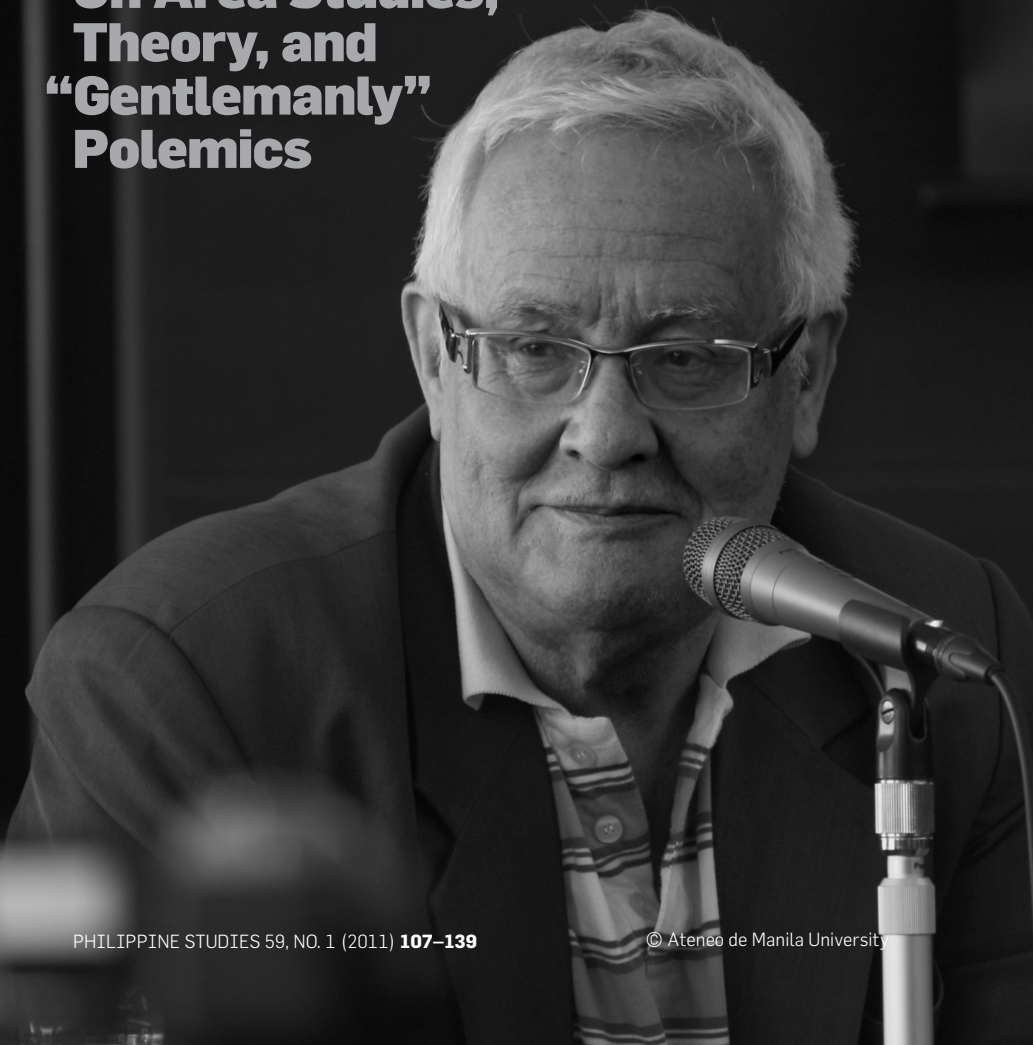


## **Interview**

FILOMENO AGUILAR, CAROLINE HAU,  
VICENTE RAFAEL, AND TERESA TADEM

# **Benedict Anderson, Comparatively Speaking**

**On Area Studies,  
Theory, and  
“Gentlemanly”  
Polemics**



**B**enedict Richard O’Gorman Anderson, the Aaron L. Binenkorb Professor Emeritus of International Studies, Government, and Asian Studies at Cornell University and a member of the International Editorial Advisory Board of *Philippine Studies*, is one of the world’s most influential thinkers. Born in Kunming, China, on 26 August 1936, Anderson’s father was an official in the Imperial Maritime Customs in China and a Sinophile. An Irish citizen, Anderson grew up in California and Ireland before attending Cambridge University, where he graduated with a First Class degree in Classics in 1957. In Cambridge his interest in Asian politics was stirred. He moved to Cornell University in 1958 to pursue doctoral studies under the supervision of George Kahin.

In response to the 1965 coup in Indonesia, and contrary to the official version of events, Anderson cowrote with fellow graduate students Ruth T. McVey and Frederick P. Bunnell an analysis that identified “discontented army officers,” rather than communists, as responsible for the “failed” coup. The military regime tried to talk Anderson into seeing his errors, but it did not succeed. Then known as the “Cornell Paper,” *A Preliminary Analysis of the October 1, 1965 Coup in Indonesia* was published in 1971. It undermined Suharto’s claim to legitimacy and, for close to three decades, Anderson was barred from entering Indonesia until Suharto’s fall from power in May 1998.

In 1967 Anderson completed his PhD thesis entitled “The Pemuda Revolution: Indonesian Politics, 1945–1946,” subsequently published in 1972 as *Java in a Time of Revolution: Occupation and Resistance, 1944–1946*. He taught in the Department of Government at Cornell University until retirement in 2002. He was director of Cornell’s Southeast Asian Program from 1983 to 1989. His celebrated *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* appeared in 1983, and was revised and expanded in 1991. Translations in about thirty languages now exist. Anvil published a Philippine edition in 2003.

At Cornell many students from the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries had the great opportunity to have Ben Anderson (BA) as teacher, adviser, and friend. After he very kindly agreed to this journal’s invitation to an interview via email, some of his former students—Filomeno Aguilar Jr. (FA), Caroline Sy Hau (CH), Vicente Rafael (VR), and Teresa Encarnacion Tadem (TT)—put together a set of questions that was sent to him on 23 November 2010. His replies came back on 20 December 2010.

Professor Anderson emphasizes that some of the points discussed here were taken from his previous publications: the introduction to *In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in Siam in the American Era* (Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1985); the autobiographical material at the start of *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (London: Verso, 1998); and the Japanese-language intellectual autobiography *Yashigaran no Sotohe* (Out from Under the Coconut Half-shell) (Tokyo: NTT Publishing, 2009).

### **Area Studies, Single-Country Cases**

**FA:** Is it correct to say that “area studies” has fallen out of fashion in the United States? What are the conditions that will allow area studies to flourish anew in the United States? To what extent have the fortunes of area studies in the U.S. affected area studies in Asia? Is there a continuing value to area studies such that universities in Asia should not abandon it?

**BA:** I think it hard to generalize for two reasons. The first is the problem of audiences. On the one hand there is the audience of professionals in the same disciplines in English-speaking universities; on the other is the audience of bureaucrats, journalists, intelligent common readers. In the first, prestige is assigned to “theory,” disciplinary theory, while in the second readability, minimum jargon and theory, and good basic research are primary. So far as I know U.S. national state support for area studies hasn’t markedly declined. The bureaucrats know that today’s theory is gone in four years’ time, and they can’t be bothered with impenetrable prose, mathematical calculations, and the like. The second reason is really political. If a country or region is regarded as a “problem,” then area studies gets more airing. China studies is fine, to a lesser extent Japan studies. Islamic studies is fine, African studies doesn’t matter. Latin America is okay, Central Asia is not. Southeast Asian studies did well from 1950 to 1977 because of the heavy U.S. involvement in the area, communists everywhere, the Vietnam War, and so on. After that, much less so, except for opportunist Islamic/terrorist studies. Beyond that, there is simply a practical problem, i.e., that since the U.S. emerged as a superpower it was felt that it should know about the rest of the world, and for

management purposes it was useful to carve up the globe into various “areas.” “Southeast Asia” was invented on the eve of the Second World War by British and American scholars, mainly historians and political scientists, and it was taken over by the U.S. state at the end of the 1940s. This dividing up had some real advantages, in principle at least. Most university courses on the region were compelled to be comparative—only rarely were single-country classes taught. But for decades almost all Southeast Asianists in practice only seriously studied one country. Understood as “case studies,” without comparative foundations, this work could be portrayed as trivial and narrow in the eyes of professionals. Southeast Asia suffered because of its extreme linguistic, religious, political, and historical differences, while in Northeast Asia only three countries with long interactions could be more easily combined and coordinated. Added to this was the fact that very few American students really mastered even one Southeast Asian language, let alone two or three. Southeast Asian studies was given a good and fast start by the prestige of Clifford Geertz, in the 1960s and 1970s regarded as a big public intellectual and an innovative scholar. George Kahin was a lesser star, but he had written the first big book about Important Indonesia, and became well known for his opposition to the Vietnam War. A generation later came Jim Scott and Jim Siegel who became well known outside Southeast Asianist circles. We are waiting for comparable figures to emerge from the next generation down.

It seems to me that Southeast Asian universities don’t need to think about “area studies” in any hegemonic sense (Singapore tries to do this, with laughable results), but they do need to have teachers and students who can do good work on “neighbors” in ASEAN and in China-Japan-Korea, and perhaps also in Islamic studies (though here I am not optimistic). For decades, Southeast Asian students in America wrote theses on their own countries, with little attention to neighbors. With some reason, since they already had to learn English well enough to write theses in this language. (I can think of only four to five Americans who could write a good thesis in Tagalog, Thai, Indonesian, or Burmese.) Nationalism was also a factor, as well as some intellectual laziness. Far and away the most lively Southeast Asia Program in the region was founded by Cornell’s Charnvit

Kasetsiri, aimed primarily at undergraduates, which now teaches all the major languages of the region. The youngsters are much better at neighboring languages than you might expect, partly because the program sends them off to different neighbors for a few months of immersion, at quite low cost. Their career prospects are quite good: foreign ministry, business, NGOs, journalism, and so on. We are now seeing the likelihood that those who head for MAs or PhDs will produce really interesting theses—in Thai, which is as it should be. Few things are as unpleasant as the common American assumption that if something is any good it will be available in English, and if it is not in English it can’t be important. Good things are developing in Gadjah Mada and even in Phnom Penh. I think this creates linkages of lasting importance. These countries all think of themselves as neighbors, and historically tied. The “outsider” continues to be the Philippines, for domestic Pinoy reasons as well as external ones. What this should add up to is that Southeast Asian universities should do Southeast Asia area studies, but not in the American style. This should help diminish Filipino parochialism, without inviting in obsolete obsessions with the U.S.

**FA:** From your vantage point, what have been the strengths and weaknesses of studies on the Philippines in the last three decades or so? How do studies of the Philippines compare with those of, say, Indonesia or Thailand during the same period?

**BA:** This question is difficult for me to answer for a quite simple reason. I did not start seriously studying the Philippines till the end of the 1980s, at which time my Tagalog was minimal, and I had then to teach myself Spanish. I was then well over 50 years old, and heading for retirement. Most of what I have published on the country came after retirement, and one of the curses and blessings of retirement is that finally one can study what one wants, at one’s own elderly pace, and without any pressure to “keep up” with Philippine studies as a whole. Thailand preoccupied me between 1974 till about 1986, and then again only in the past three to four years, in retirement. I “kept up” with Thailand only in the earlier period. Being banned from Indonesia from 1972 to 1999 meant that, although my interest

remained great, it was, so to speak, a long-distance interest, and focused on history and literature more than the interminably boring Suharto dictatorship and its ruthless, destructive politics. So my knowledge of the field or fields has been pretty fragmentary and very punctuated. But here are some notes, not to be taken too seriously.

*Indonesia.* Thanks to the minimal number of college graduates in the late colonial era, the ravages of the Japanese Occupation, and the turbulence of the revolution, national universities in the country only really got going in the early 1950s, and then suffered from the (relatively mild) oppression of Guided Democracy under Soekarno (1959–1965) and the ferocious repression of the Suharto era (1966–1998). Even after Suharto’s fall, the effects of this repression can still be felt: mediocre teaching, corruption, commercialization, and political interference still persist widely. There are plenty of bright and intellectually curious youngsters, but often they are mainly autodidacts, dependent on the Internet and photocopies more than on their professors. There are still no good newspapers, and certainly no serious intellectual journals. Scholars and students actually write a lot, but typically in the form of short articles, mostly in response to the changing political situation. At the moment I can’t think of a single new “big book” of real caliber and scope published in the last decade. The best thing that happened in the early 2000s was the republication of a mass of works banned by the dictatorship—mostly historical and literary—written between 1915 and 1965.

Indonesian studies as a “program” was developed first in the U.S. and The Netherlands, later on in Japan, France, the U.K., Australia, and Scandinavia. For all these countries, with the partial exception of Holland, the first obstacle was language. Outside Holland, almost nobody knew any Dutch, which was crucial for any serious historical work. The first good Indonesian-English dictionary only appeared in the later 1950s. This meant that for the first generation of young Indonesianists (myself included) there was a strong feeling of being pioneers: the first generation to know Indonesian well, and the first to teach itself Dutch (since Dutch was rarely taught). In the 1950s and 1960s Holland was still reeling from the sordid loss of its empire, and little important work was being done. This put the U.S. in a commanding position, given its vast financial resources, its political

domination of much of the world, and its abundance of universities. The founding sites for Indonesian studies in the U.S. were Cornell and Yale. They drew students from many countries that had no experience in the field, many of whom went back home and started to form Indonesian studies of their own, mostly drawing on the American (Cornell-Yale) models. Examples: Nagazumi Akira to Tokyo, Herbert Feith to Clayton, Ruth McVey to London, Heather Sutherland to Amsterdam. I remember vividly those of my fellow students who came from England, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, Australia, Japan, and so forth. Yale was, to a lesser degree, the same. Most of the later centers for Indonesian studies in the U.S. were initiated by Cornell and Yale graduates. The two universities complemented each other. Cornell for a long time had no historian, while Yale had the commanding Harry Benda, a Czech Jew who had worked in colonial Indonesia (so he knew Dutch well) and had been interned by the Japanese. Yale had no political scientist, while Cornell had the progressive George Kahin, who had participated in the Indonesian Revolution and knew all the top leaders of the period. But Cornell also had the master-linguist John Echols, who created the first Indonesian dictionary and built on his own the great Southeast Asia collection for Cornell’s research library. Furthermore, and this was something very unusual, Kahin brought to Cornell the remarkable Claire Holt, from a Jewish family in Imperial Russia’s Riga, who studied dance and archaeology in the colonial Indies, and taught students a lot about the arts and literature of modern Indonesia. All these people liked each other and worked closely together. The U.S. government and the big foundations were mainly interested in contemporary Indonesia, especially its politics, but also its anthropology and economics. Indonesian studies got a fast start by the rapid ascent to U.S. star-status of Clifford Geertz, one of the top anthropologists of the 1960s and 1970s. Cornell was lucky to hire, in the middle 1960s, the brilliantly original Jim Siegel, Geertz’s best student. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the top Indonesianist students were all in politics, Ruth McVey, Herbert Feith, and Daniel Lev. Kahin also brought a number of fine students from Indonesia itself, including the sociologist Selo Soemardjan and the beloved, already elderly “Mas Mur” (Soemarsaid Moertono), who worked on the untried subject of ancient Javanese thinking about political

matters. Younger students like myself had perfect opportunities to learn not only from our teachers, but also our seniors, and from Indonesians too. But the crash came in 1966 when a confidential study, written very fast by Ruth McVey, Fred Bunnell, and myself, on the mysterious coup of 1 October 1965, was leaked, enraging the Suharto regime and the American State Department and Pentagon. By the early 1970s, only a few independent students dared to come to Cornell, and not till the 1980s did the numbers increase (mainly Catholics!). Meantime, Benda had died too early, and Yale's program went into decline.

After the U.S.'s humiliating "loss" of Indochina, there was certainly a reaction against Southeast Asian studies generally. The flood of new appointments in the previous decade created a major employment block, since even the old-timers did not really start to retire until the end of the 1980s. By this time, Indonesia still attracted many students, but it was no longer "exciting"; countries like Vietnam, Burma, and later Cambodia, long closed to scholars, were the countries where the new self-imagined "pioneers" preferred to go. There is no doubt in my mind that the towering figure in Indonesian studies in the past three decades has been Jim Siegel, who produced a steady flow of brilliant and subversive studies of Indonesia under Suharto, and the aftermath. Next probably has been the Czech historian Rudolf Mrazek with two original books on late colonialism and its spectral postcolonial present. The key young Indonesianist today in the U.S. is the Yale-trained historian Eric Tagliacozzo whose book on maritime borders and their porousness under late colonialism is startlingly new. Interestingly enough, The Netherlands was also productive in an original way. I can mention here anthropologist Lizzy van Leeuwen's very funny, acid, but also tender anthropological study of Jakarta's superrich nonentities, and veteran Jan Breman's scary recent tome on the history of forced labor in West Java from the late eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth. I can't think of anything major coming out of Japan, the U.K., or Australia. To my mind the major gap, or weakness, is the absence of any modern and impressive study of Indonesian literature or intellectual history, with the possible exception of Daniel Dhakidae's alluring but eccentric book on the "betrayal of the intellectuals" under Suharto.

*Thailand/Siam.* Here I think the story runs in a direction opposite to that of Indonesian studies. The fact that the country was not directly colonized created problems for early researchers in the postwar period. Its archives, where accessible, were mostly in the Thai language, and written with a fussy, irregular non-Roman script. There were no vast "colonial" archives easily available in Holland, France, the U.K., or the U.S. It is hard to think of anywhere where there have been foreign Thai-ologist scholars whose work can compare with the best books on Indonesia, except the flow of publications by recently deceased Japanese scholar Ishii Yoneo, who wrote in Thai as well as Japanese. During the Cold War when authoritarian regimes in Siam were enthusiastic allies of Washington, most foreign scholars, fearful of not being granted visas, usually wrote on uncontroversial topics. For the above reasons it is fair to say that "Thai studies" was never strong outside the country, and Thais themselves assumed the task of developing it. Here a paradox shows up. Until 1965 the Indonesian Communist Party was far the largest outside the Socialist Bloc, with many millions of supporters, but it produced no serious scholars. In Siam, in contrast, the quite small, illegal, and late-founded Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) attracted into its orbit at least two generations of the country's keenest minds. The first generation, that of the 1950s, included Siam's first modern genius, Jit Phumisak, who produced in a very short time, before he was imprisoned and later, after release, killed by government forces in 1966, an astonishing, revolutionary (Marxist) body of work on Thai history, Thai literature, Thai relations with its neighbors in early times, the Thai language, as well as contemporary political conditions. His most famous book was bravely entitled *The Real Face of Thai Feudalism . . . Today!* All this work was prohibited by the military regime of Marshal Sarit and his successors, but began to leak out after 1970 as the regime decayed. The nice irony is that the leaking was mainly done by *Sangkomsat Parithat* (Social Criticism). This intellectual journal, founded by the legendary essayist, social critic, and natural rebel, Sulak Siwarak, was intended as the twin of Frankie José's *Solidaridad* in Manila, both founded with American backing and in American eyes firmly anti-Communist.

Sulak's successor, Suchart Sawadsi, profited greatly, however, from an unexpected source of intellectual support. From the late



1950s on, the U.S. had arranged for hundreds of young Thais to attend American universities, with the idea of Americanizing them and making them firm supporters of American global dominium. But the timing was unfortunate since in the 1960s the U.S. was in the midst of a huge political and social turmoil, thanks to Martin Luther King and others in the movement for Afro-American civil rights, a powerful new wave of feminism, a sort of sexual revolution, and most of all the disastrous Vietnam War in which Thailand was deeply implicated. Many young Thais were caught up in this nicely wild atmosphere, and also had access to a huge amount of public information about the war, from Fulbright's senatorial investigations, courageous reporters, and so on. Very soon they started sending documents and writing articles, from the safety of the U.S., against the military regime and its stupid submission to Washington—especially after Nixon and Mao made a comfortable deal without the Thai government being consulted or informed before the fact. It is also important that this was the time when there was a flood of Marxist books printed in the U.S., not Moscow or Peking, and these too had a real impact. Most of this “student” writing ended up in *Sangkhomsat Parithat*. Further, young teachers, reporters, and students began composing detailed articles about the crimes of the military, the social consequences of 48,000 U.S. military personnel on Thai soil, the secret bombings of Laos and Cambodia, vastly enlarged and industrialized prostitution, the oppression of minority tribal groups, and so on. *Sangkhomsat Parithat* was not an academic journal, but a genuinely public journal “for anyone,” and it had an enormous influence on the students of the time. Almost all the famous public intellectuals of 1980–2010 were formed in the period 1968–1976: the country's most original historian, Nidhi Aeusriwong, acerbic “political scientist” Kasian Tejapira, number one organizer of critical publications Charnvit Kasetsiri, former student leader and social critic Seksan Prasertkul, and many others.

In October 1973 the military regime collapsed in the face of gigantic demonstrations, and for the next two and a half years Thailand experienced a real democracy for the first and last time. Two socialist parties won a respectable number of seats in parliament, also for the first and last time; labor unions and farmers' organizations

flourished; the press was pretty free; and so on. Then in late 1976, after the U.S. fled from Vietnam, and the three Indochinese nations fell to communism, there was a violent reaction in Bangkok and elsewhere: many students were horribly murdered and far more fled to the protection of the CPT in the underground or in the maquis. But not for long: because Vietnam invaded Cambodia and overthrew the Pol Pot regime and, in retaliation, China tried (unsuccessfully) to invade Vietnam. Peking made a deal with Bangkok and ceased serious support for the CPT, which was also kicked out of its bases in Laos and Cambodia. The CPT disintegrated and a new military regime intelligently offered amnesty for those who laid down their arms. In the early 1980s then, many leftist younger generation students left for graduate education in Europe, Australia, and the U.S., to lick their wounds and reflect on the causes of what had happened to them. Examples: Kasian and Seksan, both at Cornell, produced very original theses. Seksan studied the finances of the conservative idol King Rama V, and was able to show how deeply he collaborated with the British Empire, while the people who seriously resisted British capitalism came from the despised, not-really Thai, “comprador” Chinese merchant class. Kasian wrote a brilliant, ironic study (later a book) of Marxist writers and publishers in Thailand in the 1940s and 1950s. In Australia, Thongchai Winichakul finished a thesis that became legendary when published (in the U.S.) as *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*. Thongchai had been tried and sentenced to prison for lèse majesté soon after the bloody crackdown of 6 October 1976. (Thongchai eventually moved to teach in the U.S., but has not been able to do much for Thai studies there; Seksan and Kasian returned home to teach at Thammasat University, and to write profusely books, articles, essays in various newspapers and magazines up till today.)

After the financial crash of 1997, a huge blow to the propertied classes in Thailand, a larger crisis of legitimacy began to develop that is still deepening as I write. It is characteristic that the two most interesting journals in the country today are *Fai Diaw Kan* (mainly politics and history) and *Aan* (mostly cultural and social analysis)—neither one academic, but aimed, in a language that tries to eschew academic argot, at the intelligent public. Neither Indonesia nor the

Philippines has this type of journal, which descends directly from *Sangkhomsat Parithat*. It remains only to mention the brilliant husband and wife team of Chris Baker (British historian) and Pasuk Phongphaichit (progressive, unconventional Thai economist) that has published far the best books on post-1997 Thailand in English.

Weaknesses. The most obvious one is the effect of the stringent and punitive laws on *lèse majesté*. Even the most radical writers have to be very careful in dealing with the monarch, especially dealing with him as a politician. The only serious book on the monarch's political career had to be written by an American journalist, and published by Yale University Press. The Thai regime put huge pressure, fortunately resisted, on Yale to abandon publication. The book is banned in Thailand, though underground copies, in Thai, circulate widely, also on the Internet.

*The Philippines.* Here I face an obvious difficulty: Cornell was lucky enough to attract some of the best young scholarly and political minds, from the time of Joel Rocamora and Rey Ileto through Vince Rafael up to Jun Aguilar and Carol Hau. Sometimes I feel a bit sad that three of them have settled overseas. Each has written at least one book of lasting importance and each has a very distinct, personal vision of the Philippines. Perhaps the most I can do is to try to situate Philippine studies somewhere between Thai studies and Indonesian studies. It has never, except for a short time after the fall of the Marcos dictatorship, been very popular in the U.S. This is certainly the consequence of the peculiar character of American colonialism, which, one could argue, was, in the long run, a domestic embarrassment. The U.K., France, Spain, and Holland were small countries with huge colonies of which they were proud, and none of them today is of any major importance. The U.S. is a vast continental country, while its largest true colony, the Philippines, is only the size of New Mexico. London, Paris, and Amsterdam regularly put on shows, in museums and elsewhere, about India, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Indonesia. It is hard to imagine the U.S. doing anything like this for the Philippines, which, except for Filipino-Americans, is largely invisible. An American going to the Philippines will find very little to be "proud of." You might also say that it was difficult for a young American to feel himself or herself as a "pioneer," except in one

respect: in the later 1960s a few young researchers believed themselves the first to be truly fluent in Tagalog. Perhaps, too, the Philippines was and is not "exotic enough," too Christian, too lacking in spectacular precolonial edifices. No imposing dynasties, no aristocracies—always a lure for Americans. Not really disdain, rather indifference.

On the other side, the Americans ruled for such a short period—less than half a century—that few developed roots in the Philippines. Disdain, yes, for the Spaniards, so the rather rapid extinction of easy fluency in Spanish among Filipinos even though the vast archives in Spain are quite available. It is interesting that the Dutch made determined efforts to revive knowledge of their language after 1970 by financing young students to study in Holland—with some real success, especially since politically Holland has no power or significance at all. Spain tried this under Franco but without much success.

Maybe another element in discouraging Philippine studies from really flourishing in the U.S. was the tide of hostility to American scholars that began to be felt seriously from the 1960s. Abusive attacks on people like Glenn May, David Wurfel, Al McCoy, John Sidel, and others seem to me childish. They are serious scholars, who do and did useful work for future generations. But you could also argue that this attitude arose partly from the general absence for a long time of young scholars from countries other than America. (Contrast Indonesia where major works have been done by Japanese, Dutch, Germans, French, Scandinavians, Australians, English, and so on.) The reverse side of this is the difficulty of finding Filipinos who think or work comparatively. People of the caliber of Vince Rafael are perfectly capable of studying Indonesia or Peru or Cuba, but they don't. The wonderful exception that I know is Joel Rocamora, who in the 1960s and 1970s at least was fluent in Indonesian and wrote a pioneering study of the Indonesian nationalist party and its history.

All this said, it is worth noting that Yale had only Philippinist anthropologist Harold Conklin, Cornell only the economist Frank Golay, who knew neither Spanish nor Tagalog. Hence the centers for Philippine studies were at Michigan University and in Honolulu.

So, the contrasts: Uncolonized Thailand does not worry about foreign scholars provided they are nice about the monarchy. Heavily colonized Indonesia also doesn't worry much, not least because the

foreign scholars are so varied, Japanese, Chinese, Indian, Dutch, French, Danes, Spaniards (now), Americans, Brits, and so on.

Philippine studies in the Philippines: you know it far better and more thoroughly than I. The journal *Philippine Studies* has no counterpart in Indonesia, and the main open-to-the-general-public equivalents are published in Ithaca and Paris. Bangkok has excellent intellectual journals dealing with the country, but their titles do not contain the word Thai. The important books that I know of have been mainly written by Filipinos, mostly with doctorates in the U.S., but are unlike anything the Americans have attempted in their scope and perspicacity. Here it is good to underline the grand trajectory of Resil Mojares's enormous output, which is not only often brilliant, but uses gentle irony rather than abuse when dealing with writers with whom he does not agree. Maybe Philippine studies needs more "gentlemen"!

Weaknesses. I have mentioned one or two above, so here I will only point to the biggest and most obvious one: the virtual absence of any serious, large-scale study of the Catholic Church, its modern history, its policies and effects, and so on. The church is a bit like the Thai monarchy in this respect. This is rather strange when you think about the writings of the *ilustrados* in Rizal's time, and the great man's blistering attacks not just on seedy moral behavior by particular priests but on the institutions of the church, its reactionary politics, abuse of power, and, in those days, its racism. It is shocking to me that up to this day the church still feels Rizal's sting and hasn't hesitated at various times to erase them. I will always remember Leon Ma. Guerrero's bitter reflection on the Ateneo that he experienced as a "topnotcher." He said that as far as literature was concerned "it was a desert." What he meant was the ignorance and philistinism of the American Jesuits sent from Baltimore and Boston to replace the Spanish Jesuits whom Teddy Roosevelt forced the Vatican to move to India. Filipinos still prefer to blame the Americans, except, by silence, American Catholics. Let's face it; this is absurd.

**CH:** Your work on Rizal has helped bring Rizal to the attention of non-Philippine audiences around the world. But the impression we sometimes get is that, while Rizal's *Noli me tangere* and *El*

*filibusterismo* have had such great impact on Filipinos, there is far less appreciation of the novel in the "world republic of letters." What do you think of comments, often made by non-Philippine literature specialists, that they see nothing remarkable about the *Noli me tangere*? Does this point to a difference in expectations or standards between international and domestic audiences?

**BA:** The first thing to note is that, although the *Noli* and the *Fili* were written in Spanish, most people in this dying American era read them in English translation, and all of these translations are in different ways inadequate. The main thing is that the readers cannot, in translation, feel the beauty and slyness of Rizal's Spanish prose. It's the same with *Madame Bovary*, *Fathers and Sons*, *The Magic Mountain*, and so on. If you can't read the original languages, you will miss 33 percent of the gorgeousness of the originals, even though the translators may be first-class, bilingual professionals. None of the Rizal translations has been done by such people. The same is true of Pramoedya's novels.

The second factor is the status of Spanish and Spanish literature in the contemporary world. In Europe, Spanish is regarded as a second-class language. If you ask a bright young Englishwoman who the greats of Spanish culture are, you will get Velázquez, El Greco, Goya, Picasso, and Cervantes. Maybe Falla and Guardí. For literature, only Cervantes, in translation of course. Latin American Spanish literature is a different story. Educated people in Europe will know about García Márquez, Vargas Llosa, Borges, Fuentes, Neruda, Asturias, Cortázar, and so on, again typically only in English. But this literature comes from the mid and later parts of the twentieth century. America is a bit different, since for obvious reasons Spanish is, so to speak, the country's unacknowledged second language. But it is primarily regarded as something simply useful. Spanish-Latin American literature is still read, except by professionals, in English. When I wrote the long essay on Vargas Llosa's *El hablador*, I had to compare carefully the Spanish original as well as a not-bad translation, and felt deeply the gap between them. The U.S. is in fact amazingly provincial. It has one of the lowest rates among the "Atlantic" countries of translations from foreign languages, and the sale of foreign literature in the original language is almost nonexistent.



“If it’s not in English, it can’t be worth reading.” My guess is that the non-Philippine literature specialists that you mention will turn out to be overwhelmingly American. One thing that often depresses me in the Philippines is that even when intellectuals are hostile to the U.S. for good political reasons, they don’t see how provincial the superpower really is. Rizal laughed at Spanish provincialism, but who in Manila laughs at American provincialism today? Nobel Prizes are, alas, often awarded for political reasons, and the quality of choices is very uneven. But here are, let’s say, the “top” countries between 1901–2008: France, 12; U.S., 11; U.K., 8; Germany, 7; and, for kicks, baby Ireland, 4. Among the French Twelve we find Rolland, Anatole France, Bergson, Martin du Gard, Gide, Mauriac, Camus, St. Jean Perse, and Sartre, all topnotchers. Among the eleven Americans by birth, only Sinclair Lewis, O’Neill, Faulkner, Hemingway, Bellow, and Toni Morrison are pretty good. Ireland: Yeats, Shaw, Beckett, and Seamus Heaney, all top. (The American “team” is beefed up by some fine refugees: Milosz, Brodsky, Singer.) The greatest American, Eliot, is listed under the U.K.!! The U.K. list is full of mediocrities, and the most notable partial exceptions are Kipling and . . . Naipaul! Germany: only three serious figures, Thomas Mann, Günter Grass, and Heinrich Böll.

### **On *Imagined Communities***

- VR:** Every time I teach *Imagined Communities* (IC), my students invariably ask why you left a number of quotations in French and German untranslated (while translating the Indonesian and Tagalog passages, among others). What should I tell them? Are these passages left untranslated as well in the non-English editions of IC?
- BA:** I grew up in a time when languages and literature were central to education in much of Europe. I started Latin when I was 9, and in high school added Ancient Greek, French, and a bit of German and Russian. My mother was fluent in French, pretty good in German, and could handle conversational Italian. At Cambridge I mostly continued study of the history and literature in antiquity. These languages were taught mainly as written languages, whereas in the U.S., if they were taught at all, they were aimed at oral fluency—

American practicality. This traditional education was becoming obsolete as I finished Cambridge: it was no longer regarded as useful or relevant for a modern country, which needed scientists, business managers, economists, technologists, and so on. Commercialization of higher education was beginning. When I went to Cornell early in 1958, graduate students still had to pass examinations in two foreign languages: French, German, Spanish (Latin America), or Russian (Cold War). Many students grumbled about this, even if the examination amounted only to translating into English three or four paragraphs, with full access to dictionaries. A few years later, one of the two languages disappeared to make way for statistics. Ten years later, no foreign language was required except one needed practically for fieldwork. The Americans were sure that the only language that was universal and rich was (American) English. I was pretty horrified by all this, and the general ignorance of my colleagues and classmates about non-Anglo-Saxon literature. So *Imagined Communities*’s use of untranslated French and German phrases and quotations was intended as a rebuke to American academic culture, also U.K. to a lesser degree. But the book was aimed at a British public, not an American one (on the whole), and I knew very well that at least older U.K. intellectuals would feel patronized if I translated the French and German. As for whether these quotations were left untranslated in foreign translations, I don’t really know, and would have to research the question. You have to bear in mind that IC has been translated into an enormous number of languages most of which I do not understand. For the Thai and Indonesian versions, I worked closely with the translators, and translated the French and German quotations for them. One reason why, later, I was so fond of *Under Three Flags* was because, in the age of Rizal, people naturally were trained to read many languages, Pinoyos included. The absurd world-domination of a crass form of English was still far away. There was Rizal writing in French, German, English, Spanish, Latin, and Tagalog. This kind of Pinoy hardly exists today.

- VR:** Whenever I think of your work, I of course think about you, and Cornell, and Ithaca, even Freeville (and its bizarre Philippine connection) in the late 1970s to the early 1980s, roughly the time you

were writing *Imagined Communities*. What was it about the particular configuration of intellectual and political life at Cornell (along with its small town/rural location and the communal ambience of 102 West Avenue) at this time that informed the style, if not the substance, of *IC*?

**BA:** The answer is quite simple. Cornell: I became full professor around 1977, so didn't need to feel any pressure about what to write about or in what format. I had wonderful colleagues, especially Jim Siegel and George Kahin; a fabulous library easily accessible; not too demanding a teaching load; and, it has to be said, no family. I could rise and go to bed at any hour that I wished, and was happy to live in a rural environment without close neighbors. Getting to campus took 15 minutes, max. Second: training. The Southeast Asia Program was set up as a center for area studies, not for one-country studies. Thus the deep core was always comparison within the region: Southeast Asia History, Southeast Asia Government and Politics; Southeast Asia minority groups; Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, the Art History of Southeast Asia. The only exception was the rotating single-country seminars that were set up as crossdisciplinary, forcing you to study anthropology, sociology, history, politics, culture, and so on; they were intended for both would-be specialists and others who, like everyone else, had to take one-country seminars not the center of their research projects. This was a good American academic invention, which was later copied in other countries. The last thing was closeness to a huge variety of students, made possible by the smallness of Cornell and Ithaca. You ran into students in classrooms, canteens, shops, bars, cinemas, restaurants, libraries, and so on. From the time I was a student I shared rooms with Joel (Filipino), Charnvit Kasetsiri (Thai), and so on. We partied together, especially dancing parties, first in Collegetown apartments, later often in my Freeville house. I had close Filipino, Thai, Burmese, and Indonesian friends, as well as Germans, Japanese, British, and so on. The place was too small for self-segregating national groups: very good for morale and for learning, also comparatively.

By the late 1970s my "security" was such that I felt I could write not only what I wanted to write about, but also in the way I

liked. The style of *IC* is quite different from anything I wrote before: lots of jokes (in a scholarly work??? Omygod!), sarcasms, weird comparisons, "classical English" not academic English. This was a great liberation.

The theory came from outside Ithaca and Cornell. Bless his evil heart, Suharto was crucial. By expelling me from Indonesia in 1972, for who knows how long, I had to think about where next to do fieldwork. I was thinking seriously about Sri Lanka, but then came the downfall of the military regime in Bangkok, in which several of my Thai friends were involved. So Thailand it was. A perfect contrast between Thailand, uncolonized, conservative, monarchical, and Buddhist, versus Indonesia, colonized, with a long history of radicalism, republican, and Muslim. All the time I was first in Thailand (1974–1975) I was forced to think and think comparatively, wondering in what frame I could and should put them together. Second, and here, if not Ithaca, at least George Kahin was in my favor, I was more and more hostile to Washington, which was responsible for the Vietnam War, the Marcos regime, the Suharto regime, the cruel occupation East Timor, the bloody coup of 6 October 1976 in Bangkok. I was always irritated by the way many Americans talked as if other countries were merely nationalist, while America stood for "universal values." But as a non-American I learned early the hurricane force of U.S. nationalism, even in commercial advertising. So: I thought I must write about America too, but comparatively, as just another white-settler colony in its origins. I was also annoyed by what today is called Eurocentrism. Europeans always think that everything important was started in Europe. Hence my insolence in starting *IC* with the Americas, mainly Spanish but also British, and only then turning to Europe.

The strongest impulse came from something unexpected. The U.K. was the only country in the world where there were big scholars arguing very well about nationalism. Perfect casting: on the left the great, then-Communist comparative historian Eric Hobsbawm; on the middle left, the grand Czech philosopher and anthropologist Ernest Gellner; on the center right, the historian Anthony Smith; on the far right, the ex-Iraqi "political historian" Elie Kedourie, all more or less from the same generation. Crosscutting factor: all of

them were Jews with roots in London, Vienna, Baghdad, and Prague. Two anti-Israel, and two pro. The new guy on the block was a close friend of my brother Perry, and part of the New Left group around the *New Left Review*. Tom Nairn was Scottish, a Marxist, and a Scottish nationalist, also not Jewish. He was in my generation, also from the periphery of the “British Isles,” and a lovely man. In 1977 he threw a molotov cocktail at the U.K. with a wonderful book titled *The Breakup of Britain*, in part a strong attack on mainstream Marxism’s failure to deal theoretically with nationalism. Hobsbawm went after him in the strongest terms, Gellner was okay but uneasy, Smith was horrified. So I thought I would enter the lists in support of Tom. *IC* was thus written polemically for a U.K. readership, and in the book no country is mocked as much as Perfidious Albion. The U.K. in those days still had one or two fairly intellectual newspapers, which was lucky for me. Within three weeks of the book’s publication, I got strong support in reviews by the legendary anthropologist Edmund Leach, the Irish-English politician and controversialist Connor Cruise O’Brien, the leftist journalist and essayist Neal Ascherson (also a Scottish nationalist), and the Black Jamaican Third Worldist Winston James. But none of this would have happened without the prodding of my brother who gave me great criticism as well as courage. I guess I found out in the process that I had some gift for polemics, and this never left me afterwards. Both my large and small books about the Philippines clearly have a polemical base, but are not abusive—I hope!

**FA:** As you are aware, some scholars of Latin America acknowledge the theoretical value of *Imagined Communities* but question the book’s chronology and cause-and-effect account of the rise of nationalism in the Spanish American colonies. If they are correct about the historical details, what do you think are the implications for theoretical work given that, despite the empirical aspects, *IC*’s theorizing was extremely successful and its theoretical contribution stands?

**BA:** You have to remember that when I wrote *IC* I knew no Spanish at all. I remember going to Mexico for a big conference on Latin America nationalism, not long after *IC* came out, and feeling very embarrassed, because there were only two non-Latin Americans attending, David

Brading, the grand British historian of Latin America, and I. All the discussions were in Spanish, and all I could do, using French and a dictionary, was to try to read the contributions. Everyone was very kind to me, and to my surprise Mexico was one of the earliest countries to translate *IC*. I didn’t seriously start to self-study Spanish in Manila till 1989. So for the chapter on The Americas I had to rely on English-language books that my brother and others suggested. I don’t think I ever got round to reading Spanish-language criticisms of *IC*, so I can’t say whether I think the criticisms were justified. Later on I had great experiences in Peru and Brazil, but didn’t get any detailed attacks. Out of this came my long essay on *El hablador*, which is still one of my favorites. Fools step in where angels fear to tread. In fact, I have always been surprised how little severe criticism I ever got about *IC*. One reason must have been the fact that I didn’t concentrate on any one country or region, so the scale of the theory was supermacro. Basically it was also very simple: technology + capitalism + Tower of Babel = nationalism! Hahahaha! Mistakes: I am sure there were and are heaps of them. But what theory does, if it is any good, is to push readers to think about the world in a new way, especially to abandon fossilized ideas and unmask fantasies and legends, for which each nationalism has plenty to answer. I was also lucky in that the book was both semi-Marxist and yet sympathetic to nationalism, which, theoretically, was almost unheard of in those days. It is possible too that some Latin American critics realized that I was not an American. If they thought I was a gringo, then they had to hit back! I am not sure the criticisms would have been the same if they knew my national affiliation. I remember early criticisms of my work in Pinas, the tone of which told me that the critics thought I was a Kano. Hahaha!

### **Youth, Revolution, and Separatism**

**FA:** Starting with *Java in a Time of Revolution*, you have shown the “youth” of Southeast Asia as performing a preeminent and determinative role in history. Given the changed historical conditions, do you see the youth in today’s Southeast Asia still playing a critical role in their respective societies or have they been largely coopted by the state and the forces of globalization?

**BA:** The question of Youth as an important politico-historical category or force in Southeast Asia is very complicated. In so-called traditional societies, governed in part by age hierarchies, girls were married off very soon after their first menstruations and so moved fast into the categories of wives and mothers. Postpuberty males had slightly more freedom of maneuver but not for very long. Marriage marked them as working adults, but there were institutions like the Theravada Buddhist Sangha and the *pesantrèn* of the Islamic world, where boys got religious education and thus a certain premarital social status. But I think it is fair to say that generally speaking “youth” was not a significant category, separated sharply from childhood and adulthood. The big first break came with the introduction of Western-style schools, first primary, later secondary, and eventually tertiary. It is important to recognize the revolutionary character of the innovation.

With the exception perhaps of missionary schools, the new schools belonged to a coordinated, state-owned and organized “system,” arranged by year of birth, and with carefully calibrated levels of instruction: same textbooks, same curricula, same examinations. The contrast with traditional religious schools was glaring, since these were usually local in character, and paid little attention to “age” as such. You could go to a *pesantrèn* and find yourself learning the Qur’an at almost any age, with fellow students from little boys to adult men; more or less the same was true of Buddhist temple-schools. State schools were also geographically hierarchical, with higher institutions in big towns and colonial capitals, so that successful students from villages and small towns moved into urban environments far from home, where they met others of the same age-group from different parts of the colony. The state system was, except in the Spanish Philippines, firmly secular, and authority was exercised, often by quite young European teachers, in the name of scientific knowledge. To varying degrees the schools insisted on the acquisition of secular European vernaculars, something for which the traditional schools were scarcely equipped. The consequence was a sharp break with tradition, since youngsters quickly realized that their elders had little or no access to the knowledge they now commanded. They were forming a previously unknown avant-garde. If one looks at Burma,

Indonesia, Vietnam, and even Malaysia, one finds everywhere the growth of organizations whose names contained the local words for Young and Youth. Their absence in uncolonized Thailand is very striking. The relevant period is more or less between 1915 and 1940. The Philippines seems to be the big anomaly, and this might be explained by the Orders’ control of colonial education, and the fact that Catholicism was a European religion, saturated, even against its own will, with the pre-Christian civilization of antiquity, and with several centuries of scientific progress. In this way, you could argue that there was no comparable revolutionary break between old and new.

Western schools, sometimes unconsciously, began the production of nationalists, as well as Marxists and Islamic reformers. The linkage between youth and political consciousness is perfectly illustrated in the case of Indonesia. Semaun and Tan Malaka successively became heads of the early Indonesian Communist Party in their early twenties. Sukarno and Hatta were recognized nationalist leaders around the age of 30. Marital status was no longer important—Semaun, Hatta, and Tan Malaka became famous while still bachelors. You can see the same thing in 1920s Burma; even in the Philippines, Rizal and Mabini, the big political intellects of the revolutionary era, were also bachelors.

A second wave of youth avant-gardism came out of the Japanese Occupations, which wiped out Western colonialism, and offered quite different ideologies and experiences. It was considered Japanese policy to concentrate on the “youth,” regarded as still largely uncontaminated by European values. Hence programs to Japanify and above all militarize substantial sections of the young male population. Out of this policy came a new “military youth,” especially in Burma and Indonesia, symbolized by Gen. Aung San, prime minister when still in his thirties, and General Sudirman, commander-in-chief of Indonesia’s revolutionary army at the age of 35. Gen. Ne Win, dictator of Burma from 1962 to 1988, and General Suharto, dictator of Indonesia from 1966 to 1998, were part of that same “first-militarized” generation. But the effects of the Japanese Occupation were not confined to the still small Burmese and Indonesian official armies. Large numbers of rural youth, unschooled in Dutch or English, were organized in paramilitary

organizations, which later became the popular bases for revolutionary struggles after 1945. Something parallel, if in an odd way, happened in Vietnam, which the Japanese did not take over till four months before Hiroshima. The Vichy regime in power in Hanoi also tried to organize Vietnamese youth under the flag of French fascism and Vietnamese nationalism of a sort. *Java in a Time of Revolution* was largely a study of this second wave, and its relations with the ex-youths of the first wave.

I should here acknowledge that the book was also heavily influenced by my own relative youth (I started research in my mid-twenties) and the worldwide youth rebellions of the 1960s.

I don't think there has been, perhaps never will be, Youth waves comparable to the first two, which came out of fundamental breaks with different pasts. One of the disagreeable sides of the two waves bringing quite young people to national power has been that they clung to power or leadership for two generations or more, and getting more and more fossilized and authoritarian as they aged (Soekarno, Suharto, Ne Win and Tan Shwe, Ho Chi Minh's acolytes, JoMa Sison, and so on). But more important is the difficulty of novelty. There are heaps of idealistic and energetic young people all over Southeast Asia today, but their reference points are human rights, democracy, equality, freedom of expression—all good things to various degrees, but also scarcely new. What is new—and it is not something one feels happy about—is we've-heard-it-all-a-million-times boredom. Thai students (not high-schoolers) have had a good track record of opposing military dictatorship from the late 1960s to the early 1990s, but this has by now almost disappeared. During the violent political crisis of May 2010, one of the spectacular features of the Red Shirt uprising was the almost total absence of young people, especially students. Behind this lies something deeper, which you could call hierarchical normalization of higher education, with a "normal" age hierarchy. Big professors in their sixties, upcoming professors in their early forties, students in their twenties. Boredom is also a product of the oligarchization of politics in almost all Southeast Asian countries. Many people like to rattle on about neoliberalism and globalization, which is okay up to a point, but it doesn't explain the boredom. I have experimented with asking youngsters in different

Southeast Asian countries: Who in your country do you really admire and respect? The typical response is either head scratching or cynical laughter, if the youngsters think I am asking about political, religious, or intellectual leaders. Otherwise you might find athletes, singers, writers, or filmmakers. It's not that they are not nationalists, but rather that nationalism is getting old, fussing about the past rather than any utopian future. Indonesia, Number One in the interstate competition for Most Corrupt, Thailand Number 4 in the murder rate, and so on, and so on.

The difficulty for youth is always the synchronization of individual time and historical time. They would like to see their personal time fit with something larger, i.e., their own youth should be coordinated with something historically new. This is what was behind all the "notorious" voluntarism of some varieties of Marxism: the Revolution should come when I am 27 not 77, or dead. There are many world crises visible up ahead, but maybe too far ahead for the young.

**VR:** I've always felt that the question of revolution, and the revolutionary—its unfinished history, its uncertain, perhaps doomed, futures—has tended to loom large in your thinking about nationalism, at least until *Under Three Flags*. Is this still the case? Is it fair to say that your work on nationalism is a way of retrospectively coming to terms with the tattered histories of revolutions in the twentieth century?

**BA:** This question surprised me, and it is really interesting. I am not sure I can handle it. My thesis had no serious theoretical implications, but I wanted to understand how a huge colony, mostly illiterate, deeply divided by religion, language, social systems, education, flattened by the late Dutch police state, and brutally occupied by the Japanese could produce what they called from the start Our Revolution. Why was it successful along the dimension of taking possession of the vast, archipelagic territory of the colony, and unsuccessful in fully overthrowing the feudal-colonial social system? I wasn't that much interested in ideology as such, more in an enormous release of social energy, liberation jouissance, class conflicts. Like Ben Kerkvliet for his Huk thesis, I was lucky in the timing of my research—the last time in Indonesia's history when it was possible to have easy access



to every group from left to right. The strange thing is that the thesis was actually written just after the extermination of the PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia) and the onset of the Suharto regime. Today it seems so strange to me that the last sentence runs: “But the hopes are still with us” (!). Eleven years later came *IC*, which was based on an anomaly in Marxist thinking (and liberalism), and revolution appeared in it not only as a political movement but also as a profound change in consciousness over quite a long period.

Revolution didn’t come back to me till *Three Flags*. This was written at a time when World Communism was dying very fast, along with all Leninist claims that “political power” showed the historic truth of a certain kind of Marxism put all other kinds in the dustbin of history. At the same time, Seattle and so on seemed to show that there was energy and vision emerging from the dustbin into which Leninism was itself heading. At Cornell I never taught Marxism or Communism, but I did once in a while teach Anarchism. When I first got to be good friends of Jim Scott in the early 1970s, he said to me with a smile: “You know why we like each other so much? It is because we are both anarchists, and are allergic to State Power.” I think it still holds for both of us. *Three Flags* thus had a certain polemical intent, general, and also for Pinoy readers—who have forgotten their anarchist past, and are living with the living corpse of Leninism. Good to remind narrow-minded “nationalists” how many non-Filipinos from the strangest corners of the world pitched in to help the *revolucionarios*. I was also thinking of the impasse that Rey Iletto’s wonderful thesis left him facing as the years passed by.

**TT:** Could you explain the similarities and differences of the nationalism of separatist movements in developed societies, like the ETA in Spain, where the Basque region also happens to be one of the richest regions in Spain, with the nationalism of the Moro separatist movements in an underdeveloped country like the Philippines, where Muslim Mindanao also happens to be among the poorest regions in the country?

**BA:** It’s interesting to look back at the recent history of quasi-separatist movements in Western Europe, which emerged as a big shock in

the 1970s and 1980s. Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Belgium, Brittany, Corsica, the Liga in North Italy, the Basques, the Catalans, the Valencians, Old Czechoslovakia. Only in the last was separatism successful, and peaceful, mainly because the right-wing regime in Prague was happy to be rid of backward and thuggish Slovakia. In almost all the other cases the thrusts of the movements were blunted by decentralization policies, and some relaxation of linguistic standardization. The other helpful development was inclusion in the European Community as a supranational apparatus to which the candidate-separatists had easy access. I don’t think that poverty or riches was a central factor, rather a sense of permanent minoritization and cultural-linguistic exclusion. In the U.K., for example, not only was there administrative decentralization, but also the spread of autonomous TV and radio stations in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. At the same time the national media’s insistence on the Queen’s English crumbled and the media stars used and use every kind of English dialect, with the once despised London Cockney becoming the language base for “cool” younger generations. My brother and I were born too late to adapt, so we still speak the Queen’s English, but my sister uses London-speak quite comfortably. In Ireland the media use both Erse (Gaelic) as well as Irish-English, the former is doing quite well—no fear of extinction.

In Spain, in spite of the very substantial decentralization, one finds something quite different. As you know, the Basque language has very old origins, and it is not connected to any other European language. So the fear of extinction is quite real, and in ETA eyes can only be prevented by the formation of a separate national state where Basque can be enforced. There are some ironies involved. Basques and Catalans figured very prominently in the creation of the Old Spanish Empire—Ibarra is a Basque name, Fidel Castro is descended from Basques, and so on. Basque bankers have long dominated high finance in Spain. In the nineteenth century the Basque country was always identified with ultraconservative Catholicism, as well as “deviant” Carlist monarchism, while wealthy Catalonia was identified with the left, especially after the 1880s (anarchism first, communism later). But the nineteenth-century Spanish state was too backward and too weak to impose itself

autocratically. The conscious repression of Basque (and Catalan) came with the ruthless all-powerful Franco dictatorship, and the ETA comes straight out of that time. It blew up one of Franco's most reactionary prime ministers: Heroism!

There is a nice comparison with Northern Ireland, where Scotland-originated Protestants (who played a big part in the U.K. military and British imperialism) ruthlessly controlled the territory, eventually resulting in the IRA's "terrorist" response on behalf of the Catholics. But: electorally, the Catholics slightly outnumbered the Protestants, and both groups spoke the Northern Ireland dialect of English, so that there was never any long-term prospect of linguistic extinction or electoral minoritization. Now the two groups uneasily hold power together.

What this stuff suggests is that separatism arises from a kind of despair under conditions of high minoritization. The danger emerges when a particular linguistic-cultural group has a huge electoral and "media-educational" majority, which permanently excludes the tiresome minorities. You can see this in Thailand, where Thai-speaking Muslims are doing fine, and have done so for a long time. The opposite is the case in the Far South, Muslim and Malay-speaking. Very few bureaucrats or state-employed teachers have any interest in learning Malay or studying local culture or religion. As Karl Deutsch brilliantly put it: Power is not having to listen. Typically, there was a huge uproar about ninety-one people dying during the Red Shirt assault on Bangkok ("worst bloodshed in our modern history"). Greater numbers were killed in the Tak Bae murders and other atrocities in the Far South, but Bangkok doesn't want to hear this—who cares! The Moros are also a permanent and marginalized minority, linguistically (various small languages) and religiously. You can see the same thing in Vietnam and in Burma, where one ethnolinguistic group is so large that it feels it can do what it likes. The difference is striking if you look at Indonesia, which has no majorities. Even the Javanese (if they were solidary, which they have never been) are only about 40 percent of the population. Nominally 85–90 percent of the population is Muslim, but Islam has been fractured for generations, and no Muslim political party has ever collected over 25 percent of the vote; all Muslim parties

put together still don't amount even to 50 percent. This reality means that governing requires building coalitions across religious and linguistic boundaries. Long ago, in the 1920s, Javanese gave up any idea of linguistic domination. Indonesians habitually use both local languages and Indonesian without any severe conflict between them. This is all the more the case in the post-Suharto period, when the tyrant's attempt, à la Franco, to centralize control of language practices collapsed. In South Asia, India has been forced to be plural after the failure of imposed Hinduization in the 1950s and 1960s, because there is no permanent majority. Ceylon is the opposite, where only two major ethnolinguistic groups exist, of which one has a permanent majority.

The fate of Tagalog in Pinas is interesting in this regard. Tagalogization as a government program seems to me to have failed, but Tagalogization through the market has been quite successful. One needs a lingua franca, with lots of local variants, and people want access to it (but not at the cost of their own languages), not the forcible, standardization of Tagalog as the high-caste National Language.

### **Technocracy, Long-Distance Nationalism, and Taboo Subjects**

**TT:** Is there a sense of nationalism in the technocracies in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand where key technocrats are pursuing the U.S. paradigm of development, particularly as espoused by the IMF/World Bank, in order to bring about development in their respective countries?

**BA:** I'm afraid I can't reply intelligently, since I don't know any technocrats, and political economy is far from being one of my few fortes. My sense is that the noonday of technocracy is passing. They had the most power under U.S.-sponsored dictatorships, and now they are faced with powerful domestic political-financial extrabureaucratic blocs, with their own ideas of how to further their interests. A very high percentage of the most corrupt countries (so-called) are in Southeast Asia. A nice recent example is the fall of Sri Mulyani, long-time Bank of Indonesia technocrat and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's minister

of finance. She was forced out by the most powerful tycoon in the country (and head of the Golkar Party) A. Bakrie, and poor woman ended up in the World Bank (WB). There's exile for you. The crash of 1997 helped create a new class of ruthless, new rich tycoons who have no illusions about the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the WB. Ditto Thailand. Burma and Singapore go their own way. Mahathir got away with defying the IMF and came out ahead. China's enormous economic power lies outside IMF-WB control, and will be used in China's interests, not America's or Europe's. The spectacular crash of the U.S. economy and the bankruptcy of so many European states is also something to learn from. Immensely nontransparent economies like China's, Thailand's, and Indonesia's are doing fine, ditto Latin America. Many people are getting to know that the U.S. became a titan in the late nineteenth century by the ruthless pirating of mainly British and German inventions, high tariff walls, and so on. My dim and stupid impression is that only in the Philippines do the IMF and WB appear as almost invulnerable masters.

**VR:** One of your most intriguing essays is the one on long-distance nationalism where, if I remember correctly, you seemed largely skeptical of efforts to conjure a sense of nationness amid exile or migration because these were made by those who lived elsewhere and, thus, not directly accountable to the motherland. Do you still feel the same hesitations around long-distance nationalism, or have these changed in light of the avalanche of scholarship on "diaspora" and "ethnic studies"? I also wonder how your argument in that essay would apply to Filipino Americans and perhaps explain their vexed, ambivalent relations with Filipino middle-class nationalists in the Philippines.

**BA:** I think the way you pose the question in the first four lines misses my polemical intention. It was written in the years when progressive, lefty political solidarity was breaking down in the U.S. with the arrival of "identity" and "identity" politics, which struck me as a bad sign. It wasn't long after the huge TV audience watched "Roots," and tens of thousands rushed off to dig up family trees in the same manner. I then realized the difference between nationalism and ethnicism, which is

that the latter is obsessed with the past without any focused interest in a future, while nationalism was from the start oriented to the future, or some kind of utopian horizon. Self-pity versus hope. I thought this was true not only for ethnic or religious identity movements but even, to some degree, in praiseworthy "universalist" movements like feminism and Gay and Lesbian liberation (utopia = G and L ghettoes). I had quite a lot of experience, and also read a lot, about "overseas" migrant political movements, especially those identifying themselves as "nationalist." In those days I used to read fairly regularly the Pinoy newspaper published in Los Angeles (can't remember the name). It was really freaky in its internal fractures. Sentimental articles about *lola* and her great Pinoy recipes. Achievements of FilAms in Los Angeles (LA) high schools: study and athletics. Heavy pages about crime, corruption, and poverty in Pinas. Meetings of the FilAm bigwigs and their endless crab-like jealousies and quarrels. Articles about Pinoy veterans from the Second World War betrayed by the Kanoys. Gossip columns about *artistas* in Pinas. Side A of the disc was: Pinas is hopeless, so we were right to move here, and we are doing nicely. But Americans never recognize this. Side B: how we miss *lola's* recipes, how terrific our sexy *artistas* in Manila are. Should we have moved here? Jammed together in an unintelligible soup. All this isn't unique to Pinoys, the same jumbles you can find in most overseas ethnic groups feeling themselves nationalists, but somehow glad not to be back home. Most American Irish think like this, knowing very little of real, rapidly changing Ireland, living a version of Irishness that is not merely superficial, sentimental, and ahistorical, but also deeply reactionary. If Pinoy middle classes are irritated by *balikbayan*, you will find the same annoyance among Dublin middle-class intellectuals, ditto Delhi, ditto Bangkok.

The overseas people are easily manipulated by unscrupulous politicians (see Mexicans in LA). The obvious problem is the divorce between citizenship and nationalism. If you are an American citizen (and you became one by your own choice), then your first duty is to the U.S. If you don't take this citizenship seriously, why not go home? Under all this is, frankly, a huge amount of false consciousness and self-delusion. The long reign over FilAm kids by people like E. San Juan shows two things. A kind of fossilized mixture of JoMa and

Constantino simply further detaches these kids from Pinoy reality, but lets them feel “radical” in cybersphere. No one knows how honestly to discuss that reality. But some fine young people are now resisting this wretched and misleading stuff.

**CH:** In the keynote speech that you delivered at Nippon Foundation’s 10th Regional Anniversary Celebrations, held in Ateneo on 28 May 2010, you talked about the long-term decline of the traditional public intellectual who wrote for the general public, a trend that is in part a result of the professionalization and commercialization of universities. But you also mentioned the influence of environments, particularly the changing culture of the national elites and the ways in which these elites use the power of the state to shape public discourse, including what can or cannot be talked about or researched. In the Philippine case, how would you characterize the national elites, their use of state power, and the kinds of subjects that are considered “taboo”?

**BA:** The Philippines has the oldest oligarchy in Southeast Asia, forged in the time of *Quezon*. Oligarchies are really interesting political formations, much less vulnerable than dictatorships. Their numbers are large enough to allow for limited internal competition and (usually) to block dictatorships. They know how to handle elections because they all operate the same way, are flexible enough to allow new entrants in limited numbers, have interlocking financial interests, and prefer a certain circulation in the very top offices. They can use the state rather than be used by the state. They can easily unite against any exterior or subordinate political movement. (Look at the history of Switzerland, which is an enviable example of generations of oligarchic rule.) They are used to being reviled by intellectuals, but couldn’t care less. This is why, up to a certain point, the Philippines has an open press. So the big question is: what can’t be attacked or profoundly criticized, and the obvious example, maybe the only one, is the Catholic Church, with the papacy behind it. One can’t really say that the church is part of the oligarchy, because it is a powerful hierarchical institution in its own right, unlike any regular member of the oligarchy. Its celibacy rules make it impossible for it to be controlled by a single family or even a group of families. Its basic source of power, very old, comes

from outside the country, where it has many more allies than any sector of the oligarchy. Financially, it is the least transparent apparatus in the country. It knows how to snuggle up to the oligarchy by its ownership of Ateneo, but this ownership is not part of its regular self-advertisement, which of course comes from Christ, Maria, and so on. It “serves” most Filipinos by providing baptisms, weddings, funerals, even if none of these is free. At the same time it is responsible for the irresponsible ban on divorce, opposition to birth control, stigmatization of homosexuality and lesbianism, ideological hostility to any Marxist left, close connections with the U.S.A., and so on. This is why there is no good and searching book on the modern history of the Catholic Church in the Philippines. The oligarchy has long ago made its peace with the church, and this suits both parties. Even the CPP-NPA is afraid of it.



The photo here and the one on p. 107 were taken by Mario Ivan Lopez during Professor Anderson’s talk at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 9 Nov. 2010.