

The Work of Memory:
Justice for the Indonesian Genocide of 1965-1966

By

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the College of
Literature, Science, & Art
at the University of Michigan in partial fulfillment
for the requirements for the degree
of Bachelor of Arts
(International Studies with Honors)
2019

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Abstract

Title of Thesis: The Work of Memory: Justice for the Indonesian Genocide of 1965-1966

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In a span of less than 10 months between 1965 and 1966 in Indonesia, 500,000 to 3 million people were murdered in an attempted purge of communists by the military. The military dictatorship that followed, and the continued power that perpetrators of the genocide hold today, produced a silence around the events of 1965. Until recently, scholars only referred to the genocide as “mass killings.” After the release of a documentary film by Joshua Oppenheimer, *The Act of Killing*, more people began questioning this history. This thesis investigates the question, what lessons should the field of transitional justice learn from Oppenheimer’s films and the Indonesian genocide case? My argument is threefold: first, I argue that the Indonesian case shows that memory can be a tool of repression. Second, because of memory’s role in repression, addressing memory politics after genocide is critical. Third, I assert that memory work like Oppenheimer’s documentaries should be part of transitional justice because of its ability to dismantle hegemony with an awareness of deep-rooted societal nuances.

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Dedication

For the victims

“i am sorry this world
could not keep you safe
may your journey home
be a soft and peaceful one”

Rupi Kaur

Acknowledgments

Writing this thesis has meant more to me than I could have known when I began. This thesis is the fulfillment of a dream in iterations - my dream at the end of high school to come to the University of Michigan and pursue a degree in international studies, my dream during my sophomore year to immerse myself fully in the world of human rights, and my dream one year ago to create something that was truly my own. I could not have done this without the countless people who encouraged, supported, and inspired me, and I would like to extend my utmost gratitude to them.

First, I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Hadji Bakara, who told me to watch *The Act of Killing*. You set me on a journey that has changed the course of my work and my life. I am grateful for your intellect and empathy. I would also like to thank Dr. Anthony Marcum, who has always gone the extra mile for his students. You created an environment for me and my peers to grow and thrive, and believed in me when I doubted myself. I have always been my best self in your classroom.

I must express my gratitude for Professor David Leupold, who in one short semester immersed me in the fascinating world of memory studies. You spoke with me as an intellectual equal, and showed me the power of this work.

I would also like to thank David Caron, Tomasz Cebulski, Krishna Han, Alina Utrata, Kieran McEvoy, and many others who were kind enough to give me their time along this journey. My favorite part about writing was threading our conversations throughout this thesis.

I also need to thank my friends who have been my support system as I learned about myself through this process. I would like to give special shoutouts to Tala Taleb and Laurie Perrin, who in my most difficult moments remind me that I matter, and that what I put out into this world matters. Thank you to Zainab Bhindarwala, Ayah Issa, Ben Freiband, Max Albert, and of course, Drew Ramacher for keeping me sane. I needed those study dates, coffee runs, and late-night rants more than you know.

I have to go back to where it all started and thank Mr. James Grant at Slauson Middle School. Perhaps neither of us knew it then, but your social studies class would forever change my life. It was in your classroom that I learned that history matters. It was there I discovered the world.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, from the bottom of my heart. You instilled in me the drive and will to succeed, and because of you, I believe that I can do anything. More importantly though, you instilled in me great love, and for that I am forever grateful. I love you.

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I. Introduction

“At 3 AM someone knocked on our door. They called my dad. Mom said, ‘It’s dangerous, don’t go out.’ But he went out. We heard him shout, ‘Help!’ Then, silence. They took him away. We couldn’t sleep until morning ... I was 11 or 12. I remember it well. And it’s impossible to forget.

We found his body under an oil drum ... His head and feet were covered by sacks but one foot poked out like this. That same morning nobody dared help us. We buried him like a goat next to the main road. Just me and my grandfather carrying the body - digging the grave, no one helped us. I was so small. Then, all the communist families were exiled. We were dumped in a shantytown at the edge of the jungle. That’s why, to be honest, I’ve never gone to school. I had to teach myself to read and write. Why should I hide this from you? I promise I’m not criticizing what we’re doing. It’s only input for the film. I promise I’m not criticizing you.”

Excerpt from The Act of Killing

For decades, most people who knew about the mass killings in Indonesia between 1965 and 1966 believed that they were a case of spontaneous violence by thugs and civilians. For many it was a closed chapter in Indonesia’s history, overshadowed by almost forty years of a military dictatorship. For others, however, it remained an open question. In recent years, researchers, advocates, and citizens have worked to uncover the truth of what happened in 1965. What they revealed was a highly organized genocide orchestrated by the Indonesian military and carried out by paramilitary groups and the police, with the help of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. The genocidaires intended to “purge” accused communists from the archipelago (Bevins 2017; International People’s Tribunal 2015; Melvin 2013; Melvin 2017; Oppenheimer 2012; Robinson 2018; Simpson 2008). These accused communists were murdered en masse, often horrifically tortured or raped before being killed (Kombas Ham 2012; International People’s Tribunal 2015). Determining how many people were killed during the 1965 genocide is difficult; estimates are anywhere between 500,000 and 3 million (Melvin 2017; Oppenheimer 2012; Simpson 2008).

In 2012, an American filmmaker released a documentary called *The Act of Killing*. The filmmaker, Joshua Oppenheimer, went to Indonesia to find out what happened in the 1960s (Oppenheimer 2012). He asked Indonesians he met about who had committed or conducted the mass murders, and learned that these murderers were living amongst everyday citizens, leading normal lives as part of society (Oppenheimer 2012). Oppenheimer sought out these men, gaining their trust and learning their stories (Oppenheimer 2012). What he did next would lead to the unprecedented nature of the documentary and the brutality it exposed: he asked them to create scenes about their killings “in whatever way they wished” (Oppenheimer 2012). The films examine what it means for society when the oppressors win.

Oppenheimer’s documentaries - *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* - are a painful exercise in memory, fifty years after the violence. They provide the chance to revisit this moment in history. This thesis investigates the question, what lessons should the field of transitional justice learn from Oppenheimer’s films and the Indonesian genocide case? I argue that revisiting the case of the Indonesian genocide shows how memory can be a tool of repression, and thus it teaches the field of transitional justice that addressing memory politics is critical. More broadly, the field should prioritize approaches that take into account the nuances of the case at hand. Oppenheimer’s films are an example of how memory work can help dismantle repressive structures by challenging state-controlled collective memory.

There is seemingly no better time than the present to study genocide and mass violence; while still grappling with the legacies of genocide in Cambodia, Rwanda, and Bosnia, the world is watching genocidal violence unfold in Syria, Myanmar, South Sudan, and many other places around the world. The current generation and the next will have to deal with the aftermath of

today's genocides. There are still many lessons to learn from previous genocide cases, and perhaps by revisiting the past we can find new paths forward.

This chapter will provide historical context on Indonesia that illuminates some of the root causes of the 1965 genocide. It then describes the research conducted over the past ten years to uncover the truth about what happened from 1965 to 1966. This chapter then further discusses the research question that drives this thesis, my proposed argument to answer the research question, and methodology, and concludes with a roadmap for the next four chapters of this thesis.

Indonesia in the Twentieth Century

Nusantara

The Indonesian genocide resulted from both complex local and global dynamics. Before Dutch colonization, the area that comprises modern-day Indonesia was part of what some historians call Nusantara (Soebadio & Sarvaas 1978). This Malayo-Polynesian term refers to the Malay archipelago, encompassing modern-day Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, East Timor (Timor-Leste), and the Philippines (Soebadio & Sarvaas 1978). This region was, and still is, made up of many ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups (Anderson 1998). Like much of Southeast Asia, Nusantara had many layers of influence over time; scholars of Southeast Asia describe India's early influence on the region as "Indianization" (Anderson 1998; Soedjatmoko 1960). Indianization of Nusantara from the second to the twelfth centuries brought religious and cultural influence (Anderson 1998). Traders brought the influence of Islam in the region dating back to the thirteenth century, and Islam became the dominant religion on the Indonesian archipelago by the sixteenth century (Anderson 1998; Soebadio & Sarvaas 1978).

Dutch Colonization

Dutch colonization of Indonesia shaped Indonesian society in ways that became critical to the onset of genocide in the 1960s. In the sixteenth century, European powers began their attempt to dominate the region and take control of its lucrative spice trade; the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and British each had a presence in the region (Anderson 1998, Ricklefs 1991). The Dutch eventually colonized Indonesia, naming it the Dutch East Indies (Ricklefs 1991). Indonesia officially came under Dutch rule in 1800 when the Dutch East India Company, the company that expanded the Netherland's economic presence in the region, was nationalized (Pentecost 2013; Vickers 2005). This period in Indonesia's history is one of exploitation of labor and resources by the Dutch, as well as creation of social hierarchies that placed the Dutch at the top, Chinese in the middle, and native Indonesians at the bottom (Anderson 1998; Vickers 2005).

Colonization laid the groundwork for what was to come in 1965 in three ways: the influence of colonialism on Indonesian politics, the Dutch's legacy of violence, and their constructed social hierarchy. Debates over Indonesia's national identity were the foundation of the country's independence struggle during World War II. Conflict over the country's political identity after colonization shaped the Sukarno era leading up to 1965 (Simpson 2008; Vickers 2005). The Dutch strategy for maintaining power and squashing rebellion in Indonesia included the use of native auxiliary forces against native uprisings (Ricklefs 1991; Simpson 2008). The Dutch would economically privilege native people who fought for them (Ricklefs 1991). This practice of deputizing local militarized groups would be a key characteristic of the independence movement and the genocide in 1965 (Simpson 2008). The Dutch enforced a social hierarchy that divided the population into "Europeans," "Natives," and "foreign Orientals" (Luttikhuis 2013).

These three groups were subject to different legal systems, economic opportunities, and schools. “Foreign Orientals” mostly comprised ethnic Chinese, who the Dutch privileged due to their strategic role in Dutch control of the region; Dutch colonization occurred during a time of expansion of Chinese influence into Southeast Asia, and the Dutch saw an opportunity to use the Chinese as trade intermediaries with native Indonesians (Liu 2014). An article written in 1930 in the journal *Pacific Affairs* writes that “ the Dutch found [the Chinese’s] presence necessary for the exploitation of the islands,” and that “certainly little would have been accomplished in Java by the East Indian Company without the aid of the Chinese” (Vandenbosch 1930). This positioning of the Chinese within the Dutch social hierarchy was a precursor for the later targeting of ethnic Chinese during the genocide and military dictatorship.

The Fight for Independence

The divide between “left” and “right” politics in Indonesia were at the center of the country’s independence movement, though ethnicity and religion did play a role (Simpson 2008). During the 1920s and 1930s, Indonesians debated over political visions of the nation and how different elements, such as Islam, Communism, and colonialism, should be prioritized (Simpson 2008). Sukarno rose to prominence as a leader of the nationalist movement during the 1930s, founding the Indonesian independence party Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI) (Vickers 2005). He attempted to bring pro-independence Indonesians together under one ideology in which nationalism, religion, and communism all played important roles, calling this idea “Nasakom”: *nasionalisme, agama, komunisme* (Soebadio & Sarvaas 1978). Sukarno’s nationalist vision opposed both imperialism and capitalism (Ricklefs 1991).

World War II and the Japanese Occupation of Indonesia

The Japanese occupation of Indonesia during World War II had a critical influence on the country's independence struggle and the later military takeover and genocide (Greenlees 2015; Han 1998). People's experiences of the occupation and treatment by the Japanese differed greatly depending on their social position during Dutch rule, geographic location, and class (Baird 2016; Pentecost 2013). When the Japanese invaded in 1942, many Indonesians welcomed them as liberators from Dutch rule (Han 1998). The Japanese collaborated with Indonesian nationalists to legitimize their power, forming alliances with leaders like Sukarno (Baird 2016; Simpson 2008). The Japanese taught Indonesian revolutionaries their brutal methods of torture and murder; military and paramilitary groups would later use these methods during the genocide (Robinson 2018; Simpson 2008). The Japanese also brought many young people into militarized youth groups, many of whom later became military leaders who gained power during the Suharto dictatorship (Robinson 2018). The Japanese occupation, however, was still brutal; Indonesians, especially those who lived in strategic areas for the Japanese, were subjected to torture, sexual violence, arbitrary imprisonment, murder, and enslavement (Han 1998). When the Japanese began to lose the war, they promised independence to Indonesians, though never set an official date (Robinson 2018). In 1945, Sukarno and his party, the secular nationalist Republicans, declared independence (Simpson 2008). What followed, however, was a four-year independence struggle against the Dutch who attempted to reclaim their former colony and Allied forces who opposed the independent government as a product of Japanese fascism (Vickers 2005).

The role of the United States and the United Kingdom during this time set the stage for their later involvement in the genocide (Simpson 2008). The United States loaned Dutch forces the capital to return to their former colony, considering the independent government to be a

communist threat (Robinson 2018). Only after the Republican government crushed a leftist uprising in the country did the United States accept Indonesian independence and put pressure on the Dutch to accept Indonesian independence as well (Simpson 2008). After these four years, now considered the Indonesian National Revolution, Indonesia achieved formal independence in 1949 (Vickers 2005). Sukarno became the country's first president (Ricklefs 1991).

The Sukarno Years

Sukarno, who led the independence movement, is considered by many Indonesians as the Father of the Nation (Hering 2001). On paper, the newly independent country was a parliamentary democracy (Robinson 2018). In reality, the first ten years of Indonesian independence were full of strife, riddled by conflict over the political vision for the country and uprisings by rebel groups (Mietzner 2016; Vickers 2005). In 1959, Sukarno introduced what he called "Guided Democracy," claiming that parliamentary democracy would not work for the country (Hering 2001). This policy was, in practice, authoritarian (Simpson 2008). An attempted coup by members of the Indonesian Armed National Forces in what Indonesians refer to as the 30 September Movement ultimately ended the period of Guided Democracy. There is still great debate within the literature over the extent of the involvement of the PKI in the coup and Suharto's connection to the coup (Melvin 2017; Roosa 2016; Simpson 2008).

Suharto, who would later orchestrate the Indonesian genocide and head the military dictatorship that followed it, became a commander and eventually a general in the Indonesian National Army during the Sukarno years (Robinson 2018; Simpson 2008). Suharto was inducted into the military during Dutch rule and rose to military prominence during the Japanese occupation and Indonesian National Revolution (Simpson 2008; Vickers 2005). Suharto quickly

blamed the coup and 30 September Movement on the communists, calling for a mass purge of communists in the country (Melvin 2017; Roosa 2006). This mass purge of supposed communists became the Indonesian genocide (Melvin 2017; Robinson 2018; Roosa 2016; Simpson 2008).

The Indonesian Genocide

Many details of the Indonesian genocide remain obscured; what research on the genocide thus far has made clear, however, is that the genocide was not the spontaneous outbreak of thug violence that the military dictatorship asserted it was for decades. Instead, the violence was a systematized campaign orchestrated by the Indonesian military with the assistance of the United States and other Western governments (Bevins 2017; Komnas HAM 2012; Melvin 2013, 2017; Melvin et al. 2018; Robinson 2018; Roosa 2006; Simpson 2018).

In the months following the 30 September Movement, the army mobilized paramilitary groups and local gangs in mass killings of accused communists. In a matter of months, perpetrators of the violence murdered hundreds of thousands of people (Komnas HAM 2012; Melvin 2017; Oppenheimer et al. 2012). Most of the people killed were perceived or actual members of PKI and its affiliated organizations (Melvin 2017; Simpson 2008). Lists of those to be killed came from anti-communist organizations in the country as well as from Western intelligence agencies such as the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (Roosa 2006; Simpson 2008). Ethnic Chinese were also targets of suspicion, seen as less patriotic due to their social position as a result of their status during Dutch colonization (Melvin 2013). Evidence discovered in recent years, as will be further discussed in the literature review, demonstrates that this was a state policy planned and trained for well in advance with the assistance of Western governments

(Melvin 2017; Simpson 2008; Wilkins 2017). These mass killings were highly organized, utilizing military strategy taught by the United States (Simpson 2008; Bevins 2017). Perpetrators tortured and killed victims in the most horrific and disturbing ways, as evidenced by the men Oppenheimer follows in *The Act of Killing* (Oppenheimer et al. 2012, 2014). Many of their practices were taken directly from the Japanese during their occupation of Indonesia (Simpson 2008). Perpetrators' atrocities included mass shootings, live dismemberment, strangling, beheading, castration, and stabbing (Oppenheimer et al. 2012, 2014; Robinson 2018). Without industrialized methods of violence, perpetrators murdered an estimated five hundred thousand to three million people in less than a year (Robinson 2018).

Suharto and the “New Order”

The Indonesian genocide is unique in that its perpetrators “won” and still retain political power today. The 1965 genocide effectively ended Sukarno’s rule, with General Suharto taking over during the genocide (Melvin 2017; Simpson 2008). Suharto officially took power in 1968 (Vickers 2005). Suharto’s 31-year reign, termed the “New Order,” was one of continued violent repression of supposed communists (Melvin et al. 2018). The New Order included silencing of “sympathizers” of victims of the genocide (Melvin et al. 2018). The New Order constructed and enforced an official narrative of the genocide as spontaneous civilian violence against cruel communists who were a threat to the nation (Melvin 2017; Simpson 2008). Suharto’s regime was committed to economic development and political order through autocratic and capitalist means (Berger 2008; Farid 2005). Many Western governments, including the United States, supported the Suharto government (Farid 2005). Repression during the Suharto regime largely contributed to the lack of justice for the Indonesian genocide (Farid 2005; Melvin et al. 2018).

Uncovering the Truth

A handful of academics and practitioners have researched the events of 1965 to 1966 in Indonesia. The purpose of most of the research on this period has been to uncover what happened; the past ten to fifteen years have been somewhat of a fact-finding mission (Melvin 2013, 2017; Melvin et al. 2018; Roosa 2006; Simpson 2008, 2018). Literature thus far on the Indonesian genocide has centered - and in fact, debated - on three main questions: What happened? Who is responsible? And crucially, was this genocide? Less work has been done to analyze the *implications* of this case as a genocide; a gap exists in drawing lessons from the Indonesian genocide for the field of transitional justice. With this thesis, my goal is to build on recently established empirical knowledge about the Indonesian genocide to evaluate what the case can teach us that the field of transitional justice has been missing.

What Happened?

A culture of silencing around the events in 1965 has pervaded Indonesian society (Melvin et al. 2018). This silencing, in combination with the Suharto government's intentional obscuring of evidence, has made primary sources and physical evidence scarce (Melvin 2017; Oppenheimer et al. 2014). Many survivors are reluctant to speak out, even anonymously, because they still face threats to their safety today if they do so (Melvin 2013; Melvin et al. 2018; Oppenheimer et al. 2014). Further, people who were adults during the genocide are in their old age now, and many have since passed away. Due to these factors, understanding the details of the Indonesian genocide has proved difficult. Academics such as Jess Melvin documented the testimonies of survivors, perpetrators, eyewitnesses, and relatives of victims (Melvin 2013, 2017;

Melvin et al. 2018). Many survivors and relatives of victims have written on the genocide as well, such as Ken Setiawan, whose father was imprisoned without trial (Putu Oka Sukanta 2011; Putu Oka Sukanta 2016; Setiawan 2018). Through these testimonies and analyses of the genocide and its aftermath, the field is learning more details of the atrocities as well as their long-lasting consequences.

Who is Responsible?

Throughout the Suharto regime, the government upheld a narrative of the 1965 events that described the violence as spontaneous uprisings by citizens (Melvin 2013; Roosa 2006). When not erased from history books altogether, official accounts describe the events as an uprising by the people against communism, which the military ultimately stopped (Melvin 2017; Oppenheimer et al. 2012). Many Indonesians themselves believed this narrative, and for decades after the genocide, many scholars of the mass killings believed no evidence existed that implicated the military in the killings (Melvin 2013, 2017; Notosusanto 1967). Whether the killings were carried out with any state coordination or organization was a main point of debate (Melvin 2013, 2017; Roosa 2006). Leo Kuper asserted the government's involvement as early as 1981, including the Indonesian case in his study of genocide in the twentieth century (Kuper 1981). In 2010, Melvin ventured into the archives of the former Indonesian Intelligence Agency and asked for their records (Melvin 2017). Analyzing these previously secret documents, Melvin found overwhelming evidence of the military's premeditated planning of the mass killings: the military had dubbed this campaign of violence the "Annihilation Operation," a deliberate state policy formulated well in advance of the 30 September Movement (Melvin 2017). The military conducted militia and paramilitary training as early as April 1965, gradually putting in place

structures for military rule (Melvin 2017; Simpson 2018). The September 30 Movement was merely the trigger that the military needed to activate their “Annihilation Operation” (Melvin 2017; Simpson 2018). Melvin refers to these incriminating documents as the Indonesian genocide files (Melvin 2017).

Melvin’s research, along with the research of Bradley Simpson and John Roosa, also uncovered the involvement of international actors in the genocide (Melvin 2017; Roosa 2006; Simpson 2008). Documents declassified less than two years ago by the National Security Archive demonstrate clearly that the United States did not “stand by” as the violence went on, as officials and news media have often reported. Instead, the United States - particularly the CIA - was instrumental in the genocide, helping the Indonesian military strategize and providing the military with lists of supposed communists (Beech 2017; Simpson 2018). Documented evidence shows, however, that US officials viewed the violent crushing of communists in Indonesia as a Cold War victory, a country in Asia that was successfully “flipped” (Melvin 2017; Simpson 2008, 2018; Wilkins 2017). US government officials will vehemently deny any involvement in the September 30 Movement or the genocide (Simpson 2008, 2018). The US supported Suharto’s military dictatorship for the 31 years it remained in power after the genocide (Simpson 2008). Great Britain and MI6 have been similarly implicated (Simpson 2008).

Was this Genocide?

A central debate in the literature on the Indonesian genocide since its occurrence is whether the killings do indeed constitute genocide. Scholars have derived their arguments from two main “variables”: existing evidence and the definition of “genocide” they employ (Farid 2005; Melvin 2013, 2017; Vickers 2005). As much of the evidence for the Indonesian genocide

has emerged in the past ten and even five years, scholars in the 1970s to early 2000s mainly referred to the genocide as “mass killings” or “massacres” (Melvin 2013). With limited evidence of the government’s involvement in the genocide and silenced voices of survivors and their families, determining the extent of the killings was difficult (Oppenheimer 2012, 2014; Melvin 2013, 2017; Melvin et al. 2018, Roosa 2006). Opposition by some scholars to calling the killings a genocide were mainly based on the question of intent; by the United Nations’ definition, genocide must be any “acts with the intent to destroy” (United Nations 2006). As more evidence has emerged that demonstrates organization and premeditation by the Indonesian army, an increasing number of scholars and practitioners consider the killings to be genocide.

Academics have also debated whether the killings can be considered genocide since the victims were targeted for their alleged participation in a political party or ideology: communism (Melvin 2013; Roosa 2006; Simpson 2008; Vickers 2005). The United Nations’ definition articulates four categories of targets of genocide: “a national, ethnical, racial or religious group” (United Nations 2006). While many victims were indigenous Indonesians and ethnic Chinese, some scholars have argued that they were not targeted for their ethnic identity but rather for their accused affiliation with communism, which does not fall under any of these definitional classes. Jess Melvin and others, however, argue that the mass killings constitute genocide (Melvin 2013; Melvin et al. 2018; Robinson 2018; Roosa 2006; Simpson 2008). These scholars present several arguments for the Indonesian case being classified as genocide. The first draws on the precedent set by the Khmer Rouge tribunals that establish an event can constitute genocide if a case or cases of genocide occur during the event as a whole (Melvin 2018). In the Indonesian case, evidence of targeting ethnic Chinese in particular areas of Indonesia constitute genocide (Melvin 2013). The second calls into question the definition of genocide itself. Some scholars are critical

of the fact that despite the Indonesian genocide's comparability to canonical genocide cases such as Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, it does not fall under the legal definition of genocide established after World War II (Melvin 2013, 2017; Roosa 2006; Simpson 2008). Proponents call on a moral and sociological understanding of the function of the term "genocide" to advocate for the Indonesian genocide being considered as such (Melvin 2013, 2017; Melvin et al. 2018, Robinson 2018; Roosa 2006; Simpson 2008).

In my thesis, I choose to refer to the event as the "Indonesian genocide." I align my work with that of scholars who, with overwhelming evidence of the orchestration and atrocity of the killings, believe the events of 1965 to 1966 should be regarded with the same weight ascribed to other genocides. The debate over how events come to qualify as genocides will be discussed further in the literature review in Chapter 2. I assert that the relegation of the Indonesian case to the periphery of genocide studies only furthers its invisibility to the rest of the world and the perpetuation of injustice. Understanding the 1965 events as genocide is also critical to analyzing the Indonesian case in the context of transitional justice.

Research Question and Methodology

Research Question

In this thesis, I attempt to answer the question: What lessons should the field of transitional justice learn from Oppenheimer's films and the Indonesian genocide case? I use a multidisciplinary approach that weaves together literature in the fields of transitional justice and memory studies, empirical data on the Indonesian genocide, and Oppenheimer's inventive documentary films, recognizing each as uniquely informative evidence. I take a historical and sociological approach to existing literature and media on the Indonesian genocide and its

aftermath, and do an in-depth analysis of both of Oppenheimer's documentaries through the lens of memory studies.

Through my research, I conclude first that Oppenheimer's films demonstrate that control of memory is a key tool of repression. Secondly, I argue that addressing memory politics after genocide is critical. This thesis establishes that justice does not solely exist in a judicial realm, but as well in the collective memory of a people and place. Memory is an active, dynamic, and political process steeped in existing relationships of power. Lastly, I assert that memory work should be part of transitional justice after genocide because it can dismantle hegemony with a greater awareness of societal nuances. Oppenheimer's films deconstruct hegemony by challenging state-enforced collective memory.

Methodology

In this thesis, I utilize two main forms of evidence: empirical research on the Indonesian genocide, and Joshua Oppenheimer's documentary films *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence*. Empirical research on the 1965 to 1966 killings provides factual historical evidence that serves as a foundation to investigate narrative and collective memory of the genocide. This research comes from peer-reviewed articles and publications by academics like Jess Melvin and Bradley Simpson who have spent years studying Indonesia. Utilizing their research provides information that I have limited access to, such as archives and interviews with Indonesian citizens and political officials. For example, Jess Melvin is the only scholar of the Indonesian genocide who went into the Indonesian military archives, a potentially dangerous act. Her publications are the only works directly using this evidence. Empirical research on the genocide does, however, have limitations. As the Indonesian military and state suppressed information

about the genocide for decades and continues to do so today, accessing evidence or even testimony of survivors or victims' families is a challenge. This limitation is where Joshua Oppenheimer's films provide an opportunity.

The Act of Killing and *The Look of Silence* are a window into narrative and collective memory in Indonesia. Joshua Oppenheimer spent years building relationships with perpetrators and survivors, and it is only because of this that he has access to their private lives and thoughts. Oppenheimer enters his subjects' homes, attends rallies of former perpetrators who maintain political power, and follows perpetrators and survivors to the places where mass killings took place. The films also acknowledge the influence of Oppenheimer's presence on the situation, an anthropological approach that empirical research does not always take into account. The films are, however, subject to Oppenheimer's lens and his choices. Documentary film is allowed - or arguably, recognizes - more subjectivity than empirical research, and thus acknowledging the filmmaker's intentions and positioning is part of using these films as evidence.

I argue additionally that film is a legitimate form of evidence because even beyond mere documentation, film can engage in a unique way with the informal social and cultural aspects of post-genocide societies. Film has been critical to transitional justice, and specifically to post-genocide justice, since the Holocaust. The Nuremberg trials were the first to submit film as evidence; the Americans created a documentary that compiled their tape from liberating the camps, and thus the film was not only a way of documenting the horrors of the Holocaust but also a way of representing and framing the horrors for others (Douglas 2001). The reactions from perpetrators in the courtroom demonstrates that the film's impact went beyond emotional appeal, renegotiating perpetrators' own relationships with their actions (Douglas 2001). The proliferation of fictional and semi-fictional Holocaust movies also demonstrates the role of film in post-

genocide reconciliation (Douglas 2001). In the case of the Cambodian genocide, the biographical film *The Killing Fields* was instrumental in pushing forward stalled justice ten years after the genocide (Ear & Duong 2009). Film is uniquely able to engage with memory and other more informal social forces, and thus Oppenheimer's documentaries are important evidence in the investigation of transitional justice in Indonesia fifty years after the genocide.

Structure of the Thesis

The following two chapters establish the conceptual frameworks through which to analyze the Indonesian genocide and post-genocide justice more broadly. Chapter 2 serves as a literature review of the field of transitional justice, providing the historical context for the field's prioritization of legalism and institutions, to the detriment of cases such as the Indonesian genocide. Chapter 3 begins with an introduction to the field of memory studies, with notes on terminology including collective memory, cultural memory, memory politics, and just memory. These chapters lay the groundwork for my argument that the field of transitional justice must recognize the role that memory can play in repression, and the importance of addressing memory politics as part of a broader attention to the unique nuances of each post-genocide society.

In Chapter 4, I do an in-depth analysis of Oppenheimer's documentary films, *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* (Oppenheimer et al. 2012, 2014). *The Act of Killing* works to dismantle the state-enforced narrative about the genocide by having perpetrators revisit their memories. Deconstructing the dominant narrative creates space for other narratives such as the victim's story that Oppenheimer presents in *The Look of Silence*. I argue that Oppenheimer's films demonstrate the potential of memory work to address deep-rooted societal challenges after genocide.

Chapter 5 describes efforts for justice in Indonesia since the release of Oppenheimer's films in 2012 and 2014. It first discusses the International People's Tribunal of 1965, an event organized by activists and Indonesian exiles in the Netherlands. I argue that while the event increased the visibility of the Indonesian genocide on the international stage and created a space to tell victims' and survivors' stories, it was an attempt to map a legalistic framework onto a case that did not have the context for it. Chapter 5 then describes several local actions for justice, arguing that like Oppenheimer's films, they better match the realities and nuances of the Indonesian case. This chapter ends with a conclusion of the thesis, summarizing the lessons that the field of transitional justice should learn from the Indonesian genocide case.

II. Transitional Justice from Above

“Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their own decisions, do not organize the people - they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they liberated; they oppress.”

Paolo Freire

This chapter serves as a literature review that examines the broader history of transitional justice, demonstrating that the field has historically prioritized institutions and legalism. This chapter will argue that the field must reduce its reliance on institutions and legalism, making room for other approaches to transitional justice that are better suited to reconcile deep-rooted societal challenges after genocide. The first section will look at how the Nuremberg trials formed the basis for legalism’s dominance in later transitional justice movements. The second section asserts that the dominance of the Genocide Convention’s legalistic definition of genocide creates a canon of highly visible cases that guide the transitional justice field, to the detriment of cases like the Indonesian genocide that have not been *legally* defined by the international community as genocide. The third section examines the proliferation of transitional justice and the rise of legalism in the 1990s in the context of several genocides and conflicts occurring during this period. The final section introduces the key debate in the field: the limitations of legalism and institutionalization in transitional justice.

Transitional Justice

Transitional justice is a relatively new field that is based on both theory and praxis. Transitional justice is broadly defined by the International Center for Transitional Justice as “a response to systematic or widespread violations of human rights,” and efforts to transition from

autocratic or abusive regimes to, purportedly, democracy (ICTJ 2008). The term “transitional justice” was coined as early as 1991 (Hinton 2010). Transitional justice emerged as an academic field in the 1990s, rooted in the praxis and on-the-ground-realities of genocide and the emergence of states from autocratic regimes (Hayner 1994). Since the 1990s, the field has expanded to include rebuilding society after mass violence more broadly (ICTJ 2008). The approaches of transitional justice, however, were largely informed by cases occurring prior to the field’s creation, especially the Holocaust and its aftermath.

Legalism

The field of transitional justice, both in theory and praxis, has come to be dominated by legalism. Brooks describes this domination of legalism as an “explosion in promotion of the rule of law” (Brooks 2003). McEvoy considers legalism to be an attachment to legal standards, and the prioritization of legal institutionalization in post-conflict societies (McEvoy 2007). A prioritization of legalism does not necessarily mean the promotion of criminal tribunals or other criminal proceedings, but rather a general tendency to value the law, legal standards, legal institutions, legal habits, and legal actors over other approaches to reconciliation and peacebuilding (McEvoy 2007). A focus on legalism is driven by the belief that strengthening legal infrastructure in a country is the best way to rebuild other parts of society such as economy, culture, and governance (Brooks 2003; McEvoy 2007).

The Nuremberg Trials

The legacy of the Nuremberg trials contributed to the prioritization of criminal tribunals in transitional justice in the latter half of the twentieth century. I argue, without diminishing the

severity of the Holocaust, that this is the result of a broader Holocaust exceptionalism: the notion that the horrors of the Holocaust are unique to it and should further serve as the standard for what genocide is (Bloxham & Moses 2010). The Nazi regime murdered six million Jewish people, as well as hundreds of thousands of other people deemed inferior, including Roma people, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ people, black people, and Jehovah's Witnesses (United States Holocaust Museum). After World War II, the Allied Forces looked to ways of dealing with the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany (Hinton 2010; Teitel 2003). At the same time, many political leaders, academics, and civilians saw the post-war world as ushering in a "new world order," in which previous notions of state sovereignty would be subordinate to international law and governance (Hinton 2010). What resulted was the Nuremberg Trials (Hinton 2010). The military tribunals tried the most prominent leaders of Nazi Germany for offenses including war crimes and crimes against humanity. These trials were, arguably, the world's first attempt to prosecute individuals for crimes committed across borders. It also faced challenges of prosecuting individuals under laws that did not exist at the time of their crimes (Arthur 2009; Kritz 1995). Though these trials at the time did not prosecute specifically for genocidal acts, they became a powerful reference point for post-genocide tribunals in the decades after. As Lawrence Douglas writes in *The Memory of Judgment*, "it is the memory of these earlier trials [Nuremberg and the Eichmann trial] that creates the hope, if not the expectation, that today's perpetrators will be forced to answer to the law" (Douglas 2001). The Nuremberg trials and later Eichmann trial served as "proof" for many early transitional justice practitioners that prioritizing the rule of law in post-conflict societies was critical to peace (Kritz 1995; Fichtelberg 2009). The Nuremberg legacy also sits within the broader "Holocaust paradigm" as Bloxham and Moses describe it; the notion that the Holocaust is unique and "taken as an 'ideal type' genocide" (Bloxham & Moses

2010). This means that “scholars and advocates of particular cases often seek to fit theirs within a ‘Holocaust paradigm’ at the expense of careful contextualization” (Bloxham & Moses 2010). This “Holocaust paradigm” has created a canon of genocide cases defined by legalism.

The “Canon” of Genocide Cases

In this section, I argue that the legalistic definition of genocide that emerged with the Genocide Convention creates a “canon” of genocide cases that only accepts those instances of mass violence that have undergone an international legal proceeding and fit a legal definition of genocide; this is detrimental to justice for cases such as the Indonesian genocide that are comparative in scale and severity to cases in the canon but have not seen criminal proceedings and cannot be retrofitted to the Genocide Convention. This canon of genocide cases is an extended result of Holocaust exceptionalism and the hierarchization of instances of mass violence that followed the Holocaust (Bloxham & Moses 2010). As the Genocide Convention was written after the Holocaust, genocides that followed the Holocaust are measured on their similarity to the Holocaust (Bloxham & Moses 2010). Bloxham and Moses name a “few instances of genocide that, for a variety of reasons, have qualified for the canon of general acceptance: alongside the Holocaust, Armenia, Cambodia, Rwanda, and the former Yugoslavia, and now Darfur tend to be included, but virtually no other cases” (Bloxham and Moses 2010). In the next section, I will discuss three cases that occurred after the Holocaust and before the 21st century that led to the proliferation of transitional justice: the Bosnian, Rwandan, and Cambodian genocides. All three of these well-known cases were at a later point apprehended through a criminal tribunal. I argue that transitional justice’s focus on the criminal tribunals of these cases is to the detriment of lesser-known cases such as the Indonesian genocide.

The Genocide Convention, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, defines genocide as “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group” (United Nations 1948). This is intentionally a legal definition, created after the Holocaust for the purpose of being able to hold states and individuals accountable to an international legal system. This legal definition, however, has become authoritative across the board. Despite the fact that this definition was created after a single genocide, the Holocaust, it has not been adjusted based on the genocides that followed. The result is that the Genocide Convention shapes assessments of mass violence, rather than new instances of mass violence adapting the definition of genocide.

The 1990s: Transitional Justice, Criminal Tribunals, and the Rise of Legalism

The 1990s saw many instances of mass violence, conflict, and genocide, and is the starting place for the field of transitional justice; the dominance of legalism is evident in the aftermath of violence during this period. In this section, I will discuss three cases of genocide that informed the field at this time: the Bosnian, Rwandan, and Cambodian genocides. While the field of transitional justice learned quickly from past mistakes and made new attempts to avoid making them again, the field’s insistence on legalism and institutionalization is evident in all three of these cases.

The Bosnian Genocide

The Bosnian genocide was the first case in the 1990s that the international legal system attempted to apprehend through an international tribunal, and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) revealed the field's gaps in understanding local dynamics (Hinton 2010). The ICTY, formed in 1993, tried perpetrators of crimes committed throughout the region that comprised the former Yugoslavia, including modern-day Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Montenegro, and Macedonia (Hinton 2010). In 1992, Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence from Yugoslavia (Hikmet 2016). In the years that followed, Serbian forces carried out a campaign of ethnic cleansing against Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) and Croatian people (Hoare 2014). By the end of the war, Serb forces had murdered over 100,000 Bosniak and Croats (Donia 2015). Held in the Hague, the ICTY had mixed outcomes and was the target of great criticism; it was called lengthy and expensive, too weak, and strong-armed by international powers in a setting where the conflict was ongoing (Minow 1998; Hinton 2010). Perhaps the most powerful criticism of the ICTY was that it failed to resolve tensions between communities, or even exacerbated them (Verovšek 2018). Many considered the ICTY to be detached from the reality on the ground, deaf to how members of the community viewed the trial (Ivković & Hagan 2017). By the time of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda's founding, it was evident that criminal justice needed more local consciousness.

The Rwandan Genocide

Rwanda's gacaca courts were the first attempt in the 1990s to be conscious of local dynamics in criminal proceedings. The Rwandan genocide took place within the Rwandan civil war, a culmination of decades of ethnic division largely created by the Belgian colonial

government in the first half of the twentieth century (Semujanga 2003). In 1994, over 800,000 Tutsi were murdered by government-directed Hutu police and gang groups (Herr 2018). The atrocities committed were systematic and widespread, including murder, sexual violence, and torture (Costello 2016; Herr 2018). The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), like the ICTY, was founded by the UN in 1994 (Hayner 1994). The ICTR is often referred to as the ICTY's "sister" trial, given the overlap of the trials and the genocides themselves (Minow 1998). Held in Tanzania rather than the Hague, its goal was to establish truth about the crimes committed, hold perpetrators accountable, and broker a sustainable transition to a new government (Hinton 2010). Learning from the challenges of the ICTY, a new system of justice parallel to the ICTR was established post-genocide in Rwanda: the gacaca courts (Hayner 1994). These courts were intended to be a localized means of truth-seeking and justice, utilizing local practices of transitional justice while also dealing with the issue of volume of cases to be tried in the country (Herr 2018). These gacaca courts would ideally bring community members together in seeking truth, addressing grievances, and providing restitution following human rights violations that took a uniquely personal and brutal face due to the nature of the genocide (Costello 2016). The gacaca courts have been both celebrated as a locally conscious system standing in contrast to the pitfalls of the ICTY, and heavily criticized as failing to produce particular outcomes such as reparations (Hayner 2001; Herr 2018; Hinton 2010; Minow 1998). It is not possible here to address the full scope of responses to the gacaca courts, but the key takeaway from this case for the purposes of this thesis is that it represents an attempt by the international justice system and local actors to solve the issue of local consciousness with a localized but still institutionalized and legalistic approach.

The Cambodian Genocide

The Cambodian genocide occurred almost twenty years before both the Rwandan and Bosnian genocides, from 1975 to 1979; its “hybrid tribunal,” however, was not formed until 2003, and demonstrates a new yet still legalistic attempt to address local needs. The communist Khmer Rouge originally came to power as a political party during Cambodia’s civil war, overshadowed by the Vietnam War (Ear and Duong 2009). On April 17th, 1975, the Khmer Rouge gained control of Phnom Penh, immediately evacuating everyone from the city (Peou 2017). The Khmer Rouge tortured and killed anyone seen as anti-communist such as doctors, teachers, academics, monks, artists, and many others, and forced the rest of the population into the countryside where they were subjected to abuse, starvation, and hard labor under the regime (Ear & Duong 2009). Between 1975 and 1979, an estimated 1.7 to 2 million Cambodians were murdered (Peou 2017). After decades of advocacy by survivors of the Khmer Rouge genocide and their allies across the globe, the United Nations, in collaboration with the Cambodian government, created Cambodia’s Khmer Rouge Trials, formally named the Extraordinary Chambers in the Court of Cambodia (ECCC) (Brinkley 2013). The Khmer Rouge Trials were an experiment in a new form of criminal tribunals: mixed (or hybrid) trials (Brinkley 2013). Founded in-country with dual support from the UN and the Cambodian government, it was another creative attempt to bridge the gap between local actors and the international legal system (Sperfeldt 2012). It has been lauded for its respect of the country’s own institutions while maintaining international standards (Maguire 2018). It is most heavily criticized, however, for being weak and expensive, having only produced three real sentences over sixteen years (Brinkley 2013; Sperfeldt 2012; Un 2013). Some scholars and practitioners say the ECCC has failed as a mechanism of transitional justice, as the country seems to be sliding back from

democratization today (Brinkley 2013; Heder 2011). Other scholars, such as Peter Maguire, attribute the ECCC's failures to politics, rather than the form of the mixed tribunal (Maguire 2018). The field of transitional justice is still learning from this trial, but it is evident that even this localized form of criminal tribunal has its limitations.

Time and again, actors in post-genocide societies have attempted to solve the issues that arise from a lack of local consciousness by reconfiguring legalistic institutions. The continued limitations of these institutions, however, demonstrates a need to cease reliance on legalism and institutionalization as the only means of achieving justice.

Limitations and Growing Criticism

As the consequences of earlier genocides and their aftermath have come to light and more situations of mass violence have arisen, people engaged in post-conflict justice - some in local communities and some international advocates - have criticized the international justice system overall. In this section I will address a key debate in the transitional justice field: the limits of legalism, and the need for inclusion of other approaches. This thesis will argue that the Indonesian genocide case demonstrates the need for transitional justice to recognize the importance of tailoring to the specific nuances of a post-genocide society, rather than insisting on legalistic solutions.

Limits of Legalism

An ongoing debate in transitional justice is about the limits of legalism; this thesis argues that international criminal tribunals are not the only important approach and may not always be

the best approach. Legalism, as has been discussed, has been dominant in the transitional justice field; with the creation of the International Criminal Court in 2002, the international community is quick to turn to criminal trials after mass violence (Wilson 2006). Institutions like the United Nations and the US Institute for Peace seek to “promote the rule of law” first and foremost in many transitional societies (Kritz 1995). In contrast with this, many scholars and advocates criticize this prioritization of legalism. McEvoy argues that lawyers think too highly of their role in transitional justice and could benefit from what he calls “legal humility” (McEvoy 2007). While not disregarding the role of legalism in transitional justice altogether, he calls for lawyers and legal practitioners to value and respect other actors and forms of knowledge in post-violence societies (McEvoy 2007).

Brooks examines the consequences of well-intentioned international practitioners, criticizing the short-sightedness of applying identical frameworks to cases across the world (Brooks 2003). This thesis aligns with to this perspective, arguing that while the International People’s Tribunal 1965 in the Hague made strides for visibility of the Indonesian genocide case, it attempted to impose a tribunal structure on the Indonesian case without the context for it; the government today denies the genocide and the IPT 1965 did not have any real legal structure, unsupported by the United Nations or the International Criminal Court. Scholars like Richard Wilson take their criticism of legalism a step further, asserting that the field’s focus on legalism and the rule of law is imperialist and detrimental to holistic justice (Wilson 2006). Wilson describes how the legalization of human rights has caused international practitioners to overlook complex historical, political, social, and cultural contexts in which violence occurred. Both advocates and community members in post-violence societies of the Global South - such as Rwanda, East Timor, and Cambodia - criticize international transitional justice practitioners

predominantly from the West for failing to recognize their own role in shaping the political and social structures in which violence was bred (Wilson 2006). For example, some scholars, practitioners, and advocates argue that in Rwanda, European colonialist “divide and conquer” tactics that transcribed hierarchy onto ethnic and tribal affiliations directly influenced the later genocide (Semujanga 2003). While this thesis will not discuss the complex legacy of colonization on political and social structures in Indonesia, it is critical of the imperialist tendency of international transitional justice practitioners to disregard local and grassroots justice efforts. Increasingly, a new generation of transitional justice scholars and practitioners are raising these criticisms of overlegalization in the field and seeking new frameworks and approaches to transitional justice. This thesis seeks to expand the field of transitional justice by introducing the Indonesian genocide as a case that offers new approaches.

Conclusion

This chapter has illuminated gaps in the field of transitional justice that both disregard the Indonesian case as a genocide and disregard non-normative approaches to transitional justice being taken in Indonesia today. Holocaust exceptionalism created a narrow and legalistic definition of genocide that excludes the Indonesian case from the “canon.” Transitional justice, as a relatively new field, has been growing and learning from on-the-ground realities since its foundations in the 1990s but continues to insist on legalistic approaches. Increasingly, scholars in the field have criticized this prioritization of legalism and institutions. The field’s prioritization of international legal interventions has led it to disregard other potentially constructive approaches to transitional justice, such as Oppenheimer’s documentaries on Indonesia which challenged hegemony through engaging with memory politics.

III. Memory Wars

“All wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory.”

Viet Thanh Nguyen

This chapter will introduce concepts in the field of *memory studies* to argue that the field of transitional justice has insufficiently recognized memory as a powerfully influential force in post-violence societies. The Indonesian case demonstrates just how large of a role memory politics play. In this chapter, I will first introduce the field of memory studies that forms the basis for understanding memory politics. I will then argue that memory, rather than being passive or static, has an active and powerful impact on the present and future. In the subsequent section, I will argue that memory is inextricably linked to power. These arguments serve as the foundation for my overall conclusion that the field of transitional justice must recognize the role of memory in post-genocide societies, and see memory work as a legitimate approach to transitional justice because of its ability to challenge the more informal structures of hegemony.

Memory Studies

This section introduces the field of memory studies as a lens through which to understand post-genocide Indonesia and defines terms in memory studies that the rest of the thesis will refer to. Memory studies is a broad, interdisciplinary field that explores questions about how people make meaning of the past; it deals with the interaction between past and present and people's relationship to it (Bosch 2016). The field comprises both theory and praxis, drawing from academic disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, and history and taking form in museum studies, archive studies, technology, and the arts (Bosch 2016). Memory studies as a

field emerged at the end of the twentieth century, though its foundations lie in scholarship from the early twentieth century (Roediger & Wertsch 2008).

Memory studies is largely seated within post-Holocaust discourse. Thus, memory studies gained traction as a field in the 1980s and 1990s as the children of Holocaust survivors began to grapple with the history they had inherited from their parents (Hirsch 2012). As Holocaust survivors grew into old age and passed away, discourse shifted from asking what happened in the Holocaust to asking how it should be remembered (Hirsch 2012). The growth of the field also coincided with a proliferation of movements fighting for the creation of Holocaust memorials, as well as memorials for other instances of mass violence such as the Armenian genocide (Ashplant 2000). The 1980s and 1990s also saw many more genocides and mass violence, further solidifying the need to investigate how memory might influence the present (Müller 2002).

The field of memory studies formed alongside transitional justice, sometimes intersecting on topics such as memorialization and museum studies. For the most part though, memory studies has been regarded as a “softer” field in comparison to the formal and institutionalized focus of transitional justice (Kritz 1995). While transitional justice has historically been focused on institutions, memory studies focuses on culture, social norms, and communities (Roediger & Wertsch 2008). I argue that memory politics played a significant role in the aftermath of the Indonesian genocides, and thus memory studies, and specifically *memory work*, should be considered important to any transitional justice process.

Collective Memory

Collective memory is one of the earliest concepts in memory studies as it was the basis of understanding memory beyond the individual, as having impact on society and the present. The

term “collective memory” was first coined by Maurice Halbwachs, who argued that people only engage memory in relation to others; thus, there is a memory that exists outside of the individual, and a society’s understanding of the past is influenced by the social frameworks of that society (Halbwachs 1992). Collective memory requires that there is a “collective,” a group of people united by at least one characteristic (Halbwachs 1992; Nguyen 2016). Therefore, collective memory is key in identity formation, especially in relation to national or ethnic identities (Assmann 2008; Suny 2004). In Halbwachs’ definition, collective memory is shaped by contemporary interests, agendas, and power dynamics (Halbwachs 1992). In other words, the way that a society remembers a war, for example, is largely dependent upon who won the war, which political parties exist today, and upon what identities people were divided (Halbwachs 1992; Nguyen 2016; Suny 2004). The concept of collective memory was built upon the theory of history called *historical materialism* championed by Walter Benjamin who argued in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History” that historical “events” are not self-evident and are rather deemed important based on what people value in the present (Benjamin 1968). People contemporarily impose a structure of meaning on the past (Benjamin 1968). This premise, that the present is deeply intertwined with the past, will be discussed more in the following section on memory and the present.

Cultural Memory

Cultural memory is a form of collective memory that relates specifically to a people’s cultural identity. Jan Assmann built off of Halbwachs’ concept of collective memory in his definition of cultural memory in his work “Communicative and Cultural Memory” (Assmann 2008). Assmann considers cultural memory to be an institution, describing it as “exteriorized,

objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that, unlike the sounds of words or the sight of gestures, are stable and situation-transcendent” (Assmann 2008). Cultural memory manifests in objects such as monuments, museums, rituals, icons, and other external symbols (Ashplant 2000; Assmann 2008).

Memory Politics

The concept of *memory politics*, also known as memory wars, builds on both collective and cultural memory (De Brito et al. 2001). The term “memory politics” relates memory to power, conflict, and resources (De Brito et al. 2001; Müller 2002). One can think of memory as a field upon which people battle over legitimacy, political dominance, and economic control (Müller 2002). Memory politics is the struggle over who gets to ascribe meaning to the past, and what meaning they ascribe (Müller 2002; Nguyen 2016). Memory politics are thus deeply linked with identity (Longley 2013; Suny 2004).

Just Memory

Just memory is an ethics of memory put forth by author Viet Thanh Nguyen in his 2016 publication, *Nothing Ever Dies*. Just memory is aware of the complex ethics of remembering and remembers both one’s own and others (Nguyen 2016). This ethics of remembering builds off the post-modernist historical tradition that criticizes the notion of objectivity, asserting that each person has a subjective lens and that there is no knowable “past” (Apperley 2018; Aylesworth 2015). Just memory recalls the memories of all people involved, bringing forth the forgotten to remember alongside the rest (Nguyen 2016). Just memory actively seeks what may have been forgotten and attempts to understand why (Nguyen 2016). Nguyen articulates that collective

memory relies on an identified “collective,” a group to call “us” (Nguyen 2016). Having a defined identity upon which to include people in this collective means there is an exclusionary aspect to collective memory (Nguyen 2016). Nguyen argues that collective memory can never be completely inclusive (Nguyen 2016). He describes competing “ethics of memory”: remembering one’s own or remembering others (Nguyen 2016). Remembering one’s own is often about remembering the victors, or those who would like to see themselves as victors; in the case of the Vietnam War, the collective American memory of the war is one that justifies the war itself, places Americans in a moral position, and forgets those outside of the collective, the non-Americans: the Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, and others who were tied up in the war (Nguyen 2016). Nguyen sees remembering others as an ethos of those who denounce war, calling for remembrance of the victims and marginalized (Nguyen 2016). Yet, Nguyen argues, this produces a similar judgment to remembering one’s own; in this case, “we” are the bad guys and “the other” are the good guys (Nguyen 2016). Nguyen argues that the antidote to unjust practices of memory is not to stop remembering, but rather to renegotiate the memory and our relationship to it (Nguyen 2016). He calls for an approach that recognizes and interrogates who controls memory and how memory is abused (Nguyen 2016). The final section of this chapter will argue that memory work should strive toward just memory.

Memory and the Present

In this section, I will describe the ways that memory interacts with the present in general, arguing that memory has a dualistic relationship with the present: collective memory shapes the present, and the present shapes collective memory. In this way, memory is not static, objective, or passive, but rather actively negotiated in the present context of societies. Booth eloquently

states that “though memory is of the past it also very much belongs to the present: in how it shapes our understanding and sensibilities and in how it can be called into the service of our present projects” (Booth 2009). This understanding of memory will become important when studying the contemporary implications of the Indonesian genocide which occurred over fifty years ago. Understanding memory’s relationship with the present and future is critical to seeing its importance for transitional justice.

Collective Memory Shapes the Present

Collective memory can influence and shape society in the present. De Brito et al. write that “the impossibility of ensuring a perfect process of transitional truth and justice means that the past continues to live in the present ... hence the ‘Vichy Syndrome,’ the ‘Vietnam complex’ in the United States, and the various German terms for working through the past, all of which indicate that the past is a disease of sorts, a burden on the present” (De Brito et al. 2001).

Memory, in this way, is active in the present; it is not simply the story people tell about the past, it influences their behavior in the present (De Brito et al. 2001). Collective memory about a historical event shapes how people construct the history leading up to the present, and further, how they envision the future (Benjamin 1968; Assmann 2008; De Brito et al. 2001). De Brito continues to say that “even after it has ceased to become a part of the active political agenda, the past can continue to be a source of conflict in the judicial arena and of latent or overt deep-seated social animosities” (De Brito et al. 2001). Unresolved tension in collective memory plays out in memory wars in the present; this is clear in Indonesia where present hatred of communists is rooted in their association with the mass killings in the country’s collective memory (Melvin et al. 2018, Müller 2002). This hatred becomes institutionalized through anti-communist laws and

policies (Melvin et al. 2018). Booth writes, with hope, that “memory can also change, or be moderated, so that it no longer disturbs the present” (Booth 2009). This is the motivation behind *memory work*, which will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

The Present Shapes Collective Memory

Contemporary society can shape people’s collective memory of the past. This philosophy on the relationship between memory and the present is rooted in historical materialists’ assertion that the significance of historical events is not self-evident, but rather determined retroactively from the present (Benjamin 1968). Benjamin writes that “to articulate the past historically does not mean to ‘recognize it the way it really was.’ It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger” (Benjamin 1968). He refers to the way that people construct memory each time they remember. He argues that memory is instrumentalized in the present by political actors for a specific ends. As memory is about ascribing meaning to the past, memory is constructed when it is relevant and holds value for the present (Benjamin 1968). Douglas writes that Gideon Hausner, the lead prosecutor of the 1961 Eichmann trial, believed that the trial “would turn the public into witnesses of the witnesses - thereby creating a vital organic link to the past. This mindfulness of the past was meant, in turn, to support the Zionist politics of the present” (Douglas 2001). Establishing a collective memory of the past through the trials served a political end. In the next section, I will describe how wars over memory reflect struggles for power in the present.

Memory Wars: Power and Memory

Memory is inextricably linked with power, and can be used as a tool of hegemony. To achieve justice in Indonesia, one must understand the role that memory plays in upholding hegemony. There are countless ways that power is manifested in memory wars; in this section, I will discuss three main ways that are evident in Indonesia: delegitimization, social silencing, and historical negationism.

Delegitimization

Collective memory has the power to delegitimize certain groups of people by putting bounds on the “collective.” Nguyen argues that collective memory relies on a “collective that extends only to family, tribe, and nation” (Nguyen 2016). Collective memory means that an “us” exists, at odds with “them”; whether this “us” and “them” are explicitly defined depends on the case at hand (Assmann 2008; Nguyen 2016). The legitimacy of the collective relies in part on the delegitimization of those who lie outside of it. De Brito et al. describe how “myths and memories define the scope and nature of action, reorder reality, and legitimate power holders. They become a part of the process of political socialization, teaching people how to perceive political reality and helping them to assimilate political ideas and opinions” (De Brito et al. 2001). When collective memory becomes an authoritative telling of history, those who wish to tell that history differently lose legitimacy in society (Bond & Gilliam 1994). Benjamin articulated this in different terms, arguing that historicism, which assumes the objectivity of the framing of historical events, empathizes “with the victor,” and “empathy with the victor invariably benefits the rulers” (Benjamin 1968). Those who currently hold political power instrumentalize memory by enforcing as objective a collective memory of past events that maintains their power (Bond &

Gilliam 1994). De Brito et al. describe this as a “strong partisan rendering of the history and socio-cultural properties of subjugated and oppressed peoples,” arguing that “power and economic domination establish one rendering of history and culture as objective and ethically neutral and another as subjective and partisan” (De Brito et al. 2001). By establishing their own understanding of history as the only objective and legitimate narrative, people in power effectively delegitimize any voices that challenge that narrative (Bond & Gilliam 1994; Müller 2002). This tactic is evident in Indonesia and will be discussed in Chapter 4 with regard to Joshua Oppenheimer’s documentary films.

Social Silencing

Collective memory that is hegemonic and institutionalized leads to social silencing of voices that speak against that collective memory. In the collective memory of Indonesian society, the genocide was civilian-initiated violence in retaliation against communists for the attempted coup, and often even as a necessary measure to uphold democracy in the country (Melvin et al. 2018). This collective memory is reinforced by those in power often through violence or threat of violence. Bond and Gilliam argue that “social constructions of the past are crucial elements in the process of domination, subjugation, resistance, and collusion” (Bond & Gilliam 1994). Memory, as social constructions of the past, serve to mobilize individuals for a particular political end; in Indonesia, this means that people impose consequences upon those individuals who challenge the collective memory (Bond & Gilliam 1994; Melvin et al. 2016). These consequences range from social humiliation to violence. The threat of these consequences is often enough to keep people from challenging the hegemonic collective memory. Another example of this is in Poland; in January 2018, the government passed a bill banning any blame of

the Polish government for crimes committed in the Holocaust (John 2018). The bill would charge offenders with “three years in prison or a fine for accusing the Polish state or people of involvement or responsibility for the Nazi occupation” (John 2018). This is despite evidence and testimony about the participation of Polish citizens in the atrocities of the Holocaust (John 2018). Though few people have actually been convicted under this law, the threat of consequences is enough to cause a “chilling effect” - the mass quieting of speech and discourse on the topic (Askin n.d.). The chilling effect is even more pronounced in Indonesia after a decades-long authoritarian regime; as will be discussed in Chapter 4, *The Look of Silence* reveals how deep the consequences of social silencing truly are.

Historical Negationism

Hegemonic collective memory is often institutionalized through historical negationism in official historical accounts. Historical negationism is the falsification of history through the distortion of facts and evidence (Ranalletti 2010). Historical negationism can take form in school textbooks, laws, and museums or memorials (Melvin et al. 2018). In Indonesia, the curricula taught in schools upholds the narrative that the genocide was a series of spontaneous mass killings of communists by civilians in retaliation for the attempted coup (Melvin et al. 2018; Oppenheimer 2014). Most schools teach that though the killings were terrible, they were necessary to sustain democracy in the nation (Oppenheimer 2014). This stands in contrast to the evidence that has since come forth revealing the Indonesian government’s role in orchestrating the violence, and the role of the military in carrying out the massacres (Melvin et al. 2018). Institutionalizing collective memory in this way gives it power that can even withstand evidence.

Memory plays an active role in power struggles in the present. It can be used as a tool to delegitimize target groups and uphold a politically expedient narrative by silencing voices outside of the hegemonic collective memory. Memory is often used to uphold hegemony through historical negationism in official accounts. This demonstrates that memory is not, in fact, a peripheral element of post-genocide challenges, but instead deeply integral to societal dynamics after genocide. Thus, memory work, which will be discussed in the next section, is crucially important to transitional justice.

Memory Work

Memory work is critical to transitional justice because it addresses the nuances of post-genocide societies that manifest in memory. Memory work is that which attempts to interrogate, renegotiate, or reconcile collective memory and people's relationships with that memory. I argue that the best memory work has an ethics of just memory (Nguyen 2016). In the next chapter, I will argue that what Oppenheimer accomplishes through his documentaries demonstrates the effectiveness of memory work and the importance of addressing memory politics as part of transitional justice.

Memory work can take many forms. Memorialization, which is considered a transitional justice approach, is but one form of memory work that attempts to bring awareness of and legitimacy to a particular historical narrative, typically that of the victim of violence (Ashplant 2000). Memory work can also be done through artistic means such as film, photography, literature, fine art, or public art. One example of this is the graphic artist Daniel Rarela's effort to publicize lesser-known texts from Martin Luther King Jr. that stand in contrast with what he considers "whitewashed" narratives of MLK's philosophy (Mic Staff 2017). For Martin Luther

King Jr. Day in 2017, Rarela created a series of social media-friendly graphics depicting images of MLK or images of contemporary Black Lives Matter actions with quotes from MLK's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (Mic Staff 2017). With his work, Rarela strove to deconstruct the instrumentalization of a particular memory of MLK that opposes modern-day anti-racism movements (Mic Staff 2017). This kind of memory work renegotiates a society's collective memory of an event, place, or people in pursuit of a more just memory. Oppenheimer does the same through film; *The Act of Killing*, for example, is a microcosm of Indonesian society's collective memory. By having perpetrators revisit and reconstruct their memories, the film dismantles the state-enforced collective memory. The ability of memory work to tackle deep-rooted societal challenges demonstrate the need for the field of transitional justice to recognize the importance of addressing memory politics after genocide.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced the key concepts of collective memory, cultural memory, memory wars, and just memory that form the basis for my argument about memory's role in transitional justice. I argued that memory has a dualistic impact on the present, both shaping contemporary society and shaped by it. Thus, memory is neither passive nor objective, but active and influenced by politics in the present. I discussed the key yet often overlooked relationship between power and memory after genocide. Memory has real consequences in the present, as collective memory can be used as a tool of hegemony. Finally, I presented memory work as a solution to deconstruct hegemonic memory. Memory work has a large role to play in transitional justice because of its ability to address more informal structures of hegemony in society. In the next chapter, I will argue that Joshua Oppenheimer's documentaries and their influence on

Indonesian society demonstrate the need to address memory politics as part of transitional justice.

IV. Oppenheimer's Memory Work

“I refuse to comfort myself with the moral lie that these men have done something monstrous, and consequently are monsters, and therefore I am not like them.”

Joshua Oppenheimer

This chapter examines the central evidence of this thesis: Joshua Oppenheimer's films *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence*. Through a critical film analysis using the lens of memory studies, the chapter concludes that *The Act of Killing* dismantles the state-controlled collective memory present in Indonesian society by having perpetrators revisit their memories, creating space in the collective memory for other narratives like the victim's story presented in *The Look of Silence*. The chapter argues that these films are examples of memory work that address the role that memory politics has played in the aftermath of the Indonesian genocide.

Joshua Oppenheimer is an American filmmaker with ties to the Netherlands and Indonesia (Weiner 2015). Originally visiting Indonesia for a documentary project on factory workers and unions, Oppenheimer ended up spending five years in the country learning about the Indonesian genocide and its repercussions over fifty years that persist today (O'Hagan 2015). From the onset, the movies were intended to not only be for both Indonesian and foreign audiences, but be both Indonesian and foreign projects. All dialogue in the films is in Bahasa Indonesia (the Indonesian language) with English subtitles, and each movie was released under an Indonesian title in-country: *Jagal* (for *The Act of Killing*) and *Senyap* (for *The Look of Silence*). In both films, there is an anonymous Indonesian director alongside Oppenheimer. Their identity is kept secret for their safety, which is evidence of why this movie had to be initiated by someone from outside the country. Oppenheimer first set out to film survivors and families of victims, but after threats from the military, was encouraged to try and speak with perpetrators

instead. To his surprise, they proudly described the atrocities they committed in 1965 (Oppenheimer February 2014). He spoke with and filmed countless perpetrators, and this journey birthed what became *The Act of Killing*, released in 2012.

The Act of Killing

The Act of Killing dismantles the dominant collective memory about the genocide in Indonesian society by having perpetrators revisit their own memories. This film was a project developed from Oppenheimer's time in Indonesia beginning in 2004. The film was mostly shot between 2005 and 2011 in Medan, North Sumatra (Whittaker 2013). Oppenheimer gains the trust of Anwar Congo, a man who is rumored to have murdered thousands during the genocide, and his friends Herman Koto and Adi Zulkadry (Oppenheimer 2012, Weiner 2013). These men embody and articulate the state-enforced collective memory of the 1965 genocide that is dominant in Indonesia: the violence was the fault of cruel communists, and the men who murdered them are national heroes who saved people from their wrath. They speak about their killings openly and proudly. When Oppenheimer tells them to reenact their killings in any way they wish, the men decide to make their own movie in the style of the American westerns and gangster movies they idolize; as the documentary progresses, however, the perpetrators' movie morphs with the documentary itself (Oppenheimer 2012). *The Act of Killing* is about the Indonesian genocide, but it is really about the consequences of impunity and lack of justice over fifty years. By revisiting their memory of the genocide, the perpetrators reconstruct it, and this process dismantles their former memory and therefore dismantles the state-enforced collective memory.

The Beginning: Unchallenged Memory

The beginning of *The Act of Killing* shows that the perpetrators' memory of the Indonesian genocide reflects the state-enforced narrative about this history; this is a consequence of their impunity for over fifty years. The perpetrators see their killings as admirable brutality, and talk about the killings much like how someone might talk about a violent video game. One of the most famous scenes of the movie is in the first ten minutes, when Congo energetically demonstrates to the camera his former technique of strangling people to death with wire (Oppenheimer 2012). This is an act of showing off; not only is he proud of what he has done, he wants others to validate his sense of power. The scene shows how desensitized Congo is to the violence of his killings; this desensitization is created by the state-enforced collective memory that writes people like Congo as heroes, and talks about their killings as heroic acts rather than as horrific brutality.

In one scene, driving down the street in a convertible, Zulkadry, smiling and laughing, reminiscently brags to Congo about the "Crush the Chinese Campaign": "All along Surdiman Street, I killed every Chinese person I met. I stabbed them! I don't remember how many, but it was dozens. If I met them, I stabbed them" (Oppenheimer 2012). He expresses no shame or solemnity when talking about these killings. His killings were a demonstration of power, and the way he talks about them in the movie reveals that the power he holds is still unchecked.

These scenes are perhaps the most striking evidence of the consequences of these men's impunity over fifty years. These men show no remorse or internalization of the atrocity of their actions. The memory they hold is glorified, bathed in the heroic narrative of the military dictatorship. For the past fifty years, these men have lived in a country that does not see their actions as wrong, and in fact, often celebrates them. The beginning of *The Act of Killing* sets the

stage for the memory work of the rest of the film, showing that its subjects' own memory is shaped by their impunity and the state-enforced collective memory.

The Middle: Challenging Memory

The Act of Killing deconstructs the state-enforced collective memory by having perpetrators engage with their own memories; through the process of staging reenactments of their killings, they renegotiate their relationship to their memories. Almost halfway through the movie, Congo, Hoto, Zulkadry, and their friends are reenacting an interrogation of a communist victim. After shooting one scene, Zulkadry pauses to remark, "Listen, if we succeed in making this film, it will disprove all the propaganda about the communists being cruel and show that we were the cruel ones! ... We must understand every step we take here" (Oppenheimer 2012). This prompts a conversation between Zulkadry and Koto about what their movie means for the nation's collective memory. This moment is the first time in the movie that the perpetrators begin to discuss their memories in relation to morality; Koto asks, "But why should we always hide our history if that's the truth?" (Oppenheimer 2012). To this, Zulkadry responds that "not everything that is true should be made public" (Oppenheimer 2012). These men recognize that the nation's collective memory of 1965 relies on portraying them as heroes while portraying the victims - the communists - as cruel. For the first time, they question their own relationship to the state-enforced collective memory that has benefitted them.

In the same scene, one of Congo and Zulkadry's friends, a man who worked at the newspaper publishing office where Congo and Zulkadry did most of their killings, expresses surprise at the reenactments. Incredulously, he shares, "Now, seeing your reenactment, I realize you were so smooth that even me, a journalist with such sharp senses, I never knew!"

(Oppenheimer 2012). In his memory of the 1965 events, he is ignorant to the murders happening on the floor just above where he works. Earlier in the film, however, the viewer learned that the publisher was directly involved in the murders; Congo tells Oppenheimer that “when [the publisher] had the information, he’d say ‘guilty!’ and we’d take them away and kill them” (Oppenheimer 2012). Zulkadry and Congo challenge their friend; Congo tells him outright, “your publisher directed the torture,” and Zulkadry remarks, “this man, a journalist distancing himself from these things, that’s predictable. But logically, something we didn’t hide, how could he not know? Even the neighbors knew! Hundreds were killed, it was an open secret” (Oppenheimer 2012). In the process of creating reenactments together, the perpetrators compare their memories of this past, forcing some to reconstruct their memories. This friend who would like to see himself as detached from the violence was forced to confront his own role in the atrocities. *The Act of Killing* serves as a microcosm of Indonesia’s collective memory about the genocide, so by showing perpetrators’ process of deconstructing their memories, the film also deconstructs the broader collective memory.

The End: Renegotiated Memory

By the end of *The Act of Killing*, the perpetrators have renegotiated their memories, pulling back the veil of the dominant narrative enforced by the state. The second to last scene of the documentary depicts Congo and Koto reenacting an interrogation and torture of a communist, this time with Congo playing the victim (Oppenheimer 2012). Congo sits in a chair, fake blood painted across his face, as Koto yells at him and pretends to hit him with a wooden object (Oppenheimer 2012). Softly, Congo says “cut,” pausing the scene to take deep breaths as Koto brings him a bottle of water (Oppenheimer 2012). They resume the scene, with Koto “killing”

Congo using the same method of wire strangling that Congo demonstrated at the very beginning of the film (Oppenheimer 2012). Before Koto finishes, Congo wordlessly motions to him to stop, saying almost in a whisper: “I can’t do that again” (Oppenheimer 2012). Later, when Congo rewatches the scene, he asks Oppenheimer, “Did the people I tortured feel the way I do here?” (Oppenheimer 2012). Oppenheimer responds, “Actually, the people you tortured felt far worse”; Congo looks at him with confusion and what appears to be dawning realization as Oppenheimer continues to explain, “because you knew it’s only a film. They knew they were being killed” (Oppenheimer 2012). Congo thinks about this for a moment and replies with tears, “Have I sinned? I did this to so many people, Josh” (Oppenheimer 2012). By the end of the film, no longer does Congo live in the bliss of the state narrative about the 1965 events. By placing himself in the shoes of his victims, an act only allowed by the choice to reenact his actions, Congo is revealed the truth of his violence. Perhaps surprisingly, Congo praises the movie today, calling it “honest and true”; Oppenheimer says that this means he achieved his goal of giving “him pause to look at himself in the mirror” (Shatz 2015). His memory of the genocide had previously remained untouched, unquestioned for fifty years. Oppenheimer’s film is remarkable in its ability to renegotiate this memory so long after the events.

The memory work that *The Act of Killing* does goes beyond documentary convention by getting genocide perpetrators to revisit and renegotiate their memory of the Indonesian genocide. At the beginning of the film, the viewer sees that the genocide perpetrators’ perception of their own actions reflects the collective memory enforced by the state. By telling Congo and the other perpetrators to reenact their killings, the film asks them to revisit their memories, and therefore reconstruct them. As the perpetrators go through the process of staging these reenactments, they

question their relationship to their memories and by extension, to the state narrative about the genocide. The result is that the movie reveals the falsehood upheld by the perpetrators that the state narrative relies on, and deconstructs that narrative. By putting the state-enforced narrative into question, Oppenheimer tears open the nation's collective memory, making room for other narratives to enter. Work like Oppenheimer's that challenges hegemony in its underlying, social forms is critical to transitional justice; without an environment that allows for many voices in society, it is unlikely that normative transitional justice approaches such as tribunals will be effective.

The Look of Silence

Joshua Oppenheimer's 2014 sequel to *The Act of Killing*, called *The Look of Silence*, presents the story of a victim through the eyes of his brother on a journey to confront perpetrators and seek closure; the film does memory work by revealing the consequences of hegemony in memory. *The Look of Silence* was released two years after *The Act of Killing*, and Oppenheimer says that it completes what *The Act of Killing* started by sharing the experience of a victim (O'Hagan 2015, Shatz 2015). The footage in *The Look of Silence* was taken during roughly the same time as the footage in the first film. *The Look of Silence* follows Adi Rukun's journey to find answers about his brother, Ramli, who was murdered before he was born. Sometimes against the wishes of his family, Adi decides to confront the men who killed his brother yet live in the same town and live normal lives, having faced no consequences for their actions. Oppenheimer does memory work by showing the traumatic repercussions of Ramli's murder on his loved ones, and the lasting consequences of the state's enforced narrative about the genocide.

Silenced Memory and Private Mourning

The Look of Silence shows its audience how Ramli's family has had to remember him and mourn in private because of the silencing of victims in Indonesian society. The first minutes of the documentary contain a voiceover of Adi's mother speaking to her murdered son; almost a whisper, it sounds like a prayer, meant to be heard by no one: "Your mom misses you, Ramli. I haven't seen you for so long. I still see you in my dreams. You can see me but I can't see you. I wish I could see you" (Oppenheimer 2014). Her loss is heartbreaking; yet, she must keep her pain to herself and cope with it privately. When asked how she feels about living surrounded by her son's killers, she says "When we meet them in the village - we don't speak. I hate them," but goes on to say that "it's up to God. Those people can do what they like. They destroyed so many people. Now they enjoy life. But just wait. In the afterlife, their victims will take revenge. They will suffer later. There's no use raising it now" (Oppenheimer 2014). Without any justice for her son Ramli and the persisting impunity of perpetrators, Adi's mother has found her own way to cope with the loss, looking to God. As Adi begins to confront his brother's killers, it becomes evident why his mother thinks there is no use in raising the issue of this injustice now.

Persistence of Threat

The Look of Silence demonstrates that a consequence of fifty years of impunity and hegemony is that survivors and the families of victims still face threats of violence. When Adi visits the leader of Komando Aksi, the paramilitary group in his region, he tells the man that his brother was killed and as the leader of Komando Aksi, he must be responsible (Oppenheimer 2014). When the man says he cannot be held responsible as he was removed from Ramli's direct

killers, Adi suggests that the man is “avoiding his moral responsibility” (Oppenheimer 2014). The man then proceeds to ask Adi which subdistrict his brother lived in, and when Adi refuses to tell him, the man accuses Adi of doing secret communist activity (Oppenheimer 2014). Adi calmly asks, “If I came to you like this during the military dictatorship, what would you have done to me?” (Oppenheimer 2014). The man replies, “You can’t imagine what would have happened” (Oppenheimer 2014). Even in the present, decades after the genocide, perpetrators remain in power to an extent that they can still threaten the families of victims. They accuse people of being communist as if they are still in the 1960s, and this is a viable threat.

The behind-the-scenes strategy of Adi’s visits with perpetrators further shows the reality of threats to survivors and families of victims today. In an op-ed in 2014, Oppenheimer said that his intention was to make a movie about survivors first. After some time working with survivors, however, the military “found out what we were doing and threatened the survivors about participating” (Oppenheimer 2014). Survivors then encouraged Oppenheimer to try and speak with perpetrators instead. Only after years of building relationships with perpetrators was Oppenheimer able to work with Adi safely, and even then, Adi’s family had to relocate after the film’s release. Oppenheimer’s relationships with perpetrators in powerful political positions serves as a safety guarantee when Adi speaks to perpetrators with less political power (O’Hagan 2015).

Consequences of Denial

As Adi confronts perpetrator after perpetrator, the audience realizes he will never get the closure he deserves; this leaves the audience with a sense of the injustice that persists in Indonesia today. In one scene, Adi confronts M. Y. Basrun, the speaker of the local legislature

and former secretary general of Komando Aksi, the local paramilitary group that carried out many of the mass killings. Adi tells Basrun that many people were killed at Snake River, a local site of many of the mass killings. Basrun replies that “the mass killings were the spontaneous action of the people.” Adi asks, “Aren’t you just saying this because you’re in the legislature?” to which Basrun responds, “No, I’m setting the record straight.” Adi challenges him again, suggesting that maybe “the crime [is] so big you don’t want to admit it?” Basrun still denies this, saying, “No, I don’t think it’s big” (Oppenheimer 2014). Finally, Adi tells Basrun that his brother was a victim murdered by Basrun’s men, at which point Basrun rolls his eyes and asks Adi, “Do the victim’s families want the killings to happen again?” When confronted with the reality of his actions, Basrun refuses to admit his wrongs or take responsibility. He upholds the falsified, state-enforced narrative that the killings were spontaneous violence by the people against evil communists. Even when Adi tells him to his face that he took part in killing someone Adi loves, Basrun responds not with remorse but instead with a threat to Adi and his family.

A scene in the last ten minutes of the movie shows Adi’s father, who is deaf and blind, lost in the courtyard of his own home. Alone and afraid, he calls out, “Where am I? ... How did I get here? Help me! I’ve wandered into a stranger’s house” (Oppenheimer 2014). The scene feels like a break from the rest of the movie, which mostly consists of shots of Adi on his own or in conversation with perpetrators. This scene of Adi’s father was actually filmed by Adi, and he says it is the moment he “realised it was too late for [his father]. He would die with the trauma from Ramli’s murder, and he would never heal, because he had forgotten the son whose murder destroyed our family” (O’Hagan 2015). The consequence of the lack of acknowledgment from perpetrators seen in the rest of the movie is that victims and their families are unable to heal. The

scene is a painful representation of the lasting and sometimes permanent consequences of genocide and impunity.

The Look of Silence is an intimate look at one narrative that has long been silenced in Indonesian society. The film shows its audience the pain of a family that has lost a son to the genocide, and the further trauma of being silenced by fear. Memories like those that Adi's family holds of Ramli are not part of the collective memory of society because there has been no justice and perpetrators still have impunity today. The movie also displays the threat that survivors and their families still live in fear of; even after fifty years, perpetrators can still make viable threats because they remain in positions of power. *The Look of Silence* does not give its audience any satisfaction; by the end of the movie, no perpetrators have acknowledged the consequences of their actions. The film ends with a sense of the injustice that persists in Indonesia today. *The Act of Killing*, by deconstructing the nation's collective memory, made room for narratives like *The Look of Silence*. Oppenheimer's hope is that by telling the story of one victim, it can make room for others (O'Hagan 2015).

Conclusion

The Act of Killing and *The Look of Silence* were released in Indonesia and internationally; Indonesians are able to watch the films digitally, as well as at film screenings that have occurred across the country since the movies' releases. The government, however, opposes the film; on many occasions, "private showings have been shut down by police and violently disrupted by Islamist and anti-Communist militant groups," and the "government and anti-communist organisations continue to try to stop [the movies'] distribution" (Bjerregaard 2014; Emont 2015).

When *The Act of Killing* was nominated for an Academy Award in 2014, however, the government was forced to respond publicly. Presidential spokesman Teuku Faizasyah criticized the film, saying that it portrays Indonesia as a “cruel and lawless nation ... as backwards, as in the 1960s” (Pulver 2014). It has been less than ten years since the movies were released, and thus it is difficult to ascertain the true impact these movies have had on collective memory amongst Indonesians today. Examining the pervasiveness of *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* in discourse and collective memory in Indonesia could be an opportunity for future research.

The Act of Killing does memory work by blowing apart the state-enforced collective memory in Indonesia through the transformation of perpetrators’ memories; this created space for other narratives like *The Look of Silence* that showed the lasting and painful consequences of genocide and continued impunity. These films go beyond the convention of human rights documentaries, instead pushing their subjects and viewers alike to engage with their memories of violence. For transitional justice institutions such as tribunals to be effective, practitioners must understand the nuances of post-genocide societies. Memory work like Oppenheimer’s delves deep into the nuances and deconstructs memory politics.

V. The Indonesian Genocide: Present and Future

“Dimana bumi dipijak disana langit dijunjung.”
Where the land is stepped, there the sky is upheld.

Indonesian proverb

Introduction

This final chapter will describe actions taken for justice for the Indonesian genocide today, arguing that the field of transitional justice should focus on approaches tailored to the nuances and reality of the post-genocide society in question. The first section will enumerate efforts for justice in Indonesia today, including details on the International People’s Tribunal 1965 in The Hague in 2015. The chapter argues that this event was a prime example of trying to appeal to the conventions of transitional justice by mapping a legalistic framework onto a case that does not have the context for it. The chapter then highlights local approaches to justice in Indonesia today including textbook and curriculum revision, excavations, and artistic expressions. The last paragraphs of this chapter conclude the thesis, offering final thoughts on the lessons to be learned from the Indonesian case.

Efforts for Justice in Indonesia Today

This section will discuss efforts made in recent years for justice for the Indonesian genocide, beginning with one of the most significant endeavors that came to fruition in 2015: The International People’s Tribunal 1965 (IPT 1965 2015). After describing the ideation, formation, and outcomes of the IPT 1965, I argue that while it was important for raising global awareness and allowing for truth-seeking driven by survivors and families of victims, the event was an attempt to appeal to the legalist mindset of transitional justice by mapping a legal

framework onto a structure without legal power. This section then highlights several local approaches to transitional justice, many of which do memory work, including textbook and curriculum revision, excavations, and artistic expressions. I argue that though these kinds of efforts may receive less attention in the international transitional justice sphere, they are critical to Indonesian transitional justice and should be recognized as such.

The International People's Tribunal 1965

The IPT 1965, held in The Hague in 2015, had a role in raising global awareness and creating a platform for survivors to tell the truth of what happened during the Indonesian genocide; it did, however, try to pose as a legal institution even though that did not match with the reality. In a sense, the IPT 1965 was “playing tribunal” - on the surface, it had all the elements of a tribunal, but without any real legal structure or weight. This section will examine the path to the IPT 1965, its structure and process, and its outcomes, ultimately arguing that it tried to apply a conventional transitional justice approach that did not suit the Indonesian case.

Forming the IPT 1965

The motivation for a tribunal for Indonesia in 2015 came out of the government's repeated unwillingness to admit the crimes of 1965 or attempt to reconcile them. An informal meeting in 2013 in The Hague between Joshua Oppenheimer and human rights activists and Indonesian exiles in the Netherlands sparked discussion of the possibility of a tribunal (Santoso & van Klinken 2017). They discussed the impact of *The Act of Killing* in the country, as well as efforts for justice thus far. Acknowledging that there was little hope of government action, the group saw a need for another intervention. In 2014, the International People's Tribunal

Foundation was founded, including Indonesian exiles, human rights activists, and international researchers. This group would organize the IPT 1965 held in The Hague the following year (Santoso & van Klinken 2017).

The Tribunal

The IPT 1965 was held in the Nieuwe Kerk, an exhibition venue, in The Hague over four days in November 2015 (IPT 1965 2015). This event had the elements of past international tribunals: it had prosecutors and judges, held hearings with testimonies from survivors and scholars, and accepted submissions from civil society leading up to the event. Despite its appearance as a tribunal, however, it was held without any official or legal support from the United Nations or International Criminal Court. It had no power to enforce, and thus its organizers called it a “trial of inquiry,” with a mission of truth-seeking (Santoso & van Klinken 2017). Its stated mission was

“to determine whether these events amounted to crimes against humanity, to express a conclusion on whether the state of Indonesia and/or any other state should assume responsibility for these crimes and to recommend what may be done in the interests of lasting and just peace and social progress in Indonesia” (IPT 1965 2015).

Indonesian and international scholars, as well as civil society organizations in Indonesia, compiled a research report of over six hundred pages providing documentary material and evidence leading up to the trial (IPT 1965 2015). The panel of seven judges was presided over by Zak Yacoob, the former Chief of the South African Constitutional Court from 1998 to 2013, and Indonesian human rights lawyer Todung Mulya Lubis headed the prosecution team (Santoso & van Klinken 2017; IPT 1965 2015; Constitutional Court of South Africa). Indonesia, the United

States, the United Kingdom, and Australia were all invited to participate or make submissions to the tribunal, but none accepted the invitation (IPT 1965 2015). More than 20 witnesses came forth to provide testimony during the tribunal, some with their identities concealed due to continued threats to the safety of survivors and advocates (IPT 1965 2015). Scholars of the Indonesian genocide, including Jess Melvin and Bradley Simpson whose research has been extensively cited here, gave testimony as well (IPT 1965 2015). Though the IPT 1965 conducted itself as a tribunal, it did not hold weight in any official capacity.

Outcomes of the IPT 1965

The IPT 1965 judges concluded that the mass killings were a case of genocide, and found Indonesia guilty on nine counts of crimes against humanity: “(1) Murder, (2) Enslavement, (3) Imprisonment, (4) Torture, (5) Sexual Violence, (6) Persecution, (7) Enforced Disappearance, (8) Hate Propaganda and (9) Complicity of Other States” (IPT 1965 2015). The tribunal found the US and the UK guilty of complicity (IPT 1965 2015; Santoso & van Klinken 2017). These findings were issued in a final report in July 2016 detailing the evidentiary, legal, and theoretical basis of their ruling (IPT 1965 2015). In their report, the judges enumerated four criteria that deemed the Indonesian case a genocide:

1. The military’s acts fell within the provisions of the Genocide Convention,
2. The acts were committed against a protected group (a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group),
3. The acts were “committed with the specific intent to destroy that group in whole or in part,” and

4. The state of Indonesia is bound by the 1948 Genocide Convention as a member of United Nations (IPT 1965 2015).

Perhaps the most significant stance by the judges was their application of Raphael Lemkin's original definition of genocide in 1943: "the destruction of the national identity of the oppressed group [and] the imposition of the national identity of the oppressor" (IPT 1965 2015; Lemkin 1944). Positioning themselves in agreement with proponents of genocide designations for the Argentina and Cambodia cases, the judges chose a broader definition of genocide (IPT 1965 2015). The judges' definition goes against historical convention which asserts the perpetrator must be part of a group outside of the victim group (IPT 1965 2015). Using this stream of logic and the protection of "national groups" under the Genocide Convention, the judges argued that the military intended to destroy Indonesian communists, and therefore intended to destroy part of the Indonesian national group (IPT 1965 2015). The tribunal did not, however, decisively conclude whether attacks on Chinese people constituted genocide with ethnic motivation (IPT 1965 2015). The judges did recognize that "ethnic motives played a role in mass killings of Chinese-Indonesian citizens as well, particularly in Medan, Makassar and Lombok," so "to the extent that they were killed because of their Chinese identity, their murders would plausibly amount to genocide under the Genocide Convention" (IPT 1965 2015). The final report expressed a need for further investigation into this particular issue (IPT 1965 2015). In its ruling, the IPT 1965 judges went against norms in transitional justice by applying a definition of genocide that went beyond the Genocide Convention. Though this has great discursive significance with regard to the Indonesian genocide, the judges' conclusion holds no legal weight nationally or internationally. The judges presented it as a ruling, but their conclusion serves as more of a recommendation.

Indonesian Government Response

The outcome of the tribunal with regard to the judges' final recommendation has been unsuccessful. The judges recommended that the Indonesian state do the following:

(a) apologize to all victims, survivors, and their families for the commission by the State of all the crimes against humanity and other crimes committed in Indonesia in relation to the 1965 events; (b) investigate and prosecute all crimes against humanity; (c) ensure appropriate compensation and reparation to victims and survivors (IPT 1965 2015).

At the time of this thesis, the Indonesian government has not done any of the above. From political and government officials, there was an overwhelmingly negative response (Santoso & van Klinken 2017). The current president since 2014, Joko Widodo has refused on multiple occasions to make an apology. At a public commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the murders of the six generals killed in 1965, Widodo made clear there would be no apology, saying, "Who should forgive whom when both sides claim to be victims?" (Emont 2015). Without recognition of the genocide, it seems unlikely that the government would go so far as to investigate or prosecute crimes of 1965 or issue reparations. The IPT 1965, however, did see coverage by Indonesian news outlets such as the Jakarta Post that also reported the tribunal's ruling of genocide (Yosephine 2016). This momentum helped spur greater dialogue and investigation by civil society.

International Response

International reactions to the IPT 1965 were generally positive and supportive of the tribunal's findings. Media outlets such as the BBC, CNN, Aljazeera, and TIME reported the

tribunal's 2016 ruling of genocide (Aljazeera 2016; BBC 2016; Kwok 2016; Perry 2016). The IPT 1965 raised the profile of the Indonesian genocide on the international stage. The accused governments (the UK and the US), however, have not made any formal apology for their participation and complicity in the genocide (Simpson 2017). Particularly in the US, where recent declassified documents have proved the active role of the US in the genocide, the lack of formal recognition is disappointing for many (Simpson 2017).

The IPT 1965 asserted on a global stage that the Indonesian genocide was indeed a genocide, raising the profile of the Indonesian case, and creating public space for survivors' and victims' stories. It was not, however, the tribunal that it purported to be; it did not hold the legal weight of a tribunal or have any support from international institutions, and did not put the pressure on the Indonesian government that a tribunal might. Perhaps more significant are the local transitional justice approaches that Indonesian activists have taken since the IPT 1965. In the next section, I will enumerate some local approaches that have been taken toward reconciliation, justice, and peacebuilding.

Local Approaches

This section will highlight several approaches that Indonesian activists and citizens have taken for justice for the Indonesian genocide, arguing that these efforts should also be regarded and respected in the field of transitional justice for their ability to address deep-rooted social challenges after genocide. While there have been many forms of activism around the 1965 genocide, this section will detail three approaches: textbook and curriculum revision, exhumations, and artistic expressions.

Textbooks and Curriculum Revision

Textbooks and curriculum revision in Indonesia are a form of memory work; historically, Indonesian textbooks have either left the genocide out entirely or have told the state's official story. Oppenheimer shows the audience this particular aspect of memory in *The Look of Silence*; in one scene, Adi's son sits in a classroom listening to his teacher say that "the communists were cruel, so the government had to repress them," and, referring to the perpetrators of the genocide: "Let's thank the heroes - who struggled to make our country a democracy" (Oppenheimer 2014). In 1963, before the genocide, the government passed a law called the Law on Securing Printed Materials Whose Content Could Disrupt Public Order (Buchanan 2010). Throughout the Suharto dictatorship, this law came to mean a ban on any books that did not agree with the government's official story about 1965 (Schonhardt 2012). Even after the fall of the Suharto regime, hostility toward perceived communists - including victims and survivors of the genocide - led to mass book burnings (Forbes 2007). In 2010, however, Indonesia's Constitutional Court declared this law unconstitutional and struck it down (Buchanan 2010; Schonhardt 2012). While the law has had a long-lasting chilling effect, there has been a movement for textbook revisions since the Constitutional Court ruling as well as the IPT 1965's ruling of genocide (Schonhardt 2012; Santoso & van Klinken 2017). A publisher in Java called Ultimus has released several memoirs of victims and survivors of the Indonesian genocide, and both Indonesian and non-Indonesian writers of banned books have pushed against the current government's continued attacks (Schonhardt 2012; Yulius 2016). The head of the Indonesian Teacher's Association, Ratna Hapsari, has been leading efforts to revise the history curriculum (Schonhardt 2012). While the government continues to resist efforts to introduce more truthful texts into schools, teachers have

found other ways to incorporate this material into their classrooms through other resources, including those online (Schonhardt 2012). Teachers like Hapsari have been incorporating the collections of memoirs published by Ultimus in their classrooms as well (Putu Oka Sukanta 2011, 2016). By attempting to change the way that Indonesia's history is taught to the next generation, activists in Indonesia are engaging in memory work that attempts to dismantle the government's enforced memory of the 1965 events.

Exhumations of Mass Graves

Since the end of the Suharto regime, activists have attempted to find and exhume mass graves from the killings in 1965; these efforts both provide physical evidence of the genocide and can help to reconcile the events for victims, survivors, and their families. After the genocide, many residents knew where mass killings occurred in their towns and villages, but could not speak about them out of fear for their safety (McGregor 2010). In 2000, two years after the fall of the military dictatorship, an organization called the Foundation for the Research into Victims of the 1965-66 Killings (YPKP) exhumed a mass grave in Central Java (McGregor 2010; Santoso & van Klinken 2017). This exhumation gave community members and families of victims the opportunity to witness physical evidence of the mass killings, and to give some of the murdered a proper burial (McGregor 2010). The attempt at reburial after the exhumation in Central Java, however, was met with attacks - members of a group called the Kaloran Muslim Brotherhood blocked proceedings to the burial site and attacked the cars carrying the remains to be buried, removing the remains and tossing them out (McGregor 2010). This attack cast doubt on the possibility of future identification and excavation of mass graves. Indeed, this was the only exhumation before the IPT 1965 (McGregor 2010). In 2016, President Joko Widodo called

for the government to identify mass graves. The government has since failed to carry through on this (Harsono 2017). The tribunal's organizers, however, along with survivors and activists, have identified about 120 mass graves in Java alone (Santoso & van Klinken 2017). A group called the 1965 Murder Victims Research Foundation has also been involved in such efforts (Harsono 2017). Exhuming mass graves now is critical as over time, remains will become even harder to identify. Exhumations both provide important physical evidence and can be part of the healing process for survivors and families of victims.

Artistic Expressions

The Act of Killing and *The Look of Silence* demonstrated the power of art as an approach to transitional justice, and many people in Indonesia have taken a similarly artistic approach to representing, revisiting, and reconciling the Indonesian genocide. Through literary fiction, theater, film, and fine arts, Indonesians have grappled with the legacies of the genocide. This section will examine one initiative in particular that stands out as an example: The Papermoon Puppet Theatre in Yogyakarta (Lis 2018). The Papermoon Puppet Theatre is a group that does performances for audiences of all ages that grapple with the pain and legacy of the Indonesian genocide. In Indonesia, puppetry has been a tradition for centuries with an art form called *wayang kulit*, or shadow puppets. These intricately cut out puppets are a way to tell stories of mythical origin, but have also been used historically for political ends (Lis 2018). Combining this tradition with more global forms of puppetry, the Papermoon Puppet Theatre “focus[es] on the stories of individuals which might resonate with the experiences of audiences as people who were either bystanders to the violence in their communities or affected by it in their family or community circles” (Lis 2018). One performance named *Mwathirika* explores themes of loss and

suffering after the genocide. The group spoke with people in their own communities to weave together stories that formed *Mwathirika*. Much like Oppenheimer's films, this performance "does not pass judgment instead, [it] describe[s] the impact of historical events upon the life of individuals, families, and an entire generation brought up in those years" (Lis 2018). The Papermoon Puppet Theatre does similar memory work to Oppenheimer's films, connecting deeply with their own communities. While puppet theatre is unconventional compared to the institutions of transitional justice that the field prioritizes, it can be an effective approach to engaging with collective memory of communities.

Textbook and curriculum revisions, exhumations, and artistic expressions are just several of the many ways that Indonesians have pushed for justice for the Indonesian genocide. Each of these strategies plays a unique and critical role. Grassroots approaches like the ones described here have the complex and nuanced understanding needed to reshape culture and informal social structures. These local approaches are important to justice for the Indonesian genocide, and serve as an example for the kind of work that the field of transitional justice should support more moving forward.

The Way Forward

This section will conclude both the chapter and this thesis by articulating how the field of transitional justice should learn from the Indonesian genocide case. This thesis investigated the question: What lessons should the field of transitional justice learn from Oppenheimer's films and the Indonesian genocide case? Through an in-depth analysis of *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* with supporting evidence from empirical research on the genocide, this thesis

argues for three main lessons the transitional justice field should learn from the Indonesian genocide case: 1) memory can be a powerful tool of repression, 2) addressing memory politics is critical to transitional justice after genocide, and 3) memory work should be part of transitional justice after genocide because it can dismantle hegemony with a greater awareness of societal nuances.

The Indonesian genocide case demonstrates that memory can be a powerful tool of repression. This genocide is unique in that the oppressors “won,” remained in power over forty years, and retain social and political power today. Historical negationism, the falsification of historical facts, was a key tool for the military dictatorship to retain power. By enforcing a narrative about the genocide that blamed the communists for the violence, portraying them as evil and cruel, the state silenced the victims of their regime. This state-sanctioned narrative became part of Indonesian collective memory so that even after the end of the dictatorship, survivors and families of victims are still silenced. *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* show that survivors and families of victims still face viable threats from former perpetrators who still hold political power. The democratic government today continues to deny the genocide, upholding the dictatorship’s narrative.

The impact of memory politics on justice for the Indonesian genocide demonstrates how necessary it is to address it as part of transitional justice. Joshua Oppenheimer’s films reveal memory’s active and powerful impact on the present, and how it is inextricably linked to power. The work that *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* did to challenge the national narrative, and therefore Indonesia’s power dynamics, strove for *just* memory: an ethics of memory that recalls the memories of everyone involved in an event. *The Act of Killing* dismantled the dominant narrative that shapes Indonesian society in order to make space for a multitude of

narratives. Creating this kind of environment is necessary to the success of transitional justice approaches like tribunals; the safety of open dialogue is critical to truth-seeking and reconciliation.

Memory work like Oppenheimer's should be part of transitional justice after genocide. Recognizing the role of memory in post-genocide societies is part of a broader need for the field of transitional justice to deeply understand the informal dynamics that often determine societal outcomes. In places like Indonesia where formal structures for justice are absent at the government level, the transitional justice community must recognize the importance of bottom-up approaches like memory work. More broadly, the field must allow for non-legalistic approaches to take priority if it best suits the case. The IPT 1965, while significant in its creation of an international platform for survivors to speak, was a prime example of practitioners forcing a legalistic framework onto a case that it did not make sense for.

This thesis addressed lessons from the Indonesian genocide for the field of transitional justice, but was limited in its ability to assess the status of justice in Indonesia today. Investigation of the impact of Oppenheimer's films in Indonesia and assessments of ongoing transitional justice efforts in the country are potential areas for future research. The field must have a critical eye toward its own efforts across the world and the limitations its priorities impose on each case. The way that the field of transitional justice grapples with the aftermath of previous genocides such as the Indonesian genocide will inform the outcomes of conflict and violence currently happening in the world. By revisiting approaches to past genocides, perhaps the field can find new paths to peace today.

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