



40 years of silence

An Indonesian tragedy

General Film Guide

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Film Synopsis

Directed by anthropologist Robert Lemelson and edited by two-time Academy Award winner Pietro Scalia, “40 Years of Silence: An Indonesian Tragedy” is a moving feature length documentary film about one of the most horrific chapters in Indonesia’s history.

In one of the largest unknown mass killings of the 20th century, an estimated 500,000 to 1,000,000 people were secretly and systematically killed in 1965-1966, when General Suharto began a bloody purge of suspected communists throughout Indonesia.

Under his authoritarian rule, any discussion, recognition or memorializing of the mass killings that differed from Suharto’s official state narrative was quickly suppressed. This enforced silence inspired the film’s title.

“40 Years of Silence: An Indonesian Tragedy” follows the compelling testimonies of four individuals and their families from Central Java and Bali, two regions heavily affected by the purge.

As they break their silence publicly for the first time, each family provides an intimate and frightening look at what it was like for survivors of the mass killings.

In chilling detail, they describe the events of 1965 through their own experiences; re-living and reflecting upon the stigmatization and brutalization that they continue to endure on both the village and state levels.

Over time, the survivors and their families attempt to find ways to deal with a tragedy that was not openly recognized by their neighbors, government or the world.

Through their stories, the audience will come to understand modern-day Indonesia’s potential for retribution, rehabilitation and reconciliation within this troubled historical context.

The characters’ narratives illustrate that such violence creates tears in the social and political fabric of society, which can take generations to heal.

Director's Statement



I am a research anthropologist and I have been working in Indonesia every year since 1993. I have conducted thousands of interviews with subjects throughout the country, all focusing on issues relating to personal experience, culture, and mental illness.

It was through this work that I became acquainted with the subjects of this film, all of whom I now consider my close friends. Some of them were patients in the clinics where I was conducting anthropological research, some were colleagues, and others were informants. As I grew to know

them well, they began to speak about their experiences during 1965 and afterwards.

Although they are from different parts of the Indonesian social world, all four characters witnessed their family members being imprisoned, tortured, or killed. Some feared for their personal safety in talking about this little known but tragic history, but ultimately, they all felt that their stories should be told.

There are both similarities and differences between the mass killings of 1965 and other mass killings of the 20th century. One of the striking features of the violence under General Suharto's

Director's Statement

regime was the degree to which the government successfully repressed all memorials, remembrances, and recollections of the event.

The Suharto regime created a monolithic state narrative, and thus the world knows very little of this horrific and tragic history. There was an enforced silence in Indonesia because the perpetrators remained in power for decades afterwards.

It is only now, after the fall of the New Order regime in 1998 and the death of President Suharto last year, that Indonesians are

beginning to speak out and come to terms with this complicated and painful history.

This film represents part of that effort. Whenever I have given talks about this, even to highly educated audiences, rarely do people even know about this event, even though it was among the largest mass killings of the 20th century.

This brings to mind the quote from Adolf Hitler, who, in planning the “Final Solution” stated, “Who remembers the Armenians?” His belief was that he could act with impunity because he believed no



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one remembered or chose to care about the Armenian Genocide.

It is our hope that more people in the world become aware of this tragic history, from the perspective of the victims. Understanding and telling their stories is long overdue in modern Indonesia.

It is also a vital process to ensure that this history is never repeated. The “will to bear witness” in the efforts to bring such events as the mass killings of 1965 to wide attention are necessary correctives to the silencing of millions.



- Gain a familiarity with the mass killing events of 1965, and understand their significance in Indonesian history
- Recognize the social, cultural, and personal repercussions of mass violence on a local and national scale. Acknowledge the deeply personal aspects of these horrific struggles and trace the long-term effects of trauma through generations
- Situate Indonesia's mass killings within a global context of genocide and genocide studies and grasp modern-day Indonesia's potential for retribution, rehabilitation, and reconciliation
- Understand that trauma occurs within a specific social and cultural setting, which provides clues to interpreting its meaning and implication
- Appreciate the highly individual responses to violence and trauma and the resilience factors that provide pathways to recovery

Purpose of Guide

Designed to accompany *40 Years of Silence: An Indonesian Tragedy*, this guide provides a framework for viewing the film and discussing some of the many responses it may evoke. The guide also suggests follow-up activities that address the key concerns of the film, enrich the viewing experience, and encourage further learning and growth whether in a classroom or community setting.

Additionally, the guide provides links to useful supplemental information that will enhance viewers' understanding of the content of the film.

The film may be relevant to a variety of audiences, and therefore we encourage a flexible approach towards the guide. Feel free to use it as a starting point from which you may tailor questions and activities to your particular group's interests and concerns.



Pre-Viewing Suggestions

This film is appropriate for a variety of different audiences such as church and activist groups, Indonesian or Indonesian-American cultural organizations, therapists and educators, support groups, and general audiences.

After welcoming the audience and introducing the event, if it is an unfamiliar audience the facilitator is encouraged to:

- Read aloud the film synopsis and/or the director's statement.
- Canvas the room to find who is present and what their interest is in being there. This will help participants get acquainted with one another and prepare the facilitator to ask relevant and appropriate questions in the discussion period following the film.
- Remind all participants of viewing expectations such as:
 - The viewing event marks a safe space where people are free to respond as they feel appropriate
 - Compassionate and objective listening and speaking will be encouraged
 - All comments will be kept

confidential

The facilitator may want to alert the audience that those who have experienced similar events, whether they have been affected by Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the past or not, may be triggered by images and memories of violence.

Depending on the expected audience, you may want to consider having support systems in place during your outreach activities. For more information about PTSD, visit <http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/> and see the further links and resources section of this guide.

Post-Viewing Suggestions



After viewing the film, it may be helpful to provide 5-10 minutes where the participants may quietly write down their immediate responses and reflections.

The facilitator may then initiate discussion by asking people to read aloud and share these with the group.

Beginning a discussion with personal reactions will both help review the film and hone in on what is important to your audience. Facilitators can then guide the conversation to focus on whatever key issues might be of importance to their audience by asking questions such as those provided in the following pages.

Discussion Guide



Personal Reflection

What parts of the film stood out to you? Was there anything particularly surprising, troubling, or inspiring?

Does the film raise any questions for you?

Lanny says that her initial response to her father's death and the violence and injustice suffered by her family was,

"Where is God? Why does he let this happen?"

However ultimately she comes to a different conclusion, saying,

"During this chaos in 1965, I would say there was a big choice, that I would collapse or I would grow. If I still keep the hatred, it's like I have a bomb inside me. I think I have suffered enough, why should I suffer more?"

Do you relate to her perspective?

How is Lanny's process of coming to terms with what happened to her similar to or different from those of the other characters? What are some of the ways the other characters empower themselves to find peace, acceptance, and healing? How do you understand these reactions?

What do you think you might do if you or a family member were in a similar situation? How have you come to terms with past traumas or grief? Does it help to address grief communally?

Discussion Guide

Personalizing Mass Killing

What other incidences of genocides or mass killings are you aware of?

Is it easy or difficult for you to think of genocide on a personal scale?

Do you know anyone who has experienced political violence or the effects of genocide?

Do you see any similarities or differences between their stories and those of the characters in the film?

If don't know anyone, has this film improved your understanding of what such situations might be like?

Did the film give you any new perspectives on trauma?



Discussion Guide

Memorializing Trauma

Thinking about what you saw in the film, why do you think these mass killing events remain relatively unknown in the global consciousness?

Whose loss or suffering has been overlooked or ignored in your own family or community?

Whose grief has been overlooked in national policy or national versions of history?

Whose loss or suffering has been memorialized? Why do you think there is this disparity?





Long-Term Effects of Trauma

What does the film show about the long-term effects and outcomes of trauma?

Which aspects of suffering lessen with time? What problems or challenges persist?

How do different generations face and cope with the fallout of violence? For example, how is Mudakir and Sumini's situation different from that of their children, Budi and Kris?

How do social or cultural influences contribute to the experience, expression, repercussions of, and recovery from violence? For example, while Degung and Kere-ta both live in Bali, their outcomes were very different. Why might this be? What factors contributed to their different trajectories?

Discussion Guide

Seeking Justice

What might these characters, or the hundreds of thousands like them in Indonesia today, need in order to feel like they have achieved justice?

Does the current Indonesian government, either on a national or local scale, have any responsibility to initiate former procedures? What might these be?

What role, if any, should the international community play in potential truth and reconciliation or retribution efforts?





Considering what further actions viewers can take to follow up on some of the feelings and issues raised by the film may be an empowering way to conclude your viewing event.

The main characters in the film come to realize that the search for truth, the quest for justice, and a measure of peace must begin with themselves, their families, and their local communities. Brainstorm what kinds of activities your group/parish/etc can engage in that can start the process for yourselves.

The film illustrates how personal reflections and memories provide powerful testimony in the

context of large-scale institutional violence. How can survivors be encouraged to share their stories?

For example, how can your group create an environment that feels safe and supportive? How can the your community/clients/ worshippers/ group members foster the “will to bear witness”?

40 Years of Silence suggests that grieving and healing processes were hindered by the state’s monolithic control over the representation and memorialization of the events of 1965.

It also clearly shows that giving voice to personal experiences

Taking Action

of trauma or violence may be therapeutic for those who have suffered.

Yet, such processes of remembrance can be very complex. This may be because there are differing accounts of past events that were highly frightening and chaotic, such as when Degung and his neighbor have different perspectives on what exactly happened in their village. It also may be due to the present realities of social life where perpetrators and victims are still living in close proximity.

Discuss how events of mass violence might be successfully remembered or represented.

For example, is it necessary that the remembrance occur on a national scale, or in concert with retribution?

What role might media and the arts play in contributing to national or personal recovery from mass violence?

How might you choose to memorialize these events?

Create a memorial together, either for the victims of 1965 or for an event that is most relevant to your group.

The facilitator may also want to conclude by suggesting that participants continue the conversation with family members, classmates, and the broader community. They may also hand out photocopies of the resources listed on the following pages.



Links and Resources

1965

[“The Killings of 1965-66” by Inside Indonesia](#)

[“Suharto’s Gulag/ The Buru Island Humanitarian Project: Former Prisoners Look Back on a Remote Tropical Hell”](#)

[by Thomas Fuller, New York Times](#)

[“Indonesians Differ on Penalties](#)

[for the Past” by Seth Mydans, New York Times](#)

[“Transition to the New Order” by Wikipedia](#)

[“Who Plotted the Indonesia 1965 coup?” by Inside Indonesia](#)

[“The Attempted Coup d’Etat in Indonesia of October 1965” by Thayer Watkins](#)

[“Mass Grave Indonesia” by Lexy Junior Rambadeta and Offstream Media](#)



Childhood Trauma

[The Foundation for Psychocultural Research](#)

[National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder](#)

[National Institute of Mental Health \(NIMH\)](#)

[Mayo Clinic](#)

[National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)

[Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Gateway](#)

Links and Resources

Genocide

[The Genocide Research Project,
University of Memphis & Penn
State University](#)

[Institute for the Study of Genocide
Montreal Institute for Genocide
and Human Rights Studies](#)

[Web Genocide Documentation
Centre](#)

[Centre for Comparative Genocide
Studies, Macquarie University
Australian Institute for Holocaust
and Genocide Studies, Shalom
College](#)

[Yale Genocide Studies Program](#)

[Danish Center from Holocaust
and Genocide Studies](#)

[Center for the Study of the
Holocaust, Genocide, & Human
Rights](#)

[United States Holocaust Memorial
Museum](#)

[The Genocide Factor](#)

[Center for Holocaust, Genocide
& Peace Studies, University of
Nevada, Reno](#)

[Fortunoff Video Archive for
Holocaust Testimonies
Cultural Survival](#)



Indonesia

[BBC News Indonesia Profile](#)

[Jakarta Post](#)

[Inside Indonesia](#)



Film Credits

Director	Robert Lemelson
Producer	Robert Lemelson
Supervising Editor	Pietro Scalia
Cinematographer	Dag Yngvesson
Editor	Kathy Huang
Editor	Wing Ko
Editor	Emily Ng
Editor	Heidi Zimmerman
Music Composer	Malcolm Cross
Music Editor	Richard Henderson
Motion Graphics	Luis Lopez
Print Graphics	Yee Ie
Post-Production Supervisor	Alessandra Pasquino
Field Supervisor	Wayan Sadha
Field Supervisor	Ninik Supartini

Study Guide Credits

Author	Robert Lemelson
Author	Annie Tucker
Design	Yee Ie



Purchase Information

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CD

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