

Lubang Buaya: Myth, Misogyny and Massacre.¹

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In 1992 when this work was first presented at a postgraduate seminar at the University of Sydney a very different political climate pertained in Indonesia. Then the airing of topics such as this in the public domain was totally taboo inside Indonesia, unless the writer adhered strictly to the “script” sanctioned by the Soeharto regime. Even outside Indonesia, scholars thought twice before venturing into this highly sensitive terrain.² At that juncture few expected that within a few years President Soeharto would be removed from power and that his New Order regime would fall (or begin to fall) with him, ushering Indonesia towards democracy.³ Perhaps nothing has better epitomised the new atmosphere of political openness that has pertained in Indonesia since May 1998 than the public questioning of the New Order’s foundation narrative that has begun to emerge, although not without considerable resistance and reluctance.⁴ An important dimension of this questioning has been the hitherto unimaginable publication in Indonesia of numerous works of history related to this sensitive subject matter, a phenomenon echoed beyond Indonesia where overseas scholars have also been prompted by the new climate to engage in this re-examination.⁵ I hope that this revised work can make a contribution to the revived scholarly discussion of this pivotal period in Indonesia’s post-independence history.

This foundation narrative in question, foundation myth to put it less politely, was centred on the regime’s version of events associated with what it referred to as “Gestapu”.⁶ This acronym refers to what according to the regime was a coup attempt by the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), a terrible disaster had it been successful from which the regime claimed to have narrowly saved the country thanks to the decisive intervention of then General Soeharto. Having thus emerged as Indonesia’s savior in its hour of most desperate need, the regime narrative continued, Soeharto proceeded to establish the New Order in order to safeguard the nation and to steer it towards development and prosperity. The focus of this article is on a particular component of the Soeharto-New Order foundation narrative, one that is integral and fundamental to it: the myth of Lubang Buaya. More specifically, the primary focus here is on the contribution that this myth’s propagation in 1965-66 makes toward an explanation for the mass political killings that occurred in

Indonesia in this period, killings which both accompanied and propelled the regime change associated with Soeharto's seizure of power. By the time these killings petered out in 1967 hundreds of thousands of people with leftist associations had been put to death arbitrarily, mostly at the hands of their civilian political opponents operating in concert with the Army (Cribb, 1990: 7-14).

The Lubang Buaya myth was a black propaganda campaign which luridly and highly effectively detailed alleged crimes against humanity, against the Indonesian nation and state, against God, and against the normative Indonesian cosmic and social order. These alleged crimes occurred at a place called Lubang Buaya (Crocodile Hole) on the night of 30 September-1 October 1965. The campaign was primarily aimed at the PKI and through it at the secondary target of the so-called "Old Order" regime of President Sukarno of which the PKI was a major bulwark. The autonomous women's movement was also a target, an aspect to which I will return below. Accordingly, elements of the PKI, or more correctly elements associated with the PKI, were alleged to have committed the heinous crimes detailed in the propaganda. The featured perpetrators were claimed to be members of Gerwani (Movement of Indonesian Women), a PKI-affiliated women's organisation that occupied (in context) the most radical end of the spectrum of the Indonesian women's movement. Interestingly, after their initial splash (both inside and outside of Indonesia), the specific details of the horrific events alleged to have taken place at Lubang Buaya have rarely been accorded more than a passing reference. The lurid details of female sexual sadism and promiscuity, so featured in the Lubang Buaya horror story, were relegated to the status of a macabre footnote, or glossed over in language that hinted only vaguely at this aspect of the events that were claimed to have taken place there.⁷ Even the regime's own propaganda film of the Gestapu affair, a four-hour epic "reconstruction" does not reproduce the lurid details contained in the original black propaganda.⁸ Here it is argued that the actual content of the Lubang Buaya myth as first disseminated warrants serious attention because of the important role it played in mobilising and motivating the Army-civilian coalition which crushed the PKI through the mass killings and mass detentions. Further, it is argued that the sex and gender aspects of the Lubang Buaya horror story are central to its impact, and thus demand serious scholarly treatment in their own right.

Torture, Atrocity, and Massacre

On 17 August 1965 Indonesia celebrated twenty years of independence. Beneath the customary pomp and bravado so beloved by President Sukarno, it was not a happy occasion. The euphoria of independence having long since faded, Sukarno's Indonesia - in self-imposed exile from the United Nations, embroiled in confrontation with Malaysia, and with an economy swamped by hyperinflation - seemed to be sliding towards catastrophe. It was against this ominous backdrop that long simmering tensions in Indonesia's complex and highly polarised political spectrum rose suddenly towards boiling point. Almost daily demonstrations railing against various foreign enemies fueled the politically charged atmosphere of 1965, as did vicious clashes between rival political youth groups in Jakarta and other cities. In the countryside competing Muslim and PKI-led peasant groups continued the brawls and tit-for-tat beatings, arsons, kidnappings, and murders begun in 1964 over a land reform campaign. At the same time, the jockeying for strategic advantage between the would-be institutional successors (the Army and the PKI) to Sukarno's highly personalised rule intensified as rumours of the President's deteriorating health unsettled political players and the general populace alike. In this highly charged atmosphere, rife with coup and plot rumours, few doubted that a conflagration was imminent, and fewer still did not fear the consequences.

It was at this precise juncture that the events associated with the term Gestapu occurred. It appears that during the night of 30 September-1 October a group of disaffected and mostly middle-ranking Armed Forces officers with leftist/radical nationalist inclinations seized control of strategic points in Jakarta and kidnapped and then killed several members of the Army General Staff. Calling themselves the 30 September Movement (G30S), they announced from the captured central radio station that they were taking power to protect the Indonesian Revolution and the President from an imminent right-wing coup led by a "Council of Generals". Despite the intervening forty two years it is still not clear if the G30S was what it purported to be. Nor, if it was not, is it clear what else it was and who (if anybody) was behind it or manipulating it. The Gestapu or more neutrally the G30S affair remains the subject of considerable controversy, a classic and intriguing historical "whodunit".⁹ It is clear however that (rightly or wrongly) the actions of the G30S were blamed successfully on the PKI by General Soeharto, one of the few senior Generals to have survived. Over the next few days Soeharto's crack Kostrad (Strategic Reserve Command) troops crushed the

G30S and repression of the PKI and its allies began; repression which quickly assumed the form of indiscriminate mass killings of people associated in some way with the PKI.¹⁰

There can be little doubt that this repression was incited by the G30S affair which had contributed significantly to the generation of a massive wave of anger towards the PKI. Central to understanding how the G30S affair had this effect is an appreciation of how it was presented to the Indonesian public, bearing in mind that the media came under tight Army control after 1 October. It is under this essential condition that certain events, which took place during the brief bid for power by the G30S, became the essential subject matter of a powerful and pervasive black propaganda campaign (in Army Intelligence terms a "psywar", or psychological warfare, campaign). The centrepiece of this propaganda campaign was the Lubang Buaya horror story, for which, like most effective black propaganda, there is a little basis in fact, if only the better to make the ludicrous embellishments ring true. Except in passing, the following pages do not address the question of what really happened at Lubang Buaya. Here the primary objective is to consider how the official story was used in the months – and years - which followed.

An outline of the key events may be quickly given. It appears that during the attempt by G30S forces to kidnap seven Generals, three were captured alive, three were killed in the process, and the seventh, General Nasution, managed to escape, while his aide, Lt. Tendean, was seized in his place. The four captives and the three bodies were taken to the G30S coup headquarters at Lubang Buaya, located within the sprawling Halim Air force base on the outskirts of Jakarta. Shortly after their arrival the four captives were killed and the seven bodies dumped in a disused well which was then filled in. Present at Lubang Buaya, in addition to troops commanded by officers committed to the G30S, were members of the PKI-linked Pemuda Rakyat (People's Youth) and members of Gerwani. Ostensibly at least, these civilians were present as volunteers undergoing training by the Air force for the "Fifth Force" (a civilian militia that the PKI proposed should exist alongside of the four armed services). The Generals' bodies were discovered on October 3 and exhumed the following day in a publicity blitz which maximised the emotive impact of the exhumation and directed the duly aroused abhorrence towards the G30S and the PKI. Not surprisingly the presence at Lubang Buaya of Gerwani and Pemuda Rakyat members was a key piece of evidence put forward to implicate the PKI.¹¹ Over the ensuing days gruesome allegations appeared in the press,

including assertions that the G30S captives had been tortured and mutilated, specifically that their eyes had been gouged out and their genitals severed. However, even these horrible deaths were not enough grist for the propaganda mill. Further purported details of the Generals' deaths began to appear, usually first in the Army's newspaper *Angkatan Bersendjata*. In a new twist to the propaganda theme it was alleged that the atrocities had actually been carried out by Gerwani members. Thus on 9 October it was reported that the Gerwani women had mocked the Generals before they killed them by "playing with and fondling the genitals of the victims while at the same time displaying their own..." (*Angkatan Bersendjata*, 9 October 1965). A few days later it was reported that Lt. Tendean was used as an "obscene plaything (by the) Gerwani mothers of evil" before they used him for target practice (*Angkatan Bersendjata* 11 October 1965). A few weeks later the "confessions" of Gerwani members in Army custody began to appear. Particularly featured were the confessions of three young Gerwani members: Sujati, Saina, and the reportedly pregnant Djamilah, aged 19, 17 and 15 respectively.

According to Djamilah's "confession", she and a hundred other Gerwani women were issued with small knives and razor blades which they used to slash and hack at the genitals of the captured Generals (*Angkatan Bersendjata* 5 November 1965). Djamilah's confession specifically states that all of the Gerwani members present took part in this atrocity (which makes one wonder how there could have been enough male genitalia to go around). Sujati's confession added the salacious detail that the Pemuda Rakyat and Gerwani members who underwent training at Lubang Buaya had "mixed in complete freedom" during their stay in the barracks (*Kompas*, 30 November 1965). Saina's statement was even more accommodating. According to her confession, for six and a half months the Gerwani and Pemuda Rakyat members at Lubang Buaya had "indulged in delirious sexual orgies which the ancient Romans under Nero would have been jealous of" (*Antara* 8 December 1965, morning edition). Twice a day, her statement continued, she and the other Gerwani women performed the Tarian Bunga Harum (The Dance of the Fragrant Flowers) which the Army-controlled news agency, *Antara*, described as "a shockingly obscene show". *Antara* went on to explain for the benefit of its readers that "the Bunga Harum dance was performed by totally unclad females with a view to tempting the approximately 400 male "Gestapu" members into various obscenities". After each twice-daily show a mass sex orgy was supposed to have ensued, in which every woman had to "serve three to four men" (*Antara*, 13 December 1965, morning

edition). Any incredulity on the part of *Antara* readers as to the inclination for such frequent sexual activity was catered for by the confession's claim that the Gerwani members were frequently injected with drugs to stimulate their libidos. As Saina explained, after receiving the injections she was "overcome with an irresistable (sic) desire to indulge in all kinds of immoral acts" (*Antara*, 8 December 1965, morning edition). Other propaganda claims, not directly related to the Lubang Buaya story but with similar themes, were also forthcoming; including the claimed existence of a PKI organisation with the alluring name, Kantjing Hitam, (or Black Button). The Kantjing Hitam was said to have comprised "seductive members of Gerwani, enchantresses (whose task was to) lure leaders of other parties by offering themselves, (and thereby persuading) them to follow the PKI program" (*Djakarta Daily Mail*, 5 November 1965). Documents, allegedly captured from the underground PKI, supported the claim that the PKI utilised "beautiful women to destroy opposing parties", on the premise that these women would "weaken the spirit" of the nationalist and Muslim youths whom they seduced (*Djakarta Daily Mail*, 20 December 1965).

Terror, Myths, and Monsters

At a comfortable remove from the events and atmosphere of 1965 this sort of material seems inherently ridiculous. Were it not for the real human tragedy involved, its crudity, absurdity and total lack of plausibility prompt its dismissal with derision. But these fantastic accounts deserve to be treated seriously for the simple reason that they were widely believed at the time.¹² To understand how such material could be so widely accepted it is necessary to bear in mind the highly charged atmosphere of fear and tension that had built up over the months and years, even decades, beforehand. Against this background a wide range of irrational fears and rumours readily washed around the country (a phenomenon not unknown in other historical contexts, such as the "Great Fear" during the French Revolution). These fears and rumours acquired further credibility thanks to a press full of panic-inducing reports of water and food supplies being poisoned by the PKI, and of discoveries of "poisoned arrow" caches and suspicious stores of DDT (*Djakarta Daily Mail*, 16 November 1965, 9 December 1965). Also reported discovered were comprehensive death lists, ready-prepared mass graves and arms caches in every PKI stronghold. In this atmosphere, in which every rubber-tapping tool was construed as an "eye-gouger", the "PKI Malam" (underground PKI) seemed supernaturally potent, and ever ready and able to strike regardless of how many times it was decapitated.

To a significant degree it is to this climate of fear that the phenomenon of the killings can be attributed. The tense atmosphere that had prevailed in the months leading up to the G30S affair had led many people to expect a denouement almost as terrible as that which occurred, and the expectation is itself a part of the explanation for the extremity of the violence.¹³ Long held fearful expectations of terrible things about to happen perhaps inured people to the horror of what did happen, perhaps even to the point of allowing them to perpetrate horrors of which they would never have imagined themselves capable. Numerous testimonies make clear that many of those who participated in or egged on the killings were convinced that they were engaged in a life or death struggle. Otherwise quite ordinary people, they acted driven by the fear that if they did not kill their PKI neighbours they would become their neighbours' victims. Nor was this a wholly irrational perception. Serious violence between pro and anti-PKI forces had been taking place since early the previous year, and there were the bitter memories (held by both sides) of the tit-for-tat massacres of civilians which accompanied the Madiun Affair of 1948.¹⁴ Bearing the psychology of this atmosphere of terror in mind, it is not difficult to see how not only the Lubang Buaya horror story was believed but also how it galvanised the perpetrators of the killings into action.

Of perhaps equal importance, however, are the ways in which the portrayal of the G30S affair contributed to the conditions which made the mass killings possible. That same wave of hatred that the propaganda campaign fostered greatly swelled the ranks of the PKI's committed enemies. At the same time it washed away the PKI's sympathisers and allies. Those, like Sukarno, who tried to defend the PKI, found their political influence much undermined and thus their ability to protect the party much diminished. The PKI was left exposed to the severe repression that occurred by isolating it from potential sources of political support while fostering the largest possible coalition of enemies. Of particular significance was the central place of the Army in the anti-PKI coalition, in part a consequence of how profoundly it had been enraged by the G30S affair. Until this juncture, Army actions against the PKI had been constrained by the protection afforded the latter by Sukarno, and also by a degree of pro-PKI sympathies in sections of the Armed Forces, especially amongst the lower ranks. The enormity of the crimes associated with the G30S affair and attributed to the PKI (essentially the Lubang Buaya story) overwhelmed Sukarno's protection and

poisoned the party's name amongst the significant proportion of Armed Forces members who hitherto had been ambivalent rather than hostile towards the PKI, or had even harboured some sympathy for it. For these Armed Forces personnel the dramatic shift in the political climate left them vulnerable to discharge or worse as a purge of suspect military personnel got under way. In these circumstances the most effective means whereby they might expunge any suspicions about their loyalty lay through enthusiastic participation in the violent campaign against the PKI. Thus unrestrained, indeed inflamed, the full force of the Army's might fell upon the PKI, making for a completely unequal struggle. Furthermore, the Army's enthusiastic engagement in repressive operations against the PKI also served to generate confidence amongst anti-PKI civilians groups, as well as providing them with political endorsement. With their numbers much augmented, their morale raised high by the sudden turn of events, and with crucial Army protection, civilian enemies of the PKI were able to go much further in late 1965 and throughout 1966 than had been possible previously. That in many areas, Central Java for instance, large scale civilian on civilian killings did not begin until after elite troops had arrived from Jakarta is one indication of the significant degree to which the Army's intervention made a difference. Amongst civilians too, participation in or support for the killings of PKI and its sympathisers was augmented by a desire to demonstrate one's loyalty to the cause, particularly amongst those upon whom suspicion might otherwise have fallen.

The success of the Lubang Buaya propaganda campaign also greatly reduced any intrinsic capacity the PKI might have had to survive the wave of repression that engulfed it in 1965-66. Since the G30S affair was clearly a complete surprise to the overwhelming majority of the PKI cadre (though perhaps not to a few of the party's principal leaders) the party was totally unprepared to deal with the backlash that resulted from the G30S's failure. This in itself created a serious problem of paralysis that was as much psychological as logistical. But the Lubang Buaya horror story further contributed to this paralysis. Few PKI members and supporters could justify the terrible deeds claimed to have occurred at Lubang Buaya in their name. Many of the thousands of PKI members who in vain publicly renounced their party memberships in October probably did so as much because they shared the widespread repugnance towards the purported Lubang Buaya events as out of fear of the personal consequences that these events held. In turn, these mass resignations

exacerbated the PKI's psychological paralysis and severely hampered its already ineffectual efforts to defend itself, or even to shift to a clandestine mode of operation.

Thus as direct consequences of the Lubang Buaya story the PKI was organisationally and psychologically paralysed, politically isolated, and confronted with overwhelming military firepower. All of these factors ensured that the 1965-66 clashes between the PKI and the forces arraigned against it were extremely lopsided. There was simply no means, either military or political, by which the PKI could protect its membership or its leadership. The PKI's military weakness also meant that the Army and the civilian killers it protected need have little concern for their own potential casualties, thereby removing another need for restraint on their part that might have served as a check in other circumstances. It is this very lopsidedness, as much as the virulence of the hatred and fear, which led to the systematic massacres, as opposed to sporadic and mutual killings which might have erupted otherwise in response to the G30S affair failure or to some other triggering event. The Lubang Buaya story ensured that the G30S affair became far more than a mere trigger for repression meted out to the PKI. To a significant extent it shaped the extreme form that the repression took - the large scale, extra-judicial killings of largely helpless victims. Clearly the Lubang Buaya myth was a crucial causal aspect of the killings phenomenon.

Few Indonesians at the time had both the platform and the courage to dispute the Lubang Buaya horror story publicly. The notable exception was President Sukarno who in December 1965 castigated journalists for writing "untrue things", declaring (in vain) that post mortem autopsy reports proved that the mutilation stories were false (*Antara*, 13 December 1965, afternoon edition). Since (not surprisingly) the autopsy reports were not made public at this juncture, this crucial element of the Lubang Buaya horror story remained intact. As a consequence, the manner of the Generals' deaths at Lubang Buaya remained an irresolvable historical issue until the autopsy reports emerged and were published (though not in Indonesia) in 1987 (Anderson, 1987). The autopsy reports make clear that the seven officers taken to Lubang Buaya were neither tortured nor mutilated. This can only mean one of two things. Either Djamilah, Saina and Sujati decided to deceive their interrogators by spinning an elaborate fantasy of their participation in the torture, sexual mutilation and murder of the Generals, or else they were induced to sign (quite detailed and

mutually consistent) statements fabricated by their captors.¹⁵ It seems safe to prefer the latter explanation.

It is not difficult to imagine what motivated the concoction of the Lubang Buaya horror story. It needs to be borne in mind that the G30S had portrayed itself as an internal Armed Forces group acting entirely on its own initiative against a corrupt and treacherous High Command, and that the PKI had strenuously endorsed this claim. While this version is certainly questionable, it was certainly the case that (relatively senior) Armed Forces officers were involved in the plot. It was they who implemented it, and it was troops under their command who were directly responsible for the deaths of the Generals. For the new Army leadership, political necessity decreed that these inconvenient facts be suppressed or at least attention diverted from them, and that quite a few fresh "facts" be invented. The Lubang Buaya horror story served to fulfill this purpose, undercutting the degree of sympathy which existed within the Armed Forces for the G30S (or at least for something like the G30S). Thereby it forestalled the real possibility of the Army splitting asunder.¹⁶ It did so first by downplaying the role of Army personnel and highlighting that of Air force personnel and PKI-linked civilians, thereby portraying the G30S affair as an attack on the Army as an institution by the PKI and its dupes. Secondly the Lubang Buaya horror story served to enrage and thus motivate Army personnel. That it had the same effect, as mentioned above, on anti-communist civilians fostered civilian support for the Army's stance. This support was vital, not only because it lent the Army political legitimacy, but also because civilian forces were vital to the Army's efforts to eliminate the PKI. Civilians made up the shortfall in the numbers of reliable troops and brought crucial local knowledge to the exercise.

This brings the discussion to the question of how, given the context of its dissemination described above, the Lubang Buaya horror story functioned to produce the effect desired by its creators. Essentially, as black propaganda of about the darkest shade imaginable; the horror story was designed to "otherise" the PKI to a truly extreme degree. In other words, it was intended to demonise the PKI (and dehumanise its members) in order to feed the fear and loathing with which many regarded it, and thereby to stimulate, justify and facilitate the harshest possible anti-PKI measures.

Two principal interrelated themes had always dominated how the PKI was represented by its enemies: that it was an extrinsic, alien element which had no place in the Indonesian nation; and that as the supreme manifestation of atheism it was intrinsically immoral, evil and against God. The Lubang Buaya horror story played upon both these themes. The very framework in which the Lubang Buaya story was placed (the G30S coup attempt) established the PKI as traitors to Indonesia. The inherent assumption that the PKI needed to employ such intrinsically illegitimate means in order to come to power reinforced the notion that it was an alien element. This was also reinforced by the implication that as it came to power so it would go on, imposing its alien ideology upon an unwilling Indonesia through force. The ruthless, even sadistic, violence that the PKI allegedly employed at Lubang Buaya also exemplified the PKI's "otherness", since such behaviour was presented as alien to the true Indonesian culture and character. The immoral-because-of-atheism theme fitted snugly with the foregoing. It did so in a formal sense because "belief in the one God" is the first of the five principles which comprise the Pancasila, the national ideology contained in the Preamble to the Constitution. Thus for its enemies the PKI was automatically disqualified from inclusion in Indonesia. But on a broader level it fitted because the PKI's atheism was seen, particularly by its Muslim enemies, as the root of the immorality it displayed in a number of ways: betraying the nation, seeking to pervert the national identity, perpetrating appalling acts of violence, and above all by wallowing in sexual licentiousness, all of which were features of the Lubang Buaya horror story. Indeed the PKI's alleged sexual immorality stood for its general immorality, and as the prime indicator of its inherently evil/atheistic nature.

The Lubang Buaya horror story also "otherised" the PKI on an even cruder level. Its rigorous demonisation of the PKI dehumanised PKI supporters so that they appeared as nothing but bloodthirsty and sexually sadistic monsters. The dehumanisation even approached a literal equation of PKI members with animals: "these scurvy mongrels (who) put their slimy claws on the innocent souls of our children" (*Djakarta Daily Mail*, 11 December 1965). This equation was also conveyed through the sexual behaviour attributed to the PKI at Lubang Buaya: sexual behaviour unrestrained by morality and propelled only by "animal" sexual instinct and appetite. Yet another feature of the demonisation/dehumanisation process included the repeated association of the PKI with a range of pollutants. Thus the description of the PKI as the "poisonous stabbers in the back (who) must be eliminated", and the employment of headlines such as: "The Coming Generation

must not be Infected by the Anti-God Mentality", "Clean all Departments Etc. from "G-30-S" Elements" (*Djakarta Daily Mail*, 16 November 1965, 17 December 1965, 17 November 1965 respectively).

The natural corollary of this sort of propaganda, all of which fostered the image of the PKI as the ultimate dangerous "other", was a tendency for the PKI's enemies to see themselves in the opposite terms: as the defenders of morality, religion, and the national identity. As such they not only felt justified in purging the Marxist pollutant, but obliged to do so. Islamic leaders stressed that crushing the G30S/PKI was not merely *sunnat* (recommended) but *wajib* (obligatory) for Muslims.¹⁷ Moreover, the very extremity of the danger, and of the PKI's otherness, encouraged an equally extreme sense of self-righteousness on their part, which in turn both encouraged and justified the extreme measures taken to expunge the PKI from the face of the Indonesian earth. Thus "... not only the roots should be pulled out but also the seeds of Gestapu should be destroyed..." (H. Anwar Tjokroaminoto, General Chairman of the PSII, (*Antara*, 21 December 1965, morning edition), and "Cast out this spawn of hell root and branch, tear down the walls of their ideological edifices, plow the salt into the sterile sands of their alien mental beachhead, let Communism nevermore sojourn in this Nation" (*Djakarta Daily Mail* (editorial) 11 December 1965). Perversely, the more drastic the means employed, the more the means justified themselves by emphasising the extremity of the perceived PKI threat. The significance of these extraordinary efforts to dehumanise the PKI is quite simple. Death, for such dangerous animals and pollutants, dealt out without compunction, question, trial or mercy, even without the dignity of a burial, became merely a reasonable response to the PKI's nature and the threat that it posed.

Misogynous Themes

Given their general effectiveness, and the political motivations of those who used them in this instance, it is understandable that black propaganda techniques should have been utilised against the PKI at this juncture. But what is intriguing about the Lubang Buaya material, as should by now be apparent, is its rich vein of misogynous themes. Their presence cannot be dismissed as either incidental or accidental, if only because they are featured so prominently. Indeed, upon closer examination it is clear that the misogynous themes are absolutely indispensable to the material's impact, and therefore to the propaganda campaign's success.

A striking feature of the Lubang Buaya horror story is the casting of the Gerwani women as the principal torturers, mutilators and executioners. This cannot be attributed to the need to downplay the involvement of military personnel in the Gestapu affair and to highlight that of the PKI. This effect could have been achieved by casting the male Pemuda Rakyat members in the sadistic role allotted to the Gerwani women. Closer analysis reveals how this "casting decision" made the propaganda much more effective in demonising the PKI. Although intrinsically horrifying, the alleged murders, tortures, and mutilations appeared even more so as the acts of women. This effect hinged on the well-founded assumption that for the target propaganda "consumers" there was an immediately obvious contradiction between this sort of behaviour and that expected of women. As *Angkatan Bersendjata* (9 October 1965) asked rhetorically "How far is behaviour such as this from the values of women?" Thus the propaganda authors exploited the widespread belief in the existence of innate gender characteristics in order to magnify the desired sense of outrage.¹⁸ On another level, the very subversion of the Gerwani women from their "true" female natures (indicated equally by their callous capacity to commit atrocities and their wanton sexual behaviour) was presented as one of the most wicked of the PKI's crimes. Thus the actions of the Gerwani women were frequently portrayed as being initiated by PKI leaders (*Angkatan Bersendjata*, 5 November 1965). Even the alleged orgies were presented as being personally orchestrated by PKI leader Aidit (*Antara* 8 December 1965, morning edition). More explicitly, when Saina was asked how she could have had the heart to carry out murder she explained that she had been indoctrinated by Aidit to believe that "women should be as brave as men" (*Kompas* 8 December 1965). Similarly Sujati stated that she had been taught to believe "that in the communist world there is no difference between men and women" (*Kompas*, 30 November 1965).

There was a subtle but powerful warning here. The claimed PKI subversion of the "true" female nature conveyed the propaganda authors' version of the PKI world: a world turned upside down (to borrow Christopher Hill's phrase from his work on the English Revolution) both in the cosmic and the social senses which are inextricably linked in the traditional Indonesian world view. The propaganda suggested that a PKI Indonesian "world" would be one in which women defied their "inherent" natures, and rejected their "proper" social places, a condition powerfully symbolised by their sexual assertiveness. This message would have disturbed its target audience because of the

entailed loss of male privileges and of male power over female sexuality. But more was suggested by the powerful symbolism through which the profoundly upside-down nature of the PKI world was conveyed. The "inherent" nature and role of women stands for all the values and norms of society, thereby suggested was that the very foundations of civilization and order would be uprooted. Thus threatened were all aspects of social order, including all forms of privilege and status, and all notions of righteous behaviour and community. To a religious audience the symbolism would have been particularly resonant as such "improper" female behaviour necessarily entailed the flouting of religious laws and values. The message was conveyed explicitly as well as symbolically. The Lubang Buaya horror story frequently made the explicit point that the PKI consciously attempted to counter the influence of religious morality, suggesting thereby that the PKI understood that this was a major obstacle to its plans. For example, Saina stated that Aidit and others "gave talks at Lubang Buaya asserting that the male and female PKI volunteers should not be restrained by religious regulations but should live and mix in complete freedom including having sexual relations" (*Kompas*, 8 December 1965).

The phenomenon of political propaganda employing misogynous themes is of course not exclusive to the Indonesian context. For example, Francoist propaganda during the Spanish Civil War disparaged and demonised anarchist and communist women, accusing them of bloodthirsty crimes, sexual immorality and sacrilege in a manner strikingly similar to the Lubang Buaya material. Through such material propaganda authors condemn their political enemies and their ideas as barbaric, while simultaneously counterpoising themselves as the upholders of civilization. Of course this technique is a variation on an old propaganda theme which employs the "fair sex" representation of women. A group's women are like a flag around which the group gathers, representing the group's cause and way of life, indeed its very identity. The Lubang Buaya horror story was simply a variation of this technique amended to take into account the idea that the enemy was within, both in the sense of being within the nation and in the sense of being within the self, an illegitimate condition that demanded purging. The idealised representation of women was crucial, because it allowed the contrast with the Gerwani members who were accused of having "besmirched the prestige of Indonesian women who are renowned for their noble character..." (*Angkatan Bersendjata*, 11 October 1965). Thus the Lubang Buaya horror story authors portrayed themselves as upholding the values of their idealised Indonesian woman (and thus of the nation,

religion etc), values which they contended were far from those of the Gerwani (*Angkatan Bersendjata*, 9 October 1965). The propaganda's easy shifting between the (supposed) nature of women per se and that of the Indonesian woman also allowed reiteration of the point that the true Indonesian identity was threatened by alien values. As Soeharto put it: "...morally Indonesian women are ignorant of sadism. They only know tender feelings which correspond to harmony in life" (*Antara*, 31 May 1966, morning edition). He went on to regret that the "sadistic practices perpetrated by members of the Gerwani...had destroyed the identity of Indonesian women", and called for "Indonesians, including women, to have the courage to return to the true national identity...".

The drug injection image also reinforced the charge that the PKI sought to subvert the "inherent" nature of women. The claim that they were drugged suggested the externality of the evil force moving the Gerwani women (*Antara*, 8 December 1965, morning edition, *Angkatan Bersendjata*, 8 June 1967). Even the method by which the drugs were administered (injection) reinforced the impression of their externality, as well as suggesting their foreign origin. Again this implied that the PKI's philosophy was so unnatural that it could only be introduced artificially. Of course the metaphor could be readily extended to stand for the PKI's attempted subversion of Indonesia itself: the injected women standing for Indonesia and the drugs for the alien ideology. On another level, the image of drugs with their mysterious capacity to radically distort human behaviour smacked of magic potions, thereby echoing the widespread fear that PKI members possessed black magic powers (Young, 1990: 74). This idea was part of the propaganda's literal demonisation of the PKI. The frequent employment of epithets such as "savage she-devils" constantly reinforced the suggestion that PKI members were possessed by tangible evil forces (*Djakarta Daily Mail*, 11 December 1965). Moreover the central image of the Lubang Buaya horror story was of a macabre, female-dominated, sexually charged event, conducted by torchlight in the dead of night, suggesting an Indonesian equivalent of a coven of witches busily serving supernatural evil. For an Indonesian audience, such images, and the behaviour attributed to the Gerwani women, resonated with Indonesia's rich tradition of "superstitious" beliefs which particularly feature female monsters and ghosts that usually happen to be the most dangerous in the Indonesian monster-ghost pantheon. Interestingly, particularly characteristic of these female monsters is their wanton cruelty, sexual

licentiousness and sexual provocativeness, precisely the characteristics attributed to the "Gerwani Mothers of evil".

The Lubang Buaya horror story could be read as a darker, more subterranean, misogynous tract which suggested that the PKI deliberately released a powerful evil potency, inherent in female sexuality, which leads inexorably to mayhem and violence.¹⁹ The message implied therein was that the maintenance of social (read male) control over women is necessary to keep this potential evil in check. Therefore the Army and its civilian allies had to act decisively in order to force this evil genie of unrestrained female sexuality back into the confines of "proper" female behaviour. Thus their actions amounted to a restoration of order in a political sense, as well as a restoration of the natural and spiritual orders.

The demonisation (both literal and a figurative) of the Gerwani readily included the PKI because of the intimate political relationship between the two organisations, a relationship which the Lubang Buaya horror story was, as noted, at pains to display in operation. But more was implied. Within this discourse the Gerwani was frequently used to denote the PKI. This was made explicit in an article entitled "Can we still be bed partners?" where the PKI was assigned the female gender and the characteristics ascribed to the Gerwani (Lucas, 1965). Here the PKI (the daughter of Karl Marx) was presented as a young girl whose favourite game was torturing animals, then as a teenager who obtained amusement by duping boys into fighting each other, and finally as a married woman who delighted in using a "homemade eye-gouger" on her husband (Indonesia) and in amputating parts of his anatomy. In keeping with the monster theme, the PKI was referred to as a "Gorgon" with "the new Medusa look". The author concluded by calling for this "bitch" (whose crimes included the "exasperating habit" of striving to get on top of her husband in bed) to be strung up from "the tallest pole or tower in town". The strident tone of his last sentence is no doubt reflective of the prevalent political mood amongst anti-communists, but equally well the stridency as well as the phallic symbolism indicates just how virulent was the vein of misogyny the Lubang Buaya horror story was tapping into and exploiting.

There is another feature of the material that begs attention. The details of the sexual promiscuity attributed to the Gerwani women were necessary if the propaganda was to convey the messages

discussed above. Arguably this material was intrinsically titillating, crammed as it was with details of dancing naked women, sexual orgies, free love, aphrodisiacs, and seductive *femmes fatales*. But its very manner of presentation, the breathless purple prose, was deliberately titillating (despite the accompanying affected tone of outrage). For example, the description of the orgies as "delirious" and their comparison with those popularly associated with the excesses of ancient Rome (*Antara* 8 December 1965, morning edition). In part this may have been a product of the embellishment of the journalists through whom the propaganda was conveyed to the public. But it is interesting to note that while this sort of material might seem pretty tame (as well as quaintly amateurish) by today's standards, it would have stood out starkly at the time. With the notable exception of matters related to the Gestapu affair, sexual references in the Indonesian press, up to and during this period, were rare and phrased quite delicately.

There is a distinct possibility that the titillating nature of the material enhanced the effect of the propaganda. The sexual arousal of some of the key intended propaganda consumers may well have sharpened the virulence of their hatred and thus further stimulated their participation in the killings. There is surely an element of repressed sexuality in the phenomenon of young men, who often shared a strong institutional bond (such as shared membership of a religious school), roaming at night with little or no "adult" supervision, and hunting down and killing their immoral enemies, often in a highly ritualistic manner (MacDonald, 1980: 53). Moreover, it is not difficult to imagine young Muslim and Catholic men (the main perpetrators on Java) finding the idea of seduction by sexually assertive women rather appealing, but simultaneously threatening and guilt inducing.²⁰ The profound concern of the PKI's enemies with morality ensured that propaganda detailing the PKI's alleged moral turpitude would evoke disgust. That the material was also titillating was likely to have evoked a sense of shame on the part of the self-righteous "voyeurs" who despite themselves were aroused by the material. Because the propaganda emphasised the associations between the Gerwani and the PKI, and aroused feelings of sexual threat and sexual guilt, then participation in the killings was a subconscious means of eradicating the supposed source of these uncomfortable feelings. The political sins of the Gerwani/PKI allowed any sense of sexual guilt on the part of the killers to be turned outwards instead of inwards. It was, after all, the enemy within the self and within the nation that needed to be exorcised.

Lubang Buaya and Gerwani

Hitherto, the main thrust of the argument has been to show how the Lubang Buaya horror story's misogynous themes served to swell the wave of extreme anti-PKI sentiment. However, the black propaganda's vicious slandering of the Gerwani cannot be entirely attributed to its authors' desire to achieve this objective. The virulence of the slander, both in substance and tone, suggests that this propaganda form was more than a mere means to the end of the PKI's destruction. The virulence also seems to reflect the authors' genuine abhorrence of the Gerwani and suggests that its destruction was an important subsidiary objective. Illustrations of the virulence abound. Extreme denunciations of the Gerwani such as: "the savage she-devils of Lubang Buaya, depraved women who can go from mutilation and murder to immorality in almost the same breath" were common in the press of the period (*Djakarta Daily Mail*, 11 December 1965). It is also striking how reflexive was the equation between the Gerwani and sexual immorality; hence the 23 November 1965 *Djakarta Daily Mail* headline: "Gerwani Top Jezebel Caught". Similarly, the epithet "Gerwani whore" was an automatic term of abuse directed towards any woman identified as an opponent of the New Order. For instance, the insult "Gerwani Whore" (Lonte Gerwani) was hurled at Hartini, Sukarno's left-wing wife, by pro-New Order students, who painted it, along with similar slogans, on her Bogor house in January 1966 (Soe Hok, 1983).

By today's standards the Gerwani was not a particularly militant or effective exponent of women's interests. Ironically this was largely due to the PKI's influence which sharply curtailed Gerwani's ability to campaign for reforms which conflicted with the party's short term political interests. Particularly pertinent here was the party's cosy relationship with Sukarno whose ostentatious polygamy undermined Gerwani's long-standing campaign on this issue. Nevertheless, the Gerwani was a large mass movement and thus had considerable impact in the realm of sexual politics.²¹ It had fought for greater social equality for women, notably campaigning for a "democratic marriage law" which would outlaw polygamy and remove the ease with which Muslim men could obtain a divorce. It had also urged heavier penalties for rape and abduction (Wieringa, 1988: 78). In pursuit of such causes the Gerwani earned the ire of all socially conservative forces, but especially of many Islamic groups for whom many of these policies were a blatant contradiction of Islamic teachings. That the Gerwani was also seen as the PKI's creature added additional sharpness to the animosity

directed towards it, and tended to confirm the view that its policies were part of broader secularisation campaign which key Muslim organisations were resisting.

The proposition that the propaganda authors bore a specific malice towards the Gerwani helps to explain a prominent feature of the Lubang Buaya slander: the lie that Gerwani members castrated the Generals. In terms of the propaganda's horror-creation needs it surely would have been sufficient for the Gerwani women to have been portrayed as torturing the Generals to death. Why instead of the castration concoction is there not a lingering description of them gouging out the General's eyes? This fabrication was also one of the horrors supposedly perpetrated at Lubang Buaya, but it remained unattributed to any specific group or individuals. At the risk of straying into "vulgar Freudianism", the explanation offered here is that the castration story was intended to symbolise the Gerwani threat to male dominance. The bizarre allegation that the Gerwani women mockingly displayed their genitals to the Generals immediately before killing them can also be explained by this particular theme of the propaganda. Such alleged behaviour suggested that the Gerwani were flaunting their gender in triumph over their hapless males prisoners whose "potency" they were about to remove a slice at a time.

Certainly if the destruction of the Gerwani and thereby of an autonomous women's movement was an objective of the Lubang Buaya propaganda story then this purpose was met. Gerwani activists were hunted down, killed or detained for long periods, often in hellish conditions, and the organisation utterly destroyed (Pohlman, 2006). Once established the New Order implemented a policy of enforced "cooptation and regimentation of women's organisations", effectively transforming them into agents of the state, a policy which was greatly facilitated by the trauma of the 1965-66 terror, especially by the vivid example of what happened to the Gerwani (Nursjahbani, 1992: 1-2). This is well understood by contemporary Indonesian feminists. At a Women's Congress in Yogyakarta in December 1998 a former leader of Gerwani, was the first speaker.²² The Congress organizers sent two important and related signals with this controversial action. First, that the resurrection of an autonomous Indonesian women's movement after the stultifying decades of the New Order demanded an acknowledgment of Gerwani's historical legacy and, second, that the New Order's propaganda linking Gerwani to the horrific crimes allegedly perpetrated at Lubang Buaya has to be confronted. At the Lubang Buaya site today there is an

elaborate monument (officially known as Monument of the Sacred Pancasila). Below a pedestal upon which the murdered Generals stand there is a relief in which Gerwani women are depicted performing the Dance of the Fragrant Flowers and cavorting lasciviously with men. In the background are scenes of chaos and violence including a depiction of one of the generals being lowered into the disused well.²³ The New Order's Lubang Buaya slander against Gerwani is literally cast in bronze set in stone and constitutes part of a major national monument visited by tens of thousands of school children each year. This is an apt metaphor for the solid place that the Lubang Buaya myth occupies in mainstream Indonesian historical accounts and popular understanding of the events in question. Confronting this vicious slander is necessary not merely for the sake of historical accuracy, but more importantly because the slanders hurled against Gerwani contained in the Lubang Buaya myth are by extension also leveled at all Indonesian women who dare to engage in autonomous political activity.

The "Voices Off" of the not-quite silenced victims

More than forty years on the "Gestapu affair" still reaches into Indonesia's present with a palpable force, showing just how much life remains in that "dead hand of History". The Lubang Buaya events are a pivotal aspect of the Gestapu affair, but their importance is largely a consequence of the myth that was manufactured from them: a myth which harnessed misogyny to the political goals of its creators. Lubang Buaya (Crocodile Hole) could hardly be a more ironically appropriate place name considering the role allotted to the Lubang Buaya myth in Indonesian political history. The very term became synonymous with infamy in the political lexicon of New Order Indonesia, the mythical events of Lubang Buaya serving as a the epitome of the horrors from which it is claimed the nation narrowly escaped. Indeed the term Lubang Buaya, as much as the site itself with its monument, its museum, its diorama and its preserved buildings and well, was a key shrine in the New Order-approved Indonesian national legend.²⁴ However, like many other such national "shrines" around the world when "excavated", Lubang Buaya proves to be a fraud. The "bodies" that were recovered from the "Crocodile's" hole eventually spoke louder than the sanctified lies in which the Lubang Buaya myth-makers shrouded them. Moreover, if counterpoised against the silent witness of the "bodies", the lies of the myth themselves cast an additional glimmer of light into the shadows of what is still only a partially excavated mass grave. Crumbling newspapers, half-forgotten documents, and decomposed bodies unite to tell tales on those who exhumed the

bodies only in order to bury them in the sacrosanct silence that a shrine is meant to evoke, or perhaps impose.

At the Lubang Buaya monument the faces of the famous Lubang Buaya victims: Generals Yani, Suprpto, Harjono, Pandjaitan, Parman, Siswomihardjo and Lieutenant Tendean, still stare down accusingly from their pedestal above the well that was their temporary mass grave. The statues were intended as a permanent accusation against the PKI, but perhaps now their accusing gazes are directed at those who constructed the New Order regime and authored the Lubang Buaya myth: those who built their regime on the deaths of these seven men and on the deaths of hundreds of thousands of largely anonymous other Indonesians. These countless others remain in their rather more anonymous mass graves, still awaiting their own exhumation, both physical and historical. They too were Lubang Buaya victims, as were Saina, Djamilah and Sujati.

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Notes

¹ This article is a revised version of a paper published (with the same title) in the Working Papers series of the Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, by the Monash Asia Institute of Monash University in 2000. An earlier version, which circulated rather too widely, it seems, was given as a paper to the Women in Asia Conference held at the University of Melbourne in October 1993.

² Prominent scholars, such as Ben Anderson and Ruth McVey (1971) who had written alternative accounts were placed on a “blacklist” and prevented from visiting Indonesia, providing a salutary lesson for others considering such a course.

³ I do not wish to be detained here by quibbles about the precise nature of the current regime in Indonesia, the degree to which it is democratic and the degree to which it has retained elements of the New Order, both in terms of personnel and institutions.

⁴ Not surprisingly, given that Soeharto’s version was propagated so widely, insistently and repeatedly for more than thirty years in Indonesia, alternative accounts have been slow to gain acceptance. But it is more than the dead weight of decades of propaganda that has impeded this process. Active and committed resistance to even the consideration of alternative accounts from a range of groups and individuals who retain a vested interest in the previous historical orthodoxy is largely responsible for the persistence of the New Order’s version of history. Earlier this year for instance the Attorney General’s Office banned thirteen books associated with the 2004 history syllabus simply because they did not include the standard terminology that implied acceptance of the normative account. The terminology in question is G30S/PKI. This term implies that the G30S movement was a PKI operation, a version which many historians regard as dubious, or at least open to challenge. In response Indonesian historians circulated a petition of protest demanding that other versions of the events not be precluded from consideration in this manner.

⁵ Notable works published in Indonesia dealing with this subject matter include Sulisty, 2000 and Roosa et al, 2004.

⁶ The acronym “Gestapu”, with obvious similarity with the term “Gestapo” (itself an acronym for the infamous political police of Nazi Germany), was ascribed to the 30 September Movement by Army propagandists. Using selected letters it was constructed from the Indonesian for 30 September Movement (Gerakan September Tiga Puluh).

⁷ Recently Lubang Buaya has received more scholarly attention. See the studies by McGregor (2002 and 2007) of the Museum and monument at the site and of the annual commemoration ceremonies that took place there during the New Order.

⁸ The film is *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI (The Treason of the September 30 Movement/PKI)* (1984). Screened on television every year on the night of 30 September it was a powerful tool for imprinting the New Order’s account of events.

⁹ There have been numerous attempts to fathom the mystery. Prime examples include: Anderson and McVey 1971, Oey Hong, 1976, Dake, 1973, Crouch, 1973, Wertheim, 1970, 1979. More recently there is the excellent work by Roosa, 2006.

¹⁰ Much about the killings remains unknown. For an excellent discussion of the state of our knowledge on this and related subjects see Cribb, 1990: 1-45. The subject’s extreme sensitivity in Indonesia has been and remains the major impediment to the research necessary to answer these and other questions.

¹¹ Other evidence included a cartoon on the front page of the PKI newspaper, *Harian Rakjat* (People’s Daily) which implied support for the G30S and seemed to indicate foreknowledge of the G30S’s actions.

¹² Indeed, although now rarely repeated in an explicit form, for most Indonesians the Lubang Buaya horror story remains an established historical fact. It is worth pointing out that Indonesians are not alone in taking this view. The Lubang Buaya story has been repeated uncritically by Western journalists, and not a few scholars. John Hughes, one of the few Western journalists in Indonesia at the time, is one whose gullibility in accepting the Lubang Buaya story is more difficult to excuse. Hughes was granted the opportunity to interview some of the captive Gerwani members whose confessions constituted virtually the only evidence offered to substantiate the Lubang Buaya story. As Hughes himself relates, the Gerwani prisoners he interviewed denied their guilt and insisted their confessions had been extracted under duress (Hughes 1968, 45-50). Not surprisingly, when he re-interviewed them later in the presence of Army interrogators they admitted their guilt and dutifully repeated the details contained in their confessions. Hughes, for reasons unknown, preferred the accounts acquired in his second interview.

¹³ I am indebted to Herb Feith for stressing this point in a personal communication.

¹⁴ For the Madiun Affair see Swift, 1989

¹⁵ Wieringa, 1988: 82-4 states that the Gerwani women who signed these confessions were "badly tortured" and notes that none of them, nor any of the other women arrested because of their presence at Lubang Buaya, were ever brought to trial.

¹⁶ According to David Bouchier, 1987: 8) Ben Anderson made a similar point at a seminar held at Monash University on 11 July 1987.

¹⁷ See *Antara*, 11 November 1965, morning edition, 15 November 1965, afternoon edition, and *Suara Muhammadiyah*, November 1965.

¹⁸ The precise identity of the propaganda authors is unknown to this writer, but according to (logical) rumour they were Kostrad Intelligence Officers. They may well have been amongst the 2,800 members of the Indonesian officer corps who received training in the United States, some of whom certainly received training in counter-insurgency/intelligence operations (Evans 1989, 39n, 40. McGehee, 1981 implies that the CIA played a role in the propaganda's creation, but his (CIA-censored) article does not make clear the precise nature of this alleged CIA role. Similarly vague suggestions appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald recently (Wilkinson 1999).

¹⁹ Much the same idea of the potency of female sexuality perhaps is contained in the legend of Nyai Loro Kidul, the Goddess of the Spirit World and the Southern Ocean, who, surrounded by a court of women in her underwater palace off the south coast of Java, accepts offerings from the Sultan of Yogyakarta in exchange for her spiritual/magical support. Her "marriage" to the Sultan is surely a metaphor for the "necessary" social control that marriage places on this potency.

²⁰ Nigel Barley, 1993: 123 suggests the Indonesian "soft-porn" industry caters to an obsession of Indonesian men with "predatory, aggressive female sexuality (that they) find simultaneously titillating and terrifying". Often employed in this context is the Nyai Loro Kidul legend.

²¹ Wieringa, 1988: 82 suggests a Gerwani membership of 1.5 million at its peak.

²² See Sen and van Klinken, 1999.

²³ For a full analysis of the relief see McGregor, 2007, especially pp.75-84.

²⁴ See McGregor, 2002. Also see McGregor, 2007 and Schreiner, 2005.