Geoffrey B. Robinson, *The Killing Season: A History of The Indonesian Massacres, 1965–66*. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018, xvii + 429 pp. ISBN: 9780691161389, price: USD 35.00 (hardcover).

During the *National Symposium of the 1965 Tragedy* held on April 18, 2016, Indonesia's Coordinating Minister of Politics, Law, and Human Rights, Luhut Binsar Panjaitan, questioned the numbers of victims killed in 1965–1966. His skepticism was echoed in the opening speech of a retired commander-general of Indonesia's Special Force Command (*Kopassus*), Sintong Panjaitan, who shared his experiences in leading what he referred to as the anti-communist operation in Central Java. Both speakers criticized existing publications that, as they asserted, have overestimated the numbers of victims (conventionally estimated between 500,000 and 1,000,000 people), challenging the audience to provide proof of the mass graves. Although the symposium itself was a breakthrough under president Joko Widodo's government—it was the first symposium about 1965 organized by a formal government body—statements by government representatives that downplay the killings were constantly repeated. This follows a similar pattern from the Soeharto era, which placed the killings on the periphery of Indonesia's historiography and portrayed them merely as a result of spontaneous horizontal conflict.

Within this context, Geoffrey Robinson's *The Killing Season: A History of The Indonesian Massacres, 1965–1966* provides a significant contribution to the historiography of this period. The book does not only emphasize that the killings occurred throughout the nation, but also presents two profound conclusions about it. First, Robinson argues that rather than inevitable or spontaneous, the mass killings and detentions were encouraged, facilitated, directed, and shaped by the army's leadership (p. 19). Robinson refers to a "repertoire of violence", rather than psychological explanations of mass violence. The repertoire refers to routines of violence learned and employed by all of those associated with military institutions (p. 16). Secondly, and I think most importantly in regard to the international dimensions of the killings, he demonstrates the support of foreign powers, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, in encouraging and facilitating the violence that occurred. Their support continued until the removal of Indonesia's first president Sukarno and the ensuing historical revisionism about this period, in order to ensure that the official version of the 1965–1966 narrative would prevail. Robinson carefully develops his argument over eleven chapters, drawing on numerous published, archival, and oral sources.

After the introduction, Robinson introduces the preconditions of the 1965–1966 killings in Chapter 2. It highlights how the colonial and Japanese occupation planted the seeds for the formation of Indonesia's Armed Forces and youth paramilitary units. These developments culminated in the revolutionary period (1945–1949), when the cooperation between army and civilians solidified the army's ongoing narrative as combatants of Indonesia's enemies. It was also in the same period that the army developed their territorial command, expanding their power into the sub-district level. Another precondition, according to Robinson, is the political tension between the Right (dominated by the Army and anti-communist parties) and the Left (the Indonesian Communist Party, PKI) which escalated on October 1, 1965. Robinson then continues, in Chapter 3, to elaborate on Indonesia's famous 30 September Movement (G30S), which provided a pretext for the mass killings. It was on this date that six generals and one low-rank army officer were killed and then thrown into the *Lubang Buaya* on the outskirts of Jakarta. Robinson manages to describe existing analyses of the event, such as Indonesia's official narrative, which blames PKI, and other interpretations that scrutinize other responsible figures.

The Killing Season also presents two chapters that extensively describe the role of international powers in the 1965–1966 violence. Chapter 4 situates Indonesia in the context of the Cold War. Using declassified archives from the US and UK, Robinson manages to show the encouragement by those states to disrupt the communist movements in Indonesia. One example is a remark by US Ambassador Howard Jones, in a closed meeting of State Department officials in the Philippines in March 1965: "From our viewpoint, of course, an unsuccessful coup attempt by the PKI might be the most effective development to start a reversal of political trends in Indonesia" (p. 109). These states continued their support for the annihilation of communists in Indonesia (described in Chapter 7). Portraying the downfall of communists in Indonesia as "a gleam of light in Asia", these foreign powers maintained their support in several ways. The countries assured that the army leadership received political support and avoided interference in Indonesia's internal affairs, which resulted in the unlimited purge of the Left. The purge also included a psychological war, mostly done through propaganda, to demonize PKI and Indonesia's first president Sukarno. Furthermore, they provided material assistance in the form of rice, cotton, communication equipment, medical supplies, cash, and possibly weapons. However, Robinson also calls attention to criticism from other countries of the violence against the Left, including from the Netherlands, Australia, some of British officials, Sweden, and most strongly from China.

The fifth chapter of *Mass Killing* presents an extensive discourse about the killing itself, such as the number of victims, the identity of victims and per-

petrators, and how the killings were conducted. At the same time, the chapter contests existing ideas that emphasize local tensions as the motive for mass killing by questioning, for example, the capability of those factors to generate the killings in some areas, but not in others. The answer lies in the next chapter. Titled *The Army's Role*, Chapter 6 presents Robinson's core argument: that although there were complex national and international factors contributing to the 1965 violence, the 'genocide' could not have happened without the army's interference. Although the army's role differs cross-regionally due to the capacities of their regional leaders, the violence eventually escalated due to the mobilization of civilian groups by the army and the usage of propaganda and media campaigns, including religiously inspired tactics.

The next two chapters, *Mass Incarceration and Release* (8), and *Restrict, Discipline and Punish* (9), mainly focus on the exclusion of the remaining 'Leftists' during Soeharto's New Order government. Chapter 8 describes mass incarcerations and their relation to the mass killings, along with their effects on the detainees. The chapter also discusses the categorization of political prisoners by the state according to their perceived degree of loyalty to communism and calls attention to a special detention camp on Buru Island. This place in Eastern Indonesia was turned into a detention camp in 1969 when around 2500 political detainees were sent there by the army authorities under the guise of 'political rehabilitation'. Meanwhile, in Chapter 9, Robinson argues that although all the prisoners were released in 1979 due to international pressure, they underwent intense surveillance and control by the government. This was done through restricting their political, social, and economic rights, and at the same time, creating continuous national propaganda and censorship against the Left.

In the last two chapters, Robinson traces the legacy of the 1965 events in the post-New Order era. Chapter 10, *Truth and Justice?*, presents a thorough description of reconciliation efforts by the state, civil society, and cultural interventions, such as Joshua Oppenheimer's film *The Act of Killing*. In this section, Robinson describes some of the impediments to those efforts, including the prolonged anticommunist stance characterizing both the state and society, and also the resistance from right-wing groups. The mobilization of civilian masses has created a difficult obstacle for current truth-seeking efforts regarding the 1965 violence, according to Robinson. *Violence, Legacies, Silence*, serves as a concluding chapter, but also addresses future strategies to deal with past atrocities such as the case of 1965 Indonesia. Here, Robinson emphasizes the need for government support for all truth and reconciliation initiatives, and a joint effort to disrupt the prolonged silence. However, I think the most important and visible strategy suggested by Robinson is to create clarity in the historical records by

opening all the government archives. This does not only apply to Indonesia, but to other relevant countries in the context of the Cold War.

Amid the growing numbers of books that critically analyze the 1965 mass violence, *The Killing Season* offers a highly comprehensive analysis on the issue. It covers the preconditions and aftermath of the violence, offering a perspective of their continuity in analyzing state violence in general. The arguments are built carefully, based on substantial sources, which enables the reader to place the 1965 genocide in a broader historical and international context. *The Killing Season* will be useful for students and researchers, as well as practitioners of Indonesian studies and genocide studies.

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