

INTRODUCTION

ON SEPTEMBER 30TH, 1965, an unsuccessful *coup d'état* triggered a series of events that have decided the course of Indonesia's history to this very day. The leadership of President Sukarno, the man who led Indonesia to independence in 1949, was undermined, and the ascendancy of his successor, Suharto, was established. The orientation of this new nation, an amalgamation of peoples of disparate religions and languages living across a huge archipelago, was to change from fragile democracy and neutral alignment (dependent upon balancing the competing influences of Communism, Western colonialism, and a power-hungry army) to a military dictatorship aligned with the West.

SHADOW PLAY





THE FAILED COUP TRIGGERED a terror campaign, led by General Suharto. This culminated in the deposing of Sukarno and the establishment of Suharto's New Order in 1966. At least five hundred thousand people and perhaps as many as one million were killed during this period in purges organized by the military in conjunction with civilian militias. Many of these people were killed for their suspected involvement in the Communist PKI party. This would sound familiar to any secondary student who might have followed the story of East Timor and its struggle to attain independence from Indonesia.

Shadow Play is a response to the recent democratic impulse and freedoms that have emerged within Indonesia after more than three decades of Suharto's rule. Finally, Indonesians can begin to confront their hidden history. The massacres received very little publicity in the West at the time



or since, but now a full and frank account of the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people can be given. The film even explains some of the reasons for the West's silence.



Interviews with journalists who covered the story reveal the secret war of propaganda and media manipulation waged by the Indonesian army and actively aided by the governments of the United States, Britain and Australia. These official policies of subterfuge



were part of a broader response to events in South-East Asia. The Vietnam War was escalating in 1965, and the anti-Communist West decided that President Sukarno's power depended upon Communist support. His removal from power and replacement with an acceptable, anti-Communist leader became a policy imperative.

SYNOPSIS

The narrator of *Shadow Play* provides a concise description of these events, times and places for viewers unfamiliar with Indonesian history.

Archival footage and interviews with significant players construct a useful chronology and a clear explanation of the major incidents.

To this end, the documentary summarises Sukarno's background, his rise to power and presidency. Indonesia's colonial past, its demography and its external influences are spelt out, giving



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: REMAINS OF MURDER VICTIM, IBNOE SANTORO; BARBED WIRE SURROUNDS EX-DETENTION CENTRE, CENTRAL JAVA; COFFINS BURNT AFTER FAMILIES ARE PREVENTED FROM REBURYING BONES EXHUMED FROM MASS GRAVE; NEWLY ERCTED GRAVE STONE FOR IBNOE SANTORO AS HE IS FINALLY GIVEN THE DIGNITY OF A PROPER BURIAL; JOHN HUGHES, CORRESPONDENT, CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR AND AUTHOR OF PULLITZER PRIZE WINNING "INDONESIAN UPHEAV-AL"; PRAMOEDYA ANANTA TOER, WRITER / POLITICAL PRISONER 1965-76; PROFESSOR ARIF BUDIANTO, FORENSIC PATHOLOGIST



a background onto which the events of September 30th are projected. Archival footage of Sukarno in the U.S.A, China and Russia, for example, is used to show the influence that Cold War politics had on Sukarno as he attempted to maintain his nation's neutrality.

The narration then moves its focus to an examination of the major political elements competing for power during Sukarno's leadership, namely the PKI and the Army. The motivations and actions of each are shown in relation to the machinations of the super-powers. The effect of this structure is to sharpen the important background knowledge, allowing the uninitiated viewer to understand the coup and why the consequences of its failure were so dramatic.

Having set the scene, the horrible events of the night of September 30th are related. Indonesian witnesses, foreign diplomats and journalists give their accounts of that night and what followed. The narration links these stories and fills in details, giving the impression of an ambitious attempt by junior Army officers to seize power, but the coup,



which resulted in the murders of six Army generals, was ultimately ineffective and ill-conceived. The aims of the conspirators are not made clear. The Communist allegiance of the conspirators is only hinted at. This is one area in the documentary that remains vague, perhaps intentionally so.

Extensive use is made of two propaganda films shot for Suharto after he had taken power in 1966 (following his own successful coup). In these films, Suharto seeks to 'legitimize' the mass



killings he had authorized after the September 30th coup, portraying the conspirators as Communists who tortured and mutilated the generals before killing them. In fact, this did not occur.



Suharto's propaganda films, by graphically portraying these untruths, perpetrated a myth about the Communist PKI that permeated the larger Indonesian society. Peasant militias organized by the Army began killing and imprisoning anyone associated or implicated with the PKI. Other forms of domestic propaganda included controlling the local media and creating a newspaper that disseminated grotesque stories of Communist degeneracy. The effect of this misinformation was to encourage murderous reprisals and to engender a prejudice against the PKI that still endures.

The extent of the international media's complicity with the Western nations' foreign policy is laid bare. Journalists who filed comprehensive stories detailing the killings and the actions of Suharto's regime were either ignored completely or edited so that their intended stories were rendered acceptable to governments concerned with supporting Suharto's anti-Communist stance.

Shadow Play tells of the major participants in the story and what motivated them; it places Indonesia within an



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ALAN RENOUF, SECRETARY, AUSTRALIAN DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS 1974-77; ARISTIDES KATTOPO, JOURNALIST & PUBLISHER; BRIGADIER GENERAL KEMAL IDRIS, INDONESIAN SPECIAL FORCES; DR SUMIYARSI, POLITICAL PRISONER, 1968-71; RICE FIELDS, CENTRAL JAVA



international context; and the events leading up to and following the coup are explained in an objective way. But the documentary also switches from a broad historical background of the coup to the stories of three individuals swept up by events over which they had no control. This change of focus from the macro historical picture to the personal and intimate is very effective in bringing the events and emotions of the period to life for the viewer.

Ibnoe Santoro's story is related by his brother, Joyo. Ibnoe had studied economics in the U.S.A, returning to Indonesia to work. As an academic, he was suspected of having Communist sympathies. He was imprisoned, tortured and finally executed by the Army in March of 1966. Joyo wants to reclaim his brother's remains and re-bury him according to Muslim custom.

Carmel Budiardjo had been working as a translator and researcher at the Indonesian Department of Foreign Affairs in 1965. Following the coup, she was dishonourably dismissed from



government service. In 1968, she was arrested and detained in military detention centres for four years, and then exiled from Indonesia. She relocated

to England, where she lobbied to have her Indonesian husband freed from detention. Her campaign broadened to include all types of human rights abuses in Indonesia, including East Timor. The documentary follows her journey back to the land she had been exiled from for thirty years. (Her memoir is included in the resources list at the end of this guide.)

The third story follows Dr Sumiyarsi, who was working as a paediatrician in Jakarta when she was accused of writing false doctors' certificates for PKI members. Her house was burnt down and she fled with her husband. After two years on the run, she was caught and imprisoned without trial for eleven years.

Each character's story is engaging, illuminating aspects of the broader historical events in interesting and



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: OLD HATREDS FLARE AFTER A FAMILY EXHUMES A BODY AND A MUSLIM MOB BLOCKADES THE HOUSE IN PROTEST; EDWARD MASTERS, FORMER US AMBASSADOR TO INDONESIA; KEN WELLS, HEAD OF STATION, AUSTRALIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE, JAKARTA, 1965-68; CARMEL BUDIARDJO, AN ENGLISH WOMAN WHO WAS A POLITICAL PRISONER FROM 1968 TO 1971; ABDURRAHMAN WAHID, INDONESIAN PRESIDENT, 1999-2001;



poignant ways. Their first-hand accounts augment the narrator's broad commentary, giving these enormous historical events a personal dimension. In particular, the disinterment of Ibnoe Santoro's remains and the eloquent words of his brother force the viewer to consider the consequences of Suharto's murderous policy towards the PKI. This mass burial was one of thousands that took place at the time. Viewers may be reminded of other holocausts when watching this footage.

Shadow Play assumes that these events are largely unknown to a wider Western audience and one of its key aims is to alert the viewer to a hidden history. The way in which the film chooses to tell its complicated story simply and directly through these personal histories is its central strength.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Shadow Play is suitable for upper secondary year levels and tertiary studies. Teachers should be aware that some scenes graphically portray the murders of the generals. This is a dense film



and the subject matter requires close attention.

Shadow Play would be an appropriate text for use in the following study areas: Year 10 Studies of Society and Environment; upper secondary Politics (looking at Australian Foreign Policy, for example); Indonesian Language Studies; and Indonesian History. It could also be used as a point of comparison to studies of the World



War Two Holocaust; and as an excellent example of a documentary for use by Media Studies students.

BEFORE VIEWING



DISCUSSION TOPICS

EAST TIMOR

- Indonesia annexed (that is, invaded and took control of) East Timor in 1975. Before this, East Timor was a Portuguese colony that had only just begun a process of transition towards independence (under an elected Fretilin government). What did Indonesia seek to gain by invading East Timor?

- A military trial of generals accused of war crimes in East Timor is currently underway. What details of these trials are being reported in the Western media? General Wiranto, who commanded the Indonesian military in East Timor, has not been charged. Why not?

- In East Timor, the Indonesian military organized local militias to maintain Indonesian rule. What is a militia? What might be the advantages of using locals rather than the regular army?

- East Timor is an independent



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ROLAND CHALLIS, BBC S.E. ASIA CORRESPONDENT 1964-69; HUGH TOVAR, CIA HEAD OF STATION, JAKARTA 1964-66; FRANK PALMOS, INDONESIAN CORRESPONDENT, HERALD SUN 1962-72; JOYO SANTOSO, BROTHER OF IBNOE SANTORO; CARMEL BUDIARDJO & DR SUMIYARSI REUNITE IN INDONESIA, HAVING NOT SEEN EACH OTHER SINCE THEY WERE IN PRISON IN 1970; DON NORTH, JOURNALIST, INDONESIA 1965-66; SYLVIE LECLEZIO, CO-PRODUCER



nation. Australia played a major peace-keeping role in establishing its independence. It receives support from the United Nations as it continues to establish itself. How is this new nation different from the land that was occupied and ruled by Indonesian forces?

INDONESIA

- Describe Indonesia. What is its population? What does its geography look like? Locate it on a world map. What religions and cultures

are common to this nation? What are the major components of the Indonesian economy? What implications does its location have for Australia?

- Discuss Indonesia's recent history. Suharto ruled Indonesia from 1966 until 1998 when he retired amidst rising unrest. What do we know of this man and his policies? What was Australia's response to Suharto's rule?
- What is the state of Indonesian

politics today? Who has political power? What might the future hold for Indonesia?

- What is the state of relations between Australia and Indonesia?

ACTIVITIES

COLONIALISM

- What is a colony and what does colonialism mean? Consider here that Australia was a colony and only became an independent nation in the year 1901. Which other countries were colonized by Western powers? Research dates and the means by which each country obtained their independence. Share your findings around the class to compile a comprehensive list.

ISLAM

- The Republic of Indonesia comprises the largest Muslim population in the world. The religious make-up of the country is central to the events described in *Shadow Play*. What is Islam? What influence might this



religion have on a country's foreign policy and internal politics?

PROPAGANDA

- *Shadow Play* refers to various types of propaganda, including two feature films made for Suharto, and to Western newspapers editing journalists' reports. What is propaganda? Where might you have heard of this media technique being used? Give examples of propaganda campaigns. Do you think that the political advertising that occurs during an Australian Federal election campaign is a type of propaganda?

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

- Questions about justice and human rights lie at the heart of this documentary. All the characters speak directly or indirectly about these issues. Even General Suharto, who deposed President Sukarno and who orchestrated the mass killings described in *Shadow Play*, would have, at some level, believed in the justness of his actions. Today, human rights issues are being held up for scrutiny around the world. This is the main focus of the United Nations. Give examples of current human rights issues, including an important Australian issue. Compile a list of examples and decide what common grievances oppressed or unjustly treated people might share. Make up a charter of what you consider to be basic human rights. Compare this with the United Nations Charter of Human Rights.
- Are there any public figures in recent Australian history who have escaped justice? Research a particular subject (for example, Christopher Skase) and hold a debate as to whether this individual received justice.

AFTER VIEWING

The following comprehension questions are designed to encourage close reading by students.

- 1 What year was Sukarno born? Where was he born? (1901 in Java)
- 2 Indonesia became independent from Portuguese rule. True or False? (False. It was Dutch rule.)
- 3 What year did Indonesia become a republic? (1949)
- 4 Indonesia is the fourth most populous nation on earth. What is the dominant religion of this nation? (Islam)
- 5 The documentary refers to the PKI. What was this organization (the Indonesian Communist Party) and how many members did it hold at its peak? (3 million)
- 6 Shortly before the September 30th Coup, Sukarno aligned his foreign policy with two Communist nations. What were these nations? (China and Vietnam) This was the decisive reason for the West's determination to replace him. What year did this occur? (1965)
- 7 How did the Western media describe the mass killings that occurred after the September 30th Coup? (They were described as a civil war between the PKI and the Army.)
- 8 On the island of Bali, a horrific death toll was calculated over a two-week period. What was this toll? (80,000)
- 9 How did one Western newspaper headline characterize Sukarno's fall from power? ('Sukarno Goes Quietly')
- 10 In one important scene, Carmel Budiardjo, the exiled human rights campaigner, talks with Indonesian school students before a monument. Who does this monument commemorate? (It commemorates the six generals murdered on the night of September 30th.)
- 11 How did those arrested by Suharto's 'New Order' and tried in military court for their involvement in the



failed coup justify their actions? (They said they merely wanted to arrest the generals for planning a coup against Sukarno, and that double agents within their ranks had killed the generals.)

- 12 What year did Sukarno die? (1970)
- 13 How many political prisoners were held without trial during Suharto's 'New Order'? (600,000)
- 14 How many remains were exhumed from the mass burial site? (23)
- 15 Abdurrahman Wahid talks about the need for a new approach in Indonesian politics. What is the key word he uses to describe this approach? (reconciliation)

THE DOCUMENTARY PROCESS

- List all of the types of film used in this documentary (e.g. archival footage, dramatic re-constructions). Does the use of these different types of film improve or detract from the documentary?
- Describe the narration of this documentary. Is it emotional or dispassionate? Do you think the whole story is being told? If not, what more would you like to hear?
- What do you think the film-makers feel about the story they have told? Are you aware of a definite point of view being expressed by this documentary? If so, what is it?



- The personal stories chosen are those of victims of the Suharto regime's purges against the PKI. Would you like to hear from a supporter of Suharto? Do you think the documentary would be improved if this side of the history had been included? Why/why not?
- What is the meaning of the film's title, *Shadow Play*?

ACTIVITIES

- Write a biography of one of the characters in the documentary.
- Write a newspaper report detailing the events of September 30th for an Australian newspaper, using the information supplied by this documentary.
- Draw a timeline using the information given by this documentary that covers the period from Indonesia's gaining independence from the Dutch until the present day. Include the names of political leaders and the dates of all the significant events described.
- Investigate a current news story occurring in Indonesia and compare it to the events detailed in the documentary.
- Hold a class debate to discuss what the future of Indonesia might be. Include, as a major theme, Australia's relations with Indonesia, based on the current state of play between the two nations.
- Imagine you are one of the people held in detention. Write a diary entry describing conditions and your state of mind.
- Surf the World Wide Web for Internet sites that discuss Suharto's rule. Choose two sites and review them. See if you can detect any bias in the information being presented. Identify who has created each site. In each case, decide what the author's purpose might be.

RESOURCES

BOOKS

Carmel Budiardjo, *Surviving Indonesia's Gulag: A Western Woman Tells Her Story*, Cassell, London, 1996.

Robert Cribb (ed.), *The Indonesian Killings of 1965-1966: Studies from Java and Bali*, Centre of South-East Asian Studies, Monash University, Clayton, Victoria, 1998.

Harold A. Crouch, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia*, Cornell University Press, Revised Edition, 1988.

R.E. Elson, *Suharto: A Political Biography*, Cambridge University Press, Oakleigh, Victoria, 2001.

Nawaz B. Mody, *Indonesia Under Suharto*, Apt Books, New York, 1987.

Julie Southwood and Patrick Flanagan, *Indonesia: Law, Propaganda and Terror*, Zed Press, London, 1983.

Michael R.J. Vatikiotis, *Indonesian Politics Under Suharto: The Rise and Fall of the New Order*, Routledge, London, New York, 1998.

INTERNET SITES

(Note: there are many sites, some with overtly political messages.)

BBC NEWS / ASIA – PACIFIC
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/low/english/world/asia-pacific/default.html>

ASIA OBSERVER
<http://www.asiaobserver.com/indonesia.htm>

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/indtoc.html>

TAPOL
www.gn.apc.org/tapol

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