

Reconciliation of Social Movement: Debate of Syarikat Indonesia's Role in the Advocacy of the 1965' Victims

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Abstract: The 1965 tragedy that befell the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) left deep wounds on Indonesian society. Reconciliation efforts between these two groups still face various challenges, both from the government and from the people. This research aims to examine the Syarikat Indonesia people's movement, which is one of the reconciliation initiatives between the PKI and NU. This research also wants to know the function of the Company as a social movement that seeks to change society. This research uses qualitative methods that integrate text analysis and interviews with Syarikat members and sympathizers. The data collected was then analyzed using a social movement theoretical framework. This research provides a new contribution by revealing the dynamics and obstacles faced by the Company in carrying out reconciliation. This research also shows how the Syarikat provides an alternative narrative about the events of 1965 that differs from the official state narrative. In addition, this research highlights the role and impact of Syarikat in promoting democratization and social justice in Indonesia.

Keywords: Reconciliation, Social Movement, Syarikat Indonesia, The 1965 tragedy

A. Introduction

This paper investigates the interplay between the social movement as a theory and reconciliation approach as has been used by *Syarikat Indonesia* (hereafter also: *Syarikat*) in its reconciliatory attempts between *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU),¹ and the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in the aftermath of the 1965 tragedy. Syarikat is a non-profit and non-governmental organization that was formed in Yogyakarta in 2000 with the support of youth activists of NU. The organisation describes itself as the proponent of the grassroots reconciliation

¹ Having more than 90 million members, Nahdlatul Ulama is the largest Islamic organisation of both Indonesia and the world. It was established in 1926 by Hasyim Asy'ari. For further information about its history, mission, and organisations, see: Aziz, Imam, *Ensiklopedia Nahdlatul Ulama: Sejarah, Tokoh Dan Khazanah Pesantren*, vol. 1 (Jakarta: Mata Bangsa, 2014).

approach, its main objective being to reconcile victims and perpetrators of the 1965 anti-communist attack.²

As a grassroots initiative, the *syarikat* movement focuses on efforts of peace building, reconciliation, and human rights activities in Indonesia.³ Its name is derived from an Indonesian phrase, *Masyarakat santri untuk advokasi rakyat*, meaning ‘the Muslim community that advocates for the public’. The community was founded in 2000 in Yogyakarta with the support of young activists of *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), and its objective is to promote reconciliation between NU and the Indonesian Communist Party (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, PKI) and to create a fairer and more peaceful environment within the Indonesian society.⁴

The collapse of the Suharto regime and the reformation era of post-1998 are generally seen as a starting point for many grassroots initiatives, or, otherwise, organisations that saw the possibility to express freely their ideas to the public, including *Syarikat*.⁵ *Syarikat* found the opportunity to spread the idea of reconciliation between NU and PKI shortly after the fall of the New Order regime. This window of opportunity was also enhanced by Abdurrahman Wahid, one of NU’s leaders during the period 1984-’98, who was elected for president in 1999. Shortly after his inauguration, Wahid acknowledged the involvement of NU followers in the mass killings against accused-Communist Party members in 1965⁶ and admitted that followers of NU had participated in the atrocities against accused PKI members during the 1965 tragedy. On behalf of NU, Wahid asked for forgiveness for that past oversight and requested that the Indonesian government facilitate the reconciliation process between victims and perpetrators, the aim being the strengthening of societal bonds between the two groups that had been,

² Katharine McGregor, “Syarikat and the Move to Make Amends for the Nahdlatul Ulama’s Violent Past,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2008, 11–12, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1317145>.

³ Aziz, Imam and Ahmad Murtajib, *Syarikat Indonesia: History and Role in the Advocacy of the 1965 tragedy victims*, Email and Whatsapp Call, May 29, 2017, <https://www.syarikat.org/en/article/our-context>.

⁴ Aziz, Imam and Murtajib.

⁵ McGregor, “Syarikat and the Move to Make Amends for the Nahdlatul Ulama’s Violent Past,” 10–12.

⁶ Priyambudi Sulistiyanto and Rumekso Setyadi, “Civil Society and Grassroots Reconciliation in Central Java,” in *Reconciling Indonesia: Grassroots Agency for Peace*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 197–98.

at the time, detached for almost forty years.⁷ This involvement would not only contribute to the process of truth-telling by both victims and perpetrators, but would also enlighten the extent of NU's involvement in the 1965 tragedy.⁸ I would argue that these statements are necessary to support the significance of reconciliation between the NU and the PKI in order to achieve social justice in contemporary Indonesian society. Moreover, such reconciliation process, I believe, could enable the Indonesian people to have access to balanced source of information regarding the tragedy rather than the current formal version of the New Order regime.

The grassroots reconciliation process towards the Indonesian 1965 tragedy, as applied by *Syarikat Indonesia*, is complex due to the various difficulties that interfere to the process' effectiveness, such as challenges are, we may hypothesise, derived from both internal and external factors. Internally, challenges could pertain regarding organisational management. Externally, factors that make the process difficult could revolve around matters of sponsorship and government assistance and cooperation. Imam Aziz, the *Syarikat Indonesia's* founders, regards the 1965 tragedy as one of the darkest crimes against humanity, having occurred after the independence of the country and, since, resulted in traumatisation and stigmatization of and discrimination against the victims as well as their children and grandchildren.⁹

In a nutshell, I believe it is important and even necessary to investigate further the movement of *Syarikat Indonesia* as a socio-religious movement advocating for the rights and justice of the victims of the Indonesian tragedy of 1965. This article, 'Reconciliation and Social Movement: Polemics of *Syarikat Indonesia's* Role in the Advocacy of the 1965' Victims,' would be one of the answers to a question that examines the role of *Syarikat Indonesia*, a social movement, in advocating for the rights and justice of the 1965 victims of the Indonesian tragedy. In addition, the purpose of this article is to examine the interplay between reconciliation efforts, social movements, and the controversies

⁷ Sulistiyanto and Setyadi, 198.

⁸ Aziz, Imam and Murtajib, *Syarikat Indonesia: History and Role in the Advocation of the 1965 tragedy victims*.

⁹ Aziz, Imam and Murtajib, *Syarikat Indonesia: History and Role in the Advocation of the 1965 tragedy victims*.

surrounding Syarikat Indonesia's efforts to advance the victims' cause. It also seeks to examine the organization's motivations, strategies, and obstacles, as well as the impact of its initiatives on raising awareness and promoting dialogue about the 1965 tragedy.

B. Methods

This research focuses on the Syarikat Indonesia people's movement, which was one of the reconciliation initiatives between the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) after the 1965 tragedy. This research uses a qualitative research design, which is in accordance with Bruce Lawrence Berg's definition, namely 'seeking answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and so on.'¹⁰

The data sources for this research consist of two types, namely primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained from in-depth interviews with important figures from Syarikat Indonesia, who have valuable views and experiences regarding reconciliation and social movements. Secondary data is obtained from the study of relevant literature and documents, which provide context and background about the research topic.

Primary data collection was carried out using in-depth interview techniques, which allowed researchers to explore in depth the phenomenon under study. Interviews were conducted using open questions, which gave respondents flexibility and freedom to answer according to their understanding and experience. Secondary data collection was carried out using literature and document study techniques, which involved searching, selecting and evaluating sources related to the research topic.

Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis techniques, which involve the process of identifying, coding and interpreting themes and patterns that emerge from the data. Thematic analysis was carried out using a social movement theoretical framework, which provides a conceptual basis for

¹⁰ Bruce Lawrence Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2001), 6–7.

understanding the function and dynamics of Syarikat Indonesia as a social movement.

C. Finding and Discussion

1. Highlighted Definition of Reconciliation

The term 'reconciliation' is etymologically rooted in the Latin word *reconciliare* and consists of the prefix *re-*, meaning 'again', combined with the root word *conciliare*, meaning 'to make friendly.' Essentially, the Latin term can be translated as 'to make friendly again.'¹¹ Similar usage of the term can also be found in most Germanic languages. An example is the Swedish translation of the term, *försoning*, which the national encyclopaedia of Swedish defines as 'the re-establishment of peace and solidarity between divided peoples, in religion between deity and mankind.' The Quranic terms related to reconciliation are *sulh* and *iṣlāḥ*, an active form of 'conciliation' or 'settlement.' Daniel Philpott cites that those terms are commonly understood to mean an effort to 'make good, proper, right, to reconcile or settle.'¹²

Regardless, its terminological meaning and its definition has been challenged by many scholars of peace and conflict resolution studies. Karen Brouneus indicated some important difficulties in defining the term. First, its definition depends on the scopes and dimensions of reconciliation, for example, whether the term is used for political or theological purposes. Second, its definition depends on the object of reconciliation. When one talks about reconciliation, does one, then, refer to reconciliation in regard to the general society, or, instead, the individual victim? To some extent, I would argue, the failure to determine the object of reconciliation, i.e. to distinguish between national and individual levels, could be detrimental to the reconciliation process as a whole.

John Paul Lederach sees the process of reconciliation in three conceptual paradoxes. First and foremost, reconciliation not only functions as a bridge to allow for the expression of distressing moments of the past, but also seeks to

¹¹ Karen Brouneus, *Reconciliation: Theory and Practice for Development Cooperation* (Stockholm: Sida, 2003), 12–13.

¹² Daniel Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace: An Ethic of Political Reconciliation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 156.

establish a better, interdependent future. Second, reconciliation offers a place where both truth and mercy are able to meet in order to expose what was experienced in the past and to embrace a future of renewed relationship. Third, reconciliation grants the need to offer the possibility of justice and peace, '*where redressing the wrong is held together with the envisioning of a common, connected future*'.¹³ Based on this, Lederach further emphasizes that reconciliation consists of four essential elements, classified by him as:¹⁴

- *Truth*: Acknowledgement, revelation, and clarity;
- *Mercy*: Acceptance, forgiveness, support, compassion, and healing;
- *Justice*: Equality, right relationships, making things right, and restitution;
- *Peace*: Harmony, unity, well-being, security, and respect.

Taking into account the above, I would argue that the process of reconciliation is more likely to be a social transaction, in which both sides, victims and perpetrators, are mutually needed. In every transaction, both the seller and the customer are involved in the process of deal-making, or in the decision to sell or not to sell. Similarly, in the process of reconciliation, both victims and perpetrators are together making the effort to share past experiences and to continue to live in peace. Furthermore, the reconciliation process should not force either victim or perpetrator to forget, to forgive, or to love the other. Having considered the above definitions, I would define reconciliation as the acknowledgement of a painful past by both victims and perpetrators which requires the willingness to forgive those painful experiences of the past in order to start building a new and better relationship for the future.

2. A Convergence of the Syarikat Indonesia and Social Movement Approach

There are a variety of approaches taken by scholars to the question of what elements constitute social movements. Scholars have defined social movements from a variety of perspectives based on the typology of a social movement's network, structure, and strategies. The vast majority of academics place an

¹³ Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, 32.

¹⁴ Lederach, 26–30.

emphasis on essential aspects that define social movements. These aspects include the capacity of individuals who have common objectives to engage in long-term collective challenges to authorities, elites, and opponents through collective action. Examples of this type of action include mass demonstrations, public gatherings, petition drives, media statements, and other similar activities. These types of activities typically employ extra-institutional means of influence.¹⁵

According to Peter Gundelach, as cited by Abby Peterson, social movements emerge during periods of transition from one societal formation to another and are among the primary agents of this transition. In brief, Gundelach focuses on the connection between social movements as societal actors and changes in societal structures. Furthermore, Gundelach begins with a broad definition of social movements and a classification of societal formations. Gundelach defines social movements as an organisational field that generates a loose network of groups and organisations that share a project of societal change (either progressive or reactionary). The groups and organisations are completely reliant on the actions of their supporters.¹⁶

Furthermore, to account for the fact that social movements can take a variety of forms, employ a variety of more-or-less transgressive tactics, may last for a matter of days or decades, and may be embedded in the social structures they seek to challenge to varying degrees, such as statism, Snow (2016) defines social movements broadly as "collectivities that seek to challenge or defend institutional and/or cultural systems of authority and their associated practises and representatives." In addition, Snow acknowledges the importance of distinguishing between what social movements are and what the concept of social movements can explain. Even though social movements are frequently defined as being extra-institutional to some degree, this does not mean that explanations for their emergence, dynamics, and outcomes are limited to cases of protest movements or radical groups.¹⁷ Rather, it indicates that these theories can be

¹⁵ Fahlesa Munabari, "Presentasi Islam and Social Movement Theories at UIII" (PPT, PhD Program in Islamic Studies Class, Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia, Depok Indonesia, May 16, 2023).

¹⁶ Abby Peterson, "Review Essay: Social Movement Theory," *Acta Sociologica* 32, no. 4 (October 1989): 419–26, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000169938903200407>.

¹⁷ Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements."

applied to a broader spectrum of social movements. On the other hand, theories of collective action may be useful for explaining the mobilisation of institutional group dynamics, such as those that occur within and between political parties, the various institutions that make up the military, religious organisations, and interest groups, as well as changes in organisational fields, such as those that occur among domestic and international non-governmental organisations or educational systems. In addition, theories of collective action may be useful for explaining the mobilisation of interest groups. To put that into context. "traditional" society, "modern" society, and "programmed" society are included in Gundelach's classification of societal formations. This classification is not entirely foreign; it was inspired by Touraine, Rascke, and Giddons, among others. Gundelach argues that his classification views the transition more distinctly and emphatically as a qualitative break than as an evolutionary process. The argument of Gundelach can be found in the following sentence. As a result, the social movements that characterised the transition from traditional to modern societies are notably distinct from the social movements that characterised the transition from modern to programmed societies.¹⁸

The aforementioned social movement theories, I would argue, have a relevance and relationship with the Pyramid of peace building's Lederach, which deals with the collaboration of three societal levels of leaderships: top-level, middle-range, and grassroots level. This is because the Pyramid of peace building's Lederach deals with the collaboration of three societal levels of leaderships.

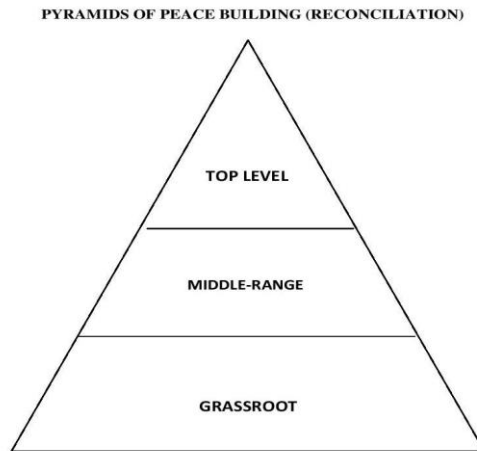
Lederach notes that the higher an actor stands within this pyramid, the greater his or her capacity to have 'access to information about the bigger picture' and the greater his 'capacity to make decisions that affect the entire population.' As such, the lower an actor's position the lesser his ability to see the broader picture and the more limited his access is to decision-making power.¹⁹

¹⁸ Peterson, "Review Essay," 420–22.

¹⁹ Lederach, 43.

Consequently, this relationship inverse results in dilemmas in the design and implementation of reconciliation process.

Figure 1.1: Pyramid of Peace Building



If we apply this to the *Syarikat*, we see that its approach functions on the lower level without intervention of top-level leaders. Imam Aziz confirms that the organisation works without legal assistance from the Indonesian government.²⁰ This is because the current government does not fully acknowledge the tragedy of 1965 as a national tragedy, thereby making it effectively impossible to assist *Syarikat* in its reconciliatory activities,²¹ and, according to Aziz, threatening the effectiveness of *Syarikat Indonesia's* activities.²² Government assistance has become even more unlikely after 2004, when the Indonesian constitutional court (*Mahkamah Konstitusi*) formally passed a law that stated the impermissibility of establishing an Indonesian truth and reconciliation commission as a platform for national truth-telling for victims and perpetrators of the 1965 conflict.²³ This

²⁰ Aziz, Imam and Murtajib, *Syarikat Indonesia: History and Role in the Advocacy of the 1965 tragedy victims*.

²¹ Sulistiyanto and Setyadi, "Civil Society and Grassroots Reconciliation in Central Java," 195–97.

²² Aziz, Imam and Murtajib, *Syarikat Indonesia: History and Role in the Advocacy of the 1965 tragedy victims*.

²³ Sulistiyanto and Setyadi, "Civil Society and Grassroots Reconciliation in Central Java," 194.

effectively made it impossible for a reconciliation process to take place at the national level implemented by, in Lederach's terms, top-level leaders. The law also means that *Syarikat's* initiatives will not be backed by the government. This lack of support is problematic if we consider that Lederach stresses the importance of actors of all three levels to be involved in the reconciliation process. In order to create 'a culture of peace, not a culture of violence' reconciliation requires active involvement from all levels of society.²⁴

The existence of *Syarikat Indonesia* has been seen as a remarkable way towards the larger scale of national reconciliation. *Syarikat* contributed to the provision of different pictures and narratives of the 1965 tragedy that differ from the official version. In doing so, the organisation has given victims the chance to speak about their experiences so that the public may see history proportionally. Nevertheless, the process of reconciliation from the bottom-up level is a complex process, especially if formal assistance and support from top-level actors is missing. However, the existence of *Syarikat Indonesia* seems to reflect a commitment to the spirit of upholding justice and human rights over and against past violence, despite the absence of government participation:²⁵

3. Roles of *Syarikat Indonesia*: Challenges and Possibilities of Reconciling NU and PKI

Syarikat Indonesia is a platform for human rights, peace-building, and grassroots initiatives in Indonesia; its main intent being the promotion of reconciliation between victims and perpetrators of the Indonesian 1965 massacre.²⁶ According to Baxter, the two main tasks of grassroots reconciliation initiatives are both mediation between conflicting groups and the maintaining of political stability at the local level in the post-conflict era.²⁷

²⁴ Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, 39–40.

²⁵ Aziz, Imam and Murtajb, *Syarikat Indonesia: History and Role in the Advocation of the 1965 tragedy victims*.

²⁶ Aziz, Imam and Murtajb, *Syarikat Indonesia: History and Role in the Advocation of the 1965 tragedy victims*.

²⁷ Victoria Baxter, "Civil Society Promotion of Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation in Chile: Villa Grimaldi," *Peace & Change* 30, no. 1 (January 2005): 123–30, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0149-0508.2005.00313.x>.

Babo Soares reveals that grassroots reconciliation initiatives originate from the local level, and thus involves the power of local and ordinary people as an inclusive communal spirit.²⁸ However, *Syarikat's* initiatives regarding reconciliation between NU and PKI go beyond specific localities, since their activities and ideas cover public forums, dialogue, and cultural activities. These activities, the intent being to decrease prejudice and to promote reconciliation, involve truth telling and the exchange of personal stories about the tragedy and are supported by victims, perpetrators (especially from NU), religious leaders, and ordinary people. The approach, as indicated by a study by Sulistiyanto and Setyadi, is narrative-based, testified by, for example, organising public meetings, workshops, closed-door meetings, and exhibitions of shared experiences between victims and perpetrators. Additionally, *Syarikat* produced a documentary film of the 1965 tragedy and published many books and magazines on the subject.²⁹

For instance, *Syarikat* has published books, documentary films, magazines, et cetera in order to educate the public and to provide a balanced narrative of the massacre. Some examples of documentary films are *Kado Untuk Ibu* ('Gift for Mother'), directed by Rumekso Setiyadi.³⁰ The film allows the voices of former female political prisoners to be heard, providing a narrative of the conditions and showing images of the conditions in the female-only Plantungan prison.³¹ The film was seen as a 'gift' to those unfortunate women, since it was first launched on Kartini Day, 2006.³² *Sinengker* told the story of one family's experiences with the 1965 tragedy, focusing on how Asih, the main character, survived his

²⁸ See more here: Dionísio Babo-Soares, "Nahe Biti: The Philosophy and Process of Grassroots Reconciliation (and Justice) in East Timor," *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 5, no. 1 (April 2004): 15–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1444221042000201715>; Baxter, "Civil Society Promotion of Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation in Chile."

²⁹ Sulistiyanto and Setyadi, "Civil Society and Grassroots Reconciliation in Central Java," 197–98.

³⁰ McGregor, "Syarikat and the Move to Make Amends for the Nahdlatul Ulama's Violent Past," 14.

³¹ Sulistiyanto and Setyadi, "Civil Society and Grassroots Reconciliation in Central Java," 204–7.

³² Kartini day is a national public holiday which falls on every April 21, commemorating the birth of Raden Ajeng Kartini who was regarded as one of Indonesian's hero to support the emancipation of Indonesian women. See more: Sulistiyanto and Setyadi, "Civil Society and Grassroots Reconciliation in Central Java."

experiences.³³ Another documentary, entitled *Putih Abu-Abu: Masa Lalu Perempuan* ('White and Gray: Women's Past'), consists of six short films produced by a number of high school students of Yogyakarta and Bandung. A photo exhibition was organised in December 2006, entitled 'Remembering What Has Been Forgotten.' The exhibition covered the story of discrimination against and victimisation of inmates of Plantungan.³⁴ Furthermore, and in consistency with its reconciliatory efforts, *Syarikat* publishes a bi-monthly magazine named *RUAS*. First published in September, this magazine usually prints about 1500 copies and is mostly read by people living in Java. Its audience including survivors, perpetrators, students at Islamic NU boarding schools, and also members of parliament. As the documentaries, this magazine aims to provide a balanced source of information.

Grace Leksana states that, in constructing the national memory of the tragedy, the Suharto regime made use of what Pierre Nora called '*sites of memory: places that possess the capability to store memory and trigger acts of remembering*.'³⁵ With this notion, the Suharto regime indoctrinated national social memory with the narrative that the 1965 tragedy relates more to narratives of military heroism than that of the suffering of (suspected) PKI members.³⁶ In fact, most Indonesian history books link the massacre to the *Gerakan 30 September* ('30 September Movement; G30S). The narrative states that the PKI abducted seven general army officers, imprisoned them, and then killed them together in the area of the military airbase *Halim Perdana Kusuma*. However, the narrative continues that the then-Minister of Defence, General Abdul Haris Nasution, managed to escape, but the G30S shot his five years old daughter in his

³³ McGregor, "Syarikat and the Move to Make Amends for the Nahdlatul Ulama's Violent Past," 14; Barbara Hatley, "Recalling and Representing Cold War Conflict and Its Aftermath in Indonesian Contemporary Film and Theatre," in *Cultures at War: The Cold War and Cultural Expression in Southeast Asia* (New York: Cornell Southeast Asia, 2010), 273.

³⁴ McGregor, "Syarikat and the Move to Make Amends for the Nahdlatul Ulama's Violent Past," 13-17.

³⁵ Grace Leksana, "Reconciliation Through History Education: Reconstructing the Social Memory of the 1965-66 Violence in Indonesia," in *Reconciling Indonesia: Grassroots Agency for Peace* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 178.

³⁶ Leksana, 176-78.

house.³⁷ In response to these events, Major General Suharto, second commander of the military at that time, quickly took it upon himself to order the attack of G30S forces in Jakarta. Many civilians, including NU leaders and their followers, participated in the execution of Suharto's order. In the period of 1965-'66, a great number of PKI sympathisers were imprisoned, experiencing different kinds of harassment in the prison camps that were located in remote areas, including the women-only camp of Plantungan, Central Java.³⁸

Suharto, shortly after Sukarno's resignation, became the new Indonesian president. Reweaving the narrative, he played the victim of the 1965 tragedy, stating that the killing against PKI members and its sympathisers were a justified retribution against those who killed members of the general army, effectively ignoring that the mass killings and imprisonment of (alleged) PKI members and sympathisers without trial contradicts one of the core concepts of human rights.³⁹

Since this has been the official narrative, *Syarikat* relies heavily on personal accounts of the victims in order to find more balanced information regarding the tragedy.⁴⁰ Leksana also emphasises that one of the most crucial steps prior to the promotion of reconciliation between NU and PKI is to re-analyse and to clarify the true story of the 1965 tragedy.⁴¹ In dealing with discrimination against 1965 victims, the anti-communist discourse continues to this day, despite that the New Order regime fell in 1998. Consequently, the victims are still experiencing various forms of stigmatisation, including not only on social and political levels, but also on economic level. On the social level, social punishment of victims continues to occur. The Indonesian society, especially so in Java, continues to discriminate and

³⁷ Ni Wayan Pasek Ariati, "The Indonesia Massacre of 1965 and Reconciliation Efforts in Contemporary Indonesia" (International Symposium on Conflict and Resolution, Kigali-Rwanda, 2012).

³⁸ Leksana, "Reconciliation Through History Education: Reconstructing the Social Memory of the 1965-66 Violence in Indonesia," 175; Berita Satu, Online News, *Online News* (blog), June 5, 2017, <http://www.beritasatu.com/nasional/46969-korban-stigma-pki-1965-menolak-lupa.html>; Aziz, Imam and Murtajib, *Syarikat Indonesia: History and Role in the Advocacy of the 1965 tragedy victims*.

³⁹ Aziz, Imam and Murtajib, *Syarikat Indonesia: History and Role in the Advocacy of the 1965 tragedy victims*.

⁴⁰ See more: McGregor, "Syarikat and the Move to Make Amends for the Nahdlatul Ulama's Violent Past."

⁴¹ Leksana, "Reconciliation Through History Education: Reconstructing the Social Memory of the 1965-66 Violence in Indonesia," 175-76.

stigmatise the (alleged) members of the PKI, treating them as a 'rebellious, wicked and godless' group.⁴² This might be in violation of the Indonesian constitution, which states that Indonesian citizens have the freedom to associate and to assemble, as well as to express their written or oral opinions.

On the political level, the access of victims to politics has been restricted; they are not able to join in the elections and have no freedom of expression in society.⁴³ Again, this violates article 27 of the Indonesian constitution, which states that all citizens have equal status before the law and government.⁴⁴ In regard to the economic level, their access to the labour market, either in the public or private sectors, is restricted; again, this violates the constitution, which states (arts. 27:2 and 28D:2) that 'each citizen is entitled an occupation to generate an income, and is entitled to 'fair and proper treatment' in labour relations'⁴⁵

In effect, *Syarikat* sees that there is still work to be done regarding the equality of rights of all Indonesian citizens. One of the main obstacles in the reconciliation process is to change the institutionalised indoctrination of the general population by the New Order regime regarding social perceptions of (alleged) PKI members – and especially within the Muslim community.⁴⁶ In this perception, the PKI are stigmatized as atheists who should pay an expensive price for their involvement in the Madiun coup attempt, East Java, in 1948,⁴⁷ and the murder of military officers preceding the 1965 tragedy as stated by the formal narrative of the New Order regime.⁴⁸ Further questions emerge when we deal with the concept of atheism. The first question is, of course, about the relation

⁴² Aziz, Imam and Murtajb, *Syarikat Indonesia: History and Role in the Advocation of the 1965 tragedy victims*.

⁴³ The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Chapter X, article 28, accessed on June 1, 2023 from: Mahkamah Konsitusi, "THE 1945 CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA," n.d., https://en.mkri.id/download/constitution/constitution_1_1625426222_4c1e13f466840d7ed721.pdf.

⁴⁴ The 1945 Constitution, Chapter X, article 28: Mahkamah Konsitusi.

⁴⁵ The 1945 Constitution, article 28D (2) Mahkamah Konsitusi.

⁴⁶ Aziz, Imam and Murtajb, *Syarikat Indonesia: History and Role in the Advocation of the 1965 tragedy victims*.

⁴⁷ The 1948 movement of PKI resulted in killing many kiai (Islamic preachers) and civilians; see more: McGregor, "Syarikat and the Move to Make Amends for the Nahdlatul Ulama's Violent Past."

⁴⁸ Aziz, Imam and Murtajb, *Syarikat Indonesia: History and Role in the Advocation of the 1965 tragedy victims*.

between communism and atheism and, second, whether PKI members were, indeed, atheists. Hasyim as it is cited by McGregor, in response to the first question, concluded that people who affiliate with a communist ideology also seem to affiliate with atheism. He states that 'communists do not believe in the existence of God. They believe that there is no Almighty God. God, according to communist teachings is a made up concept or the product of a person's imagination.'⁴⁹

Lederach points out that a grassroots approach often experiences more difficulties than top- and middle-ranged levels. This is due to the massive number of people at this level; 'strategies can be implemented to touch the leadership working at local and community levels, but more often than not these strategies represent points of contact with the masses rather than a comprehensive program for reaching them'. Second, difficulties lie in the fact that a lot of people at the grassroots level are struggling to obtain the basic necessities for life: 'although unresolved human conflict is a central cause of their suffering, efforts directed at peace and conflict resolution can easily be seen as an unaffordable luxury'.⁵⁰

Syarikat itself considers the main difficulty of the reconciliation process to be the possibility to change the institutionalised indoctrination of the New Order regime regarding social perceptions towards the victims, especially within the Muslim community. This institutionalised indoctrination not only affects the survivors, but also their descendants. It involves the stigmatisation of PKI members as atheists who should pay an expensive price for their involvement in the killing of Muslim scholars (*kiai*) in Madiun, East Java, in 1948, and their involvement in the murder of army officers in 1965 – according to the historical narrative of the New Order regime.⁵¹

Hasyim argues that those who affiliate with communism mainly adopt atheism.⁵² He, further, adds that atheism contradicts the first value of Indonesia's

⁴⁹ Hasyim, "'Kenapa Kita Menentang Komunisme?,' trans. Why we oppose the communism?"; McGregor, "A Bridge and a Barrier: Islam, Reconciliation, and the 1965 Killings in Indonesia," 215–17.

⁵⁰ Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, 52–53.

⁵¹ Aziz, Imam and Murtafijb, *Syarikat Indonesia: History and Role in the Advocacy of the 1965 tragedy victims*.

⁵² Hasyim, "'Kenapa Kita Menentang Komunisme?,' trans. Why we oppose the communism?"; The discussion on atheism in Indonesia is also available in Saskia Schäfer, "Forming 'Forbidden'

national philosophy, the *Pancasila* (five pillars) in which the whole Indonesian society are obligated to uphold one of the official religions of the country such as Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.⁵³ Religious opposition to PKI members generally springs from orthodox Islam, as observed by Robert Cribb.⁵⁴ More specifically, Cribb concludes that this kind of orthodox Islam refers to the 'distinctive Javanese form of the religion, often called *Kejawen*, which assumes that communism will be a serious threat to the Indonesian government if they could take over the Indonesian power. *Kejawen* assumes that if communism takes over power in Indonesia, it will then establish an atheist-based state. In fact, 'the Indonesian government had adopted belief in God, but not Islam, as one of its guiding principles in 1945, and for many Muslims even this was a barely tolerable compromise'⁵⁵

Stigmatisation of PKI as a supposedly atheist organisation was seen as a tool used by PKI's opponents in an attempt to weaken the communist movement in Indonesia.⁵⁶ In July 1960, the Indonesian army used that accusation to justify the banning of the party's activities, and later on NU used this rhetoric to legitimise the killing of PKI members, further enhanced by the accusation of their involvement in the murder of Muslim scholars in 1948.⁵⁷ The New Order regime made use of this atmosphere of national suspicion as an instrument to further demonise the PKI.⁵⁸ Nurcholis Madjid, as quoted in Hasani, also emphasizes that 'the PKI has been treated as the enemy of the state since 1966, it is then why every negation, transgression and wrongdoing with regard to the One and Almighty God, is a betrayal of the 1945 constitution of Indonesia'.⁵⁹ Moreover, the New

Identities Online: Atheism in Indonesia," *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, December 30, 2016, 253-268 Pages, <https://doi.org/10.14764/10.ASEAS-2016.2-5>.

⁵³ Hasyim, "Kenapa Kita Menentang Komunisme?," trans. Why we oppose the communism?"

⁵⁴ Robert Cribb, "The Indonesian Massacres," in *Century of Genocide: Critical Essays and Eyewitness Accounts* (London: Routledge, 2004), 234–35.

⁵⁵ Cribb, 235.

⁵⁶ See more: Ismail Hasani, "The Decreasing Space for Non-Religious Expression in Indonesia: The Case of Atheism," in *Religion, Law and Intolerance in Indonesia* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 197–201.

⁵⁷ Hasyim, "Kenapa Kita Menentang Komunisme?," trans. Why we oppose the communism?"

⁵⁸ Hasani, "The Decreasing Space for Non-Religious Expression in Indonesia: The Case of Atheism," 198–200.

⁵⁹ Hasani, 198–215.

Order regime established a closer relationship with Islam with their institutionalised condemnation of atheism, considering it as the enemy of Muslims. For example, the regime celebrated both Muslim piety and anti-atheism commemoration in the yearly celebration of the sacred *Pancasila*-day (*Hari Kesaktian Pancasila*) on 1 October.⁶⁰

The commemoration seemed to function as a remembrance of the PKI's uprising in the G30S movement and the dissemination of the framing of atheism as the enemy of Islam and Indonesia. Yet it was the leader of PKI, Aidit, who revealed during his speech in 1962 that: '*Communists recognize the PantjaSila, in particular its affirmation of divine omnipotence premise that forbids antireligious propaganda in Indonesia. Communists are in favor of this ban since they do not plan to participate in this kind of propaganda. Communists also claim that, in accordance with other PantjaSila tenets, religion ought not to be forced onto people. This demand is based on respect for democratic norms and fairness as well as human and nationalist sentiments.*'⁶¹

In response to this, I would argue that the stigmatisation by the New Order regime towards PKI members has significantly contributed to the general perception of the communist party as it stands today. Indonesian people will still maintain that the PKI is an atheist movement and that the existence of the PKI threatens the social and political coherence of the Republic.

Noting that the first principle of Indonesian national philosophy, *Pancasila*, is the belief in the one supreme God, which is effectively understood as an imperative for Indonesian society's constituent parts to be affiliated with one of the acknowledged religions of the country, atheism seems to oppose, and even violate, this first principle.⁶² Therefore, I would argue that religious acknowledgement in Indonesia is limited to those who adhere to one of

⁶⁰ Katharine E. McGregor, "Commemoration of 1 October, '*Hari Kesaktian Pancasila*': A Post Mortem Analysis?," *Asian Studies Review* 26, no. 1 (March 2002): 40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357820208713330>.

⁶¹ For more explanation see: Hasani, "The Decreasing Space for Non-Religious Expression in Indonesia: The Case of Atheism," 199–202.

⁶² The recognised-religions in Indonesia are: Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity (Protestantism and Catholicism), and Islam Hasyim, "Kenapa Kita Menentang Komunisme?," trans. Why we oppose the communism?"

Indonesia's officially recognised religions. Since atheism is not one of them, this is the reason why it is still a subject of discrimination and stigmatisation.

More important, however, is that the influence of grassroots initiatives of *Syarikat* seem to lack. This is because it has an informal structure and lacks support from the Indonesian government.⁶³ Regarding the lack of support, even after almost 29 years since the collapse of the New Order regime, the government is still not willing to conduct a large scale process of reconciliation with PKI members, or even intervene formally in reconciliation initiatives. I would argue that the indoctrination of the New Order regime regarding PKI's image is still an important factor that shapes public perceptions regarding members of PKI, including the victims.

Another obstacle has to do with the scale of the reconciliatory initiatives, according to Sulistiyanto and Setyadi, is that such activities involve only small groups of victims and perpetrators, and differ from a national reconciliation process that eventually compromises a large scale of both victims and perpetrators. Moreover, grassroots reconciliation, according to Lederach, may suffer a lack of funding sources. It is often believed that the process of peace building costs much money, especially when dealing with the rehabilitation process and reparation issue.⁶⁴ Regardless of the challenges, reconciliation initiatives are protected under Indonesian law, since each person has the right 'to freely associate, assemble, and express his opinions.'⁶⁵

D. Conclusion

The evidence presented in *Syarikat's* movements and goals underscores its commitment to promoting reconciliation between Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) while striving for a more just and peaceful society. These objectives align with the typical characteristics of social movement groups, emphasizing collective action and an ideological foundation for societal transformation. However, the study reveals that grassroots approaches, such as

⁶³ Sulistiyanto and Setyadi, "Civil Society and Grassroots Reconciliation in Central Java," 195.

⁶⁴ Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, 52-55.

⁶⁵ The 1945 Constitution, Article 28 (3). See: Mahkamah Konsitutusi, "THE 1945 CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA."

those undertaken by Syarikat, encounter greater challenges compared to initiatives originating at higher societal levels. The difficulties faced by Syarikat in fostering reconciliation between NU and PKI are multifaceted. First, the organization grapples with the enduring consequences of the PKI's stigmatization as an enemy of the Republic, shaped significantly by the New Order regime's influence.

This stigmatization perpetuates the notion that the PKI seeks to establish a communist-based atheist state, hindering efforts at reconciliation. Second, grassroots initiatives inherently possess less influence than top-down approaches, leading to challenges in leadership dynamics and decision-making dilemmas within society. Third, the issue of funding emerges as a significant hurdle for grassroots reconciliation initiatives, including Syarikat, which often lack the financial resources required for peacebuilding, rehabilitation, and reparations. Despite these obstacles, Syarikat's grassroots reconciliation endeavors offer valuable benefits to Indonesian society. By contributing to a broader understanding of the 1965 tragedy beyond the official state narrative, the organization's initiatives benefit both the Indonesian government and its citizens. Additionally, Syarikat's work is constitutionally protected by Indonesian law, ensuring the continuity of its efforts in the post-New Order era, marked by a more open democratic system following the collapse of Suharto's regime. []

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