

## 9 Heroism and the Pleasure and Pain of Mistranslation

### The Case of *The Act of Killing*

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The notion of hero versus villain is understood differently across time, nations, and even within a single nation-state. Yet, it is still common in many of these instances that those who disagree on the issue can nonetheless exchange views and engage in some form of debate. This chapter examines a radically different case, where the understanding of heroes and villains in one discursive practice is incommensurate and inverted in another.<sup>1</sup> The internationally acclaimed documentary *The Act of Killing* (2012), by the American filmmaker Joshua Oppenheimer, shows leaders of an Indonesian gang who re-enact their role in the mid-1960s anti-communist killings in their own country. This re-enactment entailed a complex clash of discursive frameworks in which different understandings of heroism and villainy play a central role. The ideas about heroism that are shared by the main characters in the film and their associates are deeply unsettling, puzzling, but also amusing when represented by the discursive practices of the filmmaker and the intended audiences.<sup>2</sup> As the protagonists attempt to impress the viewers by performing what they consider to be the heroic actions of the anti-communist killings they had been responsible for, they appear to be doing precisely the opposite in the eyes of the latter: namely, engaging in serious self-incrimination and obscene self-‘villainization.’

It is important to note from the outset, however, that the discursive frameworks that the film evokes and exposes cannot be reduced to simple binaries of West and East, global and local moral values or cultural practices. While both are global and local (glocal), their practices are not of equal standing in the international fora. *The Act of Killing* is the work of an international collaboration of organizations and cinema workers, including many Indonesians, and its reception has differed widely while cutting across national boundaries. The film is an intimate joint cooperation of unlikely agencies, bringing together different and conflicting discourses on moral and political issues via notions of the heroic at both a local and global scale. As will be seen, these notions of the heroic are influenced by both ‘Western’ and ‘Eastern’ traditions of hero representation in film (Hollywood and Hong Kong), and the Indian epic of Mahabharata, but also drastic mistranslation of Nazi villainy as heroism.

*The Act of Killing* as Historical Re-enactment

Before discussing the two contrasting discourses and their mistranslations, it will be necessary to provide a brief introduction to *The Act of Killing* and the historical context of the 1965–1966 killings for those unfamiliar with Indonesia. From late 1965 to mid-1966, Indonesia was home to ‘one of the bloodiest massacres in modern history’ in the context of the Cold War.<sup>3</sup> Nearly 1 million lives were lost at the hands of their own fellow nationals. The official pretext for the massacre was the kidnapping of six right-wing senior military officers and one lieutenant during the early hours of October 1, 1965, by middle-ranking military officers. Before long, the then major general Suharto had managed to suppress this revolt, before attributing the killings of the generals to an abortive coup d’état attempt by the Indonesian Communist Party. This allegation helped facilitate Suharto’s long-desired plan to eradicate the Communist Party and all its affiliated organizations and sympathizers, as well as bring to an end the government in power under President Sukarno, which the army considered too lenient on the communists. Nationwide killings took place over the next several months, and a witch hunt lasted for the next several decades.

*The Act of Killing* has been the subject of many well-documented debates from multiple angles and approaches, including its content and its form of presentation. Content-wise, the film is particularly unusual for presenting Anwar Congo—an executor during a killing spree in the mid-1960s—as a main character. He defies common understandings of a protagonist, of either hero or villain. We see him boasting to the camera about his role as leader of local gangsters Pemuda Pancasila (Pancasila Youth) in the city of Medan (North Sumatra), killing many of his fellow nationals in late 1965 and early 1966, mainly for their real or perceived affiliations with the PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia, Indonesian Communist Party), as well as local residents of Chinese descent. Instead of showing remorse, for most of the film Congo and his fellow executioners speak of their ‘cruelty’ (their own words) with pride. They reconstruct their experience and re-enact their crime joyfully with jokes and laughter, while drinking, singing, and dancing.

Stylistically, the film is remarkably bold, innovative, and controversial. The characters are given free rein to dramatize their stories to a much greater extent than is common. Oppenheimer invites the killers to create a fictive story, based on their personal experiences in the 1965–1966 killings, along with their reflective response to that past. Congo and his friends take part in the design, scripting, casting, and shooting of a film that they wish to produce and star in. Instead of trying to be as accurate, factual, and persuasive as possible, these killers opt to boast and exaggerate their crimes and impunity in a spectacular and occasionally surrealist fashion, borrowing heavily from Western and Eastern traditions

of popular cinema (see ahead). This results in a film which is neither a documentary in the most familiar sense nor purely absurd fantasy or fiction. It is both fascinating and deeply disturbing. Understandably, when the film was released, it prompted a number of questions.<sup>4</sup> Why would these killers be willing to speak about their crimes so openly, and do so in such self-heroizing and self-incriminating ways? Did the filmmaker deceive them? Were they not aware of, and concerned about, the possible consequences of their statements and actions? A quick answer can be gleaned from the film itself: The executioners have enjoyed extraordinary impunity for their crimes, and they are confident that this impunity will continue for the rest of their lives. However, even if their assumption is true—that there would be no serious risk of legal or moral liability from their actions—one is still left wondering why they would do what they did, and in the manner in which they did it. What might have motivated them to participate in the making of *The Act of Killing*? Was there something about contemporary Indonesia which might have motivated them to expect possible gains from their actions? What are the broader and relevant circumstances in which these killers enthusiastically participated in the making of the film and its exposing strategies of self-heroization?

### An Intimate Collaboration of Unlikely Allies

In what follows, the chapter elaborates on the foregoing questions. However, instead of simply offering some answers, it will also self-interrogate and re-examine these seemingly ‘rational and sensible’ questions. As a discursive practice, these questions, like all questions, imply certain assumptions, which remain unstated. These assumptions are often taken for granted and normalized as ‘common sense’ by those who engage them. By the same token, we must also ask what assumptions underlie the actions and statements of those appearing in *The Act of Killing* as they speak to the camera, to the film director, and to each other among fellow killers. As suggested earlier, the case under study is extraordinary because it is not like some of the familiar instances where disagreements involve those who can nonetheless still exchange views and engage in some form of debate. Rather, this is a case where the understanding of heroes and villains in one discursive practice is incommensurate and inverted in another. Thus, it cannot be debated on a common ground between opposing camps.

Curiously, while the discursive and moral contradictions in *The Act of Killing* are critical to the film’s successful reception, they are not immediately and equally transparent to all the parties involved. The characters in *The Act of Killing* do not appear to be cognizant of the other’s discursive practice—in this case the filmmaker’s—whose framing of their statements and actions renders them extremely repugnant. These Indonesian killers appear to believe the film crew to be a group of naïve

or harmless, easily manipulated outsiders. Conversely, to the filmmaker and their intended audiences, the characters in the documentary appear extremely odd, foolish, and morally disturbing, to say the least. Equally, the filmmaker and the implied audience may be incognizant of, or indifferent to, the discursive framework employed by the main characters in this documentary. Not all discourses are equals, just like the communities that practice them. This imbalance of power relations, however, is not as simple and straightforward as it seems, as will be pointed out later. The powerful impact of the film on international audiences can be considered an index of the dissimilarities, disconnections, or incompatibility between these two sets of discourses, particularly as regards their differing perceptions of hero and villain. The main characters' oddities, repulsiveness, and foolishness are projected onto the worldwide screen to the horror and enjoyment of those who love to hate them.

This analysis shares the discursive framework of the filmmaker and its intended audience in an attempt to acknowledge and make sense of the other's discursive framework in which the main characters of *The Act of Killing* operate. This requires some challenging work on 'translation' and an analysis of potential 'mistranslation' between the two discourses and world views. Bias is inevitable with such an endeavour and places some limits on the efficacy of this analysis.<sup>5</sup> Despite these caveats, it is worthwhile to challenge the easy and strong temptation for viewers to demonize the main characters in the documentary. By no means does this analysis condone their crimes or impunity. It is not their crime from the 1960s itself which is under scrutiny, but their recollection and performance of that crime in the 2000s. Even the main characters in the documentary acknowledge the cruelty of their crimes and can be seen from time to time grappling to come to terms with their past actions. The chapter will also illustrate the slipperiness of terms such as hero and villain when considered as binary oppositions, positing them as distinct categories beyond conceptual analyses.

*The Act of Killing* has won many international awards and countless accolades, in both English and Indonesian. It has also been the subject of criticism, both politically and ethically. Focusing on the daily life and boastful statements of the perpetrators, some criticize the film for not giving broader and adequate political context to the 1965 killings, and for not giving enough voice to the survivors.<sup>6</sup> One critic suggests that due to this ellipsis, the film is '[m]anipulative and misleading' in the sense that '[t]he killings are presented as the work of civilian criminal psychopaths, not as a campaign of extermination.'<sup>7</sup> Despite their opposing views, those who praise and those who criticize the film belong to more or less the same discursive framework.<sup>8</sup> They may have few things to agree on, but they share common ground to enable an exchange of conflicting views: Each can see the position of the other. These critics live in one discursive universe, while the main characters in the documentary live with the

signifying practices of another universe. Evidence suggests the latter do not—and quite possibly cannot—share the same discursive framework of those commenting on *The Act of Killing* at various international film festivals, or publishing reviews of the films, or providing critical analyses in academic journals. As a result, they are unable to see how an international audience of the film would see them in such negative light, and may not have otherwise participated in the making of the film—certainly not in the fashion they did.

Pointing out the difference between these two sets of discourse, each within its own vernacular universe of meanings, including those of the heroic, is not as difficult as proposing a definition of each and giving them a label. I will make a modest attempt at describing their differences, while refraining from making a broad theorization or providing precise definitions of each practice. It is safe to say that almost all of the published material—essays, discussions, and reviews in English and Indonesian—belong to the same discourse with which *The Act of Killing* was created and widely consumed. Being a dominant discourse in most contemporary societies, it is shared by many modern, humanist, and secular citizens of the world, including human rights advocates, enjoying a certain prestige in the social arena and commanding a moral authority. The dualism of heroes and villains and the distinction between fact and fiction are inherent in this discourse. Even when such a dualism is problematized, as is attempted in this chapter, we realize that such a problematizing itself is a product of the same historical paradigm of thought. It adopts a secular humanistic view of human beings, a universal ethic, and takes a generally negative view of deception and violence.

In contrast, other commentators on *The Act of Killing* belong in an altogether different category. They seem to share a lot with those appearing in the film as main characters. While the first category outlined earlier could easily be attributed to the modern,<sup>9</sup> it would be problematic to refer to the second category as premodern, unmodern, or postmodern. Regardless of the label, the views and comments to be discussed ahead belong to people with no or less legitimate cultural capital in contemporary international fora.<sup>10</sup> Articulations of the second category can be found scattered in small and local settings and are mostly unpublished; or, if they are published, they are situated in settings far less prestigious than those in the first category outlined earlier. Consequently, their existence can be easily overlooked or dismissed by distant observers. Here the distinction between hero and villain or fact and fiction is either irrelevant or fluid.

It is critical to emphasize that neither the first nor the second category of those two distinct discursive communities is homogenous—clearly demarcated by place of residence, period of history, and racial, ideological, cultural, or linguistic differences. For the purpose of analysis, they are presented here as distinct entities, while in reality they coexist and

occasionally overlap. Instead of dismissing the film as ‘manipulative’ (perhaps all films are guilty of manipulation to varying degrees), or seeing the main characters as a bunch of individual ‘psychopaths,’ I wish to identify some of the broader social forces shaping the characteristics of this ‘other’ discursive framework. Each discursive practice produces its own regime of truth, with its gaps of silence and ignorance. Therefore, at best, this study can only hope to be partially successful. In an attempt to translate text from one discursive practice to another, something—perhaps many things—will be lost.

To have an initial glimpse of this ‘less legitimate’ discursive framework, it would be useful to acknowledge and consider some of the lesser-known reactions to *The Act of Killing* among viewers in Indonesia. Let me stress from the outset that the difference among viewers of *The Act of Killing* varies significantly in Indonesia, as is common elsewhere. We cannot overgeneralize them. Many, perhaps most of them, are middle-class urbanites who share a common discursive framework with their counterparts in English-speaking societies. As reported by Mette Bjerregaard, they agreed and disagreed on aspects of the documentary in similar ways to those widely published in English and Indonesian alike.<sup>11</sup>

It is expected that reactions to the film in Indonesia would differ from those of outside audiences, because many of those in power are directly incriminated, while survivors and their close associates would be hurt in deeply personal ways.<sup>12</sup> Conscious of the potential retribution from the former, Oppenheimer has opted against returning to Indonesia for the foreseeable future, and his Indonesian crew in the production of the film has remained anonymous.<sup>13</sup> The next few paragraphs highlight a few cases where the reaction to the documentary strikes me as surprising and intriguing for reasons other than its personal safety or political implications with regard to Indonesia’s past history, and seems to belong to a very different universe. These frictions of value systems and epistemes in different cultural contexts point to the dramatic rifts in moral interpretations, exposing how complex ‘glocalizations’ of heroisms can exist.

In the city of Malang (East Java) in 2013, a group of close male friends in their forties and fifties held a private screening of *The Act of Killing* from a DVD that I supplied. Some of them were members of the local city council, representing a local political party. Others were small traders in a local market, where thugs regularly roamed. In other words, these people lived in a social and political environment not dissimilar to those appearing in the film. Barely half an hour into the show, they decided to stop watching. When I asked for their reasons, some replied the film was boring. Others felt unimpressed by a film which, in their view, championed those from a rival political party that supported the government. For these Malang viewers, they were tired of hearing the kind of boasting from individuals who were already a part of their daily lives.

There was no indication that these viewers had perceived the irony presented in the film. None considered how the film might have 'manipulated' or tricked the characters to self-incriminate or make them look ridiculous. None considered these characters to have mental health issues. They did not see what had previously excited and concerned me or many others who have discussed these similar concerns.<sup>14</sup> Until this instance in Malang, my experience was that the film had either provoked or impressed its viewers, but I had not heard or imagined it could 'bore' anyone. But this is not the only surprising case I found in Indonesia.

Another respondent from North Sumatra, whom I interviewed during my fieldwork in 2013, mentioned that for many of his associates from the same province, watching *The Act of Killing*, and particularly the way Anwar Congo speaks boastfully, made them feel homesick. The documentary that shocked the international audience for its strangeness was at the same time something familiar and intimate to North Sumatran audiences. In screenings of *The Act of Killing* in Jakarta, this respondent told me, many people felt obliged to see it because their friends talked about it and they did not want to miss out. But most of them appeared to be unimpressed by the film. The majority of them left the venue when the screening was over and the post-screening discussion was about to begin.

Yet another respondent (documentary filmmaker) shared with me a story about his trip to North Sumatra with an Australian TV journalist to meet both Anwar Congo and Herman Koto (another main character in *The Act of Killing*) for an interview in 2013. Congo met with them but did not consent to a recorded interview. Koto made himself available for an interview with a fee, which he said he was expected to share with other members of his militia organization. Both visiting interviewers tried to understand how Koto might respond to the international reactions to *The Act of Killing*, the potential risks arising from his appearance in the film, and what his strategy might be in dealing with such risks. Koto did not seem to comprehend the concerns of his visitors. Consequently, his interviewers played back the scenes where he appeared, and they paused at selected scenes and discussed the kinds of risks to which Koto might be liable. Right to the end of the meeting, my respondent said he was certain that Koto remained ignorant of the concerns of his two visitors, or those on the other side of the globe. This respondent was clear that this was not a case of someone experiencing mental health issues, or a ruthless criminal with no remorse. Rather this was an example of a serious communication disconnect and, this respondent added, was not restricted to those former killers in North Sumatra. He had witnessed several other cases of just such a communication disconnect between those behind the making of *The Act of Killing* and some viewers he knew in Jakarta.

In 2012, Benedict Anderson drew a contrast between the 1965 killings and the killers in North Sumatra (as they appear in *The Act of Killing*) with those in Java and Bali, where the death tolls were much higher.

According to Anderson, in Java and Bali there was much ‘silence. Nothing to boast about in public or on TV.’<sup>15</sup> Later that year, the local newsmagazine *TEMPO* ran a special double edition on the 1965 killings. Countering Anderson’s thesis, and very much in line with their Medan executors, *TEMPO* published gruesome testimonies of many 1965 killers in Java, boasting about their action in taking the lives of the communists.<sup>16</sup>

Some of the characters in *The Act of Killing* might have overdone their boasting in celebrating their crime. However, the examples listed earlier suggest that their behaviour was far from idiosyncratic or confined to just a few individuals in Medan, North Sumatra. Not only does this behaviour have its equivalent in Java and Bali—despite Anderson’s argument to the contrary—but also in fact, as will shortly be discussed, such behaviour strongly resembles and is strongly linked to other cases in Indonesia, and in more distant societies around the world via the dissemination of pop culture and the media industry. However, as mentioned earlier, the distinction between the two discourses outlined earlier cannot be reduced to a simplistic dichotomy between West/East, global/local moral or cultural practices. This becomes obvious when we regard the ways in which the killers stylized themselves as ‘heroic’ in the documentary.

### Transnationally Mediated Popular Culture

In *The Act of Killing*, Congo’s acting and re-enacting of his killing of perceived communists have obvious international dimensions. Throughout the film, Congo and his friends describe their fascination with Hollywood westerns and gangster films, and how these American pop-cultural products became their primary source for inspiration on methods of killing their victims. They speak very highly of Hollywood stars James Dean, John Wayne, Victor Mature, and Marlon Brando. Congo and his friends acknowledge their gratitude to American pop-cultural products that informed both their style of crime in the 1960s and their re-enactment for Oppenheimer’s camera in the 2000s. Hence, the significance of the title *The Act of Killing* and its multiple meanings in Oppenheimer’s documentary: ‘the film is also about men who are acting out memories of killing, and the feelings they have about killing . . . [F]or Anwar acting was always part of the act of killing.’<sup>17</sup> It was a specifically Hollywood-inspired act.

The transnational flows of the ‘heroization’ of the killing of the communists come full circle when *The Act of Killing* is presented across the United States and the rest of the world. What came from the West is brought back to the West—except, in a worse version. This is not an act of ‘resistance’ à la James Scott’s *Weapons of the Weak* (1985).<sup>18</sup> Rather, it more resembles Baudrillard’s concept of ‘hyper-obedience,’ where the Other ‘accept[s] everything and redirect[s] everything en bloc into the spectacular, without requiring any other code, without . . . resistance.’<sup>19</sup>



The American style of violence as entertainment both on and off screen is not only mirrored, but the degrees of its impacts appear to be dependent on each other, as illustrated by the Abu Ghraib scandal, showing the torture of prisoners in the Iraq War by US Army personnel and the publication of such images in the media. Theorizing more broadly, Achille Mbembe argues that ‘elements of the obscene, vulgar, and the grotesque. . . are intrinsic to all systems of domination,’ and such elements are most pronounced in postcolonies which are ‘characterized by a . . . tendency to excess and disproportion.’<sup>20</sup>

What makes the ‘excess and disproportion’ of Congo and his fellow executors more intriguing is the fact that they are prompted by the visit of Oppenheimer, the American filmmaker, and his powerful media equipment for filmmaking, to their home base. *The Act of Killing* is never an innocent record of some pre-existing reality or event in North Sumatra. Rather, the presence of the camera and the American filmmaker (and all the real or perceived import of what this equipment and people might entail) stimulated the idea and desire on the part of the Medan thugs to create the persona of a hero, with all the ‘excesses and disproportions.’ It is one of several similar cases where Indonesian anti-communist advocates, provocateurs, and executioners are profoundly excited to meet Americans, whom they presume to be the world’s best allies in the destruction of local communists and their sympathizers.

The story takes an interesting turn in relation to Oppenheimer. Initially, local police, military, and thugs in Medan made it difficult for Oppenheimer to work on his original project—namely, to make a documentary about a fledgling plantation workers’ union in North Sumatra. While preparing another film (*Globalization Tapes*, 2003), the filmmaker learned about the 1965–1966 killings from the plantation workers—some of whom were themselves survivors of the massacre—who always spoke on this subject in whispers. These survivors and those who murdered their family members had been living in the same village for decades. As the filmmaker attempted to record on camera the stories of these survivors, he encountered repeated threats of arrest and interruptions from the local military officers, local vigilante groups, and the police.

In the days that followed, Oppenheimer obeyed the advice of the 1965 survivors, and timidly redirected his camera to the perpetrators. To his surprise, this shift made the latter more than happy. Even the security apparatus in the village did their best to facilitate his filming the self-incriminating testimonies of those claiming proudly to have taken the lives of hundreds of suspected communists in their neighbourhood. As Oppenheimer describes it,

Local police would offer to escort us to sites of mass killing, saluting or engaging the killers in jocular banter, depending on their relationship and the killer’s rank. Military officers would even task soldiers

with keeping curious onlookers at a distance, so that our sound recording wouldn't be disturbed.<sup>21</sup>

Congo and his friends are not merely people living with impunity for their past crimes but also ageing people who desire documented recognition for what they regard as their heroic deeds in the past—namely, having supported the New Order regime (1966–1998) by liquidating the communists. *The Act of Killing* served their purpose, or so was their understanding.

Thus, here we witness the complicated unequal power relations between the two incompatible discourses outlined in the earlier section of this chapter. *The Act of Killing* is not a simple or straightforward manipulation of the local, the weak, and the subordinated by the global, strong, rich, and powerful. Neither is it a clever recuperation of the European colonial voyeuristic practice of ridiculing the weirdly exotic, primitive, and irrational natives of the tropics.<sup>22</sup> Whatever has happened behind the scenes, the Indonesian killers have significant agency in *The Act of Killing*. Furthermore, the successful completion of the documentary was in part indebted to the remarkable level of support and protection it received from the political elite and local gangsters towards whom the film is fiercely critical.

It is paradoxical then that, having enjoyed this support, the filmmaker felt so apprehensive about his own safety in anticipation of the resulting success of the project. Indeed, the team behind the production was both simultaneously powerful and powerless vis-à-vis the network of gangsters appearing in *The Act of Killing* and the ruling elite in Jakarta. Certainly, the filmmaker and his team can be credited with being the most powerful cinematic narrator of the 1965 massacre by putting the killers in the international spotlight as self-incriminating, self-heroizing criminals. However, the latter also remain as powerful as they were half a century ago, continuing to enjoy full immunity from punishment for their crimes, along with diplomatic, military, and financial protection from the world's strongest advocates of liberal democracy.

Regardless of the power imbalance between the filmmaker and those filmed in *The Act of Killing*, one thing is certain: The media—particularly visually rich media—has immense and seductive power in making celebrity or celebrity-like heroes. This can be exemplified across a spectrum with local thugs in Medan at one end, President Donald Trump at the other, and many others in between. Public figures of note require widespread and high-profile displays of recognition that confirm their status, such as having one's image circulated by a powerful media platform. In the past, all great men and great women had their deeds immortalized in stone inscriptions, temples, or monuments. One hundred years ago, still photographs and radio served a similar purpose. Subsequent decades saw the arrival of print media and television, before smartphones

democratized it all and depreciated the value of such media representations. Selfie photography can be considered a democratizing tool of self-promotion, and, as such, is very appealing to many people. Similarly, for reasons of self-aggrandizement, many people choose their image from a televised appearance as a photo profile on social media—in other words, a mass-mediated image projected on another platform of public media. The selfie-style use of video and photography in the Abu Ghraib case is another instructive incident of interest.<sup>23</sup>

Non-Indonesians are often puzzled by the non-stop smiles on the faces of captured terrorist bombers or top political figures as they appear on television after being caught red-handed and facing serious corruption charges.<sup>24</sup> *The Act of Killing* contains many scenes demonstrating the desire and pride of the former executioners for appearing in the film. The appearance on prestigious media platforms, such as a national newspaper or television channel, can be easily used to raise the status of a criminal to that of celebrity or even self-styled hero. This point is illustrated vividly in the scene where Congo appears on a television talk show and receives orchestrated applause. When preparing for the shooting of the scene of the brutal attacks in Kebun Kolam, Herman Koto told members of Pemuda Pancasila that they should be proud to take part in the film-making directed by someone from the West. The reason, in his words, is '[t]he whole world will see this. I'm talking about London, England. Forget Jakarta. Jakarta is nothing.'<sup>25</sup>

It is hard to imagine that Congo and Koto would have been as enthusiastic as they were in recollecting their crimes from 1965 if Oppenheimer had come with no camera at all, or if he was an Indonesian, instead of a North American white male. Indeed, one decade before Oppenheimer made *The Act of Killing*, American scholar Loren Ryter came to Medan and met with the same group of former executioners to discuss the same topic. But Ryter was conducting academic research for his doctoral dissertation, not a film. The response of the Medan killers was much less flamboyant and boasting.<sup>26</sup>

In *The Look of Silence* (2014), the sequel to *The Act of Killing*, Oppenheimer depicts what purports to be the extraordinary courage of protagonist Adi Rukun. As a survivor of the 1965 massacre, Rukun visits several executioners at their homes, and he confronts them with questions about their actions which resulted in the loss of his brother's life. Unlike *The Act of Killing*, which lays bare the presence of its process of production, *The Look of Silence* is presented in a realist mode, evading the presence of the camera and, for most of the time, the filmmaker. Rukun's courage is admirable, but it should not be understood in isolation from the intervention that is the filming of his action.

It would be fair and reasonable to surmise that his courage and action are inseparable, and indeed heavily contingent on the presence of the camera and the film crew. When the film was completed, Rukun fled

from his original place of residence to an unknown address for safety reasons. As a survivor, Rukun in *The Look of Silence* and executioner Congo in *The Act of Killing* are opposites in the political spectrum of Indonesia's massacre in the mid-1960s, as well as opposite in the moral universe of the viewers of both films. Yet, the courage of both to speak to the international public comes primarily from the encouragement of the same filmmaker, hailing from the world's most virulently anti-communist superpower.

The foregoing discussion shows that the action of those in *The Act of Killing* is not the idiosyncratic behaviour of a handful of individuals from Medan. It has broad resonance, links, and indebtedness to distant places and periods. Unfortunately, it is not easy to draw a precise spatial or temporal boundary around where such practices begin and end. What we can do is to look more closely at the case under discussion and identify some of the various contributing elements. It is necessary to not overgeneralize the case by considering all the 1965 killings in Indonesia in some homogenous fashion. Not all 1965–1966 executioners from the different islands in Indonesia were like Congo: being great fans of Hollywood movies and taking inspiration for killing their 1965 communist captives from Hollywood noir films.

Some additional information about Indonesia and Indonesia's veneration of heroes will be useful for understanding the broader picture. Such information will help identify other significant factors that have helped shape the ethics and aesthetics at work in the production and consumption of *The Act of Killing* in twenty-first-century Indonesia. Thus, the next part will discuss the intersection of three interrelated aspects: the making of heroes in Indonesia in both political institutions and fiction; the ambiguous distinctions between heroes and villains, between facts and fiction, and the blurring of opposites which characterizes *The Act of Killing*; and, finally, the New Order state propaganda film on 1965, titled *Pengkhianatan G 30 September*.

### Indonesia's New Order

One thing missing from most analyses of *The Act of Killing* by those unfamiliar with Indonesia is reference to a film by Arifin C. Noer, entitled *Pengkhianatan G 30 September* (The treachery of the 30th September movement), which was released in 1984. It is a state propaganda film that became the single most important and most widely watched film on the 1965 events in Indonesia under the New Order. For decades, the film has been the subject of controversy.<sup>27</sup> *The Act of Killing* is full of references to *Pengkhianatan G 30 September*, with selected scenes from the latter appearing in the former. This section will show why any analysis of heroism in *The Act of Killing*—and in Indonesia more broadly—would be unsatisfactory without adequate attention to *Pengkhianatan G 30*

*September* and some sense of what life was like in Indonesia under the New Order. Considered in this broader context, *The Act of Killing* is not as weird and shocking as it would be otherwise.

Lack of knowledge of contemporary Indonesia's political culture makes it difficult for many non-Indonesians to understand how Congo and others could behave in such unexpected ways in *The Act of Killing*. Hence the series of questions about the documentary listed earlier in this chapter: Why would these killers speak about their crimes so openly, and in such self-incriminating ways? Were they not aware of, and concerned about, the possible risks? Many reviews of *The Act of Killing* attribute the behaviour of Congo and the other executioners in the documentary to their state-sanctioned impunity. This may be the case, but such a statement remains inadequate for explaining the 'excesses and disproportion' of violence and lifestyle under the New Order off screen.

To justify the 1965–1966 massacre, the New Order blamed the violence largely on the victims. It portrayed the communists as evil, un-Indonesian, and the antithesis of anything Indonesia stood for. As historian John Roosa describes the situation: 'Under Suharto anticommunism became the state religion, complete with sacred sites, rituals, and dates,' with its state propaganda machine using a wide range of platforms: 'textbooks, monuments, street names, films, museums, commemorative rituals, and national holidays.'<sup>28</sup> The most important of these myriad forms of propaganda was undoubtedly *Pengkhianatan G 30 September*. It was the first—and for many Indonesians it remains the only—film accessible to the public, dealing with the most important series of events in contemporary Indonesian history. The film runs for almost four and a half hours, and covers six days from September 30 to October 5, 1965—an event which the New Order officially designated as the abortive coup d'état by the Indonesian Communist Party and the army's subsequent victorious countermovement.

*Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* constituted the 'master-narrative' in Indonesia's public consciousness and the quotidian.<sup>29</sup> As soon as it was released, two generations of school children were required to pay to attend screenings at regular cinemas during school hours. The film was broadcast annually on September 30 on the state television network, TVRI, and when several private television stations were established in the mid-1980s, they were coerced to follow suit. On the same date, all buildings were required to fly their flags at half-mast, returning them to full-mast the next day, in order to celebrate the triumph of the military, honour its members as the national heroes, and commemorate the elimination of the Indonesian Communist Party. Two years following the release of *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI*, the master narrative was rewritten as a 'novel' using the same title by the author Arswendo Atmowiloto.<sup>30</sup> Nowhere was there any suggestion that one genre was more or less factual than the other. Indeed, the idea of a strict distinction between empirically based

history and an imaginary work of fiction is either foreign or nonexistent to many people in Indonesia.

We may never know comprehensively how the film was received by Indonesians across the archipelago. But we do know how the film was commented on by characters in *The Act of Killing*. In one scene, as Congo watches *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* on a television set, he remarks, 'the government made this film so that people would hate the communists.' Minutes later he adds, 'I am proud of what I have done [outdoing the brutality of the communists as depicted in the government propaganda film].' Roughly 20 minutes into *The Act of Killing*, another 1965 executioner, Adi Zulkadry, shares his reflection with Congo and others on their past crime: 'About the film *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* we used to say how cruel the communists were. But now it is clear that is not true. It was we who were cruel.' Then Zulkadry remarks, anticipating how the audience would react when viewing their own film (*The Act of Killing*), 'They would say "I have suspected it. It's not true to say PKI was cruel".'

While at home, I witnessed another unexpected reaction to *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI*. In 1992, my 10-year-old son came home from school one afternoon telling me what fun it had been for him and his schoolmates to play the 'game of PKI.' I could not believe what I was hearing and with some concern I demanded an explanation. At school, he explained, children enacted the narrative they heard from *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI*. 'Everyone wanted to play the PKI, hunting down those who played the lousy generals who had to run and hide as far as the school toilets. We conquered them and scolded them. It was great fun.' These children preferred not to play the generals, even though they had been glorified as heroes by the New Order government. This was not simply because those playing the generals had to endure 'torture,' but also because these children were more familiar with films such as *Rambo* or *Rocky*, or the much-loved kung fu movies from Hong Kong, where the heroes always win in battles. It is worth noting that in *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* the Suharto group ultimately wins on October 5, 1965. However, the 1965 master narrative does not emphasize this ultimate triumph, which does not come until four hours after the beginning of the film. In order to provoke public outrage, *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* emphasizes the communists' alleged violence against the six right-wing senior military officers and one lieutenant on the eve of October 1, 1965. Scenes depicting this communist cruelty are foregrounded on and off screen in all state propaganda materials and institutions, such as museums.

Perhaps the authors of the New Order propaganda were attempting to be a little cleverer than the Hollywood and Hong Kong filmmakers by superimposing the violence that it perpetrated on its victims in its narrative. The problem with this narrative strategy for an Indonesian audience is that it goes against the dominant readings of mass-produced stories from Hollywood and Hong Kong with which they are already so familiar.

It also runs counter to the longer oral tradition of watching and listening to the Indian-derived epic stories of *Mahabharata*, particularly the Great War scenes of *Bharata Yudha*. In this light, the children's misreading or misappropriation is not purely accidental. Similarly, we can better understand the ease and confidence with which actors in *The Act of Killing* behaved the way they do, and why this film shocked most international viewers either in awe, in horror, or both, while some viewers in Indonesia found it easier to watch, and some even found it banal or boring.

Victims from the massacres half a century ago continue to be stigmatized, and discrimination against survivors as well as their families and descendants shows no signs of ending. Witnessing the persistence of such practices and their impact in 2003, Oppenheimer remarked that when he came to Indonesia he 'felt as though [he]'d walked into Germany 40 years after the Holocaust and the Nazis were still in power.'<sup>31</sup> While this comparison to Nazi Germany has some truth, it is only part of the story. Unlike the Nazis, Indonesia's New Order enjoyed generous financial and diplomatic support from Western Bloc nations to launch its anti-communist campaign. Brutality proceeded with conviviality and entertainment, as abundantly illustrated in *The Act of Killing*.

By the 1980s, anti-communist stigmatization grew to have a life of its own; it no longer attacked old or new communists or their sympathizers. Rather, it became a useful stigma and a political tool (not unlike the way the designation 'terrorist' is currently deployed in English), and was often used by a wide range of politicians across the globe to attack their political rivals. In the process, the official and popular stories of 1965 unfolded recklessly, full of spectacular fabrications and internal contradictions, not very different from those presented in *The Act of Killing*. For most Indonesians who grew up during the New Order and the early years of the post-New Order, wild fiction, fake news, and fantasies about the danger of communism and the hysterical campaigns for fighting against the potential revival of communism have been a staple consumption, but not without its slippages, contradictions, and absurd ironies. In this environment, references to Hitler slipped in and out quickly in public space, without the specific reference to the horrendous crime associated with the Nazis.

Many Indonesians have heard of the name Hitler, but most lack sufficient knowledge of the man and his political history. Indeed, it is precisely the unfamiliarity and mystery surrounding this, and many other little-known international figures appearing in the mass media and globally circulated advertisements, which generated interest among more than a few Indonesians. Hitler is tantalizing to them, just as a number of fanciful-sounding foreign words (English, Sanskrit, Arabic) have seduced many Indonesians into using them liberally without context, and for no reason other than making their utterances sound different, stylish, or enigmatic. From time to time, the Indonesian security forces caught

and detained Indonesians who innocently used the hammer and sickle as decoration on their property or t-shirts but without the slightest knowledge of what they might represent in party politics and their links to the 1965 massacre.<sup>32</sup>

In November 2017, Adolf Hitler was one of 80 ‘famous people’ featured in wax statues on display in an exhibition in a museum in the city of Yogyakarta, Indonesia.<sup>33</sup> The wax figure of Hitler stood tall against a huge image of the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex of concentration camps. Young visitors came to take selfie photographs with these famous figures, including the incumbent president of Indonesia, Joko Widodo. Hitler’s statue did not last a week after becoming the target of criticism and condemnations from various international human rights groups. However, no local visitors complained, explained the officer in charge of the museum. This is the most recent incident in a series of cases in Indonesia wherein a mistranslation of political history goes wrong—not too dissimilar to Congo’s joyful re-enactment of his killing ‘the communists’ for Oppenheimer’s *The Act of Killing*.

During the 2014 presidential election, Nazi paraphernalia provoked controversy in Indonesia when famous pop musician Ahmad Dhani appeared in a video dressed in a military outfit resembling that of SS officer Heinrich Himmler. This video was for a presidential campaign in support of one of the two candidates. More interestingly, according to Adrian Vickers and Mirela Suci, ‘Dhani is of Jewish descent.’<sup>34</sup> In 2011, a Nazi-themed café called ‘Soldatenkaffee’ was opened in the city of Bandung. Nazi paraphernalia decorated the café interior and its staff dressed in costumes reminiscent of the SS. They served the favourite Indonesian dish *nasi goreng* (fried rice) but on the menu it was spelled ‘Nazi goreng’ (fried Nazi). This café did not provoke controversy until two years later when the English media reported on its existence. Soon thereafter, the café was forced to close; owner Henry Mulyana blamed the media for its closure. One year later, and not before the controversy of Ahmad Dhani’s video, Soldatenkaffee was reopened.<sup>35</sup>

‘The Love of Hitler Leads a Nazi Revival in Indonesia’ reads the title of an article by Aaron Akinyemi for *Newsweek*.<sup>36</sup> Similar phenomena can be seen in the neighbouring countries of Malaysia and Thailand.<sup>37</sup> I strongly doubt any of the foregoing suggests anything like a ‘love of Hitler.’ Vickers and Suci provide a more nuanced interpretation: ‘This fascination with Nazism comes from a complex combination of elements, from poor history teaching, and imported anti-Semitism to a long-standing romanticization of the extreme right.’<sup>38</sup> All these elements do not necessarily or exclusively lead to the ‘heroization’ of Hitler. Rather, as mentioned earlier, Hitler was one of many, and remarkably diverse, famous, yet little-known figures who have gained prominence in the Indonesian public imagination, particularly in urban cultures among the middle classes. Others include Islamist figures like



Osama Bin Laden, soccer stars like David Beckham, former president Barack Obama, and so on. I have focused on the few cases of Hitler only to indicate how extremely such fantasy-makings and misreadings of cultural icons from overseas can go wrong in Indonesia's public space. From this perspective, Congo's fascination with Hollywood's James Dean, John Wayne, Victor Mature, and Marlon Brando is neither surprising nor remarkably different.

## Heroes and Villains

I wish to conclude by highlighting points from the previous sections within a broader consideration of an Indonesian conception of heroes and heroism. This chapter has noted how *The Act of Killing* shocks viewers who are unfamiliar with Indonesia and is seen as something extraordinarily strange, disturbing, or surreal. The documentary actually looks more 'realistic' and familiar to those who have lived in Indonesia under the militarist regime of the New Order, where a wide range of transnational cultures and storytelling traditions intersect—from Hollywood to Hong Kong martial arts films, along with the oral traditions and performing arts of the Indian-derived epics of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. The chapter has offered two related arguments.

First, there is a significant discursive gap between those behind the production of *The Act of Killing* and its implied audience in the West on the one side and those appearing as the main characters in the film on the other side. While these two discursive communities appropriated each other, they did so for very different reasons and with different expectations. While there is an intimate collaboration between the two discourses to produce *The Act of Killing*, their narratives 'pass over' each other. Those involved at the higher levels of making *The Act of Killing*, and most of the international audience who laud the film, share a secular humanistic view which assumes a universal ethics and an essentially negative view on deception and violence. Within the discursive tradition that Congo and his fellow gangsters operate in, the distinctions between fact and fiction, between heroes and villains, are not appreciated as sharply as by those of us who more readily participate in the discursive terrain of *The Act of Killing*. Unfortunately, it is not so easy—and perhaps impossible—to delineate the precise boundaries that separate these two discursive practices and their respective communities. The discursive practice within which Congo and his associates operate is not essentially or inherently 'Indonesian.' Rather, it can be seen as a convergence of transnational flows of political ideas and popular cultures. In Java and Bali, the killers of 1965 and viewers of *The Act of Killing* are intimately familiar with the Indian-derived epics of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, Hong Kong martial arts cinema, and Hollywood film noir, as well as the Indonesian state terror and propaganda during the Cold War.

Second, the two discourses embedded in *The Act of Killing* cannot be considered two distinct practices with equal status. The world views and discursive practices of Congo and other Indonesian viewers of *The Act of Killing* whose response differs to that of the majority of its international viewers do not enjoy a respectable status. Consequently, their existence and life experience could be easily overlooked, misunderstood, or ridiculed by distant observers. To acknowledge their discursive difference is not to condone the crime that Congo and his associates committed. Rather, this is to question why and how they could have participated in the making of *The Act of Killing*, and why there have been significantly different responses to the film.

The imbalance in the relationship between the two communities can be evidenced by the strikingly contrasting sentiments towards each other. Congo's and Koto's fascination with Hollywood films from the 1960s and the contemporary West more generally is not reciprocated. In fact, the contemporary audiences in the West respond to their adoration of American jingoism and anti-communism with disgust and outrage. This can also be read as an embarrassing sign of a continued and high level of the American 'soft power' that has dominated Indonesia and far beyond for the last half century. When Oppenheimer prepared *The Act of Killing*, Joseph Nye Jr was lamenting the decline of US soft power and urged to expand it.<sup>39</sup>

In a discussion of *The Act of Killing*, philosopher Slavoj Žižek argues that the shocking portrayal of Congo and his associates in Medan illustrates what he calls 'a moral vacuum.' He is careful not to attribute this to 'the "ethical primitiveness" of Indonesia,' but rather points his finger at 'the dislocating effects of capitalist globalisation.'<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, Žižek's argument fails to explain why and how he and most of the international audience for *The Act of Killing* could have largely been exempt from 'the dislocating effects of capitalist globalisation,' while Congo and the others in Indonesia have been subjected to them.

Benedict Anderson's 1972 essay is markedly different from Žižek's perspective. Anderson argues that in a Javanese world view, power is separated from questions of legitimacy or moral values. Given the strong influence of Javanese culture and overrepresentation of the Javanese in national politics, if Anderson's argument is valid, such conceptions of power could have a significant impact on national politics. Anderson also acknowledges that the various elements which compose Javanese culture also exist in many other societies, but just in different configurations.<sup>41</sup> In the same essay, Anderson refers to a public speech by Sukarno (Indonesia's first and most well-known president) in which he discusses Hitler as a person of power without consideration given to the moral qualities of the latter.<sup>42</sup> Anderson explained that he wrote the 1972 article as an attempt to deconstruct the totalizing and often taken-for-granted claims of modern Western 'rationality' and its universalist sense of 'morality.'

Against such a backdrop, Anderson compares and contrasts the familiar modern Western concept of power and rationality with those of the Javanese, arguing that there is also a coherent rationality to Javanese culture and thinking which is yet to be taken seriously in scholarship. In a way, this chapter has some elements similar to Anderson's intent, but with a more modest aim and on a more modest scale.

My own attempt has been restricted to the specific case of the making and viewing of *The Act of Killing*, which leads to a general questioning of the lack of 'normality' or 'humanness' of those appearing in the documentary. I have neither the expertise nor ambition to make a broader generalization, or offer a definition of the two discourses I compared earlier. My aim is simply to argue that there exist at least two radically different modes of thought and discursive practices involved in the production and consumption of *The Act of Killing*. Together, they collaborate to produce the powerful documentary, but not as equal partners and without mutual respect, interest, or the ability to understand each other. Each of these discourses is a complex mixture of images, histories, and meanings of heroes and villains from very diverse sources around the globe. These discourses cannot be described in simplistic binary notions of West and East, or global and local moral values or cultural practices. While both have global and local elements, the term 'glocal' is too homogenizing and it betrays their radical differences and the features and values that are incommensurate with one another.

## Notes

1. The term 'discourse' is used here to designate a mode of communicative action, involving particular interlocutors, contingent upon specific underlying assumptions, and taking place in limited domains (social groups or communities) at certain moments and in certain contexts. Strictly speaking, no discursive practice can be repeated unchanged.
2. The intended audience is a conceptual construct implied in the framing of the film and its communicative features. It may or may not share identical features and attributes with the real people who watch the documentary.
3. John Legge, *Sukarno: A Political Biography* (London: Allen Lane, 1972), 399.
4. Cf. Ariel Heryanto, 'The 1965–6 Killings: Facts and Fictions in Dangerous Liaisons,' *IIAS Newsletter* 61 (Autumn 2012): 16–17.
5. Before I obtained Western-style higher education in the United States and Australia, I was born and raised in Indonesia, and, as such, I am deeply familiar with the discourse of those appearing in *The Act of Killing*. My background is far from unique, and, in fact, it is the common experience of most intelligentsia from the former colonies of Europe and the US. While learning a Western academic discourse may involve some unlearning of the previous discourse of the homeland, it does not amount to complete erasure of the latter.
6. Heather McIntosh, 'Reenactments and the Denial of Catharsis in *The Act of Killing*,' *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 34 (2017): 379–394.
7. Robert Cribb, 'The Act of Killing,' *Critical Asian Studies* 46, no. 1 (2014): 147–150 (147, 149).

8. Cf. the special issue of *Critical Asian Studies* 46, no. 1 (2014): 145–207.
9. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 12.
10. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984); Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans. R. Nice (London: Sage Publications, 1977).
11. Mette Bjerregaard, 'What Indonesians Really Think About *The Act of Killing*,' *The Guardian*, March 6, 2014, accessed September 19, 2018, [www.theguardian.com/film/2014/mar/05/act-of-killing-screening-in-indonesia](http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/mar/05/act-of-killing-screening-in-indonesia).
12. Laurie Sears, 'Heroes as Killers or Killers as Heroes?,' *Critical Asian Studies* 46, no. 1 (2014): 204–207.
13. Adam Shatz, 'Joshua Oppenheimer Won't Go Back to Indonesia,' *The New York Times*, July 9, 2015, accessed September 19, 2018, [www.nytimes.com/2015/07/12/magazine/joshua-oppenheimer-wont-go-back-to-indonesia.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/12/magazine/joshua-oppenheimer-wont-go-back-to-indonesia.html).
14. Cf. Heryanto, 'The 1965–6 Killings: Facts and Fictions in Dangerous Liaisons' and the special issue of *Critical Asian Studies* 46, no. 1 (2014): 145–207.
15. Benedict Anderson, 'Impunity,' in *Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory and the Performance of Violence*, eds. Joram ten Brink and Joshua Oppenheimer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 268–286 (274).
16. It is also worth noting that *The Act of Killing* is not the first documentary to feature 1965 killers or witnesses testifying to the killing of neighbours with ease and without remorse, including the television news report by Ted Yates, 'Indonesia: The Troubled Victory,' *NBC*, 1967, accessed September 19, 2018, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=DI42TICZcik](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DI42TICZcik).
17. Jesse Hicks, 'How Murderers Tell Stories: Director Joshua Oppenheimer on "The Act of Killing",' *The Verge*, July 23, 2013, accessed September 19, 2018, [www.theverge.com/2013/7/23/4546638/how-murderers-tell-stories-director-joshua-oppenheimer-on-the-act-of-killing](http://www.theverge.com/2013/7/23/4546638/how-murderers-tell-stories-director-joshua-oppenheimer-on-the-act-of-killing).
18. In a critique of the Gramscian hegemony thesis, Scott argues for the existence of autonomous consciousness and social space for the subordinated groups, such as the peasants he studied, which enables them to reject their subordination in a small, organized, and non-confrontational fashion. James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). Elsewhere, I argue that even if Scott's peasants indeed have the agency to exert small-scale resistance, that does not invalidate the Gramscian hegemony thesis. Cf. Ariel Heryanto, *State Terrorism and Political Identity in Indonesia: Fatally Belonging* (London: Routledge, 2006): 181–184.
19. Jean Baudrillard, *The Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), 43.
20. Achille Mbembe, 'The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarity in the Postcolony,' trans. Janet Roitman, *Public Culture* 4 (Spring 1992): 1–30 (1–2).
21. Joshua Oppenheimer, *The Act of Killing* (Denmark: Final Cut for Real, 2012).
22. Susie Protschky, 'Seductive Landscapes: Gender, Race and European Representations of Nature in the Dutch East Indies in the Late Colonial Period,' *Gender & History* 20 (2008): 372–398.
23. Kevin McDonald, 'Grammars of Violence, Modes of Embodiment and Frontiers of the Subject,' in *War and the Body: Militarisation, Practice and Experience*, ed. Kevin McSorley (London: Routledge, 2013), 138–151 (144).
24. For the infamous case of the Bali bomber's smile, cf. Ariel Heryanto, 'Politically Incorrect Smiles: Bali Incident,' *Jakarta Post*, November 25, 2002, accessed September 19, 2018, <https://arielheryanto.files.wordpress.com>.

- com/2016/03/2002\_11\_15\_tjp-politically-incorrect-smiles\_-bali-incident-c.pdf. In another and more recent case of the Lindt Café hostage (December 15–16, 2014), Man Haron Monis held ten customers and eight employees hostage in a Lindt chocolate café in Sydney. Monis demanded that his message be broadcast on radio. When the police declined his request, Monis became extremely agitated and more violent.
25. Oppenheimer, *The Act of Killing*.
  26. I am grateful to Loren Ryter for the privileged access to a copy of his unpublished doctoral thesis. Loren Ryter, *Youth, Gangs, and the State in Indonesia* (PhD diss., University of Washington, Seattle, 2002).
  27. In September 2017, the debate was revived by the commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces, General Gatot Nurmantyo, who instigated a provocative campaign to have the film screened again, nationwide. While the campaign had the provocative yet familiar appearance of anti-communism, the general public read it as a political attempt by the nearly retiring general to attract public attention in preparation for his ambitious bid for the next presidential election due in 2019.
  28. John Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 7.
  29. I adopted the concept of ‘master narrative’ from what James Clifford calls ‘master script’: it functions as a canon, on the basis of which ‘a potentially endless exegetical discourse can be generated.’ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 86.
  30. Arswendo Atmowiloto, *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1986).
  31. Hicks, ‘How Murderers Tell Stories: Director Joshua Oppenheimer on “The Act of Killing”?’
  32. For more details on this aspect, cf. Ariel Heryanto, ‘Where Communism Never Dies,’ *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2, no. 2 (1999): 147–177; Heryanto, *State Terrorism and Political Identity in Indonesia*, chapter 5.
  33. Stephen Right, ‘Indonesia Selfie Museum Stirs Outrage With Nazi Display,’ *Washington Times*, November 10, 2017, accessed September 19, 2018, [www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/nov/10/indonesia-selfie-museum-stirs-outrage-with-nazi-di/](http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/nov/10/indonesia-selfie-museum-stirs-outrage-with-nazi-di/).
  34. Adrian Vickers and Mirela Suci, ‘Do You Know What That Means? Nazi Symbols in Indonesia’s Election Campaign,’ *The Conversation*, July 1, 2014, accessed September 19, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/do-you-know-what-that-means-nazi-symbols-in-indonesias-election-campaign-28595>.
  35. Eventually, however, the owner obtained permission to reopen the café with many of the offensive items still in place. Andrew Griffin, ‘Nazi-Themed Café in Indonesia Reopens: Keeping the Swastikas and Images of Hitler It Pledged to Remove,’ *The Independent*, June 22, 2014, accessed September 19, 2018, [www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/nazi-themed-caf-in-indonesia-reopens-keeping-the-swastikas-and-images-of-hitler-it-pledged-to-9554643.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/nazi-themed-caf-in-indonesia-reopens-keeping-the-swastikas-and-images-of-hitler-it-pledged-to-9554643.html).
  36. Aaron Akinyemi, ‘The Love of Hitler Leads a Nazi Revival in Indonesia,’ *Newsweek*, October 9, 2014, accessed September 19, 2018, [www.newsweek.com/2014/10/17/love-hitler-leads-nazi-revival-indonesia-276049.html](http://www.newsweek.com/2014/10/17/love-hitler-leads-nazi-revival-indonesia-276049.html).
  37. Tom Tuohy, ‘Thailand Wrestles with Nazism,’ *Asia Sentinel*, July 25, 2013, accessed September 19, 2018, [www.asiasentinel.com/society/thailand-wrestles-with-nazism/](http://www.asiasentinel.com/society/thailand-wrestles-with-nazism/).
  38. Vickers and Suci, ‘Do You Know What That Means?’
  39. Joseph Nye, Jr., ‘Soft Power and American Foreign Policy,’ *Political Science Quarterly* 119 (Summer 2004): 255–270.
  40. Slavoj Žižek, ‘Living a Fiction,’ *New Statesman*, July 12, 2013: 44–46 (44).

41. Benedict Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 19.
42. *Ibid.*, 31. For a detailed examination of Sukarno's contradictory views and statements about Hitler, cf. Angus McIntyre, 'Marx Versus Carlyle: Sukarno's View of Hitler's Role in History,' *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 43, no. 2 (2009): 131–163.