
THE TRUTHS OF TORTURE: VICTIMS' MEMORIES AND STATE HISTORIES IN INDONESIA

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Riding on the back of a motorcycle taxi hired at the bus station, I wound through the roads on the outskirts of the East Javanese town of Blitar, past fields of rice and sugar cane into a village that had perhaps seen better days from the sale of its harvests. I came to speak with Ibu Nafsiah, an elderly woman who had fought in the nationalist armed struggle against the Dutch in the late 1940s, and who had later joined the communist party, becoming one of the highest ranking women in the party as a member of the East Java Provincial Committee. She had been living in Surabaya until a fall just months earlier damaged her hip and prompted her to return to her ancestral village, where her expenses were lower. She was still articulate but not entirely lucid. I only told her I was interested in learning about her life history, including her years of imprisonment, when she launched into a digressive, hour-long monologue. At first, I had no idea where the story was headed and why she was telling it to me. Gradually, its coherence appeared. She was explaining how it was possible for her not to have been tortured by the military during her interrogation in 1968. Relevant information about her life before and after her capture was arranged to make one point: that she had not betrayed her comrades in the interrogation room. Those comrades, after seeing her emerge from an interrogation without a scratch on her body, assumed that she must have provided information useful to her interrogators. What else would explain the fact that she had not been tortured? In her old age, sitting on what she realized would be her deathbed, she was bothered by an incident that had occurred over three decades earlier. She was disturbed, thinking that some people still suspected that she had been a traitor to the party.¹

¹ Interview with Ibu Nafsiah, July 17, 2001, Blitar.

Ibu Nafsiah's story suggests that torture was, for the Indonesian military, standard operating procedure when interrogating detainees during the large-scale anti-communist witch-hunt. As Major General Suharto seized state power in late 1965, he began a politicide: the mass killing of members of a political movement. The army-led assault on the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI) resulted in hundreds of thousands of people killed and hundreds of thousands more held without charge as political prisoners. Suharto's government officials stated in the 1970s that over one million people had been held at one time or another since 1965 as political prisoners.² The time in prison for those not charged and put on trial—the vast majority—varied from a few months to fourteen years. From a collaborative research project that interviewed former political prisoners, I have concluded that nearly every political prisoner was interrogated and torture was frequently used during interrogations.³ Not every political prisoner was tortured, but those like Ibu Nafsiah who were not tortured had to explain to their fellow prisoners why they were the exceptions. Torture occurred in some districts and provinces more than in others.⁴ One can assume that hundreds of thousands of people were tortured from the time the mass arrests began in late 1965 until 1969, when the regime made few new arrests and began large-scale releases of those detainees whom the interrogators had classified as the least dangerous.

For the Suharto regime, this four-year round of mass torture was a grand, secret experiment in truth, a method for uncovering information about the communist party. Who were its leaders and members? Where were they hiding? What were their plans? A detainee was invariably asked what his or her position had been in the party and who else was in the party. Behind closed doors, the military interrogators performed their science, as if in a laboratory, where, as Beccaria put it in 1764, "physical suffering comes to be the crucible in which truth is assayed," and tests are carried out "in the sufferer's muscles and sinews."⁵

In thinking about the Indonesian interrogators, one could imagine that they were dull-witted and did not recognize Beccaria's point, that "torture is not a fit means of discovering the truth."⁶ But why should Indonesian interrogators be considered any

² Greg Fealy, *The Release of Indonesia's Political Prisoners: Domestic vs. Foreign Policy* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, 1995), appendix.

³ The first fruits of that research can be found in John Roosa, Ayu Ratih, and Hilmar Farid, eds., *Tahun Yang Tak Pernah Berakhir: Pengalaman Korban 65: Esai-Esai Sejarah Lisan* (Jakarta: Elsam, 2004). My colleagues and I interviewed 260 individuals from 2000 to 2001, most of them political prisoners. Since then we have conducted over a hundred more interviews. The interviews are archived at the Indonesian Institute of Social History in Jakarta. I do not use the interviews for quantitative purposes since there is no way of obtaining a representative sample of victims, or even knowing what a representative sample would be. It is impossible now to know how many people were killed at that time and how many victims have passed away since. One has to work with impressionistic evidence.

⁴ Suparman, a former political prisoner from Bandung, has claimed that the army in West Java (Kodam Siliwangi) rarely practiced torture, unlike the army commands in Jakarta and Central Java. Suparman, *Tragedi 1965: Dari Pulau Buru Sampai ke Mekah* (Bandung: Nuansa, 2006), p. 53. Torture, however, was at least occasionally used in West Java. A member of the PKI provincial committee for West Java recalled in an interview with me that he was badly tortured in a military command post in Banten and in an interrogation center in Bandung. Rusyana (pseudonym), July 11, 2001, Jakarta.

⁵ Beccaria, in *On Crimes and Punishments and Other Writings*, ed. R. Bellamy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 39.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

less aware of this point than other torturers in history? Legal scholars of ancient Rome admitted that evidence obtained through torture was “weak and dangerous, and inimical to the truth,” as the sixth century *Digest of Justinian* put it, yet remained wedded to the practice, believing that it “ought not to be rejected as absolutely unworthy.”⁷ The legal systems in Europe from the thirteenth to eighteenth centuries employed torture despite an awareness of its tendency to produce false information. As John Langbein has pointed out: “The law of torture survived into the eighteenth century, not because its defects had been concealed, but rather in spite of their having been long revealed.”⁸ The Spanish Inquisition in colonial Peru, as Irene Silverblatt notes, “employed torture to get to the truth while, at the same time, doubting the truth of the confessions obtained by torture.”⁹ If torturers have been aware that their work is so faulty, why, then, have they persisted in doing it? Why have so many states, in recognizing that the infliction of “bodily torment and pain for the drawing out of the truth” (to use the second century Roman jurist Ulpian’s definition of interrogation) can result in the drawing out of untruths, refined their methods of torture instead of abandoning the practice altogether?¹⁰

Elaine Scarry’s book *The Body in Pain* provides one answer. The book begins by insisting that the physical pain should be understood apart from the verbal question-and-answer of the interrogation. She argues that torture is “the production of a fantastic illusion of power” for states that feel their power threatened; it is “a grotesque piece of compensatory drama.”¹¹ The torturers’ belief that their questioning is the motive for torture is an enabling fiction, a pretense for enacting the desire to exact vengeance or exercise absolute power. The performative element of torture is not its surplus but its *raison d’être*. For Scarry, the infliction of pain on a captive, docile body provides a virtual reality where the torturers see another person’s pain as proof of their power, even when their power in the world outside of the interrogation room is under threat. She contends that “interrogational torture,” that directed towards the discovery of information, is actually “terroristic torture,” that intended to punish the victim and instill fear in the society.¹² The truth of torture, in Scarry’s analysis, lies in this virtual reality for the torturers and the physical pain of the torture victim, not in the words exchanged.

⁷ Quoted in Edward Peters, *Torture* (New York, NY: Basil Blackwell, 1985), p. 34.

⁸ John Langbein, *Torture and the Law of Proof: Europe and England in the Ancien Régime* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 9. The same point holds true for the G. W. Bush administration officials and producers of the pro-torture television series 24 who retain a belief in the efficacy of torture in the face of centuries of critiques. See Mark Danner, *Torture and Truth: America, Abu Ghraib and the War on Terror* (New York, NY: New York Review of Books, 2004); Alfred W. McCoy, *A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation, from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2006); Kenneth Roth and Minky Worden, eds., *Torture: Does it Make Us Safer? Is it Ever OK?* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2005); Karen Greenberg, ed., *The Torture Debate in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Jane Mayer, “Whatever it Takes: Torture on 24,” *New Yorker*, February 19–26, 2007, pp. 66–82.

⁹ Irene Silverblatt, *Modern Inquisitions: The Colonial Origins of the Civilized World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 71.

¹⁰ Ulpian quoted in Lucy Grig, “Torture and Truth in Late Antique Martyrology,” *Early Medieval Europe* 2,4 (2002): 325.

¹¹ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), p. 28.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 329 n7.

I would like to modify Scarry's analysis by suggesting that the torturer's search for truth should not be entirely dismissed as a symptom of what she calls a "false motive syndrome."¹³ The infliction of pain should not be seen as the real kernel of torture while the verbal exchange is seen as a spurious excuse. The pain and the words can be seen as two sides of the same coin, or two scenes in a parallax view. The power the torturers feel through the infliction of pain, at least in the Indonesian case I will describe here, is the power to impose their words as accurate representations of reality. The torture room becomes the locus for the reaffirmation of a regime's symbolic construction of the world, its particular conceptual framework for perceiving reality. The torturers, by posing the verbal information from the captives as the ostensible goal of the interrogations, wind up having to consider at least some of that information as valid even when they sense that they are only generating an echo chamber. When they receive new, unexpected information from the prisoners, they feel that they are engaged in a dialogue and coming to understand their enemies better.¹⁴ They will persist in using the words muttered from mangled, disjointed bodies as valuable intelligence. Even further, the transcripts of the torture sessions can become the evidence on which a regime bases its public truth claims about historical events. Those who believe in the power of torture tend also to believe that some of the information produced by it is truthful. They bridge the parallax gap between violence on one side and dialogue on the other by latching onto the dialogue and pretending as if it had not been produced by violence.¹⁵ The stories constructed during the question-and-answer of torture sessions wind up circulating for years far outside the confines of the interrogation room walls, sustaining the fantasies of power behind the original faith in torture's efficacy.¹⁶

In what follows, I will argue that the Indonesian army, in attacking the PKI, began with a fantasy, tortured its prisoners during interrogations to make them confirm that fantasy, and then used the information derived from torture sessions as both actionable intelligence and evidence worthy of being cited in its published documents. The official army line justifying the attack on the PKI was that the PKI had launched a nationwide armed uprising. All members of the PKI were supposedly participants in the September 30th Movement, which had killed nine army officers on October 1, 1965. The army ordered the mass arrests of everyone affiliated with the PKI and then ordered the interrogation of the prisoners to determine their level of participation in the September 30th Movement. The army fantasized that it was waging a war of counterinsurgency and found confirmation in the intelligence it derived from

¹³ Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁴ Carlo Ginzburg argues that "real dialogue" can be found in the records of the Inquisition in Italy. Amid all the "monologic" and formulaic exchanges are passages where the inquisitors encountered information that was "totally foreign" to them—information that could not be assimilated into their existing stereotypes about witchcraft. C. Ginzburg, *Myths, Emblems, Clues* (London: Hutchinson, 1990), p. 160.

¹⁵ On the idea of a parallax gap, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), p. 4.

¹⁶ A recent instance is the US government's use of information derived from torture. The *9/11 Commission Report*, issued by an official, bi-partisan commission appointed to investigate the plotting behind the September 11, 2001, attacks, frequently cites interrogation reports; 441 of the report's 1,700 footnotes cite CIA interrogation reports. One source is Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, a prisoner whose torture has been confirmed by the director of the CIA. See Robert Windrem and Victor Limjoco, "9/11 Commission Controversy," *NBC News*, January 30, 2008, <http://deepbackground.msnbc.msn.com/archive/2008/01/30/624314.aspx>

interrogations. Army publications ever since have cited interrogation reports as evidence of the claim that the PKI had embarked on a mass armed uprising. Given that Suharto held dictatorial power for thirty-two years, that version of the regime's origins became official state history.¹⁷

This article is largely based on oral interviews with and writings by torture victims. It draws on these sources in order better to understand interrogatory torture as one element in the social construction of knowledge. As such, this article does not intend to provide a comprehensive analysis of the patterns of torture in Indonesia. Much more work needs to be done on identifying those patterns, especially since the analytical literature on Indonesia's large-scale torture campaign of 1965–69 is so scant.¹⁸ Like any social practice, interrogatory torture has many meanings.¹⁹ This article is designed to make one general point: the meaning of interrogatory torture should not be restricted to the paradigm of terroristic (or penal) torture, as if the question of truth can be ignored. This is a point that I will expand upon in the following section before moving to a discussion of the torture of political prisoners in Indonesia.

Analyzing Interrogatory Torture

Understanding how the secrets of the torture chambers become transformed into official state truths requires supplementing Foucault's well-known analysis of torture. The first section of his book *Discipline and Punish*, titled "Torture," is largely concerned with penal torture, that performed as part of the punishment of a convicted criminal, "a differentiated production of pain, an organized ritual for the marking of victims and the expression of the power that punishes."²⁰ He discusses interrogatory torture when narrating the European "law of proof," whose strict standards for evidence prompted a frequent reliance on the confession of the accused. A confession was considered a full, incontrovertible proof that obviated the need to establish guilt by other forms of evidence. To obtain the confession, judges often ordered that the accused be tortured while being interrogated. Foucault saw this "judicial torture, or interrogation under torture" as a reenactment of the ancient ordeal; if the accused did not confess after such pain, a judge would suspect the accused might indeed be innocent.²¹ Foucault also saw elements of the joust and the duel, with the judges acting as if the interrogation was a contest of wills between adversaries, one the judges did not want to lose. He concluded by arguing that it overlapped with penal torture; it was "a means of both punishment and investigation."²² The secret interrogation and the subsequent public punishment were part of the same process. The confession first expressed under questioning had to be repeated before the public just before the spectacle of further torture and execution.

¹⁷ John Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder: The September 30th Movement and Suharto's Coup d'État* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006). [Editor's note: See review of *Pretext for Mass Murder* in this issue.]

¹⁸ The lack of much secondary literature on Indonesia's 1965–69 torture campaign seems to explain why it goes unmentioned in a recent 800-page tome that has a comprehensive international scope. See Darius Rejali, *Torture and Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

¹⁹ Marnia Lazreg, *Torture and the Twilight of Empire: From Algiers to Baghdad* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 6–7.

²⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1979), p. 34.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

I think Foucault's analysis of interrogational torture is unobjectionable but incomplete in a way that can give rise to a misconception. A central theme of *Discipline and Punish* is the shift in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from targeting the body for punishment to targeting the mind or soul of the condemned. Penal torture, with its gory public spectacles of pain, was superseded by the constant, incorporeal effects of incarceration. A reader might conclude that interrogatory torture disappeared as well. Following Foucault's analysis, with its focus on punishment, one has difficulty explaining the persistence of that kind of torture.²³ Foucault, for instance, did not note that Jeremy Bentham, the inventor of the Panopticon, the prison design that *Discipline and Punish* has made so well-known, endorsed interrogatory torture even as he opposed penal torture. In certain circumstances, Bentham argued, the information obtained through torture is of greater social utility than the well-being of the individual under interrogation. If a detainee has information that could save the lives of "100 innocent persons" then the state should employ torture "to extract the requisite information."²⁴ Liberal political theory since Bentham has frequently returned to the same reasoning, as seen most recently in the writings of Alan Dershowitz and Richard Posner.²⁵ The reasoning proceeds from the age-old premise that torture *can* produce reliable information; it does not always "work," but it sometimes does and thus should be permissible, however morally repugnant it is. The premise seems valid since torturers can always cite cases in which torture led to correct intelligence and claim the unsuccessful cases were worth the gamble. Nothing in modern liberal political theory about ethics, rights, human dignity, democracy, and abhorrence of cruelty results in an absolute ban on interrogatory torture; indeed, precisely those principles can be used to justify it.²⁶

A recognition of modern justifications for and practices of interrogatory torture is necessary for avoiding the assumption that what occurred in Indonesia in the latter half of the 1960s represents a throwback to barbaric practices that are to be expected in a "pre-modern" or "semi-modern" Third World society. The interrogatory torture in

²³ On this point, I am in partial agreement with Rejali. I do not, however, see it as a refutation of Foucault's analysis. See Darius Rejali, *Torture and Modernity: Self, Society, and State in Modern Iran* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994). In defending Foucault against Rejali's criticism, Talad Asad only muddies the waters. He does not explain why "liberal societies" that disapprove of torture and generate "a rhetoric of public denial" nevertheless continue to practice it. To claim that interrogatory torture is just "an aspect of policing" is to misperceive a practice with significance for the fundamental justifications for state power. See Talad Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 104–5. It is unfortunate that Foucault, such an original thinker about the body, power, and truth, never pursued a genealogy of interrogatory torture.

²⁴ Quoted in Rod Morgan, "The Utilitarian Justification of Torture: Denial, Desert, and Disinformation," *Punishment & Society* 2,2 (2000): 187–88.

²⁵ Alan Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 131–64; Alan Dershowitz, "Tortured Reasoning," in *Torture: A Collection*, ed. Sanford Levinson (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 257–80; and Richard Posner, "Torture, Terrorism, and Interrogation," in *Torture: A Collection*, ed. Sanford Levinson, pp. 291–98. Michael Ignatieff supports an absolute and unconditional ban on torture while conceding that it might deprive the state of valuable intelligence. The concession reaffirms liberalism's belief in the efficacy of torture for the purposes of information gathering: "If Torture Works" *Prospect Magazine*, April 2006: www.prospect-magazine.co.uk/article_details.php?id=7374 Also see David Luban, "Liberalism, Torture, and the Ticking Bomb," in *The Torture Debate*, ed. Greenberg, pp. 35–83.

²⁶ Scott Michaelsen and Scott Cutler Shershaw, "Does Torture Have a Future?," *boundary 2*, vol. 33 (2006): 3. Also see Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1987), pp. 177–88.

Indonesia was not too different from that practiced by the French military in Algeria in the 1950s or by the United States military as part of what US President G. W. Bush has called the “war on terror.”²⁷ For such a transhistorical and cross-cultural practice, the pre-modern vs. modern divide is too crude to be of much help.²⁸

The proposition that torture can be scientifically deployed after conducting a utilitarian cost-benefit analysis is an example of a rationalism refusing to recognize the cultural determinants of a state’s institutional knowledge. The decision to torture, like the decision to use the death penalty, reveals a cultural disposition since any reasoning about the matter would be inconclusive. One cannot prove or disprove the idea that torture has the potential to yield valuable intelligence. The key point is on the meaning of the term *valuable*. For states that decide to torture, the value of the practice becomes self-confirming. The Argentinean junta, for instance, in power from 1976 to 1983, believed that it faced a vast insurgency that threatened all that was civilized, good, and Christian, and its secret torture sessions produced information that confirmed that belief. The torture began with the belief that terrorists were everywhere and needed to be uprooted. As Lindsey Dubois has written, the junta and its torturers “use their victims to confirm and act out their worldview. By treating thousands of people as communist terrorists and Zionists, they create them as terrorists.”²⁹ During the years the junta was in power, the official representation of events had its supporters in the society: “People who were abducted ‘must have been involved in something,’ it was said (and is still said); or ‘the military knows what it’s doing.’”³⁰ Mark Osiel has noted that the Argentinean officers

were indeed fighting ghosts in their minds, something of their own imagination. But there is often an irreducibly imaginative element in the construction of an enemy. “The enemy” is often, at least in part, a social and intellectual “fiction,” the by-product of a particular theory about how the world is divvied up and constituted into “friendly” and “unfriendly” forces.³¹

The junta constructed its own reality in which the information derived from torture proved that it was indeed waging a just war on a dangerous enemy. Torture “worked.” The Indonesian case, I will argue, was also a case where torture succeeded in confirming the state’s preexisting understanding of the enemy it was targeting.

²⁷ The US government, of course, insists that it has not practiced torture, only “coercive interrogation,” but the distinction is only semantic. For how the US government has redefined its methods of torture as not torture, see McCoy, *A Question of Torture*.

²⁸ Foucault’s genealogical method, with its refusal to search for origins, plot an evolutionary development, and divorce the formation of truth from violence, offers a more promising approach. See Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, vol. 2, ed. J. D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (New York, NY: New Press, 1998), pp. 369–92. Also see Ian Hacking’s criticisms and endorsements of Foucault’s methods: Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

²⁹ Lindsey Dubois, “Torture and the Construction of an Enemy: The Example of Argentina, 1976–1983,” *Dialectical Anthropology* 15 (1990): 324.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

³¹ Mark Osiel, “Constructing Subversion in Argentina’s Dirty War,” *Representations* 75 (Summer 2001): 134. The same point could be made of the Khmer Rouge leaders whose torture house, known as S-21, confirmed their paranoid fantasies about the ubiquitous, devious enemies subverting their rule. See David Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot’s Secret Prison* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1999).

Knowing Another Mind

The torture of political prisoners in Indonesia usually occurred as part of an interrogation. General Suharto's army rounded up *en masse* suspected members of the PKI, or anyone suspected of having a connection to them, beginning in late 1965, and then held them indefinitely without charge. Most of the prisoners were interrogated. The army, beginning in late October 1965, created a vast bureaucratic structure to collect and channel information from a nationwide network of interrogators, from those working at the sub-district level all the way up to those working at the national level, in Jakarta. Given that over one million people had been detained, the interrogators had a heavy workload. The Suharto regime admitted in the late 1960s to having formed a vast, hierarchical network of interrogators and having classified the prisoners into A, B, and C categories (as explained below).³² The regime's officials did not, however, admit that torture was frequently used during the interrogations.

The interrogation usually focused on what the military called the attitude (*sikap*) or ideology (*ideologi*) of the prisoners. The goal was to get inside their minds and find out whether they were hard-core, die-hard communists, at one extreme, or simple-minded peasants who knew nothing about politics, at the other extreme. As political prisoners, their crime was in the realm of thought, not action. One of Suharto's inner circle, General Sumitro, once asked a US military officer for a computer chip that could be implanted in a person's brain to determine his or her political ideology.³³ The interrogators, faced with the impossible task of knowing another person's mind, fixed upon certain external clues, such as the prisoner's former position in the PKI. The A category was for those who had held high positions in the party; the B category was for mid-ranking party members, and the C category was for those who had only a passing affiliation with the party. Various sub-categories, from A-1 to C-3, were later created to make the system even more refined. How a prisoner was categorized determined how he or she would be imprisoned. The A prisoners were detained until they could be charged and put on trial in either a military or civilian court. The B prisoners were to be incarcerated indefinitely without charge; they were considered incorrigibles who could never be allowed back in society. In 1969, the Suharto regime began shipping about eleven thousand B prisoners on Java to the largely uninhabited Buru island, a thousand miles away in eastern Indonesia. Also in 1969, the C prisoners began being released in large batches, usually with the stigmatizing mark on their identity cards of ET (*ex-tapol*), meaning ex-political prisoner, a mark that banned them from government employment and turned them into the proverbial "usual suspects" to be monitored and rounded up at any sign of political trouble.

The interrogators had some difficulty figuring out the former positions of the prisoners in the PKI. They would usually work from a report from an informant about a prisoner's identity and then demand the prisoner admit that the information in the

³² Suharto's order regarding interrogation teams, dated October 29, 1965, was translated into English and published in Nugroho Notosusanto and Ismail Saleh, *The Coup Attempt of the "September 30 Movement" in Indonesia* (Jakarta: n.p., 1967), pp. 228–46. Justus van der Kroef described the attempts at classification: "Indonesia's Political Prisoners," *Pacific Affairs* 49,4 (Winter 1976–77): 625–47.

³³ An epigraph in Richard Tanter, "Intelligence Agencies and Third World Militarization: A Case Study of Indonesia" (Monash University, PhD thesis, 1992).

report was correct, for instance, that he or she had been an important party leader. The prisoners, realizing that their categorization would determine the duration and severity of their detention, if not their life or death, usually responded by claiming that their connection with the party was much less serious than alleged. Some claimed they had been just gullible followers, unwittingly caught up in what friends and neighbors were doing. Others claimed that they had no connection with anyone in the party.

One former prisoner from Central Java, Ahmad (a pseudonym), recalled being forced to admit that he was a member of the PKI when he insisted that he was a member of a schoolteacher's union (Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia, PGRI). In an interview in 2001, he reenacted the scene of the torture that occurred in early 1966:

I was called around seven in the evening for the interrogation. They were from the military, two of them, one who typed and another who asked questions.

"So you're a PKI member right?"

"No. I'm a member of PGRI."

"Wrong! You're PKI. Just admit it—here on the document you're already down as PKI."

"But I'm not PKI. I'm PGRI, a member of PGRI."

Then I was hit, electroshocked, hit again, all the while I was naked.³⁴

The interrogation continued into the early morning hours: "Yeah, finally, finally I just admitted it so that I wouldn't get hit anymore, it was because of the electric shocks and the punches." Ahmad's identity was thus confirmed for the interrogators. He himself admitted to being a PKI member. It became an official fact entered in the government's records.

Ahmad, like every other interviewee in his district, stated that such torture was typical of the interrogations: "Every single time a person was called for interrogation, he would be beaten up. There wasn't anyone who wasn't beaten up. There wasn't any person who didn't cry, and there wasn't any person who just remained quiet. Definitely, there would be screaming from the pain of all of punches." Another ex-political prisoner from a different district in Central Java, Suprpto (a pseudonym), recounted his surprise on not being tortured.³⁵ He had seen every one of his fellow inmates return to their cells after interrogation bruised and bloodied. When he returned unharmed, he did not have a good explanation to answer his inquisitive jail mates: "After I came back to the prison cells a lot of my friends doubted me. 'How did you come back with your body in one piece?' Even though a lot of my friends had been

³⁴ Ahmad interview, Ambarawa, July 28, 2000. Interviewer: Rinto Tri Hasworo.

³⁵ Suprpto interview, Lasem, September 8, 2000. Interviewer: Rinto Tri Hasworo. Yoseph Taher, a former political prisoner from Riau, has written that the prisoners rarely emerged from the interrogation center able to walk normally: "Their bodies were entirely covered in bruises and bent out of shape. Some had been given electric shocks from a car battery." Taher himself claims to have been beaten repeatedly with a metal pipe and electroshocked and to have needed a week's rest before being able to walk again. Yoseph Tugio Taher, *Riau Berdarah: Kisah Perjalanan Hidupku* (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 2006), pp. 155, 169–70.

badly beaten up. But that was just the reality of the situation." In pondering his luck today, Suprpto resorts to a simple explanation: the usual interrogator, notorious for cruelty, took a break right before the interrogation began. The substitute was a nicer fellow. But Suprpto also resorts to a more mystical explanation; he thinks that god must have answered his fervent prayers not to be tortured: "If you look at it from the perspective of religion, my request was accepted; evidently I was still being protected."

Apart from asking about a prisoner's political affiliation and ideology, the interrogators usually demanded that the prisoner name names. The prisoner had to provide a certain number of names of other party loyalists. The interrogators then searched for those individuals, grabbed them from their homes or workplaces, brought them into the interrogation room, and repeated the same line of questioning on them. The former political prisoners, in describing the process, use a metaphor from the railroads: one train car is put on the tracks, another is added behind it, and another, and another ...³⁶

The interrogators targeted the body of the prisoner, employing ancient, simple methods. They did not use the techniques of psychological torture that the CIA developed in the 1950s and most recently applied in Cuba's Guantanamo and Iraq's Abu Ghraib prisons. Theirs was a purely physical torture. In a cruel application of E. F. Schumacher's principle of appropriate technology, they used tools that were ready-to-hand. They did not use elaborate, hi-tech contraptions. The innocuous, everyday objects of the office became the instruments of pain. One of the favorite techniques was to place a table leg on the toes of the prisoner and then sit on the table, bouncing up and down for better effect. A leg from a disassembled wooden chair became a handy billy club. A pen became a knife to puncture the skin. A lit clove cigarette became a means to burn the skin. A more exotic instrument could be obtained free from the local fish market: the barbed tail of a stingray. Ahmad recalled being hit with a rustic, homemade instrument similar to a medieval flail: "They hit me with, oh, what was that called? It was, umm, cow testicles [*kemaluan sapi*] that had been dried rock hard and wrapped in wire. At the end of it they attached a piece of tin. If you were hit with that you'd definitely bleed." The military's most sophisticated torture instrument was a hand-crank generator placed on a desk to deliver electric shocks. Its component parts could be assembled from materials found in a junkyard. A former political prisoner who has written a dictionary about all matters related to the anti-communist repression recalled that the electroshock was called "putting on the rings" in the euphemistic language of the interrogators. The shock was delivered by metal rings placed on the prisoner's thumbs or toes.³⁷ Whipping with the barbed stingray tail was

³⁶ In his novel *Merajut Harkat*, Putu Oka, a former political prisoner, describes in detail what he believes to have been a typical interrogation. The main character, Mawa, is punched, burned, and whipped while the interrogator demands he identify all the people he knows in the underground PKI network. Mawa resists, dreading the reputation of a traitor, but ultimately succumbs after five torture sessions and leads the army officers to the house of a fellow activist. Putu Oka, *Merajut Harkat* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1999). Budiawan has commented on Putu Oka's description of torture; see "Tortured Body, Betrayed Heart: State Violence in an Indonesian Novel by an Ex-Political Prisoner of the '1965 Affair,'" in *Violent Conflicts in Indonesia: Analysis, Representation, Resolution*, ed. Charles Coppel (London: Routledge, 2006).

³⁷ Hersri Setiawan, *Kamus Gestok* (Yogyakarta: Galang Press, 2003), pp. 7–8.

called “giving the tail.”³⁸ If nothing else was available, the fists and kicks of a *tukang pukul*, a man whose special job was to beat up prisoners, would do.

The interrogations were usually held inside the buildings where the prisoners were being detained. The army’s territorial commands (Kodam, Korem, and Kodim) and prisons were commonly used as detention camps, as were large buildings that had been confiscated from civilians accused of being pro-PKI. The army did not normally require specialized sites for interrogations. An exception was the Satgas Intel, in Jakarta, a building in the Kebayoran Lama neighborhood that had been a film studio before October 1965. The army confiscated it, apparently because the owner had employed some filmmakers who were members of the communist-affiliated artists organization (Lekra) and had struck up a collaboration with a Soviet film agency. This ex-film studio became Jakarta’s main torture center. Selected prisoners in the jails and camps in and around Jakarta were brought in for days, weeks, or several months of interrogation. When they were not being interrogated, they were confined in tiny cells built from wood and barbed wire laid out on the floor of the main building.³⁹

Interrogators moved between oral exchanges with prisoners and the written word. For most interrogations they typed up a report that purported to represent the words of the prisoner. They then insisted that the prisoner sign it. Once the report entered the state’s archives, that signature functioned as a sign of the prisoner’s uncoerced assent to the report’s contents. Tan Swie Ling, imprisoned in late 1966 in Jakarta, recalled being tortured with a stingray tail until he signed a report in which he admitted to knowing all about the secret underground PKI network.⁴⁰ The interrogators shredded the flesh on his back. When he was brought before a military court months later as a witness in the case of Sudisman, a top PKI leader, he was asked to repeat in public the information in the interrogation report. The judge asked him about the reorganization and regrowth of the PKI after the military repression began in late 1965. He expressed confusion as to why he was being asked about a topic of which he knew nothing. According to Tan, the exchange with the judge proceeded something like this:

I was ordered to approach the judge’s bench and asked to look at the report.

“Whose signature is this?”

“That’s mine.”

“Sit down again. Now go ahead and describe the rebuilding of the PKI.”

I said, “I don’t understand your Honor’s question.” Finally I was ordered to go to the bench again.

“Look closely at this. Whose signature is this?”

³⁸ Ibid., p. 214.

³⁹ Interviews with Muhammad Sidik Kardi, May 19, 2000, Jakarta; and Rusyana, July 11, 2001, Jakarta. Carmel Budiardjo, a British national imprisoned in 1968 in Jakarta, has described her interrogation at the former film studio: *Surviving Indonesia’s Gulag: A Western Woman Tells Her Story* (London: Cassell, 1996), pp. 5, 17–25. A recent book about torture centers in Suharto’s Indonesia contains a detailed description of Satgas Intel in Kebayoran Lama. See Margiyono and Kurniawan Tri Yunanto, *Neraka Rezim Suharto: Misteri Tempat Penyiksaan Orde Baru* (Jakarta: Spasi and VHR Book, 2007), pp. 73–94.

⁴⁰ Tan Swie Ling, June 16, 2000, and March 16, 2001, Jakarta.

"That's mine."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Sit!" After I sat down he started again in a louder voice.

"Now go ahead and describe the rebuilding of the PKI!"

"Again, I request your Honor to clarify the meaning of your question because I don't understand."

"If you say you don't know then why is all this information printed here above your signature?"

"Oh, that, about the signature, that's nothing."

"What do you mean? Didn't you sign it?"

"It only means that I wanted to live. When I put my signature down there it didn't mean anything, except that I still wanted to live."

"You wanted to live! In other words you're saying that you were threatened with death?"

"Indeed. I was threatened with death."

"Why? Were you tortured?"

"Yes, I was tortured."

The judges, prosecutors, and audience were surprised since no other witness had been willing to admit that he had been tortured—for fear of being tortured again.⁴¹ Tan thought that he would definitely be punished after the trial, but was relieved to discover that he was actually treated with some respect by the guards. An observer of the Sudisman trial in 1967, Benedict Anderson recalled that, of all the witnesses who testified at the trial, he was most impressed by Tan Swie Ling, who was "straightforward, brave, respectful, and never once willing to surrender to the court."⁴²

For Suharto's army, the knowledge obtained from these interrogations about the PKI was vital for suppressing a nascent insurgency. The army began the mass arrests and the assembly-line interrogations in late 1965 while proclaiming that the PKI had begun a nationwide uprising and was about to go on a killing spree. Through army propaganda, the September 30th Movement, a brief, indecisive action largely

⁴¹ Supardjo, a brigadier general in the army who joined the September 30th Movement, admitted at his trial to having been forced to sign an interrogation transcript. He politely stated that he had signed the transcript to avoid "trouble from the interrogators again" (*repot-repot sama pemeriksa lagi*). The prosecutor (*oditur*) became furious and repeatedly pointed to Supardjo's signature as proof that there had been no torture. Mahmillub, "Berkas Perkara Mustafa Sjarif Supardjo" (Jakarta, 1967), session of February 23, 1967, pp. 650–55.

⁴² Benedict Anderson, "Tentang Pembunuhan Massal '65." Interview with Ben Abel distributed on the Apakabar e-mail list, September 24, 1996. In this interview, Anderson could not recall the name of the Chinese youth he was describing. But he met Tan in Jakarta a few years later, as Tan fondly recounted to me in an interview in 2001.

conducted by military personnel in Jakarta and Central Java, became exaggerated into the opening salvo of a massive, violent revolt by the PKI. The army's psychological warfare specialists concocted absurd stories about how the PKI had amassed guns from China, drawn up hit lists of its enemies, and dug large ditches into which the countless corpses were to be dumped. The psy-war men let their imaginations run wild, even alleging that the PKI had collected large numbers of specialized instruments for gouging out eyeballs.⁴³ These fabrications were transmitted via the state radio, military newspapers, privately owned newspapers that had been vetted and censored, and public speeches by military officers in town squares. The army's propaganda was no doubt targeted at the public and was intended to legitimate Suharto's attack on the PKI. But it also became the army's own understanding of what it was doing. As the stories of the PKI insurgency circulated, army personnel found it difficult to separate accurate intelligence from their own propaganda. The army believed it was waging a war of counterinsurgency, even if the evidence of a widespread, well-planned PKI insurgency was lacking and even if it did not face any significant resistance. The Indonesian military interrogators themselves generated much of the evidence of the PKI insurgency.

Consider the naming of names. Interrogators forced every prisoner to identify the names and locations of other people in the PKI because they believed the PKI was busy plotting a massive revolt. The goal was to imprison all those plotters before they could act. The Indonesian army officers imagined themselves to be involved in a real war against a formidable, well-organized foe. They invoked the logic of warfare and behaved in much the same way the French military did in Algeria, using interrogatory torture to uncover evidence about the cell structure of a covert movement. The torturers were not flippant in collecting the names of new suspects and hunting them down. Every time they uncovered the hideout of a PKI leader for whom they were searching, the effectiveness of torture seemed confirmed. Yet their resort to torture created a new reality for them. As they threw the dragnet as widely as possible, catching and torturing anyone whose name they obtained, the interrogators imagined hundreds of thousands of people to be clandestine operatives storing arms for a large-scale insurgency. The very lack of material evidence to confirm such assumptions became evidence of how deviously clever the enemies were in concealing their plotting.

Ahmad, the schoolteacher in Central Java quoted above, briefly described the torture of a fellow inmate: "There was also a friend of mine from Pakis named Agus. He was beaten up from around seven in the evening to six in the morning. He died from the torture. My god, he was kicked so many times. They said they had information indicating that he had hidden a tank with a mounted cannon." Ahmad here interrupted himself to laugh. He had just mentioned his friend had been killed by torture, but he could not resist laughing from the absurdity of the accusation. "That's funny, isn't it? Okay, a little toy tank could be hidden, or a cigarette lighter, but a tank? The accusation of hiding a tank with a mounted cannon—for a revolt, they said. That's really funny!" Ahmad continued laughing.

⁴³ So far, the most detailed account of the propaganda can be found in Saskia Wieringa, *Sexual Politics in Indonesia* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2002).

In October 1965, Ibu Sarbinatun was eighteen years old and newly married to a man who was a member of the PKI's provincial committee for Central Java. She and her husband were detained and interrogated. Both were badly tortured in Solo while being accused of storing large quantities of rifles from China to be used to arm the people and overthrow the government. Ibu Sarbinatun was also accused of being a participant in the killing of the six army generals in Jakarta on October 1, 1965. After repeated interrogation sessions during which she had been kicked and sexually assaulted, she finally gave up: "Enough! Whatever you want, go ahead. Write down whatever you want. I'll sign it.' And that was it. I signed the report."⁴⁴

By using torture, the military officers clouded their own perceptions of their real enemies. Those who were the least committed to the PKI, who had the least amount of information to provide, admitted to all sorts of lies: to being PKI members, to hiding weapons, and to knowing the location of important party leaders. The military's channels of information were filled with falsities. Meanwhile, the PKI members who were the most committed to the party were the ones able to withstand the torture. As Beccaria pointed out, torture leads to the "acquittal of robust ruffians and the conviction of weak innocents."⁴⁵ One victim I interviewed had been a high-level clandestine activist in the PKI, someone who had spent eight years in China in the 1950s and who had come to believe wholeheartedly in the inevitability of a worldwide communist revolution. In an unpublished autobiographical essay, he describes how he was tortured in a military building in Jakarta:

In the interrogations, I kept insisting that I was a building contractor, not a PKI activist or sympathizer. I was able to withstand the torture. I was hit, my toenail was smashed [with a table leg] by a policewoman interrogating me, I was stabbed in the face with a pen. Still today I'm partly deaf in my right ear because of the pummeling from the interrogators. I was interrogated six times, each time with violence, but I stuck to my story. A lot of my friends in the prison also corroborated my story.

Since the interrogators found no incriminating information on him, they did not classify him as a high-priority prisoner. Interrogatory torture assumed the logic of an ordeal: his ability to withstand the torture was a sign of his innocence. The underground party network inside and outside the prison, deciding that he was an especially valuable activist whose identity had not yet been uncovered, raised money so that he could bribe an interrogator and gain his freedom. In November 1966, he was released from prison. He then joined the underground network and tried, unsuccessfully, to organize a real armed insurgency in South Blitar in East Java as a response to the state repression of a nonexistent one.⁴⁶

The military operation against the PKI in South Blitar in 1968 was accompanied by a second round of nationwide mass arrests. People who had been considered the

⁴⁴ Sarbinatun, "Anggota Lekra Cabang Sala: Laki-Laki Dimanfaatkan Tenaganya, Perempuan Seluruhnya," in *Kidung untuk Korban: Dari Tutur Sepuluh Narasumber Eks-Tapol Sala*, ed. Hersri Setiawan (Surakarta: Pakorba Sala, 2006), p. 56.

⁴⁵ Beccaria, *On Crimes and Punishments*, p. 39.

⁴⁶ On the attempt at organizing a guerrilla war from South Blitar, see Andre Liem, "Perjuangan Bersenjata PKI di Blitar Selatan dan Operasi Trisula," in *Tahun yang Tak Pernah Berakhir: Memahami Pengalaman Korban 65: Esai-Esai Sejarah Lisan*, ed. John Roosa, Ayu Ratih, and Hilmar Farid (Jakarta: Elsam, 2004), pp. 163–200.

“small fish” (*teri*) during the first round of arrests in 1965–66 were hauled into the prisons. Even those who had been arrested earlier and released were arrested again. Wayan (a pseudonym), a small farmer in Bali who had been involved in agitations for land reform before 1965, was held for two years and then released in 1967. After enjoying only a year outside he was arrested again in 1968 and accused of being a key member of an underground PKI network:

They had already come up with a scenario, a whole storyline. I was accused of being part of the “Night PKI,” and the story had all been planned out: the leader here was so-and-so, and the members were so-and-so. So, I was slotted in as a leader. There they were, grouping people into what they called “trios” [three person cells]. I had never heard of these “trios” before ...⁴⁷

Wayan was laughing as he recalled the epistemological procedures of the interrogators. They presumed that the PKI had organized a tight cell structure, but since they could not obtain enough information from the prisoners to confirm that presumption, they forced the prisoners to admit it. They read the silence of the prisoners as evidence of their guilt: “We were called ‘GTM,’ *Gerakan Tutup Mulut* [Closed Mouth Movement]. If we didn’t want to answer their questions, they’d say, ‘Oh, you must have already been instructed to be in the GTM ... Who would confess if he operates clandestinely; after all, their name is the Night PKI.’” Torture was used to force each prisoner to sign the interrogation transcript that had already been drawn up: “So they created the scenario. Then if we didn’t want to sign the transcript, well, you know what would happen: the cow testicles—that was a tool for torture. They were quite heavy. Then there was stingray tail—that was also a tool for torture.”⁴⁸

Suharto’s small clique of army generals, seeking to overturn the political institutions and ideals of a generation of Sukarnoists, saw enemies everywhere. The generals ordered mass purges of all government institutions, from the state-owned businesses to the four branches of the military. In Bandung, West Java, I interviewed a man who had been a captain in the air force until October 1970, when he was accused of being a secret member of the PKI.⁴⁹ At work on the airbase one day, he was handed a written order to report to the office of legal affairs. Once he reported to the office after his day’s work was done, he was thrown into a jeep and taken outside of town to an air force building in the hillside resort area of Lembang, where no one could hear his screams. He was set upon by interrogators and their *tukang pukul*: “I was punched and kicked all over. Their main objective was to get me to admit that I really was a member of the communist party.” Eventually he admitted to being a PKI member and signed a transcript of the interrogation: “Yeah, I just signed it. Instead of dying for no purpose. If I died my family would suffer. What was important was not to get hit any more.” He was first classified as B-2, later reclassified as B-1, and imprisoned without trial for eight years. Over three decades later he still suffers from the torture inflicted that night. “I was suddenly kicked in the back. I didn’t see it coming. Until today I’m crippled because my spinal cord became pinched. It still hurts. I wear a corset every day; if I don’t, I’m not strong enough to get around.” He claimed he was only one

⁴⁷ Wayan, August 18, 2000, Gianyar, Bali.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Guritno (pseudonym) interview, April 1, 2001, Bandung.

among dozens of air force personnel framed up on false charges that year to please Suharto and his generals, who wanted an assurance that the air force had been thoroughly purged. They apparently believed it was better to make many suffer than allow one subversive to escape undetected.

Utomo, a former navy officer in East Java, recalled being arrested and tortured along with dozens of others in 1974, on the accusation of having supplied arms to the PKI in South Blitar six years earlier.⁵⁰ The navy itself later acquitted these men, but not until they had spent three years in prison and had suffered terribly from the torture used to force them to confess. Before the interview, I noticed Utomo walked with a limp. As he explained how he had been tortured, I understood why: the interrogators had placed a table leg on his big toe and sat on the table, crushing the bones.

Suharto's generals were fortunate that they did not face a real insurgency, that they could terrorize unarmed people without the challenge of a well-organized, committed movement of resistance. Where they did face such movements in later years, as in East Timor and Aceh, their torture tactics proved counterproductive, provoking widespread hatred of their rule while producing little reliable intelligence. Although they constructed an image of the enemy in such a way that torture appeared to be a useful method for defeating it, torture only helped them misperceive their enemy.⁵¹

Proving the Case

The first evidence the army adduced that the Communist Party of Indonesia, the PKI, was the mastermind of the September 30th Movement were confessions from two army officers who had participated in the movement. They had supposedly confessed while under interrogation to have acted on orders from the PKI. An army information document released in early December 1965 cited the transcripts of the interrogations as proof of the PKI's leadership of the September 30th Movement.⁵² Thus began the Suharto regime's practice of treating interrogation reports (*Berita Acara Pemeriksaan* or *Proses Verbaal*) as solid evidence when backing its claims before the public.

One of the so-called confessions was by Colonel Abdul Latief. I have a copy of the transcript of his interrogation held on October 25, 1965.⁵³ In the transcript, he admits to being a "sympathizer" of the PKI who was willing to accept orders from the party. He unequivocally states that the PKI "planned the kidnapping" of the six generals and that he was a mere "implementer" of the party's plan.⁵⁴ He confesses to having been "more loyal to the party's orders" than to those of his own superior officer.⁵⁵ When Latief was brought to trial in 1978, after thirteen years of captivity, he claimed that he

⁵⁰ Utomo (pseudonym) interview, November 13, 2000, Jakarta.

⁵¹ On torture in East Timor, see the report of the Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in East Timor (2005), chapter 7.4, posted online by the International Center for Transitional Justice: www.ictj.org/en/news/features/846.html. On torture in Aceh, see Human Rights Watch, *Aceh at War: Torture, Ill-Treatment and Unfair Trials* (2004): www.hrw.org/reports/2004/indonesia0904/

⁵² Pusat Penerangan Angkatan Darat, *Fakta-fakta Persoalan Sekitar "Gerakan 30 September," Penerbitan Khusus, no. 2*, November 5, 1965. (This booklet was published by the army information center.)

⁵³ Angkatan Darat, Direktorat Polisi Militer, "Berita Atjara Pemeriksaan Abdul Latief," October 25, 1965.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

was barely conscious during the interrogation. According to his courtroom testimony, interrogators from the military police came to Salemba prison when he was still suffering from the wounds inflicted during his capture two weeks earlier. The soldiers who raided his hiding place on October 11 had fired a bullet into his left knee and rammed a bayonet into his right thigh, breaking the femur.⁵⁶ His interrogation was held while he was lying prostrate on a table, doped up on painkillers, immobile with both his legs in casts, and starving from not having been given enough food for days. During the twelve-hour interrogation, from 3:00 PM to 3:00 AM, he occasionally passed out. At his 1978 trial, he admitted to having put his signature on the transcript so that the interrogation would end: "I hoped that once I recovered or was in a condition to be interrogated again I could correct it."⁵⁷

He was interrogated again, in late December 1965, and he did correct the claims in the first interrogation transcript.⁵⁸ His second interrogator, from the police, seems to have been more willing to accept his story, unlike the military police who interrogated him earlier. His story changed dramatically. He denied that he had any affiliation to the PKI and insisted that the PKI had not led the September 30th Movement. The Suharto regime's publications never cited, or even mentioned, his second interrogation.

The Suharto regime made a practice of citing transcripts of secret interrogations as evidence even when the prisoners themselves, in the public trials, rejected the validity of the transcripts. The regime's first official, comprehensive account of the September 30th Movement, the Notosusanto and Saleh book of 1967, is filled with footnotes referencing interrogation reports.⁵⁹ The military's favorite historian, Nugroho Notosusanto, and a military court prosecutor, Ismail Saleh, pretended as if these interrogation reports were more reliable than the statements individuals made in public.⁶⁰ Consider how the two authors handled the statements of Njono, a PKI Politburo member and trade union leader who was the first person put on trial in a special military court for those accused of involvement in the September 30th Movement.⁶¹ The authors noted that Njono, while on the stand at his trial in February 1966, rejected the contents of an interrogation report. They themselves broached the question of torture: "Could one argue that Njono was forced to confess in the first investigation, or that he was coerced?"⁶² After raising that possibility, they immediately dismissed it out of hand, writing as if they knew the precise

⁵⁶ Abdul Latief, *Pledoi Kol. A. Latief: Soeharto Terlibat G 30 S* (Jakarta: ISAI, 2000), p. 43.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁵⁸ Komando Operasi Pemulihan Keamanan dan Ketertiban, Team Pemeriksa Pusat, "Berita Atjara Pemeriksaan," December 21, 1965, and December 23, 1965.

⁵⁹ Nugroho Notosusanto and Ismail Saleh, *The Coup Attempt of the "September 30th Movement" in Indonesia* (Jakarta: n.p., 1967). The book cites the interrogation reports for Sakirman (pp. 9, 11, 110); Supardjo (pp. 34–35); Wirjomartono (pp. 45, 47); and Moeljono, Raden Mas Koesdibjo, and Bambang Setijadi (p. 45).

⁶⁰ On Notosusanto's career, see Katherine McGregor, *History in Uniform: Military Ideology and the Construction of Indonesia's Past* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2007).

⁶¹ In December 1965, the army distributed what purported to be a confession by Njono that the PKI had led the September 30th Movement. Most foreign observers believed the confession was a forgery. Njono, when appearing before the Extraordinary Military Court in early 1966, presented a very different story. The army published the transcript of Njono's trial: "*Gerakan 30 September" Dihadapan Mahmillub, Perkara Njono* (Jakarta: Pusat Pendidikan Kehakiman A.D., 1966).

⁶² Notosusanto and Saleh, *The Coup Attempt of the "September 30th Movement,"* p. 116.

circumstances of his interrogation: "He had enough time to give his information calmly and clearly." To clinch their case, they pointed to his signature: "The minutes of the investigation were read back to him before he signed them."⁶³ Again, we find the signature being interpreted as the sign of the prisoner's voluntary acceptance of the report's contents. According to these two authors, Njono had committed a crime by rejecting his interrogation: "it was an attempt to substitute true information with false information."⁶⁴

Once Notosusanto and Saleh concluded that Njono's interrogation report was true and his public statements false, they delved into a psychological study of his personality to explain his motives: "Why did he give such clear information during the preliminary investigation?"⁶⁵ They realized they were moving into his unconscious mind: "Njono himself may not have been aware or conscious of the reasons for his confession." According to these historians, the military knew Njono's mind better than he did. After all, the military had a psychologist conduct a "psycho-test" on him, a test that concluded that Njono was "cooperative," "understood instructions well and could adapt himself to new situations," and that "he was not a stupid person."⁶⁶ But his behavior at his public trial showed a different side to his character; he was "very explosive and aggressive in trying to defend the Party." He lied at the trial because "of his ambition, and his strong primitive lurge [*sic*, urge] which were not properly channeled."⁶⁷ In Notosusanto and Saleh's text, the military proves its omniscience; it understood the September 30th Movement and it understood the inner drives and desires of an individual it had interrogated.

Notosusanto and Saleh also cited the interrogation report of another PKI Politburo member, Sakirman. They did not mention that Sakirman disappeared while in military custody; he was, one presumes, secretly executed, like three other key party leaders: Aidit, Lukman, and Njoto. Perhaps Sakirman's execution occurred after Notosusanto and Saleh published their book in April 1967. Whether it occurred before or after, it indicates the absurdity of a book that relies on secret testimonies of people the military held under the threat of death.

The interrogation reports acquired a life of their own. The CIA's published analysis of the September 30th Movement, *Indonesia—1965: The Coup that Backfired*,⁶⁸ contained an appendix meant to justify the use of the interrogation reports as evidence. The main justification was the similarity of the claims in the reports. The claims, however, were not similar. Even for the same individual (such as Latief), the interrogation transcripts were not consistent. Besides, whatever similarities existed can just as easily be attributed to the uniformity of the interrogators' storyline that was forced upon the

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁶⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, *Indonesia—1965: The Coup that Backfired* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1968). This report is available online: <http://www.foia.cia.gov/CPE/ESAU/esau-40.pdf>. The report has been republished under the name of the CIA agent who authored it: Helen Louise Hunter, *Sukarno and the Indonesian Coup: The Untold Story* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007).

prisoners. Following the CIA, the Dutch journalist A. C. Dake and the Canadian political scientist Victor Fic triumphantly touted the interrogation reports as evidence for their assertion that the PKI leadership had organized the September 30th Movement.⁶⁹

When the Suharto regime's version of history began to be more widely questioned in the wake of Suharto's fall in 1998, the military responded by once again pointing to its interrogation reports as undeniable evidence. The head of the army's information department, Brigadier General Ratyono, vowed in 2003 to publish all the interrogation reports of the PKI leaders. He stated that the reports would convince any doubters of the correctness of the army's version. True to the worldview formed during the decades of the Suharto era, he interpreted any challenges to that version of history as efforts to revive communism.⁷⁰ One hopes that the army will publish the interrogation reports since most have remained classified even as government publications have cited them. So far none has been published. However, a senior newspaper editor has published a book defending the work of the interrogators as a noble and heroic effort to uncover the truth about the "PKI revolt."⁷¹ The Suharto regime has collapsed, but its version of history lives on.

Conclusion

This paper began with the contention that the verbal exchange accompanying interrogatory torture functions as something more than just a spurious motive for the infliction of physical pain. If one sees the verbal exchange as always a superfluous, inconsequential aspect of torture, one will miss how it can figure into a regime's understanding of itself and its enemy. Interrogatory torture should not be collapsed into the logic of penal torture. As Suharto's army began to seize state power in late 1965, its interrogation rooms were where its presuppositions became transformed into cold, hard facts. The army's make-believe war with the PKI—its rendering of a unilateral attack on unarmed civilians as a counterinsurgency war—became confirmed through the information derived from the ventriloquism of torture sessions. The truth of interrogatory torture can be found its contribution to a regime's construction of that peculiar fantasy world known as official knowledge.

⁶⁹ For a more detailed critique of the CIA report and the books of Dake and Fic, see my review essay, "President Sukarno and the September 30th Movement," *Critical Asian Studies* 40,1 (March 2008): 143–59.

⁷⁰ Brigadier General Ratyono quoted in the daily newspaper *Media Indonesia*, "TNI Publikasikan BAP Tokoh PKI Agar Sejarah tak Diingkari," October 1, 2003.

⁷¹ Aco Manafe, *Teperpu Mengungkap Pengkhianatan PKI Pada Tahun 1965 dan Proses Hukum Bagi Para Pelakunya* (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 2007).