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mean that of the early 1990s. The ethnographic descriptions are very readable, although a critical editing of the text would have removed some of the lengthy and repetitious discussions on the interpretation of the ethnographic data. The theoretical arguments are presented in an inaccessible style, using rather too many abstract concepts.

The greater part of the book is dedicated to changes in the original system of matrilineages, while only Chapters 8 and 9 look at the influence of Christianity and the relationship between Christianity and indigenous representations. In these final chapters almost all attention is focused on the snake myth, which I see as only one aspect of the relationship between Christianity and indigenous Arosi representations. The influence of Christianity is only partially described. The book seems to waver between two lines of thought: a major argument concerning the transformation of the matrilineages, and a subsidiary argument about Arosi Christianity. The current shift toward patrilineality, finally, is analysed only in the most general terms, although it is a rather remarkable development deserving more attention. This is the more so since many matrilineages nowadays are landless, and ownership of land is apparently connected to the patrilineage. I suspect that current developments could be illuminated with the help of more data and analysis on the increasing importance of bilateral kinship, a process mentioned but hardly examined by Scott. One gets the strong impression that social change in Arosi is not in fact dominated by the dynamics of the relationship between matrilineages and land. In that case, the book leaves the reader with a frustratingly inconclusive ending.


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*Indonesia in the Soeharto years* is an evocative photographic ‘aide-mémoire’ (p. xv) of recent Indonesian history. It was conceived in 1997 when its principal editor, John McGlynn, foresaw Soeharto’s downfall and envisaged the need
for – in McGlynn’s own words – ‘a book made up of images and voices’, a
‘new kind of history book on Indonesia’ that would ‘depict and discuss, in
ways not possible during the Soeharto years, many of the leading issues and
turning-point events of the country during that time’ (p. 459). More than fifty
short essays by government leaders, journalists, activists and scholars are
combined here with 500 historic photographs by 125 different photographers,
including many of Indonesia’s top photojournalists. The publication of the
volume was financed partly by the Asia Foundation and the Open Society
Institute. It boasts a preface by former US president Jimmy Carter, and another
by former Tempo editor Goenawan Mohamad. Originally published in 2005 by
Lontar Foundation alone, its second edition, reviewed here, involves two new
co-publishers but appears unchanged in content.

Indonesia in the Soeharto years concentrates on the dark, bloody and tur-
bulent sides of the New Order: violence, oppression, protest, censorship,
corruption. The book’s avalanche of black and white images, many of them
authentically blurred, will not fail to trigger strong emotions in anyone who
lived in Indonesia during those years, or even just observed the rise and fall
of the Soeharto regime from afar. A huge PKI emblem in wood and rattan,
burning. Golkar members, marching and saluting. Bespectacled Dharma
Wanita ladies, smiling vacuously. Two army officers, conspiratorially lighting
each other’s cigarettes. Pramoedya Ananta Toer, with his typewriter in the
prison camp on Buru. Protestors, writhing under blows from rifle butts and
bamboo batons. The Dili Massacre. Soeharto, smiling, with President Nixon,
with President Marcos, with Queen Elizabeth II. Soeharto, fishing. Soeharto,
shooting. Soeharto, as a pilgrim in Mecca. Soeharto, riding an overpowered
motorcycle with sidecar, Habibie his clownish passenger. Soeharto, voting in
one of his managed elections, his sinister black shadow etched like a wayang
puppet’s on the white cloth behind the ballot box. The last part of the book
is devoted to the fall and aftermath of the New Order, but the images here,
now mostly in colour, are no less disturbing: burning forests, burning cars,
burning banks, burned-out churches; and in Kalimantan a youth, grinning,
holds up by the hair the severed head of a Madurese settler. Soeharto’s chaotic
legacy, evidently, was as disastrous as his reign itself.

What the uninitiated reader could easily fail to appreciate after leafing
through this book is the enormous improvement in living conditions that
was experienced by ordinary Indonesians during Soeharto’s three decades
in power. Although the statistics are to some extent debated, it appears that
between 1970 and 1985 alone more than 50 million people, 40 percent of
the national population, escaped for the first time from absolute poverty.
Since Soeharto’s downfall the achievements of the New Order in this respect
have if anything received increasing recognition, retrospectively, in interna-
tional development circles. In 1998 the charity Oxfam, on the face of it an
unlikely champion of authoritarian developmentalism, published a study entitled *Economic growth with equity* in which Soeharto’s Indonesia was held up as model for equitable development. In the World Bank’s 2006 World Development Report on the theme of *Equity and Development*, New Order Indonesia is likewise portrayed as a textbook example of ‘pro-poor growth’ and praised in particular for the ‘rural bias’ of its development policies, which gave priority to agriculture, rural infrastructure, and rural public services.

*Indonesia in the Soeharto years*, ironically, mostly depicts the rich and the middle classes, and suffers from a pronounced ‘urban bias’. Except for short features on the controversial transmigration program and the Kedung Ombo dam protests, the countryside, where most Indonesians have always lived, is hardly to be seen in the book’s more than 500 pages. Almost no attention is paid to the policies and institutions that entailed real turning points in the lives of rural Indonesians: the irrigation projects, the schools, the health clinics, the fertilizer and fuel subsidies, the roadbuilding, the electrification of the villages. On the fundamental, life-and-death topic of health care, for instance, this book contains just one paragraph of text and two photos. And where economic development is depicted at all here, it tends to be either in ‘showcase’ shots which suggest that only the rich and powerful benefited – an airliner, an oil refinery, confetti at the Jakarta Stock Exchange – or in terms of outright victimization of the poor: becak dumped *en masse* in Jakarta Bay, urban squatters evicted from their homes. The ‘massive development plans’ of the New Order, according to the inside cover flap, were nothing more than a ‘benign facade’. Goenawan Mohamad, in his preface, dismisses the Development (with a capital D) of the New Order period as ‘an epic illusion’ (p. xvi).

It says a lot about the passions still stirred up in some quarters by Soeharto and his legacy that almost a decade on, such rhetoric can be used in a book like this to discuss in all seriousness what was, at the time, the biggest, fastest episode of poverty alleviation in all of human history. The benevolence of the New Order, like its repressiveness, was inspired partly by the ruling elite’s abiding fear of a resurgence of the rural discontent that had given the Indonesian Communist Party, before its destruction in 1965, its mass power base. But that is precisely the paradox. *Indonesia in the Soeharto years* opens with a quotation from Nietzsche: ‘Three-quarters of all evil done in the world is the result of fear’. But why not turn Nietzsche on his head, and ask: how much good has not also been done in the world out of fear? In their failure to address such disturbing questions, the authors of this book have mostly settled for comforting half-truths rather than admitting doubts that might have complicated their epic morality tale of a ruthless dictator’s rise and fall.