

Grace T. Leksana, *Memory Culture of the Anti-Leftist Violence in Indonesia: Embedded Remembering* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023, 226 pp., ISBN 9789463723565).

This book discusses the politics of memory in the everyday life of Indonesians in connection with the country's anti-leftist purge of 1965-1966. The author analyses how the memory of violence is embedded in the life of the villagers in Donomulyo, East Java, and how said violence impacted them during and after the events. The analysis centres on the 'intersections between private or family experiences with the national grand narrative of anti-communism' (210). Guided by Maurice Halbwachs's theory of collective memory, the book makes original contributions to the study of Indonesia's anti-leftist purge by demonstrating that different communities have different ways of remembering the mass killings. The book provides a useful reading about class struggle and the rise of capitalism in Indonesia, which, given the general disapproval in the country of anything remotely related to leftist teachings, is not often discussed in great detail. As such, the book can serve as a point of reference in the scholarly literature on Indonesian history.

In a detailed case study, conducted in Donomulyo, Leksana juxtaposes personal and collective memory of the anti-leftist violence. The village, dubbed a 'red area', was chosen with good reason, as the author aimed to move away from a state-centric approach to the reality on the ground and believed that the results would represent the collective memory in post-violence societies. Apart from the introduction and the conclusion, the book is divided into two parts. The first part, consisting of two chapters, focuses on the historical timelines in and around Donomulyo that led to the strong presence of the PKI (*Partai Komunis Indonesia* or Communist Party of Indonesia) in the village, whereas the second part, consisting of three chapters, focuses on the cultural memory of 1965-1966.

In Chapter 1, Leksana meticulously outlines the history of Donomulyo in order to illustrate the connections between global economic policy and local livelihoods. Detailing the Land Reform regulation in particular, Leksana concludes that village elites despised the Land Reform and that leftist organisations such as the PKI and the BTI (*Barisan Tani Indonesia* or Indonesian Peasant Front) actively challenged inequality in the village, but following the defeat of the Left in 1965, the New Order regime created a new alliance between local elites and the military, thus re-establishing the inequality. In Chapter 2, the author delves into the violence against the Left in the province by consulting army records of the Brawijaya Military Division that oversees the entire province of East Java. Combining the information from the military

archives and from interviews with locals, she concludes that the violence was carried out through a collaborative network of civilians and the army, with the previous having their own agendas and the latter coordinating the purge.

Chapter 3 demonstrates that the memory of anti-leftist violence is shaped rather by local social relationships than the national anti-communist memory projects – all of them are government propaganda – with the two main features of said memory culture being rural patronage network and survival strategy. Chapter 4 examines two different sites of memory: monuments built by the New Order regime to support the anti-leftist grand narrative and mass graves erected by the villagers. Here, the author concludes that ‘while the first have lost their relevance today because of their top-down nature, the latter are still commemorated by villagers’ (41). Chapter 5 discusses ‘postmemory’ in Donomulyo – that is, how the subsequent generations in the village remember the anti-leftist purge, as members of the same community remember it differently. For this purpose, the author interviewed four families, and echoing the findings in Chapter 3, concludes that silence does not always result from trauma, but can also function as a survival strategy or as ‘a way to reconcile their past experiences and their present livelihood’ (221).

A notable strength of the book is that, through extensive interviews with many inhabitants of Donomulyo, readers are able to intimately explore the feelings of injustice that the villagers experienced in the aftermath of the 1965-1966 political upheavals, such as their fear of local elites and the military. Considering the strong legacy of the Red Scare in Indonesia, the author’s neutrality in portraying sensitive topics, such as the PKI’s roles in battling inequalities in Donomulyo, is particularly commendable. One of the most important arguments in this book is the author’s take on the process of reconciliation. Commenting on Indonesia’s transitional justice movement, Leksana suggests a shift from a reconciliation between perpetrators and victims alone to a discussion that would concern the history of the nation and future generations. This book is therefore a valuable contribution to the study of cultural memory and will be worthwhile for any reader wishing to comprehend Indonesia’s ideological struggles and the anti-leftist purge at the height of the Cold War. The publication of the book is highly relevant, given how advocacies for the victims of the anti-leftist violence remain outside the mainstream and have yet to gain nationwide attention and political momentum.

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