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## Book Reviews

Pohlman, Annie (2015), *Women, Sexual Violence and the Indonesian Killings of 1965–66*

Abingdon and New York: Routledge (= ASAA Women in Asia Series; 36), ISBN: 9780415838870, 188 pages

In the introduction of the special edition of the *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (2013),<sup>1</sup> Pohlman, as guest editor, argued that despite the several “critical studies [on the 1965/1966] killings which [have] improved our knowledge about the who’s, the where’s and the why’s,” there are still “many factors, trends, actors, and motivations which remain unclear.” One of the complex realities that still requires comprehensive research is the gendered experience of violence and torture during the 1965/1966 massacres. *Women, Sexual Violence and the Indonesian Killings of 1965–66* is a groundbreaking attempt to help us fathom the complex circumstances of the violence of 1965 and its aftermath.

This book provides the first in-depth analysis of sexualised violence perpetrated against female victims during the 1965/1966 massacres. To fully understand the atrocities of these events and their legacy in Indonesia, this book argues that it is essential to focus on gender and sex because many Indonesians are unaware of how broad the range of sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls was following the 1965 coup. As Ibu Lia (a pseudonym) has said, “people must know what happened” during the 1965/1966 period (p. 2). Ibu Lia was one of the main informants who recounted her experience during the mass killings. She was one of the many who survived but suffered greatly from the violence of 1965–1966.

Pohlman’s analysis is based on extensive interviews with female survivors of the massacres and detention camps and their testimonies of the violence that followed the 1965 coup. She elaborates on these testimonies in terms of two main themes: “women’s experience of violence” and “the material forms of violence perpetrated against women victims,” the latter being specifically focused on sexualised violence (p. 3). She gives voice to the silenced narrative of female survivors during the 1965/1966 massacres. By doing so, she aims to provide an in-depth “analysis on the gendered and gendering effects of sexual violence against women and girls in a situation of genocidal violence” (p. 4). The

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1 See <<http://journals.sub.uni-hamburg.de/giga/jsaa/issue/view/102>> (30 March 2016).

data used in this book was mainly obtained through interviews with female survivors and some of their family members, many of whom are former political prisoners, in the regions of Java and Sumatra. In addition to these oral testimonies, the author also used transcripts of interviews with former political prisoners obtained from Indonesian non-governmental institutions concerned with the 1965 issue.

Following the first chapter, which summarises Pohlman's analysis and method and the book's contents, the book proceeds in two parts. Chapters 2 through 4 provide a backdrop and the five remaining chapters present the main analysis. Chapter 2 explores the testimonies of female survivors in which they recount their experiences being captured during the violence following the 1965 coup. Pohlman describes how and why they and their loved ones were captured, tortured, and killed. She identifies five types of victims of the violence: (1) the leaders and members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and its associated organisations; (2) relatives and friends of these members; (3) those who were taken hostage in place of fugitive relatives; (4) those who became scapegoats; and (5) cases of mistaken identity (p. 23).

Chapter 3 presents the stories of female victims in detention. It encompasses their experiences with interrogation and torture, depicting the techniques of persecution used during interrogations and the effects this torture had on female survivors. Torture, Pohlman argues, "destroyed victims through atrocious bodily pain and emotional torment and many of those who survived carry the scars and other reminders of this violence" (p. 61). In addition to physical abuse, a fundamental part of detention was a system of deprivation and degradation, in which people were treated inhumanly and without dignity.

Chapters 4 through 8 examine individual women's experiences of violence, with an emphasis on various forms of sexual violence. Chapters 4 and 5 give an outline of what sexual violence entails and an analysis of the testimonies and secondary accounts of various forms of sexual violence against women and girls. The sexual violence in the 1965/1966 period took many forms, such as rape, gang rape, mutilation and torture, enforced prostitution, sexual slavery, forced abortion, and sexual humiliation. Pohlman outlines four reasons why sexualised violence occurred: opportunism, false propaganda the military spread about the PKI's (Gerwani) own sexual excesses, to mark women who had been identified as PKI members, and as a deliberate strategy to destroy the left (p. 65–76). Chapter 6 presents the sexualised mutilation that was performed during the mass violence. This chapter elucidates not only the cruel torture that was perpetrated against men and women, but also how the mutilated

bodies and body parts were displayed to the public, emphasising the deeply gendered features.

Chapter 7 discusses humiliation and the practice of strip-searching women and girls. Strip-searching was a common form of sexualised violence in which soldiers, policemen, or civilian militias carried out searches to find marks or tattoos of the communist symbol, the hammer and sickle (*palu dan arit*), usually around the genital region. Chapter 8 describes forms of sexual enslavement, forced marriage, and forced prostitution of women after the 1965 coup. In addition, many wives of men who were either detained or killed were taken (*diambil*) by other men and forced or coerced into second marriages, kept as “secret” or unofficial wives and sex slaves (p. 153, 164). There were different reasons why many women carried out these relationships. First, they often thought their husbands were dead. Second, they felt they had no choice, as they were left in economic difficulties and were socially stigmatised because of their association with the PKI.

Overall, this book is a valuable contribution to the historiography of 1965/1966 and Indonesian violence in general because it significantly contributes to the uncovering of sexual violence towards women and girls during the 1965/1966 massacres. In the post-Suharto era, there are numerous works that have attempted to interview and record the testimonies of victims of mass violence during 1965/1966. The presence of this book not only continues this existing effort but, importantly, it also contributes to a broader understanding of various forms of violence which were perpetrated primarily against women and girls during 1965/1966.

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