

Remembering 1965: Indonesian Cinema and the ‘Battle for History’

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Abstract

Using four films to probe the transformations in Indonesia’s historical memory, this paper examines how the Indonesian society remembers, interrogates, and comes to terms with one of their nation’s most traumatic episodes: the widespread communist purge that followed the failed coup on 30 September 1965. It also demonstrates how they reflect various perspectives on the 1965 killings that are—to an extent—part of the “Battle of History” (van Klinken 2001) in post-Suharto Indonesia, wherein different historiographic traditions introduce new actors, reveal the nuances, and challenge longstanding dominant understandings of 1965.

Keywords: Indonesian Cinema, 1965 Communist Purge, Historical Memory, Cold War

Introduction: The Communist Purge in Indonesia

The communist purge that followed the failed coup of 30 September 1965 is one of the defining events of modern Indonesian history. Although the coup was swiftly quelled by members of the *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (TNI-Indonesian National Armed Forces), the reprisal led to the torture and death of numerous Indonesians who were members, suspected members, or even mere sympathizers of the Indonesian Communist Party, *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI). Though various scholars have attempted to find out exactly what happened (Roosa 2006; Pohlman 2013; Swift 2010; Hadiz 2010; Mortimer 2006; Kolimon and Campbell-Nelson 2015;