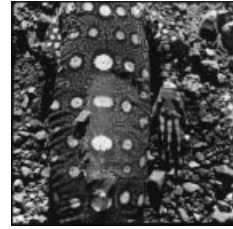


INTERNATIONAL
journal of
CULTURAL studies

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London, Thousand Oaks,
CA and New Delhi
Volume 2(2): 147–177
[1367-8779(199908)2:2; 147–177; 008929]



Where Communism never dies Violence, trauma and narration in the last Cold War capitalist authoritarian state

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ABSTRACT ● Indonesia's militarist New Order, the last and longest-lasting Cold War capitalist authoritarianism, came to power in 1965 immediately after one of the bloodiest massacres in modern history. Vigorous cultural reproduction of the trauma of the events and continuous rehearsals of state violence on the nation's body politic have been enormously responsible for the regime's longevity. They constitute the most determining force in the identity-making of the powerless subjects, and in their everyday practices. Far from being systematic, however, the efficacy of the New Order's authoritarianism is full of refractory and contradictory features. Neither instrumental political-economy nor cultural essentialism is adequate to explain them. Central to the enduring responses of the powerless Indonesians before the decisive protest in 1998, but most frequently misunderstood by scholars and human rights observers alike, is hyper-obedience, instead of resistance. ●

KEYWORDS ● history ● hyper-obedience ● Indonesia ● narrative ● political violence ● popular culture ● simulacra

Since the keyword 'globalization' has had the serious examination it deserves, its predecessor the 'Cold War' has been largely left alone. It seems there is a general perception that the Cold War is not only a dead thing of the past, but also essentially a clear-cut phenomenon. This paper examines the cultural working of Cold War politics in the 1990s in the world's last

and most enduring anti-Communist authoritarian regime, Indonesia's New Order (1965–98). By implication this paper suggests what may continue to dominate the cultural politics of the post-Cold War and 'globalized' era.

A few minutes after 9 a.m. on 21 May 1998 Suharto resigned from his 32-year-old presidency, marking the end of the US-backed New Order regime. This regime had ruled Indonesia for more than three decades with strong militarist repression, steady economic growth and prolific cultural terrorism. What will follow is uncertain. Authoritarianism may well persist in the years ahead, with new names, forms, personnel and accessories. However, several historic changes are inevitable, for instance the end of the efficacy of 'Communist threat' rhetoric, and a beginning of extremely slippery interrogation of the bloody past that gave birth to the New Order regime. A series of new problems will profoundly challenge Indonesians, even if one assumes an optimistic scenario, with an end to some of the New Order's severe censorship. How will they deal with the unravelling of the three-decade-old trauma, silence and memories of political violence? A clue is perhaps available in an analysis of how they have endured the agony over the past 32 years.

It is tempting to think of strong authoritarianism in static or totalizing terms, where a ruling agency holds full control of the population largely by coercion and in a systematic manner. Accordingly, it is easy to imagine an end of an authoritarianism as the removal of strong containment that will automatically entail an outburst of old repressed energies, revenge and desires. Many observers have resisted such a temptation.¹ Likewise, in what follows I attempt an analysis of how authoritarianism, and by anticipation post-authoritarianism towards the next millennium, operates in ways that are much more diffuse, insidious and messy than familiar labels capture.

Even at the height of the New Order's authoritarianism, its fabric of power was far from being efficient and comprehensive. It was full of contradictions, anomalies, ironies and convivial misunderstanding. These did not necessarily make New Order authoritarianism less effective. The contrary is more tenable. Nor should one too quickly attribute those imperfections to the result of popular resistance. One of the arguments presented in this paper is that out of powerlessness many Indonesians survived the extended Cold War authoritarianism, and occasionally subverted it, by engaging in a series of hyper-obedient practices.

The postmodernist-tinged notion of hyper-obedience came to my attention through the works of Baudrillard and Mbembe. As well as demonstrating the merit of this idea, in the concluding section of this paper I will try to re-examine it critically, and recognize its limits for any analysis of political violence, and for that matter social and cultural studies in general.

Underlying the ensuing discussion are several premises that are worth spelling out from the outset. My basic premise is that in the mass killings in 1965–6 lay the foundation of the New Order's authoritarianism, which until

1998 enjoyed generous assistance, and continued protection from the USA and other leading advocates of liberal democracy. That violence has been the most crucial force in the formation of subject identities, fantasies and everyday activities of this fourth most populated nation in the world for the past three decades. Arguably, in different degrees the same past may continue to be a defining factor in subsequent decades.

While the terror, coercion and violence of the past constantly foreshadow the present, they never do so without mediation and complications. The bulk of this paper focuses on the everyday details of these mediations and complications. It is my contention that both abstract generalization as well as instrumentalism (humanist, rational or otherwise) are inadequate in analysing the various political and cultural practices in question. Nor can authoritarianism be seen as a system of rule where some powerful social agents do something freely and unilaterally (e.g. dominate, repress, exploit or inflict violence) to others exclusively in an attempt to maximize the former's interests. The victims' complicity is always present.

Dragging difference of an ageing evil

On 18 January 1998 a bomb exploded in the heart of the capital city of Jakarta during the peak of the currency disaster. No one claimed responsibility for the explosion. Actually the explosion itself was relatively minor and did little damage. More serious was the political significance with which the event was supposed to be endowed. Top government officials accused the banned and left-leaning Partai Rakyat Demokrasi (Democratic People's Party) or PRD of being responsible for the incident.² The officials' chief target was not the PRD, but Sofjan Wanandi, a Chinese tycoon and until recently a major ally of the New Order. He was charged with having backed the crime financially. Leaders of the PRD, mostly young activists in their late twenties, were already in jail. Sofjan Wanandi was immediately summoned by the Jakarta police for questioning. His picture appeared on the front pages and covers of major print media for many weeks as a meek suspect.

Most observers found the whole thing a less than subtle means of attacking Wanandi, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) which he co-founded and directed, and the top businesses of Chinese Indonesians he was perceived to represent. Not long before the explosion the public saw Wanandi make a couple of political errors. First, he appeared reluctant to support Suharto's anointment of Habibie the Vice-President due in March 1998. More seriously, Wanandi expressed public rejection of an emotional campaign launched by the President's eldest daughter in a futile attempt to rescue the value of the sliding Indonesian rupiah (and her business empire). A small and suspect group of protesters demonstrated at the CSIS, demanding that Wanandi be tried and the Centre be closed down.³

Soon afterwards, rumours had it that a conspiracy of overseas Chinese was responsible for the nation's economic disaster. A few state officials described unnamed Chinese tycoons as traitors. Incidentally, Singapore's senior minister Lee Kuan Yew also made comments on Indonesia's current situation that were taken by supporters of Habibie in Jakarta to be criticism of Suharto's anointment of him, an interference in Indonesia's internal affairs and, worse still, evidence of an overseas Chinese conspiracy against the nation. Another small demonstration was held in front of Singapore's embassy in Jakarta and anti-Chinese riots erupted across the archipelagic country in the days that followed.

This episode was presented to introduce four related issues that pertain to our discussion. First, up to its last few months the New Order still tried to deploy the defunct anti-Communist spectre, along with the colonial legacy of racism, as a convenient political device. Because the PRD was earlier declared to be 'neo' Communist, by implication Wanandi was likewise stigmatized. This act makes no sense for those unfamiliar with the past success story of anti-Communist witch-hunt in the sustenance of the regime. The government's recent act indicates an ideological stagnation and bankruptcy.

Second, the incident demonstrates how a protracted use of the past anti-Communist bogey gets more and more complicated. It requires multiple intermediaries or references. It is increasingly difficult to argue that a contemporary enemy is bad simply because s/he is a Communist survivor in a post-Cold War world. Allegations of political crimes can only be presented in a series of associations with something innately evil called Communism. Let me elaborate this last point a little further before addressing the third and fourth issues that the bomb blast signified.

At face value, the accusation that Wanandi backed the PRD is absurd. The two are as politically incompatible as Bill Clinton and Saddam Hussein. But the substance of the accusation was beside the point. It was the intended effect that mattered. Demonizing Wanandi exclusively on the basis of his Chinese ethnicity would not be adequately forceful in 1998, and thus an alleged association with the already prosecuted PRD was established. For this propaganda to be effective at all, the government must rely on the efficacy of a long chain of other and outdated propaganda.

First of all, it must rely on the public's acceptance of the government's previous propaganda of the PRD's ferocious crime, namely a subscription to Communism. The effectiveness of the PRD's stigmatization, in turn, depends on the government's success in maintaining its past success in denouncing Communism in general and the defunct Partai Komunis Indonesia (Indonesian Communist Party) in particular.⁴

That the New Order had to rely on multiple layers of equally precarious assumptions in order to make a strong political statement in the late 1990s suggests its ideological decay, despite its continued strength in political and economic programmes before the 1997–8 monetary disaster. This failure did

not come overnight. When it actually did arrive in May 1998, it was not easy for the ruling party or the ruled to accept this quickly.

The New Order's anti-Communist witch-hunt constitutes a long and rich history. In a moment I suggest parts of this history, of which the incident in 1998 was only a residue. Without seeing the larger picture, the incident in 1998 makes little sense. However, I want initially to discuss the remaining two of the four issues that the January bombing signified.

Third, the further away the past Communist stigmatization is from the present, the less stable and less direct is the relation of the signifier 'Communism' to any signified or referents. In the 1990s the key signifier can refer to anything and anyone. Communism turns into a floating empty signifier, purged of any fixed historical referent, just like sexy women, cars or jeans in advertisements of late capitalism, as Roy Porter (1993: 2) puts it:

Meaning is produced by endless, symbolic exchanges within a dominant code, whose rhetoric is entirely self-referential; a sexy woman is used to sell a car; a car sells cigarettes; cigarettes sell machismo; machismo is used to sell jeans; and so the symbolic magic circle is sealed.

Fourth, unlike advertisements, the anti-Communist discourse has a seemingly more permanent and ultimate basis. It was anchored in a series of events in the final months of 1965. These events constitute a fundamental basis of the long history of a Cold War authoritarianism in the biggest Southeast Asian nation that survived towards the end of 20th century. The Communist threat is after all not a completely free-floating signifier in an aporia of difference. The seemingly arbitrary witch-hunt claimed a fairly fixed original sin, to which we must now turn and examine a little closer.

The making of an original sin

Indonesia's New Order authoritarianism would not have existed nor survived so well without the magical power of the discursive phantom of the 'Communist threat'. That powerful discourse was, in turn, only possible because of the devastating 1965 mass killings that took around one million lives in less than four months, ranking it as one of the bloodiest murders in modern history. Estimates of the casualties vary. Bertrand Russell suggested that 'in four months, five times as many people died in Indonesia as in Vietnam in twelve years' (frontispiece of Cadwell, 1975), or as much as 500 times the number killed in 1989 at Tiananmen Square, Beijing.⁵

The past trauma did not simply survive and assert itself in the present unchanged. It has not simply gone through a series of modifications and remodifications. The various versions of reproduced 'Communist threat', as it were, had a life of their own, detaching themselves further and further from the actual killings that provided them with a basis or an origin.

The continued trauma and the New Order's resilient authoritarianism have fed each other and been mutually rejuvenating. Under such circumstances, survivors of the 1965 massacre and the general population can hope to find refuge only in occasional breaks of the hegemonic discourse, its ambiguities and accidental failures. The past killings themselves are left, largely unspoken, to the ghostly past. Even in private circumstances parents and grandparents refuse to discuss with their immediate relatives what they heard or saw in 1965 or its immediate aftermath. Obviously it is not simply a case of effective official censorship, or fear of anticipated retaliation. There seems to be no ready discourse to structure and narrate the traumatic past.

The mass killings of 1965 are not generally acknowledged to be the sole origin of Indonesia's New Order. According to the official history, the killings were a response to a certain '1965 Communist coup' that killed six generals in Jakarta on the eve of 1 October 1965. Ironically, the 'Communist coup' gave rise to the heroic and victorious militarist New Order regime. From then on this regime disseminated the claim that it saved the nation from the abortive coup. In the official narrative, the coup marked the beginning of New Order Indonesia. It was the origin of all that happened afterwards. The story appears to give birth to its own narrator, and pretends to merely describe that origin, rather than invent it.

It is now easy for us to read all of this in reverse. The New Order can be said to have in fact authored the official narrative as its autobiography, in which the 'Communist coup' and 'Communist threat' are but part of the story.⁶ This is not to suggest a case of fabrication *ex-nihilo* from pure fantasy. With Baudrillard we can view the New Order regime's act of narration as simulation, where 'images precede the real to the extent that they invert the causal and logical order of the real and its reproduction' (cited in Rojek, 1993: 115). The point is not which reading or writing is closer to truth, but how such narrative or 'simulacra' can have generated far-reaching effects that have little to do with any historical truth being revealed or concealed by the narrative.⁷

Neither the coup nor the murder of the generals provided a stable origin for the grand narrative of the 'Communist threat'. While the regime claims its legitimacy partly by locating its origin in a patriotic counter to the 30 September movement, the short-lived movement made a similar claim. In their official statement on the morning of 1 October 1965, they proclaimed themselves as a counter-coup against an anticipated coup by a CIA-backed Council of Generals. Was the anticipated coup real? Was it sincerely, but falsely, imagined? Or was it crudely fabricated in haste, and after the fact, for practical convenience?

The question of which coup was the first real one, and which was the counter-coup, may be left to mainstream historians or political scientists. Widespread rumours preceded, and presumably prompted, the killing of the

generals. But by no means can these rumours occupy the privileged position of being the ultimate cause of subsequent events. A contradiction in terms seems inescapable: no origin can ever be truly original. It can only be manufactured, constructed, invented or simulated.

For nearly three decades, the discourse of the 'Communist threat' has become a master narrative, a canon from which 'a potentially endless exegetical discourse can be generated' (Clifford, 1988: 86). The master narrative secured the regime's legitimacy, and served an indispensable function in the protracted political 'stability and order' and impressive economic growth. In the quotidian lives of most Indonesians the same narrative plays a defining role in the dynamic constructions of identities, social hierarchies, and power relations. Admittedly, this master narrative has had no homogeneous effect in the course of 32 years on the lives of millions of Indonesians.

Simulacral regime

The difficulty of fixing a stable or fairly coherent truth of the events surrounding the 1965 killings has brought certain consequences. There was room both for the regime's creativity as well as the constant pressure upon that regime to revive the 'Communist threat' or a simulation to that effect. The discourse of revived threats of Communists was so fundamentally embedded in the continued legitimacy of the New Order regime, that no other anti-Communist regimes in the post-Cold War era were as committed to the militant re-production of contemporary icons, monuments, fiction, trials and simulacra. These artefacts are used to testify to the continued threats of never-dying Communists, as much as to immortalize the New Order regime.

Beyond the few cases outlined below, a list of examples of such narratives would be too long and unnecessary. As late as September 1994 the government published a 'white book', claiming to give a true and comprehensive account of the troubled years of 1965/6. This was definitely not the first 'white book' that the regime published. At the end of 1997 the National Defence Institute launched two newly published books which, according to an authoritative reviewer (Magnis-Suseno, 1997), barely present anything different from the 30-year-old official line. Although the plan was to publish the white book several years earlier, its 1994 release seemed prompted by a series of contemporary challenges to the official history, most currently by Manai Sophiaan's *Kehormatan Bagi Yang Berhak* (1994).⁸

A little over a year previously, when commemorating the anniversary of the New Order's ascendancy and the demise of the PKI, President Suharto inaugurated a grandiose display of simulation in Jakarta, officially dubbed Museum Pengkhianatan PKI (the Museum of the PKI's Treason), where 37 three-dimensional dioramas depict 'the Communist cruelty' not only during

the '1965 coup', but also in a series of earlier coup attempts since 1945 (Bernas, 1992a; Jawa Pos, 1992; Kompas, 1992a).⁹ In the city of Madiun, East Java, a similar monument was inaugurated (Kompas, 1992b).

These are only part of a prolific festival of simulations authored by the New Order state. The most salient of all is undoubtedly the four-and-a-half-hour kinetic narrative, *The Treason of G30S/PKI*.¹⁰ The film was produced in 1982–3 by the state-owned film company, and released in 1984. During its early circulation in the commercial cinemas, pupils across the country were required to buy tickets and attend the screening during regular school hours. Subsequently the film has been screened annually on the state-owned television station, with all private stations being required to relay it on the night of 30 September, while flags are flown at half-mast at every house and official building during the day.

In 1996 the replay of the film was given greater significance, in accord with the government's fresh pronouncement of a Communist revival in the People's Democratic Party (PRD) a month earlier. While these allegations did not convince the public, the Ministry of Education was adamant in devising additional propaganda. It instructed all primary and secondary schools to set up special sessions every Monday morning for the month of September that year, where the school principal read out a standard text on Communist cruelty. For 'school projects' pupils had to collect clippings or interviews that reiterated condemnation of the Communists (*Forum Keadilan*, 1996b: 28–9). All of this served as a prelude to the broadcasting of the film *The Treason of G30S/PKI* at the end of the month.

While the endeavours outlined operate mainly at a discursive level, periodic punishments were imposed to maintain the credibility and efficacy of the whole exercise.¹¹ That rehearsals of 'the 1965 coup' narrative involve punishments, torture or terror against segments of the population is already widely known, but maybe only faintly understood among students of Indonesia. The effects of this political discourse on the overall reproduction of political violence and power relations remain greatly understudied.

The extensive and vigorous anti-Communist campaign often recklessly victimized innocent non-Communists or anti-Communists alike. Stigmatization was not simply at the whim of the government against perceived threats to the status quo. The anti-Communism campaign went so far that even individual government officials were not exempted from being similarly stigmatized by their colleagues and those in opposition for any alleged misconduct.¹²

Individual officials could easily use this stigmatization to settle old scores, which were personal in nature. Members of local communities could not resist the temptation to deploy a similar strategy against each other in civil disputes. In one incident we shall see vividly how authoritarianism operated in a remarkably complex and diffuse manner.

Towards the end of an internal conflict (1993–5) that ruined one of the

most prestigious private universities in Indonesia, Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, three innocent lecturers were removed from their positions in disgrace, because of their suspected association with Communists. To cut a long story short, I will concentrate on one of these colleagues who served an extended time in the penal island of Buru without trial. He was punished because a local officer found him, instead of a close relative who was wanted, alone at his residence during a sweeping witch-hunt in 1965. Fearing the accusation that he might have protected the actual suspect on the list, the officer in charge took the innocent man.

When released in the early 1980s, all former political prisoners were prohibited from taking up 'strategic professions', including teaching. However, under the authoritarian New Order, like many of his former inmates, this man found a teaching position in the university without having to hide secrets. Local military commanders knew his background, and quietly took regular but minimal surveillance measures.

Traumatized by the extended penalty he paid in the 1960s and 1970s, and conscious of his vulnerability, this man consciously stayed away from the internal conflict within the university that took place in 1993–5. However, when the university conflict reached an impasse, which coincided with separate friction within the political elite in Jakarta, the ex-political prisoner was spotlighted. One camp in the university conflict pointed a finger at him, as a convenient way to discredit the opposing camp for sharing the same department. A high official in Jakarta named him in public, to prove his earlier allegation that Communist subversives did survive and infiltrate the restricted professions. Certain media amplified the case to boost circulation. The reluctant local military commander had no choice but to take action against the lecturer whom he had left alone all these years.

Such incidents have been frequently mentioned, but usually only in passing. They have been deplored and ridiculed, but never taken up seriously for close scrutiny. The truth is generally assumed to be self-evident, ethically appalling perhaps, but uninteresting and intellectually unproblematic. Scholars in this field seem to regard the issue as primarily of concern to human rights activists, who are assumed to be less intellectually critical, but more socially committed to a noble cause.¹³ Most familiar and tempting is the assumption that officials in strong authoritarian states universally have both the power and interest to inflict violence upon their subjects for reasons of political expediency. In short, violence is assumed to be a useful tool in the hands of the powerful.

In an interview with an Indonesian journalist, Sutopo Yuwono, former head of Indonesia's State Intelligence Coordinating Body, reflected back on the work of the intelligence service under the New Order:¹⁴

The funny thing about the world of intelligence is the technique of psywar [psychological warfare]. As intelligence officers, we make up issues, and we

disseminate them in the press, radio or television. We treat them as if they are real. When they are already widespread, usually people will talk about them and they tend to add to and exaggerate the issues. Finally the issues will come back [to the intelligence bodies] in reports. What is so funny is that these reports incline us to believe that these issues are real, hahaha. In fact, we get terrified and begin to think, 'what if these issues are real?' Hahaha.

The admission is crucial in reminding us of the futility and danger of the familiar but often misleading paradigm of modern social sciences that makes the totalizing assumption about a rationally calculating powerful subject, who masters and manipulates political instruments to maximize interests, values or dominance at the expense of others. In such a dominant discourse there is ample recognition of the complexity of the battleground and antagonism, but the demarcation between the subject and object of power is generally assumed to be clear cut. So is the line separating the two major contending parties: the ruling and the ruled.

Scholars of these or related subjects cannot afford to ignore such questions unless they are sure that all the statements about the 'Communist threat' do not really matter, because they only represent or comment on the 'real', and therefore a second order of reality. This is as if what really matters is what gets done and what is politically or materially achieved, rather than what is said, meant or understood in speeches, headlines, monuments, films, literary works, gossip, dreams and memories. This is as if the separation between the two is stable and easily drawn.

While we retain some belief in a world of the real and social, and the supposed transparency (if limited) of language, let us turn to day-to-day events of relevance. My focus in the subsequent sections is on the minute details of local and banal incidents, not pompous pronouncements like monuments, white books, or a mega-dollar propaganda movie launched by the New Order government. In contrast to the high-flying propaganda campaign of *Pancasila* (the official state ideology) that attracted many foreign observers, the Communist threat discourse penetrated profoundly into the everyday activities of ordinary Indonesians, and laid the most important foundation of New Order authoritarianism. It was not a political instrument imposed from the top on an abstract population. Mbembe (1992: 4) is very insightful when he proposes that to

account for postcolonial relations is thus to pay attention to the workings of power in minute details, and to the principles of assemblage which give rise to its efficacy. That is, one must examine the orderings of the world it produces; the types of institutions, knowledges, norms, and practices that issue from it; the manner in which these institutions, knowledges, norms, and practices structure the quotidian; as well as the light that the use of visual imagery and discourse throws on the nature of domination and subordination.

The series of examples will show that the Communist threat was not, or not primarily and immediately, an easy instrument of political deception or manipulation on the part of the state officials to repress opposition or to enhance power and promote vested interests. These statements, narratives and practices occasionally claim a life of their own, quite independent of the speaking subjects' material interests. In this sense, Communist threats appear to become 'more than real', or 'hyperreal' in Baudrillard's sense (1983b, 1988), although some critical qualification of this will be necessary.

Hammer and sickle in pop culture

As elsewhere, the expansion of a globalized industry of entertainment and popular culture permeated Indonesia after the end of the Cold War. But unlike in most other places, in Indonesia it revitalized and commodified Communist ghosts. In mid-October 1993 the world of popular culture panicked. In the small Central Javanese town of Purbalingga the State Attorney's Office confiscated copies of a newly released rock-music album *Magis* ('Magic') by Atiek C.B., a well-known young 'lady rocker', as the Indonesian media described her.

The impetus for legal action was the image on the cover of the album, a collage of densely colourful people in fashionable styles and postures with metal accessories. In the forefront is a medium-shot picture of the 'lady rocker', wearing sunglasses and a necklace with a cross. Behind her is a long-shot tiny figure of a man, also wearing sunglasses and a necklace, but his ornament is in the image of a hammer and sickle.

A deep gasp swept across the country. A furore ensued for weeks, partly because of media overexposure. One cannot help being amused by the whole affair, but also appalled. Only the naive would direct attention to the question of what intention lay behind the design, production, image, legal action, as if some secret truth was hidden. To conduct scholarly research to prove that there was no subversive intent, or that the picture of the necklace was only an empty sign is to miss the whole point. The greatest challenge in the series of events, practices, statements and counter-statements as well as silences was on the very surface of things. Real Communists and Communism are irrelevant here, but not the effects of their images at specific historical moments.

Police officers and officials of the State Attorney's Office roamed the streets of many cities, hunting down the suspected 'Communist' audio cassettes. They had to summon and interrogate those responsible for the production and circulation of the album. The latter had to formulate credible answers not only to the interrogating teams, but also the aggressive media, not to speak of countless friends and neighbours.

Important figures commented in columns and interviews. According to

Kompas (1993a), the largest daily, the head of a local Attorney's Office in Purbalingga asked why the circulation of the album should come so close to the month of September, 'when the nation was just reminded of the abortive coup attempt of the Indonesian Communist Party' back in 1965. The Anti-Subversion Law, which carries a maximum penalty of death and has been frequently used to prosecute perceived subversives, foreshadowed public discussion on *Magis*.

One of the effects of the incident was the illegal and voluntary dropping of a hit 'Kau Dimana?' ('Where Are You?') from the *Magis* album. Music shops and radio stations put away the album and pretended that it had never existed (*Jawa Pos*, 1993b). There was no legal ban, but it would be hard to call it a boycott. The amount of material damage to the producer and singer is not known.

By the end of the month, the central government decided that the case was simply a matter of technical carelessness. It was declared cleared and over (*Jawa Pos*, 1993a; *Kompas*, 1993b). No one, not even human right activists or members of the famous legal aid institutes, hinted at the question of possible rehabilitation or compensation to which the producer and artist might be entitled. A legal examination would have raised questions about the precise nature of the crime and spectre that many would prefer not to hear or understand.¹⁵

What is so remarkable about New Order Indonesia is its power to deceive and horrify children of western liberalism into thinking with indignation about its vulgarity and seeming absoluteness of repression. Despite, or precisely because of, the apparently vigorous measures against simulacral threats, the enemy keeps coming back again and again with no pretence of being vengeful and no underground conspiracy to invent it.¹⁶

Only a month after the controversy over the *Magis* audio cassette, another set of anxieties struck the Office of the High Attorney in Semarang, the capital city of Central Java. Officials had to work hard to investigate the discovery of 129 copies of 87 titles that 'contain Communist thoughts' (*Kedaulatan Rakyat*, 1993). These books arrived at the port of Semarang in a big container, delivering 40,000 copies of academic books as a donation from an American university to Universitas Diponegoro, the largest state university in Semarang, in support of a newly established postgraduate programme.¹⁷

Several days later security officers in Riau island revealed the discovery of another hammer and sickle image in a children's video game. The game came in a series entitled *Street Fighter*, featuring martial art champions from many countries: Spain, India, the USA, Japan, China and the USSR. Delegates had a national emblem tagged on their outfit. The problematic symbol presents itself 'so vividly', a journalistic report emphasized with due horror, when a certain Soviet figure named Zangief appeared on the screen. Within months, in Java a similar icon was found on a picture card depicting scenes

from the *Street Fighter* (Bernas, 1994; Jawa Pos, 1994). Almost two years later, security officers in Java encountered a similar incident in a *Nintendo* video-game cassette (Surya, 1995).

A few months before the case of *Magis*, another hammer and sickle upset authorities in Semarang. In February that year the media reported the discovery of the stigmatized image on the design of a T-shirt in a large supermarket. In his speculative comment, the state coordinating minister for political and security affairs, Retired Admiral Sudomo, connected the T-shirt design to the release of 30,000 political prisoners who left the penal island of Buru more than ten years before (Bernas, 1993a).¹⁸ In October 1995, a similar problematic icon was found in the logo on a brand of shorts (Gatra, 1995).

In March 1993, a few hundred kilometres away, the district military commander of Blora announced the discovery and mass confiscation of key-rings showing an image of a hammer and sickle. They had an image of sickle on one side and an axe on the other. But, according to the official story, ‘if you connect them, they look like the symbol of the illegal party, namely the PKI’ (Bernas, 1993b). The ‘if’ and ‘look like’ in the quotation are things that students of the social and political sciences cannot easily learn to appreciate from those who ran the fourth most populous country in the world. Despite the qualification, the district military commander drew a less ambiguous conclusion:

This is not just decoration, but there is a certain element of purposefulness. Most importantly, [it is] to indicate that till now that group [the Communists] still exist. Those ignorant of politics will not know it, but for us it is clear that this decoration means something.

At the end of November 1992 a middle-ranking official lost his job at a regional office of the Ministry of Culture and Education. The impetus was a discovery of what the title of a lengthy journalistic report described as ‘a book for pre-school children with a picture of a hammer and sickle’ (Bernas, 1992b). Towards the end of the same article readers learn that the so-called ‘hammer’ and ‘sickle’ are significantly separated in the book. The hammer icon appeared together with a pencil and a ruler in a multiple-choice question for the young learners: ‘which of these is heavy?’ at the top of the page. At the bottom of the same page, there is another question, asking the young learners to indicate which is the most solid item of the three iconized items: a sickle, bread and water.

In 1996, following the nation-wide campaign against the People’s Democratic Party (PRD), there was a sweeping anxiety about the discovery of the initials ‘PRD’ in the army-camouflage-style uniform of the ruling party GOLKAR! The case subsided only after the highest authority in the nation’s intelligence and military bodies declared that the abstract patterns in question in fact did not read PRD but ‘PRT’ for ‘Printex’, the garment manufacturer of the outfit (Jawa Pos, 1996).

The series of such events proceeded almost without interruption. The problematic icon seemed to flourish in association with consumer goods for children. In one incident, the all-powerful regional military command in East Java dealt with the wrapping paper of sweets that reportedly had the stigmatized symbol (*Jawa Pos*, 1995). The following is the most memorable case. In mid-March 1995, another children's popular toy became the target of a witch-hunt sponsored by the local military and government leadership. What disturbed the local authorities was the fact that this toy was a balloon in the shape of a hammer. Worse still, according to the officials, when children played with it and hammered something the toy made a noise that sounded like 'arit', the Javanese word for sickle (*Suara Merdeka*, 1995).

Lest we dismiss all the above as simply a case of misunderstanding on the part of uninformed or overzealous state officials, the following local incident is instructive. More than 1000 kilometres from Riau island, where the *Street Fighter* video game had been discovered several months earlier, the military leadership in Java warned the public of the monstrous image in recently circulated toys and children's collector cards, apparently a derivative of the *Street Fighter* video-game series. These, according to the Commander of the Regional Military Command, 'endanger children's psyches' (*Bernas*, 1994; *Jawa Pos*, 1994).

The case came to media attention not from the imagining of a paranoid intelligence officer. Rather, the dangerous image from the card first struck Pupung Galih Bagasworo, a 10-year-old pupil in the small town of Ambarawa. Recalling the advice of his teacher, he submitted his card to his grandfather, Sunaryo (60), formerly a member of the DPRD (the local legislative body), who in turn handed it to the Commander of the KORAMIL (village-level military command), First Lieutenant Inf. Djumadi (*Bernas*, 1994).

The pleasure of misreading

The threat of Communism may not be real, despite the frenzy that accompanies the frequent announcements of its presence. But rather than being a fake or a bluff, it is 'hyperreal', as the above cases illustrate, as well as those in the great 1988 witch-hunt and many years before.

The extraordinary power of this simulacral spectre, and its refractory ramifications, do not come from themselves or an independent world of floating signs. Undeniably, they derive such great power, at least in part, from the blood-bath in 1965–6 and the periodic punishments in subsequent years. However, two further qualifications are called for at this point. First, the derivation is never immediate, direct or uniform. Second, while the anti-Communist discourse owes its power to mass violence, it is arguable that

the latter had always already been informed by some powerful discourse yet to be explored further.

In the previous sections we saw the omnipresence of hammer and sickle in the everyday life of local communities in Indonesia. They are not uniform in nature or origin. Some may be an over-reading of commodified signs in public by paranoid security officers. Others may have been deliberately produced by ordinary citizens, if only for reasons of lifestyle, avant-gardism or a joke. In what follows we see that, although the New Order's anti-Communism was dominant and far-reaching, it was never total.

During the peak of the country's celebration of its golden anniversary in 1995, 24-year-old Siran, a meatball vendor, was detained and went through a long series of extensive interrogations by security forces in West Java. As tradition required, Siran had refurbished his residence and its surroundings like millions of his fellow countrymen. What he did in addition was unusual: he wrote 'PKI Madiun Bangkit' (The Indonesian Communist Party of Madiun Rises) on the wall of his own house.

Indeed Siran came from Madiun, and had often heard of 'PKI Madiun'. However, during interrogation with security officers, Siran maintained that he did not know what PKI really meant. He consistently claimed that he had written the slogan 'just for fun'. A regional military command officer found such reasoning 'irrational', as if detaining Siran or the vigilante witch-hunt in the 1990s were any more rational (*Forum Keadilan*, 1995: 29–30).

Whatever Siran's real motivation may have been, he had to pay a dear price for his fun. Not only was Siran detained briefly, and required to make weekly reports after his release, but his wife and eight other meatball vendors were also arrested and interrogated because of their association with Siran. None was allowed to leave the city without special permission from the regional authorities (*Forum Keadilan*, 1995: 29–30; *Kompas*, 1995: 15).

Not all Indonesians who have done similar things have been penalized. In the early 1980s, in a rural area of Central Java, a group of small children innocently chose the hammer and sickle as an emblem for their soccer team. Apparently they picked up the image from a poster for the film *The Treason of G30S/PKI* that they could not afford to see. Globalized capitalism in the post-Cold War era has changed the entertainment industry. These changes send clear messages to many Indonesians that scarcity goes together with market value.

In late 1990, the police force in Central Java was hunting down the new vogue of trade in money bills from 1964 with a picture of the late President Sukarno, and the logo of the banned party (*Yogya Post*, 1990b). About the same time, at the airport of Ujung Pandang a foreign traveller had to answer questions and got clearance from a security officer who caught him holding a bag with an image of a hammer and sickle on one side (*Yogya Post*, 1990a). In late November 1995 in the town of Sidoardjo security officers

found a suspicious T-shirt on sale. On the back of the item was a picture of a heavy-built man with long hair, his hand holding a hammer and sickle. A caption below the picture reads 'Mr Mbelink', subculture slang for the recalcitrant (*Surya*, 1995: 5). Contemporary markets increased the commercial value of the once proscribed and revolutionary signifier, and turned it into a quintessential motif for mass consumerism.

Time changes not only the value and significance of the hammer-and-sickle logo, but also the familiar master narrative of *The Treason of G30S/PKI*. In 1992 my 10-year-old son came home from school one afternoon, talking enthusiastically about what fun it had been to play the game of PKI with his schoolmates. 'What did you say?' I could only half-believe what I heard. At school, he explained, children enacted the narrative they heard in history class or the televised film *The Treason of G30S/PKI*. 'Everyone wanted to play the PKI, chasing after those who played the lousy generals who had to run and hide as far as the school toilet. We conquered them and scolded them. That was great fun.'

These children must have seen or heard of the film *The Treason of G30S/PKI* in the way Hollywood has trained them to see *Rambo* or *Rocky*, or the much-loved Kung Fu movies from Hong Kong. But there is a fundamental difference between the New Order's master narrative and these foreign films. In most of the latter, the heroes are violent males. Unlike the post-1965 Indonesian master narrative, the post-Vietnam *Rambo* and *Rocky* series expose more honestly the narcissistic desire of Reagan's USA to perpetrate violence on the enemy. If the mission turned out to be too difficult in the tropical mountains of Vietnam, it can be done more easily in the simulacral empire of a Hollywood studio and the collective fantasy of moviegoers.¹⁹

New Order authorship tries to be a little cleverer than the Hollywood and Hong Kong film-makers, by superimposing the violence that it perpetrated on its victim in its narrative.²⁰ This narrative strategy goes against not only the dominant readings of mass-produced stories from Hollywood and Hong Kong, but also the longer tradition of watching and listening to the epic stories of *Mahabharata*, particularly the great war scenes of *Bharata Yudha*. In this light, the children's misreading is unsurprising.

What the Indonesian children did in the above examples may be compared with the adults who were involved with the production and consumption of the *Magis* album, or T-shirts and key-rings with images of the hammer and sickle. These can be seen as an everyday form of vernacular conviviality. They are neither 'resistance' à la James Scott's *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), nor Mikhail Bakhtin's topsy-turvy carnival. Baudrillard's (1983a: 43) understanding of the masses is more relevant:

traditional resistance consists of reinterpreting messages according to the group's own code and for its own ends. The masses, on the contrary, accept

everything and redirect everything *en bloc* into the spectacular, without requiring any other code, without requiring any meaning, ultimately without resistance. . . .

When Achille Mbembe speaks of the postcolony as the ‘simulacral regime *par excellence*’ (1992: 11), he suggests a set of power relations that are far from acquiring rational regimentation or panoptic surveillance. Rather, they ‘free up the potential for play, improvisation, and amusement, within the very limits set by officialdom’.

Many stories can be written about convivial practices of misreading and surviving under authoritarian postcolonial regimes. Several literary and theatrical works come to more prominence in deconstructing the master narrative of simulacral threats, and they certainly deserve a separate discussion.²¹ Of course, this is not to overlook or underestimate self-consciously calculated resistance among literary writers and political activists alike. Examples of the latter will be discussed in the next section.

The subversion of hyper-obedience

Indonesians love to poke fun with play on words and puns. One such tradition is Javanese-style *plesetan*, from the root word *pleset* (‘to slip’ or ‘slip-page’), stressing and celebrating the arbitrary and unstable relationships between signifiers and signified, and between both and referents in the world.²² Such practice turns out to be popular among the powerless who have to endure the arbitrary abuse of power under authoritarian rule.

The subversion of hyper-obedience proved effective during the general elections of 1992.²³ Under New Order, elections were never about contesting and winning the majority of votes. The final result was always already predictable. Nonetheless, there was usually a collective make-believe that the elections were about the sovereign people giving a mandate to the existing regime through competition with rival parties.²⁴ There was always nation-wide mass mobilization during the so-called campaign weeks.

The elaborate festivities during the so-called campaign weeks that the government sponsored to gloss over the whole event was not lost on the general mass who took it for what it was. There were street parades, parties, open-door concerts, and occasionally free lunches and T-shirt distribution. When the government encouraged the masses to participate in formal politics, obviously it meant a mobilization that did not go beyond street festivities and mass entertainment once every five years. The masses took the invitation and pushed it to its limits.

Unlike the middle-class urbanites who campaigned for a boycott, the masses expressed formal endorsement of the elections, but by breaking all sorts of normal rules and regulations (the most visible of which being traffic

rules). In 1992 ‘mass enthusiasm’ for the election campaign was so wild that security officers had to suspend some of these merry-making events. Once again, in a hyper-obedient response to the restrictions, the masses took it to the extreme by a complete withdrawal from the public festivities that threatened the intended celebration and credibility of the elections (see Heryanto, 1996c).

Because the New Order regime regularly staged show trials to suppress opposition forces and got away with it, desperation led the powerless subjects to play the same game and push it to its logical extreme. Rather than resisting, avoiding or condemning it, Megawati, the ousted leader of the PDI, non-governmental organization activists and journalists bombarded the government with hundreds of lawsuits, without the slightest illusion of achieving a legal victory as a result of an independent judicial investigation (see Heryanto, 1996a, 1996d, 1997). Rather than stripping away the pretence of legality, these lawsuits were meant to exasperate the government, and forced officials to maintain the spectacles of pretence to its extreme limits.

In 1994, a 29-year-old student activist Nuku Soleiman was sentenced to five years in prison after the Jakarta State Court declared him guilty of making stickers featuring a *plesetan* that ‘defamed’ the President.²⁵ At the time Nuku was the chair of Pijar, a radical non-governmental organization. It is tempting to argue that the official indictment from the prosecutor was simply a pretext for the punishment of Nuku Soleiman for other and more real, testable and rational motives. But similar rationalization can be proposed for other examples I have given earlier. Even if this line of thinking has some validity, it remains unclear why the authorities felt the need to conceal their real charges when there was already enough room to prosecute Nuku using standard procedures. Less clear and more relevant here is why they fixed on this particular pretext and not others. Why select Nuku’s *plesetan* as a criminal offence?

There is no ready rational answer to such an inquiry. As with the reckless mass violence in 1965–6, legal prosecution, state intimidation and an intimidated state’s witch-hunt do not simply follow the logic of efficient instrumentalism. Both the perpetrators in state violence and their victims are caught in a complex web of cultural, intellectual and moral signification. Like language, such structures of signification both empower them to do a range of things and disempower them from doing others.

Thus, while state violence may be uniform in physical and material terms, it always implicates local elements, habitus and collective memories, making each case different in significance from others. That is why Mbembe’s emphasis on ‘the workings of power in minute details’ is commendable. In a separate but equally relevant context, Coronil and Skurski argue: ‘physical violence, not unlike painting, is a vehicle for making and encoding history whose specific form and significance cannot be understood outside

that history' (1991: 330). Thus, by situating political violence 'within the history of their making' we can hope to 'decode the semantics of violence, and listen to what was said' (1991: 333).

In a similar way, responses to state violence can be understood. What follows is an account of how fellow activists supporting Nuku Soleiman responded to his prosecution. Trials of student activists always draw public attention and attract activists from various cities. They attend the proceedings and take advantage of the occasions, both as legitimate venues for reunion and meetings without applying for the required but rarely granted permits, and a forum for making political statements in public of a kind that would be utterly taboo elsewhere.

Although the Indonesian courts have suffered from public derision for their tarnished credibility, some defendants in political trials and their supporting groups take the court more seriously than others. The former engaged in legal battles with the prosecutors and judges, all of whom were officially the President's appointees and employees. Critical analysis and strong condemnation of the prosecution, the overall social order and the incumbent rulers found expression in the defence pleas which their authors often hoped would be published and make history in the future. Those attending the court sessions applauded during the reading of these documents. Copies were circulated. But in the end, these counter-attacks neither rescued the defendants from imprisonment, nor harmed their intended targets. By trying to prove that the formal indictments are invalid, ludicrous or empty signifiers, the defendants and their defence lawyers fall prey to the dominant idea of reality and legality.

By contrast, from the beginning of his trial Nuku and his supporting group entered the courtroom with a sense of entering a theatrical stage and with a Brechtian determination to lay their strategic devices bare. They had no illusion that Nuku would be acquitted, nor did they despair despite his anticipated conviction. They had no desire to write heroic defence pleas. What they did throughout the proceedings was to strip off the signs of legality, rationality and seriousness in the affair. They took the trial as a fiesta of simulacra and they tried to respond accordingly.²⁶

Here I will describe in some detail only events on the day the judge was due to pronounce his verdict. Just before the final proceedings were to commence, a group of young people came in formal outfits and with folders in their hands. They all wanted to meet Mrs Nurhayati to apply for a job as a driver, as attractively advertised in *Pos Kota*, a large daily that specifically targets the capital city underclass. Mrs Nurhayati was the chief judge.

The advertisement invited applicants to come to see her at the time and place where Nuku was due to hear the verdict. It was soon clear that the advertisement was a fake. But those desperately looking for employment did not believe it when they were told they had been deceived by a fake advertisement. An intense argument followed, delaying the court proceedings,

destroying the seriousness of the legal event and offering the audience some highly original entertainment. When the disappointed youths finally calmed down, they did not go away. Student activists invited them to join and enlarge the audience, further enhancing the theatricality of the whole event.

Not long afterwards a sharp siren attracted people's attention. An ambulance drew up and medical assistants approached the building in response to a request reportedly made by Mr Sihol on behalf of Mrs Nurhayati who was reportedly seriously ill. Mr Sihol was a member of the council of judges. These interruptions continued for a while, with the arrival of carnations from a local florist, the Pizza Hut delivery service (demanding a large payment from Mrs Nurhayati), taxi pick-up and several others (*Tempo*, 1994).

A month later, 21 student activists from various cities were tried in Jakarta following a demonstration that also allegedly defamed the President. This time supporting groups of activists attended the court proceedings in costumes that made them look like zombies. They wrapped their bodies and faces in bandages, leaving only the eyes visible. Their presence in the courtroom destroyed the whole aura of solemn legality.

Like beauty contestants, each of these seemingly badly injured zombies wore a sash, displaying names associated with notorious political scandals and state violence in recent times: Kedung Ombo, Aceh, Nipah, Cimacan, Lampung, East Timor, Tanjung Priok and Marsinah. When the judge put questions to the defendants, different individuals in the audience made ridiculing replies before the defendants said anything.

Outside the building, another group of student activists performed what they called (in English) 'happening art', parodying the way the judiciary corrupts justice. All of these provided journalists with juicy spectacles to write about and take pictures of during an otherwise boring and predictable case. A magazine nominally specializing in legal affairs published a full two-page collection of coloured photos of these events, under a *plesetan* title 'Panggung Peradilan Twenty One', 'Court Stage 21' (*Forum Keadilan*, 1994: 110–11). The number refers both to the common designation for the trials of the 21 students, as well as to the biggest intercity chain of entertainment complexes owned by the President's brother-in-law.

In the same issue the magazine published an editorial entitled 'The Face of the Court', emphasizing the significance of spectacles of law and politics in operation. A sketch of an actor's mask is located at the centre of the editorial page as an illustration. For many weeks the media were preoccupied with expressions of public anxiety over the seriously tarnished credibility of law and the judicial system. Commentaries in the largest daily, *Kompas*, often chose titles alluding more straightforwardly to the world of arts and festivity: 'Theatrical Performance in Courtroom' (1994a), or 'A Stage, A Mockery' (1994b).

Beyond the New Order, beyond simulacra

To conclude, a number of points can be highlighted. Most fundamental to the New Order's long-lasting authoritarian rule is the mass political violence from 1965–6. This is not to deny that some discursive formation provided, at least in part, the conditions that made it possible for this blood-bath to take place with the scope, speed, direction and consequences that it did.

This paper does not aim to analyse the violence of 1965–6, or identify its causes. Rather, it examines in detail the various discursive practices of terror, silence, nightmares, memories, vigilant surveillance, misunderstanding and conviviality in the 1990s that derived from both the trauma and simulacra of the violence in 1965. Those practices embodied the New Order's remarkably long-lasting authoritarian rule.

The foregoing discussion allows us to speak of another kind of regime; a discursive regime that claims a non-arbitrary relationship between signifier, signified and referents. This regime has been responsible for the prevailing view of an unproblematic connection between the image of a hammer and sickle, the former Indonesian Communist Party and the contemporary reincarnation of Communists. The same regime generates all kinds of other simulacra differing in contents and signs.

This discursive regime predates the 1965 violence, or the birth of the republic itself. By no means is it essentially local or unique to Indonesia or the New Order regime. It may continue to constitute a dominant discourse in Indonesia long after the New Order relinquish power, although never without challenges. Such a discursive regime has undoubtedly been in constant tension with other competing discourses that have together contributed to the making of present-day Indonesia.²⁷

Under such circumstances, the politics of appearance came to prominence.²⁸ One instructive case that has no reference to Communism, but attests to the salience of the politics of appearance, is the so-called 'yellowization'. The Indonesian parliamentary elections in 1997 proved to be the most violent in the history of the republic. As before, central to the many mass confrontations that led to violence during the campaign period was the display of four colours, representing three competing contestants (green, yellow, red) and the campaign for boycott (white). More seriously than their previous counterparts, the 1997 elections carried an especially explosive tension, because never before had the ruling party felt so insecure in the face of its waning economic, political and moral legitimacy.

Although it was crystal clear that the ruling party would win the majority of votes, the Governor of Central Java went as far as demanding all buildings, including private commercial property and residential houses be painted yellow, the colour of the ruling party GOLKAR. On one occasion in early 1996, the same governor reportedly instructed the removal of red

carpet that his staff unrolled at the local railway station to welcome the visit of the Vice-President. The governor demanded that some yellow carpet be laid instead. Because his staff could not find the desired carpet, no carpet eventually covered the floor at the railway station.²⁹

In the city of Solo, trees and public property were 'yellowized'. The population creatively poked fun with all sorts of anecdotes.³⁰ Most memorable is the stubborn opposition of the local branch of the 'Islamic' United Development Party in Solo. They repainted public property white, only to find the following day or week that yellowization was back. After several instances of painting over and counter-repainting, and scuffles, the head of the local party branch was brought to court.

Having recognized the merits of Baudrillard's 'simulacra', one must go further and ask: are simulacra really a magic coinage that captures that which escapes the grid of existing social and political sciences? The answer is no. Do simulacra provide us with a better access to the truth about power relations in a former European colonial society? No. Are simulacra types of postmodernist viruses that threaten to bring social and political sciences to an end? No.³¹

The appeal and power of postmodernist criticism, as Turner tenably suggests (1993), stems from the fact that it fills with rigour an area that both mainstream sociology and Marxism are not particularly strong at dealing with, namely contemporary cultures. The concept of simulacra can help us see more clearly a profound lack in existing social and political sciences. The concept supplements, defers, shifts or simulates that disturbing lack, but never eradicates it.

Simulacra are not handy instruments that save or pretend to save social and political sciences from serious predicament. Baudrillard has not lied about simulacra. The notion of simulacra only reverses the order and hierarchical statuses between image and reality, between copy and original, without privileging one and dissolving the other.

There is both some truth and some problems in Mbembe's assertion that 'the postcolony is the simulacral regime *par excellence*' (1992: 11). While the preceding discussion has much to support the notion of New Order regime as a simulacral regime, the qualification 'par excellence' is problematic. On the one hand it acknowledges important differences in power relations and historical sites between these postcolonial societies and those in the metropolises. On the other hand, the qualification can easily be read or misread as homogenizing, exoticizing and essentializing postcolonial societies in ways comparable to the old colonial tradition of vulgar orientalism.³² That old colonial tradition finds its contemporary enthusiasts among autocrats in Asia in the 1990s.

In the other extreme, Baudrillard is famous for regarding North American society, especially California, as a simulacral utopia *par excellence*. The arguments about simulacral America in particular and about simulacra in

general share a common starting point, namely the extent to which electronic media networks transform society, and our sense of being. Viewed narrowly in this evolutionary sense, New Order Indonesia seems to be a little far behind and irrelevant. But to reduce the simulation effects to electronic media is to recuperate logocentric nostalgia of non-electronic (or pre-electronic) media. Simulation came a long way with the 'invention of language' (MacCannell and MacCannell, 1993: 131). Otherwise, why would Plato have been so hostile to the poets, agents of simulacra par excellence (Kennedy, 1992: 10, 28)²³³

Although Mbembe and Baudrillard seem to propose oppositional views, in fact both reproduce the old and dangerous dichotomies of East–West, North–South, Developed–Underdeveloped societies under different names. By extension, one can easily see the danger of overdoing the difference between what in seminars and on paper has been termed the liberal-democratic versus authoritarian regime, or between the latter and a post-authoritarian counterpart. As I mentioned in passing, New Order authoritarianism is a product of a globalized power relationship, implicating the Indonesian political elite, its domestic victims, as well the victors of the Second World War and the Cold War.

In arguing for the specific character of postcolonial power relations Mbembe emphasizes, among other things, the notion of mutual powerlessness between those who rule and their subjects (1992: 24). This is also more or less Baudrillard's argument about consumer society in post-industrial, post-capitalist, post-production masses: 'Manipulation has never existed. The game is played on both sides, with the same weapons, and who can say which is winning today' (1983a: 29). It would not be very difficult to see the parallel between Baudrillard's discussion of the uncontrollable 'floating signs' or the silent masses (1983a) and the depoliticized population that was officially termed the 'floating mass' in the New Order.

There is a danger of overstatement, and myopia, in arguing that the regime of simulacra is particular, unique or par excellence in this or that society, authoritarian or otherwise. However, to suggest the converse – that simulacrum is or can be anywhere and everywhere – is no less problematic. It overlooks differences, some more significant than others, between today's societies, subsocieties and groups. One possible and promising step to pursue from this dilemma is to work with diverse micro-level studies. This allows us to ask with Michel-Rolph Trouillot under what conditions authoritarianism or the regime of simulacra is 'enhanced or weakened through public discourses and manifestations' (1992: 79).

Such an approach helps us avoid taking for granted prior assumptions that distinguish one kind of society from others in ways tainted with more essentialism than we would like. Studying the complex particular in detail also allows us to see that the presence or even prominence of a simulacral regime in a particular society in a particular time does not make that society

totally hyperreal. One wishes political terror, killings, torture or imprisonment could only be other than real.

During the intense months of violent students' confrontations with security officers, in which they demanded that the President step down, no accusation of 'Communism' was heard. This marked the end of the New Order-sponsored 'Communist threat' simulacral phantom, rendering Wanandi's case the last and aborted attempt of the dying anti-Communist regime to regain power. By no means, however, does this indicate the demise of the spectre. The New Order was only one dominant author of the phantasmal narrative. The scars of the victims of the anti-Communist witch-hunts and of the past leftist and populist politics are still there in the everyday lives of the diverse population. The authorial New Order is dead, but the long-haunting questions and memories of the 1965 violence live on.

Notes

Some of the perspectives presented here have their origin in my PhD thesis research at Monash University (1989–1994) under the supervision of Joel S. Kahn and Kenneth Young. To both I am most grateful. I presented this paper at the conference on the 'Legacies of Authoritarianism: Cultural Production, Collective Trauma, and Global Justice' at the University of Wisconsin (1998). I want to thank several other individuals for their insightful comments, assistance in collecting relevant materials, or editorial suggestions: Michael Meehan, Keith Foulcher, Stanley Y.A. Prasetyo, Vedi R. Hadiz, Chua Beng Huat, James Scott, Otto Adi Yulianto, Budiawan, Donald Emmerson, Crawford Young, Thongchai Winichakul, Philip Kelly, Tessa Piper and an anonymous reader of this journal.

- 1 Williams's (1980: 37) insight on 'ideology' can be extended to many other power relations, including those pertaining to our present discussion on the New Order's authoritarianism:

For if [it] were merely some abstract, imposed set of notions, if our social and political and cultural ideas and assumptions and habits were merely the result of specific manipulation, of a kind of overt training which might be simply ended or withdrawn, then the society would be very much easier to move and to change than in practice it has ever been or is.

- 2 By this time it was difficult to speak of 'the government' due to its less than unified voice and inconsistent policies.
- 3 When the newsmagazine *D & R* published a critical editorial that questioned the genuine nature of the demonstration, a counter-demonstration was launched against it.
- 4 For more details of the incredible allegation of the PRD's political crime and its links with the Indonesian Communist Party, see Heryanto, 1997: 115–18.

- 5 Western media estimate the Beijing death toll in the range of 2000 to 5000 (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 1989: 10).
- 6 In fact, it is fair to name individuals who authored what later proved to be a master narrative: Nugroho Notokusanto (then Director of the Department of Defence and Security's Institute of History) and Ismail Saleh (then Instructor at the Army Staff and Command School) (1968, 1989). Apparently commissioned by Suharto, the couple wrote in English (!) and in 1968 published the book *The Coup Attempt of the September 30 Movement in Indonesia*. Significantly, no Indonesian translation was published until 1989, months before the demise of Cold War and of the efficacy of the anti-Communist spectre in Indonesia.
- 7 See Baudrillard (1983b, 1988) for more on his concept of 'simulacra' as signs that precede the real and conceal nothing, or copies of non-existing originals.
- 8 In the years that followed Indonesia saw the mushrooming – and soon to be banned – publication of memoirs by senior and ageing political figures who in the early years of the 1990s presented defiant accounts of the otherwise largely hazy events surrounding the bloody succession of 1965. One such book that provoked a particularly strong reaction from the regime and its supporters is by Oei Tjoe Tat (1995).
- 9 To emphasize the everlasting Communist cruelty, other official narratives date the PKI's earliest coup attempt to 1926 (see for instance Getal, 1994). Ironically this suggests a nationalist struggle against the Dutch before Indonesia proclaimed independence in 1945.
- 10 *G30S/PKI* is the standard acronym for *Gerakan 30 September/Partai Komunis Indonesia*, the 30 September Movement 1965/Indonesian Communist Party. This is not the only film on the events surrounding the historical 1965 coup that the government has co-produced, but it is the most ambitious and most widely disseminated.
- 11 For an account of such periodic rituals of discipline and punishment against the first generation of 1965-related victims, see Southwood and Flanagan (1983). For an examination of a more recent case in the 1990s, ferociously victimizing youths who were aged 3 to 5 in 1965, see Heryanto, 1994. Throughout 1995 and 1996 we saw another upsurge of anti-Communist witch-hunts but never without challenge from the increasingly wealthy, confident and liberal-minded middle classes.
- 12 In 1988 different and often localized discursive practices converged and created a great explosion for more than a year. Victims ranged from ordinary state employees, members of provincial parliaments, political party figures, to top state officials. Many marital engagements were cancelled. The Vice-President was attacked by rumours. For a quick but helpful overview in English on the situation in 1988, see Lane (1991: 11–12), Motek (1988: 8), Reeve (1990: 156), *TAPOL* (1988: 5–6), van de Kok and van Langenberg (1990: 163–6).

- 13 Even the well received publication of Ben Anderson's *Language and Power* (1990), critically and passionately exploring discursive practices in the New Order politics, pushes the issue to the background. There has been only one preliminary and pioneering book to date on the killings in 1965/6, edited by Robert Cribb (1990). Others have investigated literary representations. Keith Foulcher has perhaps made more contribution than anyone else writing in English, to our understanding in this area (1986, 1990, 1994).
- 14 *Jakarta-Jakarta* (1993: 33).
- 15 Until Suharto resigned in May 1998, only two legal cases had been brought to court by former political prisoners or their families to claim compensation for the material damage, killings, loss of property, civil rights and the penal exile of hundreds of thousands of citizens for more than ten years with no legal procedure in the aftermath of the 1965 bloodshed. The first of such lawsuits came from the great literary writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer (*Forum Keadilan*, 1996a; *Kompas*, 1996). The second came from the little-known Mrs Syofinar (see *Forum Keadilan*, 1996c: 32).
- 16 Many of the cases mentioned here derive from recent times, and most from Central Java, one of the major sites of the 1965/6 killings. However, the reproduction of simulacral Communist threats can be found nation-wide with differences in version, intensity, frequency and effects.
- 17 In December 1992 I received a notification from the Semarang Customs Office, informing me that the so-called 'Anti-Smuggling Section' of the Department of Immigration had confiscated a book that came with an incoming parcel. The book was held because of its title: *Atheist*. The customs official thought the book propagated atheism and thus that it was, like 'Communism', utterly illegal.
- 18 These prisoners were released after international pressure on human rights issues. And as Daniel Lev (1992) aptly describes, they were released with no legal procedure, mirroring the way they had been brought to the island in the aftermath of the 1965 tragedy.
- 19 The reverse is true of parks and monuments in the two regimes. Disneyland, as Baudrillard sees it, is created as a fiction in order to make us think that the rest of the country is real when it is all similarly hyperreal (1988: 172). The New Order built the Museum of the PKI's Treason to eradicate the distinction between real, unreal or hyperreal. This regime publishes the same narrative of the Communist coup in school textbooks, official history, white books, films and in what it calls 'novels'.
- 20 For more on the logic of narrative imputation in state political violence, see Helen Fein's comparative discussion on the massacres in Indonesia and Kam-puchea (1993).
- 21 For example, the theatrical production of *Orde Tabung* in 1988 by Teater Gandrik, *Opera Ular Putih* in 1994 by Teater Koma, or literary pieces like Putu Wijaya's *Nyali* (1983), and the more obscenely political writing of Pipiet Rochijat (1993). See also Keith Foulcher's discussion (1990) of Ajip Rosidi's *Anak Tanah Air* (1985).

- 22 *Plesetan* is largely free from academic colonization and definition. The term covers a wide variety of rhetoric and literary practices. One popular form is the anarchic free play of arbitrary displacements and replacements of phonemes, morphemes, syllables, or words from familiar statements, but without reconstructing them into coherent and fixed statements in lieu of the deconstructed. For a modest and preliminary account of *plesetan*, see Heryanto (1996b).
- 23 See Baudrillard's (1983a: 47–8) view on the possible destruction of hyper-simulation and hyperconformity.
- 24 In the 1997 elections, the New Order regime was confronted with an unprecedented challenge by the establishment of the first independent body to monitor the poll, Komite Independen Pengawasan Pemilu (KIPP). Feeling seriously threatened, state officials perpetrated all sorts of violence to repress the activities and activists of KIPP. However, when asked in a private conversation what he hoped to achieve, one of KIPP's co-founders and leading figures reportedly remarked, tongue in cheek: 'The government pretended to administer fair and honest elections. So we pretend to keep a close watch on their activities.'
- 25 Defendant Nuku Soleiman appeared in full colours on the cover of *Inside Indonesia* (1994). An overview of his case can be found on pp. 11–12.
- 26 In this sense Nuku and his supporting groups are much more radical and subversive than the victorious defence lawyers in the trial of John Hinckley, as wonderfully analysed by Rosanne Kennedy (1992). She demonstrates the profound challenges that simulacra have posed to the fundamental principles of law in modern societies.
- 27 Soon after the fateful year of 1965 the New Order declared a prohibition on the use of Chinese words, for their supposedly inherent association with Communism. Chinese characters fall under the same category as explosives, narcotics and pornographic materials in the list of items prohibited from being brought into Indonesia's territory (Heryanto, 1998).
- 28 Since the 1987 elections, it has been against the law to display portraits of the late President Sukarno. The deceased was the only significant rival to the incumbent President during the campaign period.
- 29 Private communication with a local reporter in 1993.
- 30 One caricature in a newsmagazine shows a mother calling to her son who was leaving the house, running off to school. She screamed from the house: 'brush your teeth, first'. From a distance his son replied: 'no need. I'm for yellowization.'
- 31 See Baudrillard's admission to being polemical, provocative, exaggerating and the fact that he is not as pessimistic as he may have sounded in his works (Gane, 1993: 132–3). Bryan S. Turner's (1993) critical and yet sympathetic assessment of Baudrillard's contribution and challenges to social sciences is also worthy of mention here.
- 32 On this, see a series of critical comments on Mbembe's position in *Public Culture* (1992: 47–122).

33 For more arguments that Baudrillard's account of late-capitalist western societies also applies in different degrees and forms in many other and previous societies see the collection of essays edited by Rojek and Turner (1993).

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