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Collective Memory and Reconciliation

This study attempts to address the issue of "voluntary reconciliation" between groups divided by political conflict that happened 20 years ago in Indonesia. The study took "the Tanjung Priok political violence" as a case study, where the victims were civilians and the perpetrator was the army. After the tragedy, there was a period of "silent memory" for more than 17 years where the regime imposed strong and tight control over the official history. The fall of the authoritarian regime opened the door for reclaiming collective memory of past political violence. Public discourse about dealing with legacies of the past raised questions from remembering to forgetting, from discovery of truth to denial, from punishment to amnesty. Current polemical discourse about the event prefers to bring the army to the trial. But surprisingly, a majority of the victims have chosen to forgive the perpetrators and make reconciliation with their "enemies". It was called "voluntary reconciliation" because the reconciliation processes were not mediated and sponsored by a legal and political frame (e.g., TRC in South Africa and in other countries). The processes of reconciliation have surprised many people, because it was considered as spontaneous. After many years of suffering, how can they easily forgive their enemies in the past? Moreover, popular representation of this violent history has placed them as victims and the army as the perpetrator. Observation and in-depth interviews with victims revealed the role of forgiving, psychological distancing, and healing as the prerequisites for building a new relationship with the past enemies. But the changing of perspective in viewing one's own collective memory is the necessary condition for the reconciliation process. It was clear from this case study that collective memory or collective remembering was best conceptualised as a conversational and discursive process rather than an individual cognitive process. In this case, the community was willing to "adjust" their collective memory in order to fit with their current need: reconciliation.