Chapter 17
Recognition, Apology, and Restoration of Indonesians’ Past Maltreatments of People Labeled as Communists

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ABSTRACT

Using social psychological perspectives, this paper aims to (1) explore how communism was socially constructed in Indonesia and why communism attributes labeled to a person can lead to negative effects, such as social exclusions. (2) After that, it presents findings of our study explaining that reminding people that human is naturally good and kind can reduce the negative effects of the communism stigma. (3) This chapter also discusses issues of past maltreatments to people labeled as communists in Indonesia, and why asking the government to apologize on behalf of Indonesians has not succeeded so far – the government refuses to apologize. To this matter, it is argued that as a start, what can be done is apologizing to the victims of violence and injustice because of the communist party of Indonesia (PKI) stigma, and the offsprings who don’t know the political turbulence. From here, it may be possible that the truth can slowly be revealed.

INTRODUCTION

In a documentary titled “40 Years of Silence: An Indonesian Tragedy” (Lemelson, 2009), one part tells the story of a child (let’s say his name is Arman) who is labeled an offspring of a PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia or Communist Party of Indonesia) member. This label had caused Arman to be ostracized, shunned and persecuted by his friends. Arman moved away from his hometown and tried to forget all the negative things he had experienced. On the screening of this documentary in Atma Jaya University DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-3032-9.ch017
in 2013, Arman was one of the guests. For him, childhood was the most traumatic period, and until now he was still trying to avoid his hometown and things related to it.

This is only one of the stories described in “40 Years of Silence.” The cinema is but one example of media portrayals having an impact in the digital age. The negative effects of the PKI label are not only experienced by Arman alone; there are many people in Indonesia who suffer because of this stigma. However, Arman’s story becomes interesting because, in many countries, stigmatization of children remains far from the core issues of a political ideology of a group. Usually, a child is ostracized on the basis of race, religion, or ethnicity, but not because of political ideology. Often, discourse about political ideology is in the domain of adults who are able to digest the complexities of state and political ideas.

This chapter analyzes the construction of the PKI stigma and how to reduce it; a study that seems rather untouched, especially by social psychology scholars. This chapter also discusses why the issues of apology (which is also related to reconciliation) and justice for the victims of the events of 1965-1966 (see below) always failed. A social psychological perspective is used in examining these issues.

In short, at the end of September 1965, there occurred in Jakarta, Indonesia, the kidnapping and murder of several high-ranking military officers. Of the victims, six army generals were killed and one general managed to escape with a bullet wound in his leg. The PKI was accused of being the mastermind of the kidnappings, which was then declared as a coup attempt (Čavoški, 2013). After the incidents, people who were considered as having an affiliation to the PKI were arrested and jailed by the Indonesian government led by the military without any legal process, triggering a mass movement to “eradicate” the PKI. As a consequence of this movement, five hundred thousand to one million (Pour, 2013) and (Wardaya, 2013) people lost their lives. When released, PKI prisoners and their families had their identity cards specially marked, which resulted in social exclusions and difficulties in finding jobs.

It should be noted that the incident of September 1965, and the consequent purging of people who were considered to be affiliated with the PKI (as members, supporters, friends or family), can be seen from many points of view. A socio-historical approach would highlight the history of the PKI movement in Indonesia and the emergence of conflicts between the PKI and other groups (e.g., religious groups and political parties). Political scientists would consider the political issues that occurred at that time and how the PKI’s political interests or goals were understood by other groups, which sides formed alliances with the PKI, and which groups had different interests from them. These two approaches have their own strengths, but a social psychology perspective offers a different frame. Instead of addressing questions about who was the mastermind behind the 1965 incident, or who cooperated with the PKI, such an approach lends to some understanding as to how people can be involved in or support acts of violence or exclusion, and how people might come to believe that apology is not necessary. In doing so, a social psychology perspective helps to explain the psychological aspects and the social context as to why the PKI is viewed negatively, and why killing and ostracizing people who were considered to be affiliated with the PKI became acts that were accepted. Before discussing the issue of PKI stigma and the calls for apology, first the authors will provide a deeper explanation about the field of social psychology and how it can help to solve social problems.