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Narratives of discovery: Joshua Oppenheimer's films on Indonesia's 1965 mass killings and the global human rights discourse

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ABSTRACT

The Indonesian massacre of 1965 became part of the global human rights discourse after Joshua Oppenheimer's documentary *The Act of Killing* (2012, *The Act of Killing* [Motion Picture]. Final Cut For Real.) received widespread acclaim. Focusing on the perpetrators of the 1965–66 mass killings, *The Act of Killing* was framed and regarded as a film that broke the 50 years of silence in Indonesia. This paper examines how the narratives of discovery underpin the discourses around Oppenheimer's films, *The Act of Killing* and its companion piece, *The Look of Silence* (2014, *The Look of Silence*. Final Cut For Real.), as well as the 1965–66 atrocities. While the films play an important role in enhancing the global visibility of the issue, the emphases on silence and secrecy have undermined the dissonance and friction in post-authoritarian Indonesia. The entrance of the 1965 massacre into the global stage could be seen as a reproduction of a paternalistic scenario that begins with the Western discovery of a 'dark secret' in the Third World. The status of Oppenheimer as a shorthand for the discovery of 1965, however, is mediated and preserved not only by the Western media but also local actors for their own strategic purposes. The political impacts of the Oppenheimer's films need to be acknowledged along with the complexity of power and privilege in the politics of circulation of issues in the global human rights discourse.

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Joshua Oppenheimer's award winning documentaries on Indonesia's 1965 mass killings, *The Act of Killing* (2012) and its companion piece, *The Look of Silence* (2014), have largely contributed to the entrance of the 1965 atrocities discourse into the global human rights field. From 1965 to 1966, between 500,000 and 1,000,000 individuals were killed in a military-led anti-communist purge in response to what the army called an attempted coup masterminded by the Indonesian Communist Party. This mass violence was backed up by the United States, whose main interest was to eliminate the influence of communism in Cold War Southeast Asia and whose support for the military regime under Suharto continued in the following decades. The people responsible for the killings have never been punished even after the Suharto regime ended in 1998. In *The Act of Killing*, Joshua Oppenheimer and his co-directors invited the perpetrators to reenact their past crimes. While *The Act of Killing*

provides a shocking evidence of the massacre by documenting chilling testimonies from the gangsters who took part in the state-sanctioned killings of people accused as communists, *The Look of Silence* focuses on a survivor's perspective by following his journey to investigate his past and confront his brother's murderers.

The films were considered groundbreaking in terms of both aesthetic explorations and political statements. *The Act of Killing* in particular is situated in the trajectory of innovative political documentaries that experiment with reenactments. Critics and scholars, including documentary scholar Bill Nichols (2013) and political scientist/Indonesianist Benedict Anderson (2014), have compared the film with documentaries such as Jean Rouch's and Edgar Morin's *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961) and Rithy Panh's *S21 The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (2003). My focus in this essay is not so much on the aesthetic strategies of the films than the circulation of discourse and its repercussions. As the international recognition has allowed stories of 1965 to travel through various sites beyond national boundaries, I ask the question of what global circulation enables to be told and what it excludes.

This essay examines how the narratives of discovery underpin Oppenheimer's films, his directorial statements in international forums, as well as the representations of 1965 atrocities in global, particularly Western, media. The 'discovery' of Indonesia's 1965 revolves around the notions of secrecy and silence; on the one hand, it has brought attention to Indonesia's unresolved past crimes, yet, on the other hand, it has also undermined dissonance and frictions in post authoritarian Indonesia that complicate the notion of 'silence.' Grounded in narratives of discovery, the global human rights discourse of 1965 might reproduce the 'white savior' paradigm. However, I will also show that the roles of local actors in mediating and preserving Oppenheimer's status demand that we reflect on the complex issues related to power, capital, and access that are implicated in the circulation of human rights issues in the postcolonial context.

Discovery and the mirror

The narrative of discovery is embedded within the Western travel narratives. The protagonist's main reason to travel to a remote place, whether for scientific, economic, or missionary purpose, is usually interrupted or challenged by an encounter with the Other. As exemplified by numerous travel stories from Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* (1995; original work published 1899) to the film *The Black Narcissus* (1947) by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, the encounter with the Other would lead to the discovery of a dark secret that compels the protagonist to pause, reflect, change directions, or make intervention. Edward Said (1979) has traced the construction of Self and Other in the discourse of Orientalism through texts including literature, journalistic texts, and travel books since the nineteenth century. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994) describe the figure of the 'discoverer,' often an innocent man or a romantic hero, as a trope that constitutes the dominant Eurocentric discourse in twentieth and twenty-first century film and media. The discoverer's mobility is contrasted to the static and enigmatic Other: 'In *Lawrence of Arabia* and the *Indiana Jones* series of the 1980s, the camera relays the hero's dynamic movement across a passive, static space, gradually stripping the land of its "enigma"' (1994, pp. 145–146). After resolving the enigma, the heroic discoverer then inspires the Other; in the case of *Lawrence of Arabia*, he 'leads the passive Arab masses, an interpretation of history that Arab historians have vigorously challenged' (146).

The discovery of the dark secret in the place traveled frames the narrative of Oppenheimer's encounter with the stories of 1965 atrocities. In his production notes for *The Act of Killing*, Oppenheimer writes that he discovered the 1965–66 massacres when he and his co-director Christine Cynn went to North Sumatra to produce *The Globalization Tapes* (2003), a documentary project made in collaboration with the Independent Plantation Workers Union of Sumatra. *The Globalization Tapes* focuses on how the lives of the plantation workers are shaped by local military repression as well as global financial institutions. It was during the process of shooting and editing the film that Oppenheimer and his team 'discovered that the 1965–66 Indonesian massacres were the dark secret haunting Indonesia's much celebrated entrance into the global economy.' (Oppenheimer, 'Production Notes,' n.d.). Many of the plantation workers, who were survivors of the killings, pointed out that those who killed their family members were still living in the same village. Fear and trauma of the killings were preserved to maintain power relations. Oppenheimer decided to interview the perpetrators and learned that they would boast about the details of the killing. This discovery triggered him to take a new route; after finishing *The Globalization Tape*, he embarked on a new project, *The Act of Killing*, in which he and his co-directors 'invite' the killers to tell and reenact their stories.

Encounters affect not only the traveler but also the space traveled. The subjects of Oppenheimer's documentaries also discover something, albeit in a different way. In fact, *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* remove the figure of the discoverer from the center of the narrative. Throughout the film Oppenheimer maintains the position as an observer who makes minimum intervention through comments and questions, and as the audience, we are encouraged to identify with his viewing position. However, as Mary Louise Pratt reminds us in her study of imperial travel narratives, visibility defines power relations. The relation of mastery informs the relation between the seer and the seen, as the seen/scene produced for the audience depends on the judgment of the seer/discoverer (1992, pp. 200–201). Both *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* portray the discovery – or more specifically rediscovery – of the local people, the perpetrators and the survivors, who view the 1965–66 killings with new perspectives. In both films the process of (re)discovery experienced by the subjects is mediated by the director. In this case, it echoes Oppenheimer's statement about the films as 'mirror.' As he describes in many interviews (for instance, Lehall, 2013), *The Act of Killing* holds up a 'dark mirror' to the perpetrator Anwar Congo, the Indonesian society as a whole, and all of us.

In *The Look of Silence*, 44-year-old optometrist Adi Rukun rediscovers the truth about the murder of his brother by watching Oppenheimer's film footage. Sitting motionless with eyes fixed on the television screen, Adi Rukun seems to face a mirror that resurrects a nightmarish past. By the bank of the Snake River, two old men narrate with pride the various killing methods they deployed in 1965–66 to Oppenheimer and his crew behind the camera. The men, Amir Hasan and Inong, recollect how they murdered Ramli, the brother that Adi never met, in grisly detail. Any attempt to describe Adi's face as he observes the executioners might only uncover our limitations in understanding the pain of others. Perhaps this is how we, the viewers, are invited to interpret 'the look of silence.' The film, however, is far less about silence than a survivor's quest for justice. After watching Oppenheimer's footage, Adi decides to confront silence by visiting his brother's murderers. The screen as a mirror presents a horrifying truth, perhaps even more devastating than what Adi has learned from his mother, as he now has a deeper access to

the perpetrators' story. As viewers we are confronted with the question of the function of this scene in the film. What does it mean to see a representation of a survivor recognizing his reality through Oppenheimer's mirror?

In *The Act of Killing*, we find a similar screen/mirror scene in which the unseen director shows footage to his subject. In his living room, Anwar Congo watches his reenactment of murder accompanied by the director. In evaluating the authenticity of his reenactment, Anwar Congo begins to reveal his vulnerability. As he views himself playing a tortured communist, he tells Oppenheimer that he could feel what his victims have felt. We hear Oppenheimer's off-screen voice, like the voice of conscience, telling him that his victims must have felt worse. The mirror, held up by the director, produces different effects for Adi and Anwar. The screen/mirror inspires Adi to end his silence and take further actions and opens up the possibility for Anwar to reflect on his past crimes. Even though *The Act of Killing* does not offer a redemption for the killers, it shows some critical moments in which Anwar feels ambivalent about his wrongdoing.

While Oppenheimer's discovery of truth is embedded in a classical travel narrative involving an accidental encounter with a dark secret in a remote land, the discovery of the documentary subjects is made possible by a screen/mirror held up by a foreigner with a camera. Here we are reminded of Shohat and Stam's analysis of *Lawrence of Arabia*, when the Arab masses become politically enlightened through their encounter with the figure of the 'discoverer.' The mirror metaphor implies a paternalistic power relation in which the one who holds the mirror educates those who look into the mirror by facilitating them to discover the truth. This role of a distant 'voice'/observer/facilitator, as film scholar Dag Yngvesson indicates, positions Oppenheimer as 'altruistic political actor behind the camera,' a kind of '*deus ex machina* whose helping hand appears able to bring about a new reality' (2014, pp. 215–216). As the films not only serve as a mirror to the documentary subjects but also to the audience, how do we situate ourselves as we are implicated in the power relation? What subject positions are available for Indonesian viewers in the film-as-mirror metaphor and, to a larger extent, within the narratives of discovery? The mirror metaphor comes with a particular discursive frame to interpret the reflection. Situating Oppenheimer as the discoverer and the two films as breakers of silence, this frame problematically erases the agency of local actors interwoven within the complex discourse of 1965 mass killings in post-authoritarian Indonesia.

The frame, I argue, situates *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* as films that opened up dialogue by breaking the 50 years of silence.

Global media, silence, and secrecy

Legitimized by global media, 'breaking the silence' becomes the dominant framework to interpret Oppenheimer's films. Soon after *The Act of Killing* traveled to various prestigious festivals, images of the 1965 atrocities began to circulate beyond national boundaries. As a form of political intervention, Oppenheimer's discovery presented in *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* enabled the Western world to discover the 1965–66 mass killings. The shocking revelation travels along with the notions of secrecy and silence.

Numerous articles and audio-visual media portray *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* as the films that 'broke the silence.' The title of a news article in CBS News Canada (2016) is just one among many that emphasize this depiction: 'Indonesian genocide documentaries

aim to break 50 years of silence: *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* have started a conversation, filmmaker says.' The word 'secrets' is used repeatedly to imply that through Oppenheimer's films, the international community could now have the key to Indonesia's Pandora Box. As the US PBS News (2016) writes, 'Oscar-Nominated "The Look of Silence" Unlocks Secrets of Indonesia's 1965 Genocide.' *The Act of Killing*, in portraying murderers who engaged in torture and killings without remorse, evokes for the Western media the terror in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, in which a white European protagonist witnesses violence in the 'darker' part of the world. PBS in fact describes Indonesia as 'the abyss of fear and guilt' due to the impunity and silence that followed the massacre; it further states: 'Oppenheimer's film bears witness to this, and has broken the spell of submission and terror.'

In her controversial essay, Oscar nominated filmmaker Jill Godmillow (2014) writes that *The Act of Killing* may perpetuate the divide between self and Other because the Western audience may view the horror in the Third World with a sense of distance: 'Thank God I don't live in a gangster paradise.' She argues that 'there is no evidence in the film – and there should be – that the Indonesian people are capable of resistance to domination and terror.' Publishing the article in March 2014, Godmillow did not have the opportunity to comment on the follow-up film *The Look of Silence*, which portrays the resistance of an Indonesian survivor who bravely confronts his brother's murderers. The film has indeed underlined the agency of the protagonist Adi, but the framing of Adi's story in the Western media evokes questions. Amidst the world of secrecy, darkness, and mystery, the value of individualism is highlighted. Adi, who is triggered to take action after reflecting on his reality through Oppenheimer's screen, is described as a local agent who 'dares to break a pervasive silence that has engulfed the country for 50 years' (Roberts, 2015).

While Adi's courage undoubtedly deserves respect by both national and international audiences, his story in the Western media is framed within the rhetoric of exceptionalism that detaches his individual agency from a collective agency. Adi is discovered as an individual hero whose bravery stands out in a society 'cloaked' and 'engulfed' in silence. If Adi is exceptional to the rest of Indonesia, then what actually is this entity called 'Indonesia' in the narratives of discovery? The persistent use of the notion of silence in the Western media's engagement with Oppenheimer's films demonstrates their failure to understand the highly fragmented nature of post-authoritarian Indonesian society.

The Indonesian 'discovery' of 1965

The official narrative of 1965–1966 events constructed by the New Order regime under President Suharto (1966–1998) revolves around the 'coup' of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) on the eve of 30 September 1965, which resulted in the murder of six high-ranked army generals and one officer. This so-called treason served as justification for the killings and the imprisonment of people suspected to be communists under the leadership of Suharto, then the Army General for Strategic Reserves. When Suharto replaced the left-leaning President Sukarno in 1966, he started the 'New Order,' a right-wing regime characterized by national security led the military by as well as a stable, pro-US capitalism economy that was open to foreign investments. In order to ensure stability, the New Order regime banned communism and imposed military repression and censorship on all levels of the society. The fear of communism was preserved and institutionalized through history books, museums, and films.

The human rights violation by the military in 1965–66 as well as the subsequent authoritarian maneuvers did not receive global media attention precisely because Western countries, particularly the United States, were implicated in the mass killings. Within the context of the Cold War politics, Indonesia's geopolitical status was important to Washington; as a country with the second-largest communist party after China, it could easily fall into the communist bloc. Furthermore, Indonesia under Sukarno was the host of the 1955 Bandung conference, the marker of the non-bloc Third-Worldist movement. By supporting Indonesian military, the United States ensured regional stability that offered a favorable climate for US imperialism in Southeast Asia (Chomsky & Herman, 1979, pp. 3–5).

How, then, did Indonesians 'discover' the massacre of 1965? Many of the younger generation might have discovered the country's dark past through Oppenheimer's films, but the collective effort to break the silence begun with the fall of the New Order regime under President Suharto in 1998. The new era called *Reformasi* (political reform) was characterized by the demands for truth and transparency, including in the realm of human rights violations conducted by the Suharto regime. Excavating New Order violence and the history of 1965–1966 became a concern among activists, scholars, and artists, resulting in the formation of NGOs, various publications, oral history projects, novels, and films.

In the late 1990s, the term 'pelurusan sejarah' or 'the straightening of history' permeated the post-Suharto public sphere as a new perspective along with an advocacy to interrogate the manipulation of history by the Suharto regime. Renowned Indonesian historian Asvi Warman Adam was one of the first scholars who popularized the term through a series of articles about the massacre of 1965 in the national newspaper *Kompas*. The term eventually became the title of Adam's book, *Pelurusan Sejarah Indonesia* (Straightening Indonesia's History, 2004). An interrogation of history also means challenging the official version of the 1965 history as portrayed in the propaganda film *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* (Treachery of the 30 September Movement/ PKI, Noer, 1984). A big-budget film sponsored by the Suharto government, *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* was aired every year on national television and was included in the history lessons in schools, making it the dominant source of the history of 1965–66 for every Indonesian growing up under the regime. The film depicts how the communist party members brutally torture and murder seven military generals in a coup attempt on the eve of 30 September 1965. While General Suharto is portrayed as a savior who aborts the coup and saves the country from the danger of communism, the extermination of millions of alleged communist members and supporters is absent from the film.

In an article in *The New Yorker*, Jon Emont, a journalist who specializes in Indonesia and South East Asia, writes that 'it was not until 2012 that another prominent Indonesian-language film dealt directly with the 1965 killings,' (Emont, 2015) emphasizing the importance of Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* as the first film that counters the New Order propaganda film. However, films about 1965 have been produced by different cultural groups since the early 2000s. Some examples include Garin Nugroho's art-house film *A Poet/Unconcealed Poetry* (2000), Lexy Rambadeta's activist documentary *Mass Grave* (2002), and Riri Riza's commercial big-budget film *Gie* (2005). In a much more limited sphere of circulation, there were also films made by NGOs and former political prisoners (Heryanto, 2014). These films have largely focused on giving voices to the massacre survivors as a counter to the hegemonic narrative in the propaganda film *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* and the official history textbooks. What makes *The Act of Killing* a distinctive film about

1965 is that it allows the perpetrators to speak and visualize their memories, as well as the fact that the international scope of the latter is something that these Indonesian films were not able to attain. Oppenheimer's contribution is clear, but the effort of the artists and activists to give agency to the survivors and raise public awareness about the issue could not be dismissed.

The struggles to excavate the truth about 1965–66 have also taken place in the legal arena. In 2000, President Abdurrahman Wahid, former leader of Indonesia's largest Muslim organization Nahdlatul Ulama, made a controversial maneuver by proposing to revoke the 1966 decree on the ban of communism to open up a space for reconciliation. Three years earlier, Wahid expressed his apology to the Indonesian Communist Party in a meeting with Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer, who was imprisoned by the Suharto government due to his involvement in the left-wing cultural organization LEKRA (Zurbuchen, 2002). Wahid's apology was denied by some elite members of Nahdlatul Ulama largely because the youth wing of the organization was involved in the 1965–66 killings (Wahid, 2015). Unsurprisingly, his proposals drew strong protests from his own organization, the military, as well as secular and Islamic right-wing parties. Wahid's political views contributed to the many factors that led to his impeachment in 2002.

The struggles of various elements of civil society in challenging the state discourse of 1965 had not been successful when *The Act of Killing* came out, but they had significant social and cultural impacts. More importantly, the failures of these struggles, as exemplified by the failed proposals of President Abdurrahman Wahid, reveal that post-Suharto Indonesia is characterized by ideological frictions. Various national cases since the fall of Suharto, from the debates on the 2008 Pornography Law to the 2014 presidential election, demonstrate that the country, once cohesively unified and contained through authoritarian repression, has become highly divided. Contestations about what defines the nation result in the lack of consensus in many issues, including in how the nation must confront its dark history.

In Oppenheimer's films, however, there are no traces of these frictions. Indonesian society is represented by gangsters – small-time gangsters like Anwar Congo and big gangsters with political power – and the silent majority who participate in creating the infrastructure for impunity. The cohesive world of North Sumatra serves as a synecdoche for the larger Indonesian society. For instance, in a scene of *The Act of Killing*, when Anwar Congo and his friends appear for an interview on national television, the subtitles inform us that we are watching a program called 'Indonesian National Television Special Dialogue.' As scholar of Indonesian politics Tom Pepinsky (2013) notes, 'it's hard to avoid concluding that this is national TV. But it's not: it's a talk show on the provincial affiliate of the state-owned TV station TVRI.' The host actually mentions 'Special Dialogue program of the TVRI North Sumatra,' but the regional detail is omitted from the subtitles. Although this is only a minor omission, it could lead the viewers to interpret that the killings are normalized throughout the country.

In Oppenheimer's films there are no dissonant voices nor critical Indonesian subject position other than the individual agency of Adi in *The Look of Silence*. The films emphasize the continuity of the Suharto paradigm, which certainly still exists, but by not capturing the tensions that constitute post-Suharto Indonesia, the narratives of collective struggles are missing from the 1965 massacre discourse. The global media perpetuate this perspective and thus contribute in representing Indonesia as a singular silent entity. Narratives or

dissonance and collective struggles are undermined in a Eurocentric media landscape that privileges stories of individual heroism in uncovering dark secrets in a foreign land. As Shohat and Stam write, 'The unveiling of the mysteries of an unknown space becomes a rite of passage allegorizing the Westerner's achievement of virile heroic stature' (1994: 146).

The global human rights discourse and the missing frictions

Due to the international success of *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence*, the 1965 mass killings discourse has now become part of the global human rights discourse. Although *The Act of Killing* has been criticized for not exploring the role of the United States in the atrocities, *The Look of Silence* delves into the problem more explicitly. Through various discussions about the films, the international community is made aware of the roles of the U.S. as well as countries such as the UK and Australia in supporting and justifying the anti-communist purge. In 2014, Senator Tom Udall introduced a resolution in the U.S. Senate by urging the U.S. government to declassify documents related to 1965–66 massacre (Human Rights Watch 2014). The committee for the International People's Tribunal (IPT) 1965, a transnational initiative involving activists within and outside Indonesia, was established in March 2014. In November 2015, the Tribunal found that the Indonesian state guilty of crimes against humanity.

As the film generates a tremendous impact in the field of human rights, the questions of ethics that emerged following the reception of *The Act of Killing* becomes less significant. Some commentaries have pointed out that the films are unethical because Oppenheimer does not make his intentions transparent in establishing his relationship with the perpetrators. However, in this case I agree with film scholar Thomas Barker, who argues that such approach is justified in order to provide 'empirical evidence' that mass killings really happened; the problem lies, instead, in the status of Oppenheimer as 'de facto' spokesperson for investigation and truth-seeking into the 1965–66 killings.' Barker states:

The colonial pattern of white spokesman and helpless natives is repeated again here as Oppenheimer has become the most prominent voice for 1965–66. As we know, many NGO and civil society groups, academics, writers and others have been working for long time gathering evidence, seeking justice and raising awareness. For Oppenheimer to become a global spokesperson for this issue, despite only stumbling across it and making a documentary, troubles me. (Barker, 2016)

Does the global discourse of the 1965 massacre reveal another case of white savior complex? It is via narratives of discovery interwoven in the films, the director's statements, and global media representations that the mass killings become legible in the global conversations about human rights. Nevertheless, despite some criticism about the ethics of the films, *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* have been widely celebrated by local activists, survivors, and others who support the investigations of the mass killings. Human rights NGOs use the films for their advocacy to educate the public and pressure the government to take further actions. Historian and activist J.J. Rizal, cited in the International People Tribunal 1965 website (tribunal1965.org), states that the film is a wakeup call for the current president: 'We have waited for films such as *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* all our lives' (Van Rooijen, 2015).

Globally, local activists participate in establishing the status of Oppenheimer's films as a shorthand for the atrocities of 1965. Even though there have been other films about 1965

produced within and outside Indonesia, the International People Tribunal 1965 only makes reference to Oppenheimer's films. The preamble of the International People's Tribunal 1965 begins with Oppenheimer's films to discuss impunity as an unresolved problem emerging from the events of 1965: 'The internationally-acclaimed film *The Act of Killing* (2012) by Joshua Oppenheimer has shown the world the face of impunity in relation to the crimes against humanity committed in Indonesia after 1 October 1965 in the form of swaggering killers, aggrandizing political leaders, aggressive militias and bloated businessmen.'

Activists reaffirm Oppenheimer's status as the spokesperson of 1965, but at the same time their endorsements rework the narrative of silence. The press release published on the IPT website states that efforts to reveal Crimes Against Humanity 'have mostly escaped international attention and have been silenced in Indonesia itself. Joshua Oppenheimer's 2012 film *The Act of Killing* broke the international silence.' The notion of silence is used as a point of connection because the term has been widely circulated as recognizable frame. However, the committee uses the term 'international silence' to emphasize that the international community is also implicated in the discourse of 1965 instead of meaning the silence that engulfs Indonesia alone. While tweaking the term 'silence' to highlight it as a shared problem, the committee also mentions that some efforts have been made by human rights groups.

The investment of Indonesian activists in pushing the national agenda by transnationalizing the 1965 massacre discourse exposes complexities around the politics of representation. In order to transcend the political and geographical limitations, activists need to capitalize on Oppenheimer's iconic status. The narratives of discovery are not rejected but rather deployed by Indonesian activists for their own strategic purposes; the issues of what counts as a legitimate representation and what story matters in the global arena are negotiated. The question, therefore, is no longer whether or not the discourse portrays the 'white savior' paradigm but rather why third-world issues can only travel via such paradigm. The global discourse of 1965 reveals how capital, and access are implicated in the circulation of human rights issues in the postcolonial context. Issues often need to take an inescapable detour and receive international recognition in order to gain legitimacy at home. The fact that Indonesians depend on Oppenheimer's cultural capital and his capacity to make the discourse travel demonstrates that power imbalance between North and South in the sphere of global media flows persists. As a result, any attempts to problematize the reproduction of narratives of discovery, the missing frictions, and the erasure local agency might have no place; they have become less relevant than the 'greater cause,' in this case, the global visibility that could have not been achieved without powerful Western media infrastructure.

Conclusion

Narratives of discovery, centered around the notions of secrecy and silence, frame Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* as well as the conversations around these films and Indonesia's 1965 mass killings in the global media. The familiar narrative patterns of Western discovery, revolving around the figure of the discoverer who sheds a light for the outside world while inspiring local people to take action, emphasize the value of individualism in bringing justice, or 'breaking the silence.' Such familiarity

contributes to the acceptance and the circulation of the discourse of 1965 at the international level. Indonesian activists accept Oppenheimer's status as the spokesperson of the 1965 massacre as a global discourse, but they strategically negotiate with the narratives of discovery for their own political purposes at home. While acknowledging the global impacts of *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence*, we must constantly address the complexity of power and privilege in the politics of circulation of the global human rights discourses. Who and what can travel? Who has access to enable a particular discourse to travel? What kind of infrastructure allows something to be counted as global, and where? In Indonesia, other cases of human rights violation, such as the kidnapping and murder of activists during the Suharto regime or the violence against ethnic-Chinese women at twilight of Suharto's power, remain unresolved. The challenge now is to heighten the visibility and validity of such cases as part of the global human rights discourse outside the framework of discovery narratives.

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