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Chapter 7

The World Was Silent? Global Communities of Resistance to the 1965 Repression in the Cold War Era

Katharine McGregor

Silences enter the process of historical production at four critical moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*) and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance).¹

The historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot made these observations based on his research into the Haitian revolution, which barely rates a mention in archival sources, nor in Western historiography. Trouillot analyses how power influences every point of the production of history and how this can lead to silences in history. In the case of the 1965 anti-communist violence in Indonesia different factors have led to “silences” in historical sources, archives, narratives and histories about this period of history. Most new histories about this violence have necessarily relied heavily on oral history due to a general lack of freely available records from those involved in the violence, including the Indonesian army.² Yet there were other barriers to retrieving and closely analysing

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¹ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 26.

² This includes the following manuscripts and edited collections, all of which rely heavily on oral history. Annie Pohlman, *Women, Sexual Violence and the Indonesian Killings* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015); Douglas Kammen and Katharine McGregor, eds., *The Contours of Mass Violence in Indonesia, 1965-68* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012); John Roosa, Ayu Ratih, and Hilmar Farid, eds., *Tahun yang tak Pernah Berakhir: Memahami Pengalaman Korban 65, Esai-Esai Sejarah Lisan* (Jakarta: Lembaga Studi dan Advokat Masyarakat, 2004). The National Archives of Indonesia (*Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia*, ANRI) only very recently opened select military archives related to the violence, but most military archives are inaccessible to researchers. One cache of military sources,

this past, including disinterest in “communist” victims of Cold War struggles. It was only after the formal end of the Cold War in 1989 that some scholars began to document in earnest the patterns within the violence.³ Yet the greatest stimulus for new research and new narratives was the end of the Suharto regime (1966–1998) that was founded on the basis of this violence. From 1998 survivors, activists and sympathetic historians have begun to write new histories of the violence. Some of this work has considered the Cold War context of the repression and how Western governments in particular endorsed, if not assisted, in furthering the repression.⁴ Yet perhaps because these works are based mostly on diplomatic or national archival sources, they do not capture examples of transnational resistance to the violence that challenge the idea that the world was silent about this repression. Some scholars including Simpson, Hearman and myself have begun to chart international advocacy for this case, by focusing on the roles of the British based organization TAPOL (the British Campaign for the Release of Indonesian Political Prisoners), Amnesty International, and/ or individual Quakers who supported political prisoners.⁵

In this paper I revisit two examples of resistance that derived from political ties between those persecuted and left-wing international organizations, in order to better understand the nature of “silence” regarding this case of mass violence. I use the term “silence” here to refer not just to complete silence, but also to the forces that worked to mute protests. I focus on transnational activism from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s emanating from Indonesian members of the Afro-Asia People’s Solidarity

which perhaps mistakenly was preserved in the regional archives in Aceh has formed the basis of Jessica Melvin’s research that the army co-ordinated the violence. Jessica Melvin, *The Army and the Indonesian Genocide: Mechanics of Mass Murder* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

³ The most important early work was Robert Cribb, ed., *The Indonesian Killings 1965–1966: Studies from Java and Bali* (Clayton: Monash University, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, 1990).

⁴ Bradley R. Simpson, *Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and US-Indonesian Relations, 1960–1968* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Bernd Schaefer and Baskara T. Wardaya, eds., *1965 Indonesia and the World* (Jakarta: Goethe Institut and PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2013).

⁵ See Bradley R. Simpson, “Human Rights are Like Coca-Cola, Contested Human Rights Discourses in Suharto’s Indonesia, 1968–1980”, in *The Breakthrough*, ed. Jan Eckel and Samuel Moyn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 186–203; Vannessa Hearman, “Letter-writing and Transnational Activism on Behalf of Indonesian Political Prisoners: Gatot Lestario and his Legacy”, *Critical Asian Studies*, 48, no. 2 (2016): 145–167; Katharine McGregor, “The Making of a Transnational Activist: The Indonesian Human Rights Campaigner Carmel Budiardjo” in *The Transnational Activist: Transformations and Comparisons from the Anglo-World since the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Sean Scalmer and Stefan Edberg (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

Organization, which included some Indonesian leftists trapped in exile after the onset of the 1965 violence and the protests of Dutch socialist women who had strong connections to imprisoned Indonesian women.⁶ I ask how in each case activists tried to raise the alarm over the violence and the obstacles they encountered in generating sympathy at the height of the Cold War, particularly due to the fracturing effects of the Sino-Soviet split on left-wing international solidarities, but also opposition to the Vietnam War around which most activism was centred. This research is based on sources from the archives of the International Institute for Social History (IISH) in the Netherlands, which documents activism that is not always captured in national archives.

The sense of solidarity with Indonesians targeted in the repression expressed by AAPSO and WIDF members was, I argue, based on strong political ties. I borrow the term “communities of resistance” from Chandra Mohanty to refer to the diverse alliances across the international Left that underpinned this activism.⁷ By using this term I hope to capture more of the broader scope of the critiques of the emerging regime based on a shared history of opposition to both economic and military imperialism. In doing so, I hope also to trace the shifting discourses and strategies used by activists to frame this issue. First, however, let us examine the violence and international complicity within this violence as the background for understanding transnational activism for this case.

The 1965 Violence

On 30 September 1965, an armed movement calling itself the 30th September Movement kidnapped and killed six military generals and one lieutenant in Indonesia. The army, under the command of Major-General Suharto, quickly suppressed the Movement and blamed the action on the Indonesian Communist Party (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, PKI).

⁶ There were other groups involved in activism that I do not deal with here due to limitations of space, such as the Dutch-based Indonesia Committee, the International Labour Organization and other church groups.

⁷ Chandra Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonization Theory, Practising Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 47.

Between 1965 and 1968, the army co-ordinated mass killings of persons associated with the PKI. The army worked with anti-communist groups in society to carry out a purge of approximately half a million largely unarmed Indonesians.⁸ The repression targeted members of the PKI and members of all affiliated or closely associated organizations including women's organizations, farmer's organizations, youth organizations and unions of teachers, scholars and workers. The intention was to bring about the complete destruction of the political left and associated forms of political activism and thinking.⁹

The repression took place at a critical juncture in the Cold War when the Sino-Soviet split was fracturing the international left, and when Afro-Asian solidarity similarly experienced a major blow with the cancellation of the planned second Asia-Africa conference to be hosted by Algeria, following their own military coup.¹⁰ The Indonesian violence paved the way for the rise of the military-dominated New Order regime which lasted until 1998, with the resignation of President Suharto.

One of the most comprehensive surveys of foreign responses to (and indeed involvement in) the repression is Brad Simpson's book *Economists with Guns*. Using communiqués between the American embassy in Jakarta and the State Department, Simpson traces the direct encouragement and covert complicity of the United States government in the violence and its prioritization of American economic interests above that of the mass scale loss of human life.¹¹ More recently in their edited book *1965 Indonesia and the World*, Bernd Schaefer and Baskara Wardaya have examined a broader range of cases of international complicity in this violence including the role of the East and West German governments and of the Soviet Union.¹² These chapters take up the crucial question of how the Sino-Soviet split shaped responses to the violence.

⁸ Robert Cribb, "Problems in the Historiography of the Killings in Indonesia", in *The Indonesian Killings: 1965-1966 Studies from Java and Bali*, ed. Robert Cribb (Melbourne: Monash University, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, 1999), 1.

⁹ Douglas Kammen and Katharine McGregor, "Introduction: The Contours of Mass Violence in Indonesia, 1965-68", in *The Contours of Mass Violence in Indonesia, 1965-68*, ed. Douglas Kammen and Katharine McGregor (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012), 1-24.

¹⁰ On the Asia-Africa Conference more broadly see Jamie Mackie, *Bandung: Non-alignment and Afro-Asian Solidarity* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2005).

¹¹ Simpson, *Economists with Guns*, 171-199.

¹² Schaefer and Wardaya eds., *1965 Indonesia and the World*.

From around 1963 the PKI increasingly sided with the People's Republic of China, engaging in direct critiques of the Soviet Union and increasingly following Maoist thinking. One reason for the choice was the PRC's support for Indonesia's Confrontation campaign against the formation of the new nation of Malaysia. At first the Soviets publicly critiqued the 1965 repression. In March 1966, for example, at the 23rd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, members condemned what they described as "the anti-communist terror in Indonesia" and called for a stop to the "criminal butchery of Communists".¹³ The Soviets also protested the death sentences of PKI leaders Njono, Wirjomartono and Sudisman, which were passed at the 1966 Extraordinary Military trials, and their subsequent executions.¹⁴ Yet at the same time, they maintained relations with the military regime and continued to supply them with weapons in the hope especially that large debts to the Soviet Union would be repaid. American and West German archive sources suggest that (behind closed doors at least) the Soviets endorsed the destruction of the pro-Peking PKI.¹⁵ By 1967 the Soviets began to blame the September 30th Movement on the PKI and "Chinese inspired adventurism". Bernd Schaefer has even asked the question: "Would the Indonesian army and its Western supporters have dared to launch such deadly attacks on the PKI had the latter been pro-Soviet and supported by Moscow?"¹⁶ The position of the Soviet Union partly explains why there was not stronger international condemnation of the destruction of the largest communist party in the non-communist world.

So what sources of support, if any, did the PKI have as the repression unfolded?

The first source of resistance I would like to examine is that which originated from Indonesians who were outside Indonesia at the time of the September 30th Movement. Many of these exiles were abroad as students or participants in international socialist

¹³ *23rd Congress of the CPSU, 1966* (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Pub House, 1966), 29, as quoted in Bliveer Singh, *Bear and Garuda: Soviet Indonesian Relations- From Lenin to Gorbachev* (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1994), 230–231.

¹⁴ Ragna Boden, "The Gestapu Events of 1965 in Indonesia: New Evidence from Russian and German Archives", *Bidragen tot de taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 163, no. 4 (2007): 514.

¹⁵ Simpson, *Economists with Guns*, 189–190. See Ragna Boden, "Silence in the Slaughterhouse-Moscow and the Indonesian Massacres," in *1965 Indonesia and the World*, ed. Schaefer and Wardaya, 90.

¹⁶ Bernd Schaefer, "Introduction: Indonesia and the World," in *1965 Indonesia and the World*, ed. Schaefer and Wardaya, 5.

organizations.¹⁷ They were not immune to the reach of the newly emerging Suharto regime. Many were forced to report to local embassies to declare their allegiance to either Sukarno or Suharto. Those who refused to declare an allegiance had their passports cancelled and were supplied with one-way tickets back to Indonesia.¹⁸ What this meant was that many Indonesian political exiles were in survival mode following the onset of the repression. Only a few felt able to act.

The most senior member of the PKI abroad at this time was the Central Committee member, Adjitorop who was in Beijing. He formed a group known as the “Delegation” and advised all PKI members to regroup in China.¹⁹ PKI exiles in the Soviet Union formed an alternative PKI government in exile known as the Overseas Committee of the Indonesian Communist Party, which was recognised by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).²⁰ These two alternative leaderships became rivals.

Despite these splits, which grew worse over time, some exiles were able to use their transnational socialist networks to call for protests at the imprisonment and killings of members of the PKI and affiliated organizations back in Indonesia. From the 1940s onwards, Indonesians on the political left had formed new political networks across the world, largely by means of participation in the executives and regular attendance at the international conferences and congresses of transnational socialist organizations such as the World Federation of Democratic Youth, the Women’s International Federation, the World Federation of Trade Unions and later the Afro-Asian Peoples’ Solidarity Organization. Through these connections they participated in political activism centring on issues such as decolonisation struggles, opposing what they viewed as on-going Western imperialism in the form of economic control and military bases, and

¹⁷ The 2010 special edition of RIMA (44, no. 1) edited by David Hill and Anna Dragojlovic, including these articles: David Hill, “Indonesia’s Exiled Left as the Cold War Thaws” (21–52); Vanessa Hearman, “The Last Men in Havana: Indonesian Exiles in Cuba” (83–110) and Ana Dragojlovic, “Sukarno’s Students: Reconfiguring Notions of Exile, Community and Remembering” (53–82). See also David Hill, “Indonesian Political Exiles in the USSR,” *Critical Asian Studies*, 46, no. 4 (2014): 621–648.

¹⁸ Hill, “Indonesia’s Exiled Left as the Cold War Thaws”, 31–32, and Hearman, “The Last Men in Havana”, 86.

¹⁹ Hill, “Indonesia’s Exiled Left as the Cold War Thaws”, 32–33.

²⁰ Hill, “Indonesian Political Exiles in the USSR”, 638.

advocacy for better economic and political rights.²¹ As I will show below these global networks were important in post-1965 activism.

Protests by the Afro-Asian Solidarity Movement

From the 1950s onwards, Indonesians became involved in the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization (AAPSO), inspired largely by the 1955 Bandung Africa-Asia conference.²² The AAPSO originated from non-government conferences held in 1955 in New Delhi and in 1957–1958 in Cairo. AAPSO fostered a strong anti-colonial agenda, monitoring and supporting on-going decolonisation struggles including the Algerian war and critiquing the continuing dominance of former colonisers in the post-colonial world. The first ever AAPSO gathering was held in Cairo, Egypt, in 1957 shortly after Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal as a sign of recognition of what its constituents read as a victory against imperialism.

In 1965 plans were underway to expand the Afro-Asian alliance to a tri-continental alliance following the Cuban revolution. By the time of the first Tri-continental Conference during January 3–14, 1966, the violence in Indonesia was in full swing. Ibrahim Isa served on the AAPSO Permanent Secretariat in Cairo from 1960 until 1965 as the Indonesian representative.²³

Isa headed a delegation of Indonesian participants who had all been overseas to attend the conference in Havana, Cuba. Other members of the delegation included former member of parliament, Francisca Fanggidaej, member of the Asia-Africa journalists association, Umar Said, and a member of the Asia-Africa jurists association based in

²¹ For further analysis of this activism, see Katharine McGregor, "The Cold War Indonesian Women and the Global Anti-Imperialist Movement 1946-1965", in *De-Centring Cold War History*, ed. Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney and Fabio Lanza (London: Routledge, 2013), 31-51; Vanessa Hearman, "Indonesian Trade Unionists, the World Federation of Trade Unions and Cold War Internationalism, 1947-65", *Labour History* 111 (2016): 27–44.

²² See Katharine McGregor and Vanessa Hearman, "Challenging the Lifeline of Imperialism: Reassessing Afro-Asian Solidarity and Related Activism in the Decade 1955-1965", in *Bandung, Global History and International Law*, ed. Luis Eslava, Michael Fakhri and Vasuki Nesiah, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 161-176.

²³ Bonnie Triyana, "Pengantar" (Introduction) in *Pikiran Seorang Eksil Indonesia di Luar Negeri: Bui Tanpa Jarak besi* by Ibrahim Isa (Jakarta: Klik Books, 2011), xxxi-xxxiv.

Conakry (Guinea), Wiyano.²⁴ There were in fact two Indonesian delegations at this conference, one representing the new army-controlled regime and one representing the Sukarno-era delegates.²⁵ The Tri-continental Conference committee chose to recognise the latter as a snub to the new militarist regime. 540 delegates from 84 countries attended this conference.

Using this large gathering, the left-wing Indonesian delegation issued one of the most public condemnations of the repression in the form of a conference resolution just three months into the violent campaign.²⁶ All press reporting coming out of Indonesia continued to be censored by the army.²⁷ Despite limited information the Indonesian delegation understood the attack as army- and foreign-directed. In the resolution they referred to those repressing the communists as “rightist and reactionary elements within the Indonesian military” working in co-operation with, and at the instigation of the CIA. As noted above, the violence is increasingly understood today as army directed. Simpson has argued that the United States government assisted in the repression through the provision of communications equipment and assistance with anti-PKI propaganda, but he does not go as far as to suggest that the CIA instigated the repression.²⁸

The resolution conveys some of the scale of the violence, positioning it as an attack on “democratic liberties” and an effort to split “the anti-imperialist national united front”.²⁹ At this conference, which centred on how to combat Western imperialism, the Indonesian delegation emphasized it was those most opposed to imperialism in Indonesia who were under attack. They reported:

²⁴ Triyana, “Pengantar”, xxxiv. For more on Francisca Fanggalidaj and Umar Said, see their memoirs. Francisca Fanggalidaj, *Memoar Perempuan Revolusioner Francisca Fanggalidaj* (Yogyakarta: Galang Press, 2006); Umar Said, *Perjalanan Hidup Saya* (Jakarta: Yayasan Pancur Siwah, 2004).

²⁵ Triyana, “Pengantar”, xxxiv. For commentary on this, see also “Circular Letter, Modern Revisionists of the Leading Clique of the C.P.S.U Strengthen Their Cooperation” and “Holy Friendship with the Suharto-Nasution Fascist Military Regime of Indonesia”, *OISRAA Bulletin* 1, no. 4 (1967): 9.

²⁶ “Resolution on Protests against the Suppression of Democrats in Indonesia” *Resolutions of the First Conference for Afro-Asia-Latin American People’s Solidarity, 3rd–4th January 1966, Havana Cuba*, The Permanent Secretariat of the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization, 85.

²⁷ “News censorship in Jakarta,” *Straits Times*, October 21, 1965, 1.

²⁸ Simpson, *Economists with Guns*, 171–194.

²⁹ “Resolution on Protests”, 85.

So far tens of thousands of people within the progressive movements in Indonesia have been cruelly murdered or tortured, exposing the fascist nature of the present reactionary forces there in power. More than 100,000 people have been arrested.³⁰

This report was most likely based on very limited information, because even within Indonesia, for example, the government-sponsored Fact Finding Team investigating the violence had only just reported its findings to President Sukarno at the time of the conference, conservatively concluding that approximately 80,000 people had been killed.³¹ The characterisation of the newly emerging regime as fascist resonated with older critiques across the international left of the dangers of militarist fascism exposed in World War Two.

The resolution flagged that amongst those arrested were workers, peasants, women, youth and student movements, as well as professors, students and journalists. The Indonesians explained that the army was suppressing “every democrat, no matter then [sic] he is a nationalist, a religious person or a communist.”³² In this statement, perhaps cognisant of the broader constituencies of the conference, they tried to signal that it was not only communists who were being targeted. Indeed, those sympathetic to President Sukarno, including those in the left wing of the Indonesian Nationalist Party (*Partai Nasional Indonesia*, PNI) were also attacked. The Indonesian delegates framed the violence as an “anti-democratic action” and called upon fellow members of AAPSO to “step up solidarity actions in the spirit of Afro-Asian Latin American solidarity”.

This was, however, only one of many resolutions at the conference.³³ The most consuming issue was the Vietnam War. In the outline of the conference objectives,

³⁰ “Resolution on Protests”, 85.

³¹ Oei Tjoe Tat, *Memoar Oei Tjoe Tat: Pembantu Presiden Sukarno* (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 1998), 183–192. For a discussion of the number of people killed see Cribb, “Problems in the Historiography of the Killings in Indonesia”, 7–14.

³² “Resolution on Protests”, 85.

³³ These resolutions related to different member countries and to broader issues such as military bases. The political commission of the conference made 18 general resolutions and 17 specific resolutions including the Indonesian resolution. Further to this, the conference declared 18 resolutions on so-called

organisers praised the South Vietnamese struggle against the Americans, describing it as inspiring and encouraging to all the people of Asia, Africa and Latin America, and noting that it therefore should be prioritised by the conference.³⁴ Presumably the escalation of the war from 1965, due to the American bombing campaign targeting North Vietnam and the official introduction of American troops, heightened the sense of urgency for international support for the Vietnamese. The Indonesian repression was thus to some extent overshadowed by concern for developments in Vietnam.

Following the Havana conference, the Indonesian Organization for Afro-Asian People's Solidarity (*Organisasi Internasional Solidaritas Rakyat-Rakyat Asia Afrika*, OISRAA) continued to report on the repression in its monthly bulletins, which were published in Peking, China. The reason the bulletins were issued in Peking and not Cairo is most likely due to the forced relocation of the Indonesian AAPSO representative, Ibrahim Isa. During the Havana conference he had heard news that there were plans to hold his family in Cairo hostage, so he had asked friends to help them escape to China.³⁵ Indeed in Cairo as in many other countries, the Indonesian embassy had begun to screen Indonesian nationals.³⁶

The content of the monthly OISRAA bulletins was incredibly pro-China. The first edition of this bulletin in 1967 opened with a quote from Chairman Mao and an open letter dated October 1, 1966 (the anniversary of both the Chinese revolution and the commencement of the Indonesian repression) to the Chinese Committee for AAPSO entitled "Mao Tse-tung's Thought is the Guiding Star for the People of the World to Final Victory".³⁷ From the fourth issue onwards, one article per bulletin was devoted

"burning issues", 3 resolutions on colonialism and neo-colonialism, and 3 resolutions specifically on Vietnam. For a list of all the resolutions, see *Resolutions of the First Conference for Afro-Asia-Latin American People's Solidarity, 3rd-4th January 1966, Havana Cuba*, The Permanent Secretariat of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization, 1-3.

³⁴ *Resolutions of the First Conference for Afro-Asia-Latin American People's Solidarity, 3rd-4th January 1966*, 20.

³⁵ Triyana, "Pengantar", xxxiv-xxxv.

³⁶ Greg Barton, *Abdurrahman Wahid: Muslim Democrat, Indonesian President: A View from the Inside* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2002), 89-90.

³⁷ "Mao Tse-tung's Thought is the Guiding Star for the People of the World to Final Victory", *OISRAA Bulletin* 1, no 1 (1967): 3. All bulletins are held in the AAPSO collections of the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam.

to the theme of “Learning from the Thought of Mao Tse-Tung”. Indeed, at the time these bulletins were being compiled, the Cultural Revolution in China (which foregrounded Mao’s teachings and obedience to them) was escalating. Most Indonesians in exile in China were required to live apart from local Chinese in a quasi-military compound, to study Mao’s thought and engage in self-criticism.³⁸ Furthermore, following the lead of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the bulletins continually critiqued the Soviet Union for its “revisionist line” and for collaborating with the army-led regime in Indonesia, including the on-going supply of Soviet weapons to the regime.³⁹

The former political prisoner, Hersri Setiawan, has observed that the politics of Indonesian political exiles was shaped greatly by the politics of the countries where they took refuge. In the cases of exiles settling in both the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the Soviet Union, he believes that Indonesian exiles were constrained by self-censorship and the need to follow the political lines of the respective powers.⁴⁰ This is apparent in the content of the OISRAA bulletins.

Nevertheless, Indonesians in the PRC were still able to use the limited political space they had to draw attention to the repression. Every issue of the bulletin recorded and monitored international condemnation of the violence. In 1967, the bulletin published an urgent appeal issued in 1966 from the Indonesian AAPSO committee. The appeal was addressed to “fellow liberation fighters, progressives and democrats in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the world over”. The appeal stated:

After seizing state power in October 1965, the fascist military regime of General Suharto and Nasution, acting at the instigation and in the interest of US imperialism and the domestic reactionaries, has during the last one year unleashed an unprecedented barbarous, atrocious and nationwide

³⁸ Hill, “Indonesia’s Exiled Left as the Cold War Thaws”, 34-37.

³⁹ See for example, “Urgent Appeal of OISRAA to Save More Than 300,000 Indonesian Patriots, November 10 1966”, *OISRAA Bulletin* 1, no. 1 (1967): 6.

⁴⁰ Hersri Setiawan, “Some Thoughts on Indonesian Exilic Literature”, *RIMA* 44, no. 1 (2010): 16.

terror campaign against the people of Indonesia, thereby drowning the country into a bloodbath.⁴¹

The appeal framed the violence as part of a broader project of Western imperialism. It referred to the massacre of hundreds of thousands of people and the imprisonment of 300,000 people. It recorded the specific places of detention such as Salembang, Tangerang, Tjipinang and Wirogunan prisons, and the appalling conditions of detention noting that some prisoners were dying from malnutrition, dysentery, beri-beri, a lack of food and medicine or death by firing squad.⁴² The content of this appeal suggests that information about prison conditions and the practice of taking batches of prisoners out from gaol and shooting them was filtering out to the exiles.⁴³

Drawing on the anti-colonial and anti-imperial focus of AAPSO, the appeal called upon “fellow liberation fighters” to stop further massacres and to “raise their voice of protest”. The Indonesian AAPSO committee noted, however, that it would only accept genuine solidarity, and not solidarity from the Soviet Union or its followers, which they noted had continued to send arms to Indonesia.

In this and subsequent bulletins, the AAPSO Indonesian committee published responses to this appeal. From December 1966 onwards, they had received statements of support from the Afro-Asian Writers Bureau based in Conakry (December 11, 1966); the Mission of the Malayan National Liberation League in the PRC (21 November 1966); the Chinese Committee for Asian-African Solidarity (December 11, 1966); eight African national organizations (the Zimbabwe African National Union, the Mozambique Revolutionary Committee, the Basutoland Congress Party, the Bechuanaland People’s Party, the South West African National Union, the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania, the Swaziland Progressive Party and an Angolan revolutionary organizations) (December 21, 1966); The Japanese Committee for Asian-African Solidarity (date not clear); The Laotian Committee for Asian-African

⁴¹ “Urgent Appeal of OISRRA”, 5.

⁴² “Urgent Appeal of OISRRA”, 5–6.

⁴³ For a discussion of the practice of taking out quotas of prisoners from gaols see John Roosa, “The State of Knowledge about an Open Secret: Indonesia’s Mass Disappearances of 1965-66”, *Journal of Asian Studies* 75, no. 2 (2016): 281–297.

Solidarity (date not clear) and the South Vietnamese Committee for Asian-African Solidarity (date not clear).⁴⁴

These relatively disparate expressions of support provide further evidence of the international isolation of the PKI. This was in part the result of the policies of the PKI, including its condemnation of the Soviet Union and support for the Malaysia campaign. But it was no doubt also partly because of hesitation to be seen to support the Indonesian branch of AAPSO, which was clearly aligned with the PKI in exile in the PRC and openly critical of the Soviet Union.

From an initial focus on the violent repression in the bulletins in 1966, the tone shifted in mid-1967 to an emphasis on the PKI's armed struggle. From June 1967 onwards, the bulletin increasingly focused on what it viewed as a revival of the PKI and the beginning of armed campaigns in Indonesia in West Kalimantan, East, Central and West Java, and in the southern and northern parts of Sumatra and Sulawesi.⁴⁵ In reality most of these campaigns with the exception perhaps of the West Kalimantan case were poorly resourced efforts to defend the remnants of the party rather than armed struggle.⁴⁶ Yet the bulletin praised these campaigns because they aligned with Chairman Mao's strategy of armed revolution.⁴⁷

The bulletin paid considerable attention to Indonesian attacks on ethnic Chinese Indonesians, following the Chinese government in condemning these attacks. Coppel

⁴⁴ The record of responses to the appeal can be found in the AAPSO collections at the IISH.

⁴⁵ Examples of such reporting include: "Indonesian Revolutionaries Follow Path of Chinese Revolution, Begin Armed Struggle in 1967", *OISRAA Bulletin* 3, no. 1 (1968): 15–16. "Acclaiming the Rebellion of Patriotic Members of the Indonesian Armed Forces in East Java", *OISRAA Bulletin*, 2, no. 2 (1968): 1; "Over 300 Indonesian Patriotic Army-men and Policemen Stage Armed Uprising", *OISRAA Bulletin* 2, no. 2 (1968): 3; "Indonesian People Win New Victories in Revolutionary Armed Struggle", *OISRAA Bulletin* 2, no. 2 (1968): 4; "Under the Great Banner of Mao Tse Tung's Thought, the PKI is leading the Indonesian people to March on the Road to a People's War", *OISRAA Bulletin* 2, no. 3 (1968): 4–7.

⁴⁶ On the South Blitar case see Vanessa Hearman, "South Blitar and the PKI Bases: Refuge, Resistance and Repression", in *The Contours of Mass Violence in Indonesia, 1965-1968*, ed. Kammen and McGregor, 182–207. On the West Kalimantan see Jamie Davidson and Douglas Kammen, "Indonesia's Unknown War and the Lineages of Violence in West Kalimantan", *Indonesia* 73 (2002): 53–87.

⁴⁷ The texts of these documents are translated on the following webpage <https://www.marxists.org/history/indonesia/PKIscrit.htm>. See also Singh, *Bear and Garuda*, 236–237 and Hearman, "South Blitar and the PKI Bases: Refuge, Resistance and Repression", 182–207.

and Cribb have argued that the ethnic Chinese were not disproportionately represented amongst those who died, although Melvin has more recently offered more evidence of ethnic targeting at least in Aceh.⁴⁸ OISRAA probably emphasized this link as a strategy to generate more Chinese support for opposing the violence.

It is notable that only a few country representatives of AAPSO responded to the Indonesian appeal of 1966. Although AAPSO had a broad membership base, the Sino-Soviet split continued to fracture this organization with further implications for potential support for the PKI. The 8th council session of AAPSO held in Cyprus in February 1967, for example, included seven members from the Soviet AAPSO but no Indonesian or PRC representatives. No resolutions were passed on the Indonesian repression. This is consistent with the Soviet Union's increasing belief that the PKI had a hand in the 30th September Movement and that it had taken such action with encouragement from the CCP.⁴⁹ This would explain the lack of statements of condemnation of the Indonesian repression at the meeting.

The documentary record demonstrates that Indonesians abroad were able to use the AAPSO, at least initially, to raise the alarm about the mass violence. They framed it first at the Tri-continental Conference in January 1966 as an attack on democrats and anti-imperialists forces, in an attempt to solicit solidarity. By November 1966, the Indonesian branch of the AAPSO was reporting on more specific aspects of the repression, such as prison conditions and the scale of the violence, and appealing in particular for solidarity for those imprisoned. Yet due to the increasingly pro-PRC stance of Indonesians exiles in mainland China, protest against the repression was not widespread, even in the socialist world. These examples illustrate the very limited political space that remnants of the party abroad had, to generate opposition to the violent repression in Indonesia.

⁴⁸ Charles Coppel and Robert Cribb, "A Genocide that Never Was: Explaining the Myth of Anti-Chinese Massacres in Indonesia", *Journal of Genocide Research* 11, no. 2 (2009): 447–465; Jessica Melvin, "Why Not Genocide? Anti-Chinese Violence in Aceh, 1965-1966", *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 32, no. 3 (2013): 63–91.

⁴⁹ Singh, *Bear and Garuda*, 236–248. For a recent examination of the CCP's position on G30S, see Taomo Zhou, "China and the Thirtieth September Movement", *Indonesia* 98 (2014): 29–58.

Protests by the Women's International Democratic Federation and the NVB

Other groups of Indonesians on the political left had even longer transnational links with people abroad. This included Indonesian women who had formed close connections with other women in the transnational socialist organization, the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). The WIDF was the largest women's organization in the post-war period.⁵⁰ Created in 1945 by a coalition of women who opposed fascism during the war, WIDF members were primarily concerned with advocating for women's economic and political rights and opposing fascism, colonialism, militarism and imperialism.⁵¹ Indonesian women first joined this organization in 1946, following the support of the WIDF for the Indonesian independence struggle.⁵²

The leftist women's organization Gerwani (*Gerakan Wanita Indonesia*, Indonesian Women's Movement) became a member organization of the WIDF from 1950 onwards. A handful of Indonesian women were extremely active in the WIDF, serving at its headquarters in East Berlin, on the executive of the WIDF, writing for its magazine and regularly attending its international congresses. The Sino-Soviet split was also felt within the WIDF, with Indonesian women backing Chinese members in 1963 in their attack against Soviet women prioritising peace over armed revolution.⁵³ Nevertheless, it was through the auspices of the WIDF that Gerwani in particular had built a strong global activist network.

As Saskia Wieringa and Annie Pohlman have documented, the Indonesian army was particularly brutal in its attacks on members of Gerwani, due to the potent propaganda

⁵⁰ Francisca de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organizations: The Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)", *Women's History Review* 19, no. 4 (2010): 547–73.

⁵¹ For more on the organization see Francisca de Haan, "The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF): history, main agenda, and contributions, 1945–1991", *Women and Social Movements Online Archive* edited by Thomas Dublin and Kathryn Kish Sklar, 2012.

⁵² For more on the history of Indonesian women's interaction with the WIDF see Katharine McGregor, "The Struggle for Women's Rights: 1946-1965" *Indonesia and the Malay World* 40, no. 117 (2012): 193–208; McGregor, "The Cold War Indonesian Women and the Global Anti-Imperialist Movement 1946-1965", 31–51.

⁵³ McGregor, "The Cold War Indonesian Women and the Global Anti-Imperialist Movement 1946-1965", 43–45.

against the organization, which alleged that Gerwani women sexually tortured the army men killed on 30 September 1965.⁵⁴ Gerwani was banned and its members were subjected to torture and sexual violence both within and outside of prison.

As in the case of the AAPSO, the most pressing issue for the WIDF in late 1965, early 1966, was the Vietnam War. The WIDF had similarly set up solidarity campaigns for South Vietnam and condemned American intervention in the war. However, the WIDF also tried to support women targeted in the Indonesian repression. In this case, it was not Indonesians in exile driving this activism.⁵⁵ Broader forms of solidarity motivated WIDF women in these actions.

The first reaction from the WIDF that I have been able to trace is an appeal issued in June 1966 by the head office of the WIDF in East Berlin, following a WIDF council meeting. The appeal read:

Tens of thousands of Indonesian women have been brutally murdered, languishing in prisons and concentration camps, exposed to torture and barbaric abuse. The senior officials and several thousand members of GERWANI, one of the WIDF affiliated organisations, were arrested, and we don't know where they are and what they must be suffering. In the course of events, while the whole of Indonesia was in the grip of fear and terror, and the country robbed of any democracy, GERWANI as well as other women's mass organisations were banned. Hundreds and thousands of families have been torn apart and live in grief.⁵⁶

WIDF members were horrified by what they had learnt of the violent attacks. They expressed empathy especially for the families touched by this violence. The appeal reveals the difficulty that organizations outside of Indonesia had in obtaining

⁵⁴ Saskia E. Wieringa, *Sexual Politics in Indonesia* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Pohlman, *Women, Sexual Violence and the Indonesian Killings*.

⁵⁵ I am yet to confirm which members of Gerwani remained abroad after G30S.

⁵⁶ "Appeal for Solidarity with Gerwani and the Women of Indonesia", Council Meeting of the WIDF, Berlin, June 2–5, 1966. (Appel für Solidarität mit Gerwani und den Frauen Indonesiens), Box 148, Folder 410, Indonesia 1958-1968-1979, NVB Archives, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

information about what exactly was going on. For members of Gerwani who were still on the run, it was extremely difficult to survive let alone communicate with people abroad.⁵⁷ Presumably all communication from Gerwani to the WIDF was abruptly halted due to these difficulties.

Consistent with its politics, the WIDF council viewed this repression as part of a larger global pattern. In their appeal they explained:

The wave of terror unleashed by the Indonesian military reinforces the tensions in Southeast Asia and serves the aggressionist policy of American imperialism in this part of the world.⁵⁸

Like the AAPSO, the WIDF thus connected this repression to broader global patterns. Yet by using more of a rights-based language than the Indonesian branch of the AAPSO, they focused on the on-going detention without due process of Gerwani women as a violation of the basic human right to a fair trial.⁵⁹

As a follow-up to this in 1968, the WIDF reported it had sent a telegram to General Suharto in protest against the repression. By June 1969, they had yet to receive any news on the fate of imprisoned Gerwani members.⁶⁰ It seemed that the WIDF was still struggling to get information on developments following the arrest or decision to go underground of many of the most prominent Indonesian women with whom they had links. Sudjinah and Sulami who possibly had the strongest ties with the WIDF, for example, went underground from October 1965 until early 1967, and during that time

⁵⁷ For two first-hand accounts of their lives on the run before arrest see: Sudjinah, *Terempas Gelombang Pasang: Riwayat Wartawati dalam Penjara Orde Baru* (Slammed by a Tidal Wave: The Story of Female Correspondents in the Prisons of the New Order), Pustaka Utan Kayu, 2003; Sulami, *Perempuan – Kebenaran – Penjara: Kisah Nyata Wanita Dipenjara 20 Tahun Karena Makar dan Subversi* (Woman-Truth-Jail: The True Story of a Woman who was Imprisoned for 20 Years on Account of being Accused of Treason and Subversion), Jakarta: Cipta Karya, 1999.

⁵⁸ “Appeal for Solidarity with Gerwani and the Women of Indonesia”.

⁵⁹ “Appeal for Solidarity with Gerwani and the Women of Indonesia”.

⁶⁰ Madame Cecile Hugel, WIDF Secretary, “Report on the Activities of the WIDF”, Sixth WIDF Congress Helsinki, June 18, 1969, p. 8. Available in Women and Social Movements International, Database. This report noted that the WIDF included a copy of the telegram sent to President Suharto in the 18th issue of *News in Brief* in 1968. Telegram not yet cited.

they managed to print and circulate a bulletin in support of President Sukarno condemning the violence.⁶¹

Some of the closest connections that Indonesian women formed with other women in the WIDF seemed to have been with the Dutch member branch of the WIDF, the NVB (*Nederlands Vrouwenbeweging*, Dutch Women's Movement). They had formed these close friendships due to reciprocal invitations to national congresses and the NVB's repeated support for Indonesian women in the context of decolonisation efforts. The NVB supported Indonesian women, for example, during the independence struggle and again during the early 1960s to oppose Dutch troops being sent to Indonesia to reclaim Western New Guinea.⁶² The first WIDF appeal for Gerwani quoted above is a document I discovered in the NVB archives. At the top of this document, which is written in German, is a Dutch hand-written note suggesting this appeal was in fact a reply to the NVB. This raises the possibility that the NVB first raised the alarm about Gerwani to the WIDF.

The NVB continued to oppose the Indonesian repression. In 1968, the NVB collected signatures for a petition entitled "Stop the Killings in Indonesia, Freedom for all Democrats!"⁶³ In January 1968, a branch of the NVB delivered a letter of protest to the Indonesian Embassy in the Netherlands over the detention of the Dutch WIDF member Trees Sunito-Heyligers who was married to an Indonesian.⁶⁴ Trees Sunito-Heyligers had taken on the extraordinarily brave task of representing the PKI leader Njono as his defence lawyer in the 1966 military tribunals. For her efforts she was arrested in 1968.

The colonial connection and the associated flow of information and people between the two countries might have made it easier to get information about what was happening in Indonesia. It is also possible that because of the alignment of Dutch communists with

⁶¹ Sudjinah, *Sudjinah Terempas Gelombang Pasang*, 14–17.

⁶² See McGregor, "The Cold War Indonesian Women and the Global Anti-Imperialist Movement 1946–1965", 40–41.

⁶³ "Protesteert, Protesteert Stope de Moord in Indonesie! Vrijheid voor Alle Demokraten!!" (Protest, Protest, Stop the Murders in Indonesia! Freedom for all Democrats!!), Box 148 Folder 410, NVB Archives, IISH.

⁶⁴ *For the release of Mrs. Sunito-Heyligers* Protest at the embassy, 16 January 1968, Den Haag (The Hague) NVB Archives, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

the CCP, that they had better relations with Indonesian communists than other countries and were thus more willing to defend the PKI once it was under attack.⁶⁵ Throughout the 1970s, Dutch women in the NVB continued their activism. They held a fundraising drive amongst NVB members to cover the expenses for one Gerwani member to come to the Netherlands to recover after 12 years of imprisonment.⁶⁶

The NVB also used the colonial connection between the two countries to draw attention to the violence in Indonesia in the protest organised on March 8, 1978 at the Van Heutsz Monument in Amsterdam.⁶⁷ Johannes van Heutsz was a military officer who served as a governor-general of the Netherlands East Indies. He became famous for ending the Aceh war by means of violent massacres.⁶⁸ The monument in south Amsterdam became the site of many radical protests in the Netherlands from the mid-1960s onwards.⁶⁹ The Dutch women who gathered at the monument in 1978 spread a white cover with the name Gerwani printed on it over the edifice. They symbolically renamed it as the “Gerwani monument” to, in their words, make it a “symbol of liberation” due to previous work of Gerwani on issues such as women’s rights and economic rights.⁷⁰

Accompanying documentation of the protest in the archives includes a flyer that was presumably distributed at the protest, entitled “Freedom for Indonesian Political

⁶⁵ Schaefer notes, for example, that the PKI was so exclusive by 1965 that it only invited to its 45th anniversary celebrations communist parties who toed the Chinese line in Europe this included Albania, Romania and Holland. Bernd Schaefer, “The Two Germanys and Indonesia 1965/66”, in *1965 Indonesia and the World*, ed. Schaefer and Wardaya, 101.

⁶⁶ The woman is not named in the NVB archives of the International Institute of Social History.

⁶⁷ “8 Maart, Internationale Vrouwendag Dag van Internationale Solidariteit” (8 March, International Women’s Day, Day of Solidarity), Box 148 Folder 410, NVB Archives, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam.

⁶⁸ Petra Groen, “Colonial Warfare and Military Ethics in the Netherlands East Indies, 1816-1941”, in *Colonial Counterinsurgency and Mass Violence: The Dutch Empire in Indonesia*, ed. Bart Luttikhuis and A. Dirk Moses (London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis, 2014), 34–38.

⁶⁹ These protests were organized by the Dutch anarchist anti-war, anti-military, anti-capitalist and anti-monarchy political group Provo which was founded in 1965. They frequently staged events in the city of Amsterdam, including smearing the Van Heutz monument, seen as a symbol of militarism and possibly also colonialism, with white paint and slogans. Richard Kempton, *Provo: Amsterdam’s Anarchist Revolt* (New York: Autonomedia, 2007), 31–39, 51, 82.

⁷⁰ See Wieringa, *Sexual Politics in Indonesia*, 232–275. On the WIDF’s recognition of Gerwani’s contributions to women’s rights see McGregor, “The Struggle for Women’s Rights: 1946-1965”.

Prisoners: Not a Cent for the Suharto Clique”.⁷¹ The text on this flyer argued that this colonial monument did not belong in the capital city of the Netherlands and explained that by staging this action, the NVB wanted to demonstrate their solidarity with “the tens of thousands of Indonesian men and women who are incarcerated in the crowded prisons and concentration camps.”⁷² The NVB noted the many achievements of Gerwani in Indonesia and the respect with which these Indonesian women were regarded internationally. They pointed to the continuing detention of particular women who had had significant contact with the WIDF before the 1965 repression: Umi Sardjono, Mudigdo, Sulami and Maasje Siwi.⁷³ They noted the harsh sentences received by Sulami, Suharti, Sudjinah and Sri Ambar in their 1975 trial and the continuing imprisonment of other leaders without due process.⁷⁴ NVB members chose to protest on International Women’s Day for symbolic purposes, but also because of the re-appointment of Suharto as President following the 1977 party elections. They were also protesting the continuing payment of Dutch aid to the Suharto government and therefore Dutch complicity with the regime. The NVB representatives demonstrated together with other women’s organizations at 7pm on the same day at the Amstelveld, a square in the centre of Amsterdam.

Activists in the NVB focused on protesting during the visits of President Suharto to draw attention to the on-going detentions in Indonesia. They drew on the colonial, economic and political ties between the two countries to highlight continuing repression. One noticeable shift from the initial protests of the WIDF and the NVB, perhaps as more information became available, was increasing attention to individual prisoners in continuing detention in Indonesia. This may have followed on from

⁷¹ “Vrijheid Voorde Indonesische Politieke Gevangenen Geen Cent Voor de Suharto-Kilek” (Freedom for Indonesian Political Prisoners, Not a Cent for the Suharto Clique), Box 148 Folder 410, NVB Archives, International Institute Social History, Amsterdam.

⁷² “Vrijheid Voorde Indonesische Politieke Gevangenen Geen Cent Voor de Suharto-Kilek”,

⁷³ Umi Sardjono served as Chair of Gerwani, Mudigdo served as Second Vice-Chair, Sulami was Vice-Secretary General of Gerwani from 1957 to 1965, and Maasje Siwi served as General Secretary and as a Gerwani representative on the WIDF Council.

⁷⁴ Sri Ambar was head of the women’s bureau of SOBSI (Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia Central All Indonesian Workers Union) and Suharti represented the BTI (*Barisan Tani Indonesia*, Indonesian Peasants Front). “Women on Trial,” *Tapol Bulletin* 9 (1975): 1, 3.

Amnesty International's strategy of individualising prisoners so that Cold War politics was de-accentuated alongside the rights of individuals.⁷⁵

Conclusions

The two cases of protests that I have outlined here prove that the world was not completely silent about the 1965 Indonesian repression. There was more resistance than scholars have generally recognised, although on the whole the resistance was small in scale. The nature of these protests and associated constraints also help explain some of the forces that worked to mute the effects of these protests.

The protests mounted by activists from the AAPSO and the WIDF placed the Indonesian repression in a larger global context of military fascist repressions. They stemmed from shared political views such as opposition to imperialism in economic and military form that forged together quite diverse constituencies or “communities of resistance” across Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. The reasons these protests have remained obscure in histories of the repression is that finding these historical sources requires a different historical lens focused not on national, but on transnational anti-imperial activism which to date has only been documented by a very specific archive, that of the International Institute for Social History. In other archives, such as the Indonesian National Archives, there are no traces of such activism.

The sources that document the protests remind us of the strong tenor of anti-imperial activism of the 1960s and 1970s, a period during which decolonisation was still underway and the world order was still being contested. Indonesian political exiles representing the Indonesian branch of AAPSO publicly condemned the repression at the Tri-continental Conference in Cuba in 1966, describing it as anti-democratic and a violation of civil liberties. In their publications aimed at friends across the Afro-Asian and Latin American worlds, they highlighted how that this attack had targeted both anti-imperialists and revolutionaries. They documented the appalling conditions in gaols and the practice of killing prisoners by firing squads.

⁷⁵ See Ann Marie Clark, *Diplomacy of Conscience: Amnesty International and Changing Human Rights Norms* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 4–14.

The decision of the Indonesian branch of the AAPSO to relocate to the PRC after 1965 strongly shaped, and to some extent constrained, broader support for opposing the repression due to the pro-Soviet politics of some groups within the AAPSO. The CCP's influence meant that the Indonesian branch of AAPSO had to frame the repression through the lens of the CCP as well as the more general principles of AAPSO. They emphasized particular aspects of the repression including the targeting of ethnic Chinese and what the CCP very optimistically read as the PKI's turn towards armed struggle, despite the very weak nature of this resistance. These constraints meant that even within AAPSO Indonesian representatives could not rally full support from AAPSO members who were unwilling to be seen as siding with the CCP over the Soviet Union.

The longer connections between Indonesian women and the WIDF resulted in non-Indonesian members taking action to protest the Indonesian violence. Dutch WIDF members in particular felt solidarity with Indonesian women based on shared past campaigns against continuing Dutch influence in Indonesia following formal decolonisation. Because it was not under the control of the CCP or the Soviet Union, the WIDF seemed less constrained by the Sino-Soviet split than the Indonesian branch of AAPSO. In 1966 the WIDF issued an appeal to all members, drawing attention to the brutal repression. The appeal pointed to the violation of "fundamental human rights" and connected the violence to broader regional patterns in American imperialism. In the 1970s, when some Indonesian women were still in gaol, the NVB highlighted the profiles of particular women who were still in detention. They used the colonial connections between the Netherlands and Indonesia and the symbolic space of the Van Heutsz monument to critique the repression of Indonesian women who had contributed to improved economic and political rights of women in their homeland.

The broader politics of the WIDF combined with their critiques of militarism, imperialism and human rights violations thus allowed Dutch women to represent the Indonesian repression through a broader lens than the Indonesian branch of AAPSO. Yet Dutch women's location in a largely anti-communist, pro capitalist population presumably made it difficult to rally support to halt the repression of "communists". Furthermore, for both AAPSO and the WIDF the Indonesian repression was continually

overshadowed by the more pressing issue of the Vietnam War, where foreign powers were perpetuating a devastating war.

Returning to Trouillot's reflections on historical silence, it is clear that new histories are only made with new interpretations of the "retrospective significance" of past actions.⁷⁶ The Indonesian repression was not considered a significant topic for research until the 1990s due in large part to the influence of the Cold War and the long reign of the military regime that oversaw the repression. Because the political left was so effectively erased in Indonesia, it is only in very recent years that historians and activists have begun to recover this broader history. To do this they have had to look at new sources and new archives to compile new narratives and histories today that start, in Trouillot's words, with new interpretations of the "retrospective significance" of past actions. This serves as a critical reminder that the choice of what is studied and retrieved from the past by historians inevitably results in more silences.

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⁷⁶ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 26.

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