

Where Fear Stalks the Streets: Racism and Sexual Violence in Indonesia

Friday 7 June 2013, by [VITCHECK Andre](#) (Date first published: 10 May 2013).

My good friend, a Chinese Indonesian lady, recently got grabbed and assaulted, in the middle of Jakarta, in broad daylight.

When it happened, I was in Japan and we exchanged several messages, and emails. This was not the first time such a thing had happened to her and she felt humiliated, defeated and thoroughly vulnerable.

"I wish I would be born as someone else - not as a Chinese. I wish I would look like everyone else", she wrote.

I spent half a day convincing her that there was nothing wrong with being Chinese, or belonging to any other ethnic group. It was Indonesia that had failed her; the country that, since 1965, performed three genocides fully backed by the West, the country, which has been using sexual violence in order to paralyze its own population with fear.

I asked my friend to write, to give me 3 stories, one of her own, and two of others. I asked her for three simple examples. "I will put them into context", I promised.

She said 'yes' and she delivered. And I combined their simple but symbolic stories with a much bigger and terrible story that has never been told: one with unimaginable sexual violence that Indonesian women have had to suffer since 1965.

This story was always taboo here, but finally, I realized it has to be told, without doublespeak and in plain language.

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First, Anna told me her own, her recent account.

"My office is located on Jalan Wijaya. There are several small cafes and restaurants, 'warung', around that area, but this time we went to one that is some ten minutes away.

Never before had I experienced anything exceptionally 'bad', walking around the area. Of course some young men and schoolboys at the side of the road were often teasing me verbally, but I haven't really paid much attention to that, because I have often been teased in other parts of the city, even when walking from Lebak Bulus Terminal to my place.

In fact, what Anna considers 'normal teasing' was being screamed at with words like: "Where are you going, beautiful? Are you alone?" And sometimes: "Hey white one". There was also rude mimicking of the Chinese language. And it was not only boys who were doing it, but also the drivers at the bus terminal; those who were actually mocking Chinese language all the time, whenever they would spot her.

That day I was walking slightly off the sidewalk and suddenly some schoolboys riding their bikes, came close and grabbed my behind, squeezing it.

Then they rode away, looking back to me; at me, laughing and giving me that victorious look; full of pride that they had managed to humiliate me.

I was so shocked because I really didn't see it coming, I didn't expect it.

I was stunned for several minutes, trying to come to terms with what had just happened.

But conditioned by living her entire life in Indonesia, Anna did not get angry with the attackers, she did not run to the police station ('They would harass me there, or worse', she explained to me). Instead she felt shame because of her own identity:

When I recovered a bit, my first feeling was, "I hate my Chinese look... If only I were not Chinese, I wouldn't look different from the majority. If only I had darker skin and wider eyes, they wouldn't feel the desire to do such things to me."

There were other people, women and men, walking down the road, why not them? Why me?

My two friends tried to calm me down, and there was really not much to do other than just 'let it be'. Or just be more careful next time.

When I returned to my office, I was asked: "Are you okay?" Then told: "Be strong..." and others were just trying to look concerned but also giving me that, "Thank God I'm not Chinese" look.

I was so ashamed and sad. I also thought, "What can I do? This is Indonesia. This is like my inevitable fate as a Chinese person living in this country. If this didn't happen now, it would happen some other time."

And frankly, when you offered to write about this, I had my doubts, because I wasn't even sure whether it would be okay to talk about such things. It seems to be so 'biasa saja' for everybody here, such a 'usual thing'.

From the beginning, we are shaped to just accept everything that comes. As if there's nothing we can do, as if it is our inevitable fate; a fate that we are not even allowed defining."

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Anna is not the real name of my friend. Almost none of the Indonesian victims of harassment, molestation, even rape, would ever dare to identify themselves.

After all, Indonesia is the country where sexual terror against women has been something entirely usual, biasa, since the days of the Western-backed coup of 1965.

Daughters who have been molested do not confide in their parents; female victims who become targets of rape do not report the crime to the police, which itself is notorious for molesting, harassing and raping women.

In Indonesia, to be violated is to become 'kotor', dirty. Victims are taught not to feel any outrage. Instead they feel shame; they are used to hiding instead of coming forward and fighting for themselves and for the others. There are some exceptions, but extremely few.

There are no mass movements and protests of outraged women as in India. There are no powerful

films exposing sexual violence, like the brilliant recent award-winning Egyptian one called "Cairo 678".

The victims of the 1965 genocide, victims of the East Timor genocide, victims of the on-going Papua genocide; victims of racism and religious discrimination, victims of sexual violence; all those victims have been successfully frightened into silence.

In my recent book on Indonesia: "Archipelago of Fear" (Pluto, 2012), I argue:

"Fear is a very powerful force in Indonesia. There are many different types of fear. Some are related to the past, and to violence, and others to corruption. There is the fear of being exposed, of being punished, and of losing face. There is the fear of admitting to the world one's victimhood. There is the fear of belonging to a minority - racial, ethnic or religious - as in Indonesia the majority rules no matter what, often reasserting its dominance by brutalizing and oppressing minorities."

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The gruesomeness of the crimes against women in Indonesia is on the same level as those in war-torn African countries like DR Congo.

But one would never guess it from reading Indonesian newspapers or from talking to the locals, as 'the secret' is very well hidden. In the West, for instance, Indonesia is relentlessly propagated as a 'genuine example, or a successful transformation to democracy', and a generally 'tolerant' society. And nobody dares to challenge such myths.

That is because Indonesia is fully subservient to Western geo-political and economic interests, ever since 1965, when its corrupt officers led by Suharto, committed treason and began murdering their own citizens.

In her famous speech in Beijing in 1995, Hillary Clinton declared: "Human rights are women's rights, and women's rights are human rights."

Later, in 2009, while visiting Indonesia in her role as the US Secretary of State, she announced: "As I travel around the world over the next years, I will be saying to people: if you want to know whether Islam, democracy, modernity and women's rights can co-exist, go to Indonesia."

Ms. Clinton was speaking about the country of Ms. Nursyahbani Katjasungkana, National Coordinator of LBH-APIK (Indonesian Association of Legal Aid Societies for Women), and former house member from the National Awakening Party (PKB). And Ms. Nur spoke to me, one day in 2011, in her house in Jakarta, about her Indonesia:

"Millions of women in Indonesia are genitally mutilated. For cultural, and religious reasons. I was one of them... And my sister was genitally mutilated and I witnessed it. When they mutilated my sister - it was in 1960 - I was only 5 years old... There was blood all around; blood and screams."

And my daughter had to experience the same. My family forced me. And I didn't know... she was born in 1990 before I learned that genital mutilation is a human rights issue. I refused to put her through this, but they kept chasing me, pushing me: 'Why, why, why not?! It is sin and shame on the entire family not to do it!' At the end, when she was 6 months old, I took her to the hospital in Jakarta where they did it to her... I didn't see the act, because they took her away. I sat outside and cried and cried. I felt all my hair was standing up. And I heard my baby screaming and then they brought her back to me and there was blood everywhere."

Surely, a fine example of women's and human rights, Ms. Clinton!

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In and after 1965, rape and sexual torture were used in the most beastly ways. Many women belonging to left-wing organizations, including *Gerwani*, had their breasts and genitals 'amputated'. That was, *biasa*, or 'normal', too.

The military, religious cadres, and also millions of 'common Indonesian citizens' took part in the most appalling acts. Entire myths justifying their participation in the slaughter and rapes were created and perfected. Between 800,000 and 3 million people: leftists, PKI, intellectuals, teachers, atheists, and members of Chinese minority, had been systematically liquidated.

All the legends were thoroughly grotesque, but they served as foundations for the twisted logic, from which post-1965 Indonesia has been constructed.

Almost all the myths had a sexual undertone, like those that spoke of wild orgies thrown by PKI (Communist Party of Indonesia) and its women's organization *Gerwani*. It was said that women belonging to the left castrated Indonesian army generals. Such myths were deliberately created in order to justify the gruesome sexual violence that followed.

Ms. Sudjinah, a former member of *Gerwani*, described some of the violence that came as 'reprisal' after 1965, in her book 'Terempas Gelombang Pasang' (Crashed by tidal wave, 2003):

"[We arrived] at a former Chinese school which appeared to have been converted into a detention and interrogation center. As soon as I arrived, I suddenly understood, why this building which had once been a place for children's learning was called the 'Devil's House' by the detainees... I was put into a small cell where the walls were stained with blood. I could hear cries and moans coming from the interrogation room. My friend Lami [Sulami] was interrogated first, and then it was my turn... 'Oi, open your mouth or else...' [Said the interrogator] and they hit me with long sticks of rattan all over my body. There were about eight of these 'devils' dressed in green and yellow-striped shirts who attacked my body with blows and curses. I shut my eyes as I felt the blows all over my naked body; my stomach, chest, face and arms. I could feel the blood oozing from my mouth. When I opened my eyes, I could see others who had already been beaten lying on the floor, some of them unconscious... There were more than thirty women and girls in that place; among them, young Chinese girls...one was still unconscious. She had been interrogated. When she had refused to answer any questions, they had electrocuted her."

According to the research done by Harvard University and Portuguese Institute of International Relations and Security (Kai Thaler, *Foreshadowing Future Slaughter: From the Indonesian Killings of 1965-1966 to the 1974-1999 Genocide in East Timor*):

*"Women were singled out for especially brutal treatment. The myth of *Gerwani* members mutilating and killing the generals during the G-30-S incident enraged the population. "Communist" women were thus seen as savage monsters that were guilty not only of the alleged crimes against the generals, but, in the words of Suharto, whose "sadistic practices . . . had destroyed the identity of Indonesian women."*

*"Some of the anti-Communist slogans used were "'GERWANI TJABOL' (Gerwani Whores), 'Gantung Gerwani' (Hang Gerwani) and 'Ganjang Gerwani' (Crush Gerwani)." In Bali, thousands of women were rounded up and taken to government offices to have their genitals examined for signs of sexual activity, which, it was claimed, could identify them as *Gerwani* members; these searches were frequently accompanied by rape. In a gendered analysis of the Killings, Saskia Wieringa found that*

in Indonesia's sexually repressed society, the alleged brazen sexual transgressions of the Gerwani women were both arousing and infuriating to the young, often religious, men who comprised the majority of the killers. The forms that violence against women took bear out this argument. A document received by the human rights group, Tapol is particularly illuminating: a female PKI member was ordered to strip and had her "body and honor" burned before she was hacked to death; a newlywed Gerwani member was raped multiple times by an Ansor group and then was "slit open from her breasts to her vulva"; a woman nine months pregnant, was killed, then had her stomach cut open and her child butchered; another Gerwani leader was impaled through her vagina with a sharpened bamboo pole. These extremes of violence, reflect the dehumanization caused by the Gerwani myth, and also a reassertion of male power and control over female sexuality, eliminating those who would challenge it."

The Regime was by then using entire military battalions to rape women in the villages and towns of East Timor, during the genocidal occupation. One of the commanders was Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a Suharto's high-ranking officer, now President of Indonesia.

In those days, I managed to smuggle myself into East Timor, on several occasions. In places like Ermera, the Indonesian military was known to arrive unexpected, arrest all men and then rape all females, from babies to grandmothers in their 80's. Once my work to expose the horror of occupation was discovered, I got detained and tortured, and my films confiscated.

All this had not been discussed and it has not been discussed until now. The details of the torturing and slaughtering women by Indonesian troops were so sadistic, so elaborate and gruesome, that I do not dare to include them, even in this report. The issues were made 'taboo' under Suharto, and they remain 'taboo' in 'democratic' Indonesia.

Then there were the rapes of Chinese women, in brought daylight, during those 'heroic' days of looting and mayhem that helped to bring the Western-backed dictator Suharto down, but allowed the pro-Western regime and its core to survive, and even to strengthen itself.

Wherever there are 'riots' in Indonesia, there are rapes, as I documented in the city of Solo in 1998. There, hundreds of Chinese women, most of them humble shopkeepers and their daughters, were ravished by a mad and bloodthirsty crowd, consisting of racist bigots, police standing by and watching idly.

There is plenty of revolting and ongoing sexual violence in Papua, which has already lost between 100,000 and 500,000 people in the ongoing slaughter, which resembles yet another Indonesian-style genocide. There, the members of the Indonesian military are periodically raping women, but are also kidnapping small children and holding them as virtual sexual slaves.

In October 2004, the then Director of Education of PNG, Sir Peter Baki, explained to me, the plight of many Papuan children in the occupied territory:

"Our inspectors who work with the children were repeatedly told: Indonesian troops come regularly to remote villages in Papua. When they see girls they like, they detain them. Families are sent away and the soldiers hold the girls until they have forced sex with them. Then the girls are told to remain silent; otherwise the army will destroy the whole village. It's that simple: if the girls try to press charges and identify soldiers who raped them, relatives could be killed and the entire village could be destroyed..."

Our conversation took place in Nandi, Fiji, where Mr. Baki was attending a UN-sponsored meeting. He approached me, asking for help to 'save Papuan children', providing grisly details of girls, as

young as 9, crossing the border to PNG, escaping from occupied Papua with their genitals and nipples mutilated or burned by cigarettes.

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“Here comes the second story”, continues Anna. “Her name is Melia Christina, and she is also 23 years old, from Surabaya, now a first-year medical doctor.”

Of course, as in the previous story, Melia is not really Melia, but the story is real...

"Melia was one of my close friends back at high school. She was also one of the unluckiest girls, when it came to suffering from racist insults and sexual harassment.

Melia's hometown is Situbondo, but her parents sent her to Surabaya for high school education. She was staying at a boarding house, not far from our Petra 2 Christian High School, our 'beloved school'. The building itself is at the end of a wide road, and there are some narrow alleys uniting this typical Indonesian medley of middle class neighborhoods and slums.

To get to school, we had to walk for 10 minutes down the road, passing by three-wheelers and their drivers, and meatball or chicken noodle soup sellers.

We never knew what to expect.

The road was where many of us were sexually harassed.

The first accident happened early in the morning, around 6:15AM. Melia wanted to arrive at school earlier than usual and it was still dark.

When she was about to reach the main road, a young man with long hair, wearing a dull white shirt, riding a bicycle, came from behind, he suddenly grabbed and squeezed Melia's breasts hard. Then he looked back and shouted "Cina!", spat, and then laughed.

Melia was in shock. And other assaults continued later.

Our school was aware of these things happening, on many occasions, but it couldn't or was unwilling to do much about it. They only reminded students to be careful while walking on that road and try to walk in groups, never alone.

Because nobody did anything to protect us, or by at least letting us know that what was done to us was bad, and should not happen and that it was actually a racist crime, we began thinking that it was all "biasa", 'normal'. Like, "It will happen again, as it always happens, to a Chinese girl who is living in Indonesia."

Our school never made any effort to 'defend' us, or at least make us feel safe. And we deserved to be protected.

That's what she was being told: "Be more careful and take care of yourself, and pray every day that it won't happen again. But it did, again and again. The best she could do was to 'protect' herself by holding a thick book against her chest, to cover her breasts."

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One of the best contemporary Indonesian writers and journalists, Linda Christanty, wrote for this report:

“During the 1998 May riots, Iwan Zainuddin, a friend of mine, whose father sells soup near a mosque in East Jakarta, suddenly came to see me. He kept pleading: ‘Please do not to go out, please!’ He said he had just finished his prayer at that mosque, and he heard six young men laughing while telling stories how they just raped several Chinese women. So those young men actually prayed at the mosque just after committing rape; after ravishing several women. This is a real story, and a really horrifying one.”

Answer Styannes, the Head of the Indonesian desk at AHRC (Asia Human Rights Commission) in Hong Kong, wrote for this report:

“Indonesia has dark records on the issue of racially motivated sexual violence yet little study and analysis has been done on the matter. Absence of segregated data on victims of sexual violence has made it difficult to get an accurate picture on the prevalence of the issue. Cases on racially motivated sexual violence, which are known by public at large, are those that are part of (or at least related to) a larger scale abuse. Two examples of these is the mass rape against Indonesian-Chinese women in May 1998 which are part of series of abuses took place during the year and the sexual violence against Papuan women perpetrated by the military in Central Highlands towards the end of the 1970s.

Yet even in such cases, the issue on racially motivated sexual violence tend to be withdrawn from the discussion as more attention is given to the ‘main problem’ such as extrajudicial killings or torture. Whereas the demand to investigate the abduction of activists and the shootings of students in 1998 are still loudly voiced today, this is not the case with the issue of the rape of Indonesian-Chinese women that took place in the same year.

What perhaps makes racially motivated sexual violence not widely discussed in Indonesia is that it consists of a combination of two issues whose existence is difficult to prove. In the case of racism the challenge is on proving the motive of the perpetrators, whereas in the case of sexual violence it is more on the rarity of witnesses and willingness of witnesses to speak up on what had happened. The victims, however, are not to be blamed for not being able to talk about the abuse they had experienced. In the case of 1998 mass rape against the Indonesian-Chinese women, the Attorney General Office refused to follow up the investigation conducted by Komnas HAM and government officials in different occasions expressed their doubt on whether such abuse had really taken place. It is the state to blame – the legal system is simply not promising and government’s denials on the abuses are just discouraging.”

Leading Indonesian expert on Islam, Noor Huda Ismail, also commented for this essay:

“The anti-Chinese sentiment has grown constantly and it has to do with two things: The Chinese perform better economically, because they work harder, smarter and they support each other. The locals tend to be more consumptive and less creative. The second issue is the fact that religious teachers don’t read and understand history properly: Islam was brought to Indonesia by Chinese merchants!”

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Practically, there are almost no Chinese people living in Indonesia, anymore.

That is, if one considers Chinese people to be those who speak their languages, have Chinese upbringing, were raised on Chinese fairy tales, and Chinese food, and played with Chinese toys as children.

After 1965, everything Chinese was banned. Banned were Chinese films and dragons, cakes and

playthings. Banned was the Chinese language and Chinese script.

The only reason given was that China is a Communist country. And Communism was banned, based on orders given to Indonesia by the masters in Washington, London and Canberra. For local 'consumption', Communism was equaled to atheism. And so the atheism has been made illegal as well.

Banned were also Chinese names, so Lings became Lindas and Kwies were turned to Gunawans.

Leading Indonesian human rights lawyer, Ester Yusuf, spoke about this situation in my film about post-1965 Indonesia, "Terlena - Breaking of "A Nation":

"Why are these issues so rarely discussed? - Because the scale of racial discrimination in Indonesia is enormous. People talk about human rights violations or about humanitarian issues, but are not focusing on the issues of Chinese minority in particular. Even if there were gross violations of human rights of ethnic Chinese, this was not usually discussed and addressed. From 1740 to 1998 there were 12 racial unrests and nothing was resolved.

I think it all has a long history. For hundreds of years ethnic Chinese learned that they have no legal protection. There was a pogrom in 1740 and then it was happening again and again. In 1740 it was performed by the colonial government and also by other ethnic groups who disliked ethnic Chinese. It became a pattern and no resolution ever arrived. Ethnic Chinese never received any legal protection."

Chinese-Indonesian writer, Ms. Yaya Sung, explains in detail in her *Writing on Jalan Kemenangan*:

"An inventory made by the anti-discrimination organization Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa (SNB) published in Dua Tahun Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa Melawan Rasialisme (Jakarta: SNB, 2000, Appendix), shows that there were 62 laws and regulations from the late colonial period through to the Suharto regime (inventory is only until 1988), explicitly or implicitly discriminatory towards the ethnic Chinese. Of those 62 regulations, 42 had been enacted during the New Order Regime. There were 8 from the colonial period, 12 from the Soekarno regime and 3 from the MPRS. It is clear that under Suharto, state discrimination was the most blatant, most intrusive, invasive and intimidating to the ethnic Chinese."

Racism is endemic in Indonesia. Even before 1965, the greatest Southeast Asian writer, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, was sentenced to one year in prison, for protesting against the discriminatory treatment that Chinese people were forced to endure. And "Pram" was not a Chinese.

Chinese people are not the only ones who have been suffering in Indonesia. Although barring and destroying everything related to one of the greatest nations and cultures on earth is unprecedented in the history of the world, with some gruesome exceptions developed by certain countries like Germany, during the Nazi rule.

Indonesia harmed, even exterminated around 40% of the population of East Timor and remains oblivious about it. It is performing genocide in Papua right now, while plundering its resources. That is where that proverbial 'economic growth' comes from; not from production and brilliant inventions, but from the pillage of those scarred islands, that are held together in one violent and unhappy union, with no option to secede.

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Indonesia is one of only five countries on earth that I know, where I do not dare to walk down the

street looking straight ahead. I am trying to avoid insulting grimaces, aggressively pointed fingers and shouts like 'bule' (albino, anyone of lighter skin). The other 4 countries (and I have worked in a total of 150 of them, on all continents) are war-torn and post-genocidal sub-Saharan states of DR Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and (only in rural areas and slums), Kenya.

But true horror is reserved for foreigners with dark skin, particularly those coming from Africa. I spoke to one former Kenyan MP and one Ethiopian UN expert; both who decided to explore Indonesia after attending official meetings for several days.

"Do you know what is monyet?" Asked my good African friend.

'Monkey', I replied. "Why?"

"This was the most commonly heard word I encountered in Indonesia."

"Did you go to zoo?" I was surprised.

"No", he looked down. "I was just trying to walk down the street."

'Bules' can leave, and most of them already have. Just compare the numbers of foreigners in Indonesian malls (the only 'social gathering' places left in the country where all public places were 'privatized') and those of Bangkok, Hanoi or Kuala Lumpur.

But most of local Chinese and Papuan people do not have such luxury.

Stripped of their culture, language and identity, forced to bear Indonesian names, to behave like Indonesians, to think like Indonesians, they are still insulted, humiliated and violated.

Suharto and his military and religious cohorts had clever plan: they murdered countless members of Chinese minority, raped their wives and daughters, and inflicted such terror that people could hardly move, and then they handpicked several Chinese businessmen to serve as their economic lieutenants. It is because they knew that after such terrible bloodbath, Chinese people would never dare to rebel. Otherwise an encore was always behind the corner.

Indonesia adopted perverse philosophical and moral codes. Perpetrators, murderers, torturers and rapists have been walking tall, proud. Victims who were molested, raped, and humiliated, felt shame; 'dirty'.

I have a friend. She has a son. She is Chinese Indonesian. Once she told me that she was raped and her son is a product of that 'shameful' night.

Another friend of mine was molested as a child. She was assaulted in her own home by two young men from her neighborhood; men that 'did not like Chinese'. They had sexually abuse her, for hours. "I felt terrible shame", she said. "And the following days when we were playing outdoors, they kept giving me those looks..." "Playing outdoors?" I thought I misunderstood. Those people would be surely in detention, facing charges and soon on trial? But no, they were free and still insulting her. She didn't tell anybody, not even her parents. Nothing bad ever happened to her tormentors.

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"And now we are at the third, the last story", says Anna.

A fictional name of the person she will be talking about is Sisca Gunawan, 24 years old, now

assistant general manager of one large hotel in Surabaya.

"I was there and witnessed the incident with my own eyes, because we walked together.

When we reached the end of the road, standing there waiting for the car, suddenly there were 3 men riding 2 bicycles and slowly getting closer to our side.

Sisca and I moved spontaneously away from them, but they kept riding toward us. And then suddenly, one of them extended his hand grabbing Sisca's private parts.

Sisca tried to push him away but he managed to do what he intended. Others kept laughing, as if they had succeeded in a good teamwork. One of them looked back to us and shouted, "Serves you right!"

The worst that got stuck in Sisca's memory were those facial expressions, their mocking and insulting laughs.

And again, our school only informed us that we had to be more careful. Move in groups, wear loose uniforms, and walk when it's crowded enough. But we had done all that they were suggesting and still things kept happening.

So there we were, and as time went, more and more students 'got their turn'. We slowly got used to it. As if it was something that everyone had to go through.

When we heard about another incident happening, we couldn't help but to think, "oh, another as-expected occurrence' As if it would be just a part of educational process at that particular high school.

Nobody tried to defend us or to even tell us that it was not our fault, that it is not wrong to be Chinese and that in fact it was terrible to treat us that way."

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Generally, the political climate is not geared to protecting Indonesian women, and definitely not the minorities.

Ms. Nursyahbani Katjasungkana explained:

"In our culture and according to the religion, women have to obey men. Even in our marriage law the man is described as the breadwinner. We are trying to change the laws, but there is resistance and things don't move fast.

And it is not only inside the house where the women are being harassed. I even saw in the House of Representatives, how their colleagues openly bullied female MPs. One of my fellow representatives - she was beautiful and single and she is a lawyer from Lampung -is being openly harassed by them. Their talk was like: 'Oh, I feel so sorry for her. I can't take her because I have already four wives.'"

Eva Kusuma Sundari, MP from PDIP Party is fearful about the future of women in Indonesia. She told me in 2011:

"The fear is growing among us, women. According to the national commission for women's right, there are at least 96 local regulations issued by local politicians. This is Islamic regulation; in fact it is very discriminative towards women. It is there, the threat for women. It is always there."

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One of the poems written by Ms. Sulami, former Third Secretary of Gerwani, begins:

*This is only a fragment of a story
Although it is only a fragment
Nonetheless
this story comes from
appalling horror as boundless as the ocean*

The wretched tortured deaths of people
who must bear
victimization without end
Is now what I've written about.
How could I not.

The children of humankind
hundreds of thousands tortured to death,
hundreds of thousands locked away,
cast ashore on the island of exile,
to wrestle with forested land
Threatened by pythons.

Mothers dead fathers dead too,
Mothers locked up fathers locked up too,
Children left to crawl alone.
Young girls raped,
Unwanted pregnancies,
Snarled at by those accursed children
Thrown out of schools!

Bastards!

Anna did not know this poem. Only recently, she began learning about the history of her own people, of her own country, of the world.

Until very recently, she has not suspected that each and every insult directed against her and her friends, each act of violence, has been part of something much greater, and even more sinister.

What was truly shameful, truly kotor, dirty, was the past and the present of her country. But it has been squashing her, humiliating her into submissive, servile silence, into passivity and acceptance.

Anna resisted. The great majority of Indonesian women do not dare.

The entire country has never recovered from the horrid rape of 1965, which subsided but actually never ceased, and in many ways, continues until this very day.

It is a silent rape; an institutionalized one. And around it, all definitions are twisted. In Indonesia, for decades, plunder is called progress, lies are turned into dogmas, feudalism is named democracy, and terrified submission is confused with love and respect.

For almost 50 years now, the daughters of Indonesia, Chinese and of other races, are walking on very thin ice; a bizarre image for this hot and tropical country. They still seem to be fragile,

uncertain and thoroughly unprotected.

Andre Vltchek

P.S.

* From Counterpunch, WEEKEND EDITION MAY 10-12, 2013 :

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/05/10/racism-and-sexual-violence-in-indonesia/>

* Andre Vltchek is a novelist, filmmaker and investigative journalist. He covered wars and conflicts in dozens of countries. His critically acclaimed political revolutionary novel Point of No Return is now re-edited and available. Oceania is his book on Western imperialism in South Pacific. His provocative book about post-Suharto Indonesia and market-fundamentalist model is called "Indonesia - The Archipelago of Fear" (Pluto). He just completed feature documentary "Rwanda Gambit" about Rwandan history and the plunder of DR Congo. After living for many years in Latin America and Oceania, Vltchek presently resides and works in East Asia and Africa. He can be reached through his website.