

BETTER DEAD THAN RED? SUPPRESSION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF SURABAYA'S PKI PAST

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ABSTRACT

As the September 2009 book-burning incident at the *Jawa Pos* publishing headquarters illustrates, anti-communist fervor remains alive and well in Surabaya. Beyond such flare-ups, however, lies an anti-communism that has manifested on an institutional level in more long-term ways, both in city leaders' reconstructions of Surabaya's image as well as of its physical space. Beginning with the mid-twentieth century purge of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), municipal administrators have systematically tried to suppress any associations between Surabaya and the PKI as well as to the mass killings of 1965 – 1966. In selectively evoking Surabaya's role in the Revolution to emphasize its image as the "City of Heroes" while de-emphasizing its association as a former PKI stronghold during the 1950s and 1960s, alternate histories that challenge dominant narratives of past heroisms are subverted and destroyed.

I question why city leaders in Surabaya seem more willing to continue to eradicate the past than to acknowledge the city's one-time association with the PKI and its place in history as a site in which anti-communist violence and mass killings occurred. While some of the reason may be related to a rapid push for development at the expense of historical preservation, I argue that the continued "disappearing" of people, places, and events related to the PKI has a deeper meaning. Should such counter-productive actions ultimately persist, they will continue to impede efforts at truth-seeking and reconciliation as well as of accountability of perpetrators and justice for victims and their families in Surabaya and throughout Indonesia. Instead, I suggest an alternate model that would ensure that multiple versions, and voices, of history are honored and sustained.