) ran high. Nobody could foresee the genocide that would follow, Indonesians killing other Indonesians by the hundreds of thousands. Immediately after the action of the G30S group, which was stopped on the order of President Sukarno, immediately after he learnt the generals were killed, General Suharto jumped in the fray and accused the PKI of having organized the murders. He let it be known that the PKI had to be exterminated to 'save the nation'. In a highly successful propaganda campaign, the PKI was framed as atheist and hypersexual. That infuriated religious groups (both Muslim and Christian) so

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance Harold Crouch (1988) *The army and politics in Indonesia*. (rev. ed) Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press and Ulf Sundhaussen (1982) *The road to power: Indonesian military politics 1945-1967*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

much that they helped the army slaughter their neighbours.

Sexual slander was a core element in this campaign. The young girls who had been present in the field where the generals were killed and buried in a disused well, in the neighbourhood of Crocodile Hole, were accused of having performed an erotic dance, and of having seduced, castrated and killed the generals who were not yet dead when they were brought to the field, as well as the lieutenant. They were also said to have gouged out their eyes.<sup>2</sup> Three generals had been killed right away. The field belonged to the Air Force and was used for the training of young leftwing volunteers for Sukarno's anti-Malaysia campaign. At that moment it was designated to primarily young female members of the PR; the training was held for the third time.<sup>3</sup> Similar training camps were established all around the country by various other mass organizations. They were undergoing voluntary training for President Sukarno's anti-Malaysia campaign, as thousands of other volunteers had been doing.

Most present day scholars agree, though differing in details, that the affair was organized by a group of left-leaning army officers, fierce supporters of President Sukarno, with political backing from a few members of the PKI Politbureau.<sup>4</sup> From this perspective, the first skirmish, the abduction and murder of the generals, was mainly based on inter-army rivalry and should not be seen as a coup, but a purge. It was never intended to topple the president – in fact the plotters stated they wanted to protect

the president. The actual coup is the mass murder of anything between 500.000 and three million leftist people culminating in the handing over of power to General Suharto in March 1966. President Sukarno could be pushed aside as his position was weakened by the eradication of a major group of supporters and constant allegations that he was involved in planning the first putsch.

To date it is not known who exactly can be held responsible for these absurd lies about depraved Communist women prostituting themselves and raping, castrating and mutilating the generals murdered by the G30S group in the night of October 1, 1965 but they were widely believed and incited the religious and other right wing militias to mass murder.<sup>5</sup>

One such highly inflammatory story was the alleged confession of Jamilah, a leader of the Jakarta branch of Gerwani. Actually, the name of this leader was Atikah, but when she heard of the mass arrests of leaders of organizations associated with the PKI, she managed to run away. She has never been captured and to this day nobody has heard from her. On her flight she allegedly changed her name to Jamilah. The military started searching for a Jamilah. They found Jemilah, not Jamilah. Early November four army-related newspapers published her 'confession'. The wording of these four stories is almost the same, which suggests that the statement was prepared beforehand and handed out to the press.

The story of Jemilah is corroborated by women who had been in the same prison, Bukit Duri, and who had known Jemilah. I interviewed Ibu Sujinah in the early 1980s. She has since passed away. Ibu Utati, whom I interviewed recently, also confirms the story. Jemilah herself has passed away. After her death her second husband, R. Juki Ardi, a writer who himself was imprisoned on Buru Island, wrote her story down. Ardi was a friend of Jemilah's first husband, Pak Haryanto, a leader of SOBSI, the PKI-associated trade union. Before Haryanto

2 See Saskia E. Wieringa (2002) *Sexual Politics in Indonesia*. Houndmills: Palgrave and MacMillan.

3 See also Josepha Sukartiningsih (2004) *Ketika perempuan menjadi TAPOL*. In John Roosa, Ayu Ratih & Hilmar Farid (eds) *Tahun yang tak pernah berakhir; memahami pengalaman korban* 65. Jakarta: ELSAM pp 87-113.

4 See John Roosa, (2006). *Pretext for mass murder; the September 30<sup>th</sup> movement & Suharto's coup d'état in Indonesia*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. For the role of the US see Brad Simpson (2008) *Economists with guns: authoritarian development and US – Indonesian relations 1960-1968*. Stanford University Press. Recently Coen Holzappel analysed the trials of Njono and Untung and concluded that the role of General Soeharto may have been much greater than supposed elsewhere: Coen Holzappel (2014) *Professional blindness and missing the mark*. <http://rozenbergquarterly.com/professional-blindness-and-missing-the-mark-the-thirtieth-september-movement-as-seen-by-the-perpetrators-between-registered-facts-and-authoritative-opinions>.

5 In my novel *Crocodile Hole* which deals with this episode in Indonesian history I propose a possible version of who was behind these lies. Saskia E. Wieringa (2015) *Crocodile Hole*. Jakarta: Jurnal Perempuan.

was murdered on Buru island he made his friend promise that in case Ardi would be released he would try to find Jemilah. They met and eventually married, had two children and managed to survive in great poverty.

Jemilah was not the only woman to be picked up by the military for having a name that resembled a Gerwani leader on the run. The women imprisoned with Jemilah know of two other such cases, both of them in Central Java. One of them committed suicide after being raped. The other one was finally released but she was crippled for life.<sup>6</sup>

### Crocodile Hole

Apart from some 60 young volunteers of the KPI's Youth wing Pemuda Rakyat (PR), a few members of Gerwani were present at the training field where progressive young women were trained for the Confrontation campaign with Malaysia on which President Sukarno had embarked. These included Saina, Emy and Atikah. They ran away when they learnt the false stories that the army was circulating about the night the six abducted generals and one lieutenant were killed. In their place, two prostitutes were picked up who happened to have their workplace at the air base. They were also called Emy and Saina. They were illiterate and had never heard of Gerwani. The 'real' Emy fled the country, Saina was later captured, but their two prostitute substitutes were never released until 1978, when most women political prisoners were set free. Atikah/Jamilah managed to escape. But the military had to provide 'proof'. So in Jakarta both an Atikah and a Jemilah were picked up somewhere. All substitute Gerwani members were horribly tortured, and the two illiterate sex workers were made to thumbprint stories they never even read. Jemilah refused to sign any story, but a report of her activities was printed anyway. These 'stories' of 'Jamilah', 'Saina' and 'Emy' were highly inflammatory and helped frame Communist women and by extension all progressive people as barbaric, atheist and morally and sexually depraved.<sup>7</sup>

6 R. Juki Ardi (2011) *Aku bukan Jamilah*. Jakarta: Kompas Gramedia. p 101.

7 See for the full stories Wieringa 2002.

This dehumanisation campaign provided a justification for the genocide and other mass crimes against humanity that followed.

Even when Ibu Sujinah, one of the only four women ever tried in court (but not for anything related to what happened at Lubang Buaya) pointed this mistake out during her trial in 1976 no attempt was made to rectify these grave judicial errors.<sup>8</sup> The military apparently never trusted the women to tell their own stories in court.

The autopsy (which took place in the army hospital and was signed by both Sukarno and Suharto) details the causes of death: gun shots, traumas possibly caused by blows from guns and the damage done to bodies which have been lying for a few days in a wet place in the tropics, a reason why the eyes were badly affected. The findings of the autopsy however were ignored and only after Anderson published them in 1987 did they re-appear in the public arena.<sup>9</sup>

The army propagated a very different account to the outside world. In this version the girls had seduced the generals in a lurid, naked dance (Fragrant Flower Dance), accompanied by singing the 'Communist' song *genjer-genjer*, after which they proceeded to castrate them and gouge out their eyes.<sup>10</sup> In this way, progressive, politically active women, and by association the PKI, were linked with unspeakable sexual perversions.

So what did the army newspapers say about Jamilah? The four articles mentioned above carried almost the same story about the 'honest confession' of 'Jamilah, the 'Srikandi of Lobang Buaya'. This young woman (15 years), they reported, was three months pregnant when she was arrested, and both she and her husband were alleged to be members of PR in Tandjung Priok. According to these newspapers she was picked up by a PKI leader on September 29 for exercises in Cililitan: 'That day and the following day we exercised...and at about three o'clock in

8 See Wieringa 2002: 297-8.

9 Ben Anderson (1987). "How did the generals die?" *Indonesia* 43 (April) 109/34.

10 See for details of this media campaign Wieringa (2002) and Saskia E. Wieringa (2003). The Birth of the New Order State in Indonesia: Sexual Politics and Nationalism. *Journal of Women's History* Vol. 15 (1, Spring): 70 - 92.

the night of October 1<sup>st</sup> we were woken up...we were instructed to crush the *kabir* and *Nekolim*.<sup>11</sup> There were about 500 people collected there, 100 of whom were women. The members of Gerwani, including Jamilah, were issued small knives and razor blades...From afar we saw a short fat person entering; he was in his pyjamas.. His hands were tied with a red cloth and a red cloth was also tied over his eyes. Our leader Dan Ton ordered us to beat this person and then we started stabbing with those small knives at his genitals. The first, as we noticed, to beat and stab the genitals of that person was the chair of Gerwani in Tandjung Priok, called S and Mrs Sas. Then other friends followed...after that we ourselves joined in torturing that person. All 100 of us joined in this activity. Then he was dragged to the well by men in uniform...but he still wasn't dead. Then a uniformed man ordered Gerwani to continue. The Gerwani women continued as before, stabbing and slicing his genitals and his body until he was dead'.<sup>12</sup>

### **Jemilah's Own Story as Told by her Husband**

A few years after the death of his wife, Jemilah's husband wrote down her story. At the age of 14, still in the second grade of junior high school in Pacitan, East Java, she was married off to a neighbour, Haryanto. It was early 1965, and Haryanto was an attractive party in the eyes of her parents, as he was a successful young man, a leader of the progressive trade union SOBSI in Jakarta. He was well-respected both in Jakarta where he lived, and in his natal village, where he had gone in search of a wife. Immediately after the marriage they left on the arduous journey to Jakarta. Jemilah had no idea about Jakarta, nor about the work of her husband. He often left her alone for long stretches of time. By September he came home even less often and clearly was becoming nervous. By late September she was three months pregnant. Her husband had been away again for the night of October 1<sup>st</sup> and when he came home he burned papers and told her he

would have to leave her for some time. Politically astute he apparently realised immediately he was in danger. Later, when mass arrests had already started, he came back and informed her that she herself better had return to her native village without explaining why. He left her some money for the trip. He brought her halfway to the bus station but then became very anxious and disappeared. She never saw her husband again. He was later arrested, imprisoned, and ultimately sent to the infamous slave labour camp on Buru island where he was murdered.

Jemilah had already taken a seat in the minibus on her way to the bus station when she was intercepted by soldiers. When they asked her name, she answered Jemilah. They had orders to look out for a woman called Jamilah and arrested her immediately, in spite of her protests that she was called Jemilah, not Jamilah. The soldiers (with red berets) stole her money and all her possessions. She was brought to the office of the Komando Operasi Tertinggi (KOTI), beaten till she was almost unconscious and ordered to sign a statement as Atika Jamilah, which she refused. Later she was brought to the Corps Polisi Militer. There again she was terribly beaten, undressed and humiliated. Several rape attempts were made, which she somehow fought off successfully, Ardi reported. She was tortured so badly that she had given up all hope to live and indeed had rather died. She almost went mad. Women imprisoned with her tried to support her. Ultimately she was sent to the women's prison Bukit Duri where she stayed for 14 years without ever being tried. This is remarkable and demonstrates that the military were afraid their fables would be exposed in court.

The case of Jemilah is one of several in which people were imprisoned because of a mistaken identity. Jemilah had no idea about politics. Her first husband did not feel it necessary to enlighten her about national politics and his role in that. She was so young and inexperienced. She had never even heard of the PKI, let alone Gerwani, yet during her interrogations she was often called 'lonte Gerwani', Gerwani whore.

Her interrogators tried to make her confess that she had joined the exercises at Lubang

11 Common terms at the time. Kabir stands for kapitalis birokrat, bureaucratic capitalists, Nekolim is a term Sukarno coined, neo-colonialism and imperialism.

12 Wieringa (2002: 306-7). The newspapers were: Angkatan Bersenjata November 5 1965; Duta Masyarakat November 6 1965; Sinar Harapan November 6 1965; Berita Yudha November 7 1965.

Buaya, and that she had received an award as a Gerwani heroine. They tried to force her to admit that she had participated in lurid dances while torturing the generals. Even when heavily beaten by soldiers she refused to sign any statement of the sort. Her interrogators groped her thighs and belly ('I bent over so that he couldn't grope my parts which I so value ... my prohibited parts... but I couldn't resist him, my strength was all gone'.<sup>13</sup> She was tortured so badly that her baby was stillborn.

Rapes were common in prison, although the women resisted it as much as they could: 'All political prisoners got their turn. Mbak Endah was tortured in the worst way. She had to be brought to the hospital. She tried to defend her chastity against five soldiers who interrogated her. Her face was scratched open with bayonets when they tried to subjugate this young mother. Their anger was showered over her whole body'.<sup>14</sup> Mbak Endah later committed suicide.

At one time Jemilah had decided that she would let herself be killed by her torturers. So they would carry the sin of killing her and she would not have to kill herself, which was strongly prohibited by religion. So she had resigned herself to dying when she was again brought to the 'abattoir, where five low class soldiers were awaiting me. I knew what that meant... "take off your clothes...so we can have a party together, my Srikandi..." A thin soldier approached her but she fought him off, refused to take off her underwear and at one stage managed to kick him in his crotch (successfully, it is torn - sobek) and bite the hand of another till it bled profusely. She was then beaten so heavily that she became again unconscious. She was saved by an officer coming in who told the soldiers to stop, as she was 'a special prisoner who was still needed'.<sup>15</sup> Several bones were broken and her feet crushed and shattered; she bled profusely from many wounds, her hair was torn from her head, she couldn't see as her eyes were too swollen.

Apart from the heavy torture inflicted on her, including sexual torture, Jemilah was also forced to hold a rubber knife (arit). This was the

kind of knife the generals were said to be killed with. Her torturers told her: '...Gerwani dog... you can choose... I rape you or you follow our orders'.<sup>16</sup> Jemilah had never seen this kind of knife. It resembled the kind of knife her father used for cutting the rice, but it was smaller. 'Take it. This is the tool you used to cut out the eyes of the generals in Lubang Buaya', the soldiers snarled.<sup>17</sup> She had no idea what was expected of her, but picked up the knife and was brought outside under a rambutan tree, where she was photographed as 'proof' that she had participated in the events at Lubang Buaya.<sup>18</sup>

When Jemilah was finally discharged, she was only 28. She had lost her baby, her husband, all her possessions and was heavily traumatized. Only when she had been released she realized that the story that the military had made up about her and that she had refused to sign had gone viral. All over the archipelago people were told that Gerwani women had castrated the generals. Even until now there are many who believe that Gerwani women were depraved.

### **The Act of Killing**<sup>19</sup>

Oppenheimer's 2012 documentary *The Act Of Killing* (TAOK) provides a rare insight into the psyches of some mass murderers involved in the Indonesian genocide of 1965-7. It also demonstrates that in far away Medan and separated in time by at least 40 years, the myth of the castrating Gerwani women, symbolized by Jamilah/Jemilah still lives.

A major part of the film consists of a film-within-a-film, with the main characters, such as self-confessed mass killer Congo Anwar, acting out a fictional, at times surreal story based on their experiences and Anwar's nightmares. This story centres around Arsan and Aminah; Arsan, a rightwing young man, is played by Anwar while Aminah, his communist girlfriend, is played by his potbellied assistant Herman, in grotesque drag. The script is written by journalist

<sup>13</sup> Ardi 2011: 70-1.

<sup>14</sup> Ardi 2011: 92.

<sup>15</sup> Ardi 2011: 93-5.

<sup>16</sup> Ardi 2011: 77

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ardi 2011: 78

<sup>19</sup> See for a fuller account of my analysis of sexual politics in *The Act of Killing*: Saskia E. Wieringa (2014) *Persisting silence: Sexual Slander, ass Murder and The Act Of Killing*. In *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*. Vol. 20 no. 3 pp 50-77.

Ibrahim Sinik, presently the editor of the Medan Post. Sinik was responsible for a large number of death sentences back in the 1960s which would be executed by Anwar and his team of butchers. The scenes consist of fragments of the doomed love affair of both protagonists, framed in cheerful dance sequences and a grand finale, in which Anwar is pardoned by two of his victims and presented with a medal for having sent them to paradise. In between Anwar and Adi (another mass killer and still a successful gang leader in Jakarta) explain how they tortured and murdered, and where they dumped the bodies. Anwar is plagued by nightmares, while Adi informs us that he would do the same thing again, given the right justification for it.

Anwar relives and re-enacts the past he is still so proud of and which he wants future generations to remember. How does the man explain his actions to himself? In the long version of TAOK (director's cut) Anwar gives three justifications. The first one is economic and political. They were petty criminals in 1965, scalping cinema tickets; the PKI threatened their livelihood by banning the popular Hollywood films. They were also members of the rightwing youth group Pemuda Pancasila which engaged in violent clashes with the Communist Pemuda Rakyat (People's Youth). More widely, they were caught in a situation of great political turmoil and as members of the rightwing militia they joined the murdering of leftists that was going on (and that was impelled by the military in Medan, but that is not spelt out in the film). They and their co-butchers won this struggle and are thus living with impunity, backed up by the laws their leaders designed, as Adi bluntly explained to Joshua.

The two other justifications provided by Anwar are related to two major aspects of the propaganda campaign of the military: the 1983 film which blamed the PKI for the coup, and the smear campaign against Gerwani from mid-October 1965 onwards, with all its gory, perverse details. This film was compulsory showing for school children and was regularly aired. Whenever Anwar watched Arifin C. Noor's 1983 film on the 'treachery of the September 30<sup>th</sup> Movement' in which the military version

of the putsch that signalled the beginning of the genocide was given, he felt better, he explains. If this film relieves his conscience almost 20 years after the killing started, his motivation to start slaughtering his fellow citizens is revealed when he watches the scene in which he, just murdered as Arsan, lies beside his crony Herman, who is dressed as an evil, sexually depraved communist woman, Aminah, mouth smeared with the red juice of some berries. Aminah laughs loudly, madly, and eats a piece of raw liver, shouting it is Arsan's liver which she has just ripped out. Next she produces an oblong piece of stuffed cloth, approximately 20 cm in length, also dripping with berry juice and proceeds to stuff that into the mouth of Arsan, (who, though dead, is gagging) shouting 'this is your penis, eat it'.

Later, when Herman and Anwar, comfortably seated on Anwar's porch, watch this scene being screened, Anwar muses that this should be shown at the beginning of the film, so that people would understand why he murdered. Apparently he became inflamed when he was told of the stories of wildly singing and dancing women, seducing and then castrating the army's top brass, the nation's symbol of masculinity. With millions of other Indonesians he came to associate the PKI with depravity, as the evil to be ripped out of society. Strangely enough this last scene is edited out of the short version and only appears in the long version of TAOK. In the short version the audience is thus left with two justifications for the killings.

The brutal murderers Anwar and Adi and their cronies represent an aggressive form of masculinity, the type called *jago* (literally rooster).<sup>20</sup> Fearless, callous, swaggering, boastful, womanizing, this is the kind of masculinity that of old has been sported by the musclemen of power holders.

From this angle the sexual orgy invented by Suharto and his advisors epitomized in the hate-inspiring picture of the aggressive, sexually promiscuous women of Lubang Buaya can be read as a tactical move in a wider struggle, a clash of masculinities. The female counterpart of the gender order in which the

<sup>20</sup> See Onghokham. 2003. *The thugs, the curtains thief and the sugar lord*. Jakarta: Metafor.



masculinity of *jago* thrives is a docile, sexually subservient woman – this figure belongs within the patriarchal, militarist New Order of Suharto. Gerwani belonged to the realm of the patriarchal pre-1965 Old Order of the PKI and Sukarno. At that time women's emancipation was ostensibly applauded, but the social struggle was seen as more important (Wieringa 2002; 2011).<sup>21</sup> Sukarno had stimulated women to become political actors, fighters in the war for independence. The PKI had joined this course, which corresponded with socialist ideas of women's emancipation, although PKI chairman Aidit never paid much attention to women's issues. The progressive women's organisation Gerwani enthusiastically promoted such topics as women's education, political visibility and independence. They opposed violence against women and polygyny. In the post colonial Old Order conservative forces tried to restore what they saw as women's pre-independence role based on what was defined as women's *kodrat* (religiously ordained nature). Thus Gerwani in its insistence on women's public visibility and agency came to symbolize not only all that was un-Islamic, but by extension also as curtailing post colonial newfound masculine power, in other words as castrating. The PKI, though patriarchal in its relations with Gerwani, precisely by its support of Gerwani, in this view represented the kind of abjected masculinity that the army and rightwing Islamic groups despised (Wieringa 2003 and 2011).<sup>22</sup>

In TAOK this struggle is acted out on various levels. Several dance sequences are shown, as part of the film-within-the-film on Arsan and Aminah. The association with the Dance of the Fragrant Flowers (which immediately sprang to my mind and to that of former Gerwani members who watched it with me) is imbricated by allusions to present day TV shows and by the Hollywood dreams of Oppenheimer's protagonists. TAOK is almost a genre in itself, blurring the lines of documentary (the killings, the making of the fictional film) feature film,

gangster movie, musical and *sinetron* (Indonesian TV series). The lines between myth, fantasy, boasting and truth-telling are obscured as well.

The sexual politics underlying the construction of the PKI as evil and barbaric are portrayed most clearly in the lurid scenes in which Anwar's pal, Herman Koto, is dressed up as an aging transvestite (modelled after popular transvestite TV actor and comedian Tessy, full name Kabul Basuki, typically portrayed with heavy makeup, thick protruding lips, glittering jewellery). His/her acting is associated with *srimulat*, a humorous, low-brow Javanese form of theatre (particularly popular in cities as Surabaya and Solo) which is transgressive of both class and gender.<sup>23</sup>

Herman, who in TAOK is shown to be subservient to Anwar, in drag becomes even more his 'wife', exposing a same-sex intimacy which suggests another layer to the homosocial atmosphere of the film. Herman as 'spouse', murdering and castrating his boss and 'husband' Anwar, eating his liver, mouth dripping with blood, evokes the overthrow of the normative gender order, which Gerwani was accused of.

Herman adds gaudy revealing clothing to his character (though in his case his huge stomach and thick coarse legs don't suggest feminine attractiveness). He is cast playing the communist girl Aminah, swaying a sickle, as the communists were alleged to have used. The grotesque drag of Herman/Aminah sends another message as well. The multicoloured feathers and his revealing clothing suggest a vulgar kind of sexuality which is all the more repellent by the boorish masculinity of Herman. He is never convincing as a woman character; it rather seems as if his rudeness is exaggerated to demonstrate that Gerwani women were actually crude masculine characters. So instead of just a MTF (male-to-female) gender reversal we also watch an FTM (female-to-male) drag scene: evoking the alleged masculinity, or at least unfemininity of the castrating, murdering Gerwani members. Another association is that Herman/Aminah, madly shouting, portrays the

21 Wieringa 2002 and Saskia E. Wieringa, 2011. Sexual Slander and the 1965/6 Mass Killings in Indonesia; Political and Methodological Considerations. *Journal of Contemporary Asia* Volume 41, nr 4, 544-66.

22 Wieringa 2003 and 2001

23 See also Barbara Hatley, (2008) *Javanese Performances on an Indonesian Stage: Celebrating Culture, Embracing Change*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii.

PKI as out-of-control, and therefore as unmanly and feminine (and in a witchlike way capable of performing gory, outrageous acts of perversity).

These images are juxtaposed with scenes portraying actual sexual torture. If the Arsan/Aminah story is fantasy, the scene in which gangster Safit Pardede reminisces about his raping young socialist girls ('hell for you, but heaven for me') reminds one only too well of the actual horrors of the time (we did this 'back then, when we were the law... I fucked the shit out of everyone I met'). The cheers by his mates with which this revelation is greeted suggests their complicity in or at least approval of such crimes.

Straddling the divide between fact and fiction, TAOK exposes the echoes of the horrendous mythmaking that still haunts Indonesian society. We are provided with an insight into the justifications Anwar Congo gives for his becoming a mass killer. Material benefits played a role; his position as a leader of a death squad transformed him from a broke petty criminal to a feared militia member with coins in his pocket to indulge his tastes of alcohol, drugs (and sex?). Watching the 1983 film produced by the Suharto regime makes him feel better about his atrocious acts. But the slander against Gerwani, he admits, incited him to kill.

Oppenheimer's film provides a chilling portrait of present day Indonesian society, the banality or normalcy of which is based on the violence and sadism of the massacre, and particularly on the persistent silence surrounding it. The film is an eye-opener internationally; it has bagged many awards and is shown to have shocked audiences worldwide. However in Indonesia, where the lies of the military are still widely believed, the impact of the film is disappointing. It does not break the silence that still surrounds the 1965-67 genocide.

In that sense Oppenheimer's second film on 1965, *The Look of Silence*, is more effective.<sup>24</sup> It is watched much more widely. Though, both films still cannot be screened in the major movie theatres, as happened in so many countries. Brute censorship is mainly responsible. But

there is more. The Indonesian public still shies away from these very unpleasant truths.

### Conclusion

A better understanding of the country's gruesome past cannot grow without realizing the full impact of the myth of the singing, dancing, castrating Gerwani members, as Anwar himself stressed. This myth is the core of the army's propaganda campaign which transformed an apparent inter-army clash (with heavy political meddling) into a gruesome genocide, targeting the PKI and leftwing people in general, sweeping away the Old Order of President Sukarno. The sexual moral panic created by the army shamed the nation into silence.

The genocide and other mass crimes against humanity committed after the actions of the G30S group are the major watershed in post colonial Indonesian history. The nationalist and socialist politics of President Sukarno which had forged the nation but had caused economic chaos were replaced by a militarist, brutal style of governing, based on capitalist values. Generations of people grew up in terror, fed on lies of sexual slander. Not only the political climate changed drastically, the cultural and intellectual scene became very impoverished – not only because many intellectuals, artists and teachers were murdered or imprisoned, but also because liberal, creative, free thinking was declared suspect. The Reformasi period after the fall of the dictator has not fundamentally challenged this. Still women who resist the masculinist ideology can be labelled 'new Gerwani'. A term that conjures up images of unspeakable perversity.

The campaign of sexual slander against Gerwani has not only affected those directly accused. They were imprisoned, raped, starved, tortured, murdered. When Jemilah was released her life was ruined. She died in abject poverty, the stigma of 'Gerwani whore' still upon her – and on her children. This happened to so many thousands of women who didn't even know where the Crocodile Hole was located but were nonetheless accused of having danced there. The campaign of sexual slander against them incited the genocide and other crimes against

<sup>24</sup> In this film the younger brother of one of the victims of the death squads confronts the murderers with their deeds.

humanity committed by the military and their henchmen in the form of the many militias that assisted in murdering their own neighbours. It has also changed the texture of society. As Anwar demonstrates, these slanderous fables still work in the fantasies of the murderers. But wider than that, they are also engraved in the collective consciousness of Indonesian society.

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