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Exposed: A Visual History of the Destruction of the Indonesian Left. By Geoffrey Robinson and Douglas Kammen. Southeast Asia Program Publications, an imprint of Cornell University Press, 2025. xiii+303 pp.

Visuals speak to our visceral selves, words to our reasonable selves. That is why propagandists use pictures, and historians words. In this book, two historians take on the propagandists at their own game. Geoffrey Robinson and Douglas Kammen are two of the most authoritative writers in the world on the bloody destruction of the Indonesian left. In *Exposed*, they present its first visual history. They spent six years scouring archives around the world. Of the thousand-odd images they found, three hundred appear in this book, each thoroughly contextualized.

This visual history of the violent birth of the Soeharto era in 1965 is intended to break the power of propaganda. The problem, as they acknowledge themselves (p. 8), is that the propagandists dominate the archive, even today. Many of the pictures in the book we have seen before. They show abject-looking Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) prisoners, crouching behind barbed wire, or filing past uniformed captors who point rifles at them. They look downcast, defeated.

There are some surprises that jar with the regime narrative of victory over the communist menace led by a united military force. Lieutenant Colonel Untung is the bad guy in the New Order's narrative. He led the "September 30th Movement" that allegedly perpetrated a coup against the government. When his group bungled the operation, General Soeharto seized the moment to blame the entire membership of the PKI—the largest non-governing communist party in the world. But Figure 57 (p. 63) shows Untung enjoying a picnic with Soeharto and his wife a few years prior. They were friends! Was Soeharto perhaps in on Untung's plot? Was the September 30th Movement perhaps an internal military faction?

Some surprises are more subtle. In a photo of a PKI rally taken not long before the disaster (Figure 43, p. 52), we see audience

members relaxing on the lawn. A young woman smiles at the camera. The joy in her face suggests the party was actually popular, and not a cabal of demons.

But very few surprising photos have survived. Photography was expensive in the 1960s. Few Indonesians took snapshots of public events; fewer still kept them after the terror. The famous painter Djoko Pekik had an enormous photographic archive of leftist life before 1965. But he destroyed everything (which still did not save him from jail).

All the regime photos here are curated affairs. Perhaps the book's most important contribution is to show how thoroughly the propaganda machine went to work in the days after 1 October 1965. Accredited photographers, foreign or domestic, could photograph only smirking generals, enthusiastic anti-communist student demonstrators, defeated-looking prisoners. But no torture, no killing, no blood.

Among the most striking pictures are those showing Soeharto and Sukarno in one frame during the drawn-out endgame for the father of the nation in 1965 and 1966. The military usurper, aged forty-five, appears next to the once-revered Sukarno, twenty years older, now a hapless figure of mockery. Figure 237 (p. 201) shows Soeharto sagged into an easy chair, "asleep", while Sukarno speaks into a microphone, claiming nothing has changed. In Figure 256 (p. 215), the just-installed Acting President Soeharto smiles indulgently at a frail-looking Sukarno sitting next to him, the latter holding a cigarette to steady his nerves, his confusion impossible to miss.

There are so many uniforms. So much gloating by men wearing sunglasses and medals on their chests, posing by jeeps. So much hatred pumped up by lies. So much relishing the suffering of victims, who apparently brought it on themselves. And so little of the joy that once mobilized millions with the hope that justice might at last prevail.

The authors contextualize all these photographs with great erudition. The attentive reader will never see these pictures again without knowing they were staged, that they represent the alternative reality of a military regime.

But I imagine the makers must have been haunted by the inattentive reader, who might think: *We know these pictures, we know what they mean; it was a tragedy, but at least the nation was saved from communism.*

For the latter, I would recommend seeking out some of the book's many hidden gems. One shows the novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer in detention on Buru Island, listening to a foreign journalist permitted to visit (Figure 300, p. 250). He looks unbeaten. At that very moment he was clandestinely composing his great novel *This Earth of Mankind*, in which the central character Minke is told by his muse, Nyai Ontosoroh: "Write, Nyo, always about humanity, humanity's life, not humanity's death. Yes ... there's nothing more difficult" (p. 111).

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Toer, Pramoedya Ananta. 1990. *This Earth of Mankind*, translated by Max Lane. Penguin Books.

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The Profligate Colonial: How the US Exported Austerity to the Philippines. By Lisandro E. Claudio. Cornell University Press, 2025. viii+219 pp.

Lisandro Claudio's *Profligate Colonial* places American rule in the Philippines within the historical pattern of imperial powers imposing on their subjects policies that primarily served metropolitan interests. Thus, American monetary and fiscal policies—anchored on gold, fixed peso-dollar exchange rates and preferential trade arrangements—favoured export agriculture, imports of American manufactured goods, and foreign capital over Filipino labour and