Benedict
Anderson

A Life Beyond Boundaries

A MEMOIR

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Contents

Preface

The origin of this book is quite unusual, and I hope may therefore tickle the curiosity of English readers. It began around 2003 when Ms Endo Chiho, a fine editor for Japan's NTT Publishing Company, happened to read earlier Japanese translations of my works, in particular *Imagined Communities*. She felt that young Japanese students had little idea of the social, political, cultural and epochal contexts in which Anglo-Saxon scholars were born, educated and matured. Many biographical and autobiographical books were available about 'Western' politicians, artists, generals, businessmen and novelists, but few about Western scholars. Her idea was to publish a short book about my education in Ireland and Britain, academic experience in the US, fieldwork in Indonesia, Siam and the Philippines, together with some reflections on Western universities and on my favourite books. But I knew no Japanese. What was to be done? She realized that I would have to be persuaded to write some simple kind of English-language text. But the crux was to find a distinguished Japanese scholar who knew English very well, was a close friend of mine, and was willing to work on a translation.

Kato Tsuyoshi (aka Yoshi) had come to Cornell University in 1967 to study sociology and anthropology. This was the year that I finished my PhD (on the Japanese Occupation of Java during the Second World War and the subsequent Indonesian National Revolution) and became a very junior professor of political science. Because Yoshi was determined to do fieldwork on Indonesia's western Sumatra I was appointed as one of his three mentors. We quickly became close friends, not least because of his lovely sly sense of humour. He was a fast learner of academic English and of Indonesia's national language. After completing a very original PhD thesis, he returned to Japan and taught at the Jesuits' 'international' university in Tokyo, later moving to Kyoto University, which was the centre for Japanese scholarship on Southeast Asia, where he became a great teacher. We met there often and became even stronger friends.

He told me that he thought Ms Endo's general idea a good one, and that he had worked out a useful systematic plan, if only I would accept it. He said

that too many Japanese students and teachers had little understanding of scholarship abroad because of their poor knowledge of English, French, Chinese, etc. Professors also adopted a patriarchal attitude towards their students, which made the youngsters needlessly timid.

My first reaction was embarrassed rejection. Professors in the West rarely have interesting lives. Their values are objectivity, solemnity, formality and – at least officially – self-effacement. He replied that I had been educated in Ireland, Britain and America, and my fieldwork covered Indonesia, Siam and the Philippines. Even though I taught in America, my outlook was far from that of many American social scientists. All this would help Japanese students to think in terms of useful comparisons. We would work together, he hoped. I would write a rough manuscript following the guidelines created by Ms Endo and himself, and he would translate what I wrote. He would come to my home for a month to ask me about passages that were difficult to understand, correct any mistakes, give me better paragraphs, and teach me about Japanese education.

Finally I gave in, because Yoshi was one of my best friends, had worked so hard, and was the only Japanese scholar capable of carrying out the plan. I consoled myself by saying silently that at least I would never read the forthcoming book. But in a distant way I would be chatting directly with the Japanese students. The book was published, very elegantly, in 2009, and Ms Endo and Yoshi were pleased.

From the start, my brother had urged me to publish an English-language version, and every time I refused. But by 2015 I changed my mind for various reasons, not least of which was the fact that I would be eighty the following year. The work I had been doing since my retirement in 2009 had little to do with my ‘career’, including a study of brilliant Thai filmmakers, *The Decay of Rural Hell in Siam*, the role of folklore in the Philippine Revolution, the changing meaning of advertisements, and so on, as well as various translations and a projected biography of a great Sino-Indonesian journalist and historian. None of this had much connection with education in Japan except in regard to the decay of universities in Britain, America, Europe and elsewhere. To say nothing of the miserable condition of the world as a whole.

Then the problems of ‘English’. I would have to take responsibility for all the mistakes, forms of prose, memory lapses, follies and sometimes silly jokes.

This rather wandering book has therefore two main themes. The first is the importance of translation for individuals and societies. The second is the

danger of arrogant provincialism, or of forgetting that serious nationalism is tied to internationalism.

Chapter 1

Shifting Youth

I was born on 26 August 1936, in Kunming, on the eve of the massive Japanese invasion of northern China, and just three years before the Second World War broke out in Europe. In the summer of 1941, just before my fifth birthday, my ailing father decided to take the family back to neutral Ireland via the United States.

After our ship docked in San Francisco, however, my father realized that the intensive submarine warfare in the Atlantic Ocean made a return home impossible. So we stayed in California and, later, Colorado till Nazi Germany was defeated. Then, in the summer of 1945, we sailed to Ireland on a ship still mostly filled with American soldiers heading for Europe. I was almost nine years old. My father died the following year; my English mother nonetheless decided that we would stay in Ireland.

The years during which I attended primary school, high school and (undergraduate level) college were those of the Cold War and the rapid collapse of the once vast British Empire. So far as I can remember, the Cold War did not then affect me much. But if I had not been lucky enough to reside in Ireland, I could have been conscripted at the age of eighteen (1954) to fight for the dying Empire in Malaya, Kenya or Cyprus, and might have been killed or gravely wounded.

I also grew up in the age before television. We did, however, listen a lot to the radio – a medium that allows for some entertainment while doing household chores, tackling homework, and playing cards or chess. In the evenings, we would regularly tune in to the BBC, where great novels were serially read aloud by very good actors, so that our imaginations were filled with figures like Anna Karenina, the Count of Monte Cristo, Lord Jim, Uriah Heep, Tess of the D'Urbervilles and so on.

Travelling theatre groups were also very important to us, and Ireland was full of excellent performers. We got to see not only many Shakespeare plays (before we read them as textbooks), but also the works of world-famous Irish playwrights like Shaw, Wilde, Sheridan, O'Casey and others. American

popular culture came to us only marginally, in the westerns and Disney cartoons shown at the local cinema.

It could easily all have been otherwise. If my father had delayed leaving China till the Pacific War broke out, we might have ended up in a Japanese internment camp, and perhaps died there. Had my father not been Irish, I might have been raised in England and fought overseas for the Empire. If I had been born later, I could have become addicted to the television set, and too lazy to go the local theatre.

Both my father and my mother were excellent parents, warm-hearted, interesting and broad-minded human beings to whom I, along with my younger brother, Rory, (today very well known as Perry) and my little sister Melanie, were deeply attached. I could say that we were very lucky to have such parents.

My father, Seamus (James) O'Gorman Anderson, was the product of a remarkable mixture of lineages. His mother's male ancestors were Irish, as their family name, O'Gorman, indicates. They had a long history of political activism against English imperialism and colonialism in Ireland: two O'Gorman brothers, my great-great-grandfather and his younger brother, were involved in the United Irishmen rebellion of 1798, which was inspired by the French Revolution. They spent time in prison for their pains. In the 1820s, both were key members of Daniel O'Connell's Catholic Association, which worked hard to end more than a century of legal, political and economic discrimination against the Irish Catholic majority. A nephew of theirs joined the failed uprising of 1848, which took place in the middle of the 'Irish Potato Famine', fled to Paris and Ottoman Istanbul, and then migrated to America, where eventually he became a member of the New York State Supreme Court.

My father's maternal grandfather, Major Purcell O'Gorman, was elected to the House of Commons in 1874, sitting for the small city of Waterford, and becoming an important member of the Home Rule for Ireland bloc led by Charles Parnell. (He is said to have weighed more than 300 pounds and been the fattest man in the Mother of Parliaments.) But he married a Protestant Englishwoman. In those tolerant days, which would soon disappear under the reign of Pope Pius IX, the problems of mixed marriages across religious lines were sensibly solved by the local rule that sons followed the religion of their fathers, and daughters that of their mothers. So my grandmother was a Protestant, though her elder brother was a Catholic.

The lineage of my father's father was almost the opposite. It was 'Anglo-Irish', referring to the Protestant descendants of the seventeenth-century

Scottish and English invaders who seized the lands of the indigenous Irish, settled down as local gentry, and over many generations came to feel themselves to be rather Irish. There were many military officers in the lineage of my paternal grandfather, some of whom fought in the Napoleonic wars, served in Afghanistan and Burma, or were stationed in Hong Kong and India as the British Empire expanded.

My Anglo-Irish grandfather, who died long before I was born, also made his career in the British Imperial Army. (In those days an Anglo-Irish first-born son inherited the father's properties, and younger sons usually became clergymen or military officers.) He was schooled at the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, which specialized in creating engineers, and served in India, Burma and Malaya. In Penang, where my father was born, he built a clean-water reservoir which still functions today, as well as an up-to-date port. Today, one can still observe on the Penang Heights the remnants of the little Irish-style house he designed for his wife, daughter of Purcell O'Gorman, and my grandmother. He was among the first to become interested in cryptography, and during the Great War successfully headed the War Office's secret code service. Sometimes I wonder if I inherited my lifelong addiction to crossword puzzles from his genes.

Much of this ancestral history I discovered only in the mid-1960s, when I began to ponder over which citizenship to choose for myself and, finally, decided to apply for Irish citizenship. During my childhood, I had travelled abroad on my mother's British passport and later on my own British one without much thinking about it. In growing up, it was understood that we had soul and character, yet we were seldom troubled with identity. Identity was mainly connected with mathematics or the forensic investigation of a corpse.

There were political as well as personal reasons for my choice of Irish citizenship. The Vietnam War was raging, and in nearby Indonesia the anti-communist army had seized power and massacred about half a million communists and their sympathizers. These events hardened my leftist sentiments. The other reason was more personal. My brother and sister had already decided to maintain their British citizenship. I felt that I owed it to my father, who on my birth gave me the 'tribal' O'Gorman name, to apply for Eire citizenship.

Irish citizenship could have been easily achieved if I could prove that at least one of my parents or grand-parents had been born in the country. (My father was born in Penang, where my grandfather was stationed, and my mother in London.) Unfortunately, during the Easter Uprising of 1916, in

which Irish nationalists revolted against the British, the rebels burned down the building where the Irish birth records were kept. Luckily, however, my mother had a friend whose hobby was researching the genealogy of families in the County of Waterford, and he dug up most of the information mentioned above. I took it to our local member of parliament and gained his help. So, in 1967, I received my first Irish passport.

My father was a restless, intelligent youngster. In 1912, at the age of twenty-one and before finishing his time at Cambridge, he volunteered to join the strange institution known as the Chinese Maritime Customs Service (CMCS). Originally set up by the British and French imperialists, it was designed to make sure that the Ch'ing dynasty paid the huge indemnities imposed on it after the 'successful' assault on Peking in 1860 during the Second Opium War. In effect it took control over the taxation of imperial China's maritime trade with the outside world. Over time, it diversified its membership to include Russians, Germans and even Japanese. Gradually, too, its outlook changed, so that it increasingly tried to serve what it saw as China's real interests, especially after the fall of the Ch'ing dynasty in 1911 and the onset of the age of the warlords.

My father proved to be a first-class linguist and was always top of his class in the rigorous program the CMCS created to ensure its employees were fluent in spoken and written Chinese. He became very attached to China and the ordinary Chinese, if not to their governments. He also read widely in Chinese literature. After he died, my rather prudish mother was shocked to find among his books a set of volumes, with pictures, published by the first generation of (radical) Chinese sexologists, rebelling against forced prostitution and the miserable status of many Chinese women.

In 1920, after the Great War was over, he met the impressive figure of Stella Benson, a determined feminist, as well as a gifted modernist writer of novels, short stories and travel accounts. She had come to China in order to work at a school and a hospital set up by missionaries. They married while on leave in London, and for their honeymoon decided to drive across America. My father was especially fascinated by American history. From there they sailed to China, which in turn fascinated Stella.

Stella died in China in 1933, aged only forty-one, leaving my father devastated. In 1935, however, he met my mother in London, married her, and took her back with him to China. My father hated sitting in big-city offices, so chose to spend most of his service years in remote posts where he could be his own energetic boss. From Amoy he had commanded a small fleet of

speedboats to intercept cunning South Chinese smugglers. But now he had to face Yunnan's local warlord, who controlled the production and sale of opium. My mother enjoyed telling us children about the hills and mountains near Kunming covered with bright pink Oriental poppies. I like to think that it was the Irish in my father that made him so independent-minded and adventurous. My memories of him only go back to the time when he was already very ill, and in and out of hospitals. But he was always warm, loving and very amusing.

My English mother, *neé* Veronica Bigham, was also an unusual woman, from a successful upper-middle-class professional background. Her paternal grandfather, John Bigham, came from a Lancaster merchant family, but made a very successful career as a jurist, specializing in commercial and maritime law. He became briefly famous as the judge who presided over the inquiry into the sinking of the *Titanic*. About that time he was made a baronet for his services and was titled Lord Mersey.

Her father, Trevor Bigham, was a studious 'second son' who won a scholarship to Eton College, England's most well-known 'public school' (actually, a boys-only private school), practised law, and then joined the Metropolitan Police. He eventually became the no. 2 man at Scotland Yard and received a knighthood, but he disliked the job and retired early. I remember him as a rather stiff, formal man, who did, however, teach me to do the harder crossword puzzles, for which one had to be widely read. He was married to Frances Tomlin, a semi-bohemian and a fine pianist. My sense is that the marriage was not very happy, and she died of cancer in 1927 when still quite young.

Her death may have been the main reason why my mother suffered from severe anorexia, so ill-understood at that time that she was removed from school to be tutored at home. In those days it was still fairly rare for a girl to go to Oxford or Cambridge. Late in her life she often said how unlucky she was to be born in 1905. If she had come into the world fifteen years later she would almost surely have become an Oxbridge student and had an independent career of her own. But she was a great reader of all kinds of books, and fluent in both French and German.

It would not be correct to say that my parents were intellectuals in any strict sense, but they jointly gave their children a home library unequalled in the town where we lived. They also encouraged in us the habit of reading about the lives, experiences and thoughts of people who spoke other languages, inhabited different classes and regions, and came from different

historical periods. I remember reading, quite fascinated, my father's copies of English translations by Arthur Waley of the *Tale of Genji* and the *Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon* when I was about fourteen or fifteen.

The habits of our house were unusual in Ireland in those days. We ate rice more than we ate the national vegetable, potatoes. We were served fish as often as meat, while our neighbours ate fish only on Fridays when Catholicism told them to suffer a bit for Jesus. The house was full of Chinese scrolls, pictures, clothes and costumes, which we would often dress up in for fun. I remember how appalled I was when my mother showed me a beautifully embroidered cloth shoe smaller than my hand, and explained that it was worn by Chinese women, whose feet were agonizingly bound from childhood. My parents were both keen photographers, so the house had many albums of pictures taken especially in China, and in French-colonial Vietnam, where they would go for occasional holidays. One day, pointing to a photo of a very beautiful little Chinese girl about two years old, my mother said, 'This is Celia Chen, your first best friend.'

After I was born, it was decided to hire an amah to look after me. They found a young Vietnamese girl, with a small boy of her own, who had left an unpleasant arranged marriage to find work in Kunming. She became very close to my mother and was taken to Ireland when the family went home on leave. Years later, the locals remembered her very well. She, a Catholic who spoke French, always wore elegant traditional Vietnamese clothes, with a black turban, teeth carefully lacquered, and a wonderful smile. She used to go to church on Sundays in this attire. My mother once told me that the first words I spoke were Vietnamese, not English. It is sad that children, so quick to pick up languages, also quickly forget them.

When my father decided to take us all home in 1941, this young Vietnamese woman, whose name was Ti-hai (Miss no. 2 said her parents, concerned mainly with sons), was all set to go with us, because she enjoyed seeing the world. But California, our landing point, was drumming up racist anti-Asian policies, and the American consulate in Shanghai refused to give her a visa, so she had to return to Vietnam. After the war, my mother tried to find her through diplomatic channels, but without success.

My first memory of schooling dates from about 1942. My father was in and out of hospitals in San Francisco, and my baby sister was born in 1943. My mother was too exhausted caring for her husband and the new baby to cope with two energetic little boys who, at that time, quarrelled constantly. So we were packed off to The Country School, a boarding school run by two grim

Scandinavian women outside Los Gatos, at the edge of present-day Silicon Valley. The school is still there, but the town has become so big that today it's near the centre. America was quite unfamiliar to us, we missed our parents badly, and we were often physically punished. I had the misfortune to wet my bed, and the school rules forced me almost every day to miss a class so I could wash my sheets, for which I was mercilessly teased and bullied. I do not remember learning anything there.

After the family returned to Waterford and managed to buy a house at the edge of the town, my brother and I were put into a Quaker primary school. Cars were then a rarity in our town, so we went to school in a donkey-cart driven by my mother's elderly and extremely kind gardener. I had my first experience of a traffic accident when I rushed out of the school gate and ran into just such a donkey-cart which happened to be passing by. Had it been a car I would probably have been killed, but as it was, I only broke my shoulder-bone.

When we boys were given bicycles to go to school, we were introduced to the class struggle and religious conflict. We had to ride down through a Catholic neighbourhood of relatively poor people. The boys there took us to be snobby, half-English and Protestant, and were usually ready for a fight. The way down was not that bad, as we could ride very fast and arm ourselves with hockey-sticks. But going home uphill was when we 'got it' from these lads. At the time I did not understand why we were hated, but it was a useful lesson in the effects of religious, class and racial bigotry. Today, I don't remember much about the Quaker school except that I was so afraid of a red-faced mathematics teacher that I often played truant, lying to mother. I was also a member of a little gang headed by a tough, athletic girl called Fiona.

The most important piece of luck for me was another key decision made by my mother. Irish law made it compulsory for small children to start learning either Irish (nationalism) or Latin (Catholicism). My mother saw no point in my learning a nearly extinct language spoken fluently only in the far west of the country, so Latin it was. She found a private tutor for me, Mrs Webster, a wonderful middle-aged woman who was the best teacher I have ever had. It may be hard to believe, but she made me fall in love with Latin, and realize that I had, from the start, a gift for languages.

Later I asked my mother: 'Why Latin? It is even more extinct than Irish.' Though she did not know Latin herself, she knew the right answer: 'Latin is the mother of most Western European languages – French, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian – so if you know Latin, you will find all these

languages easy. Besides, Latin has a great literature which every well-educated person should know.'

It turned out, however, that my mother had another reason for her decision. She believed that Irish schools of those days were not very good, and she wanted her two boys to go to a fine boarding-school in England which might help them get into a good 'public school' and later a university. In these educational institutions, Latin (and Greek) were essential elements in the curriculum.

So off we went, myself first and my younger brother a year later. It was quite an experience to go to England. We had to take a steamship for seven hours across the notoriously rough Irish Sea, with people vomiting all over the place. We would land at the little Welsh seaport, Fishguard, at about 2 a.m., trying to keep warm with cups of hot cocoa or Marmite, and then leave by the 4 a.m. train for London, getting there around ten o'clock. After a day or two at grandfather's house, we would be sent by train to Scaitcliffe, our little school southeast of London.

I was only at this new school for two years, but they were intense because it specialized in 'cramming' little boys to get into the top 'public schools'. The pressure also came from my mother, who told us that since she was a widow living mainly on a pension, we would not be able to go to one of these elite schools unless we could win scholarships. I duly took the nationally competitive exam for thirteen vacant scholarships at Eton (where my maternal grandfather had also won a scholarship towards the end of the nineteenth century), and to general astonishment came in at no. 12. My younger brother, more energetic and competitive, took the examination later and did much better than I.

Eton was a strange place for me. The vast majority of the pupils came from the English aristocracy and very rich business or banking families, with a scattering of brown-skinned 'princes' from the ex-colonies and the living protectorates. The scholarship boys mostly came from middle-class families; they lived together in a separate building, ate together, and had a special 'medieval' outfit they were obliged to wear. The majority, who lived in handsome 'Houses', we met only in class. These boys, whose backgrounds guaranteed them a comfortable or powerful future, saw no need to work hard, and openly despised the scholarship boys as 'bookworms' who were socially well below them. The scholarship boys, mostly intelligent, responded by mocking the 'stupidity' and snobbishness of their enemies. They had their own (intellectual) snobbishness, too, and bonded closely. I had never been in

classes with so many intelligent boys.

It was a strange place in other ways too. Even in winter, we had to get up very early, take ice-cold showers, and then go to our first class before finally being allowed to eat terrible English breakfasts. Class followed class every morning and afternoon, interrupted only by regimented sports and evenings full of homework. One reason for this intensity, we came to realize, was the teachers' firm belief in the old saying 'The Devil finds work for idle hands'. They knew that in an all-boy environment, hormone-tossed teenagers would fall into different kinds of love and sexual relations unless they were constantly monitored and kept physically exhausted.

The curriculum was especially tough for the scholarship boys, who were aware they would probably have to win scholarships again in order to get into Oxford or Cambridge. But it was still quite old-fashioned. The core element was always language, Latin, Greek, French, German, and later a little Cold War Russian. But languages were backed by classes in ancient history, art history, bits of archaeology, and a lot of comparative modern history, with Britain at its heart. No anthropology, no sociology, no political science. Aside from the above, there was a lot of mathematics and, rather feebly, smatterings of chemistry, biology and physics. But no sex education, of course.

I remember only two teachers. One was Raef Payne, a young man who taught English literature and had the temerity to introduce us to T. S. Eliot (by then an old man, and a Nobel Prize winner). This was our only taste of post-Edwardian literature at all. The usual English literature syllabus mainly covered up to the late nineteenth century, and the teaching of poetry in class stuck to certain set patterns like rhyme with limited length. It was highly unusual then to be taught the poetry of Eliot, which did not follow the standard conventions. The young English teacher also managed the annual school play, usually Shakespeare, and handled well the whistles and screams that always came when a boy was assigned to play any of the female roles. 'Don't be idiots,' he would say. 'In Shakespeare's time all actors of female parts were boys like you.'

The other memorable teacher was our intimidating Head Master, Sir Robert Birley, who, surprisingly, taught an excellent class on poetry that greatly increased my appreciation of verse. Rather than simply comparing several poems and analyzing their different lengths or rhyming styles, he would pick a poem by Kipling, for example, analyse its composition and explain its historical background. It was also he who taught me that beauty and virtue need not be the same and that poets who wrote splendid poems

were not necessarily wonderful people.

In this environment, my brother and I moved in different directions. He concentrated on modern history, mainly but not entirely European, while I focused on language and literature. The eye-opener for me was a systematic, if conservative, study of French literature, from late medieval times up to the end of the nineteenth century. It is a notorious fact that French and English are the two European languages hardest to translate into each other. I felt the difficulty right away, and was enthralled by being allowed to enter a completely un-English world.

Rather massive reading in the literature of antiquity had a different effect. It felt like bathing in two grand non-Christian civilizations. Because we scholarship boys were regarded as the school's intellectual elite, we were allowed to read almost anything, even erotic passages, though the teachers often skipped them out of embarrassment. The ancient cultures we were trained to admire and the contemporary culture into which we were being educated were miles apart. While we were taught to be ashamed of, and hide, our bodies, the statues of ancient Greece were almost entirely and unashamedly nude, and very beautiful. Homosexual behaviour in 1950s England was still a criminal offence, and could put people in prison for years, but ancient mythology was full of stories about gods falling in love with human boys or young men. Ancient history offered plenty of examples of young lovers going bravely to war together and dying in each other's arms. Then there was a gorgeous goddess of love, and a naughty little boy-god with a bow and arrow to back her up. Christianity seemed dull and narrow-minded in contrast.

One other notable aspect was that we were seriously taught how to write. We had to practise writing poetry of our own in Latin, and translate English poems into Latin. We also studied carefully the great masters of English prose from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth. Finally, we had to memorize and publicly recite many poems in different languages. To this day, I still have in my head poems in Latin, Greek, French, German, Russian and even Javanese.

I did not know it at the time, but I was lucky to be among almost the last cohort to have these experiences. By the late 1950s, the practice of memorizing poems had almost died out. Classical studies in the old broad sense, considered as the basis for a humane education, was also being pushed aside by subjects thought more useful for careers, the professions and modern life in general. Moreover, coarse Anglo-American was becoming the only 'world language', at a great loss to the planet.

I did only one thing at Eton of which I am still proud. The teachers regularly used corporal punishment, which was supposed to ‘toughen us up’. Worse, however, was that the boys in the senior class were permitted to beat smaller and younger boys. With the help of some close friends, I persuaded my classmates to break with this tradition. When we became seniors we promised all the young boys that there would be no more beatings – naturally, we were, for a while, quite popular.

Strict as Eton was, it made plenty of room for holidays. When I won the scholarship to Eton, my loving aunt took me to Paris for a week of sightseeing. I bought a French comic at a kiosk near our hotel, and in it came across a scene in which Tarzan was making Jane some sexy jungle clothes, which surprised me very much. I had always assumed that Jane sewed her own clothes, never imagining that Tarzan would do such a thing. When I raised this with my aunt she laughed aloud, so I had to fight back a bit: ‘The French have the best designers in the world, and they are all men!’ Later on, I went bicycling in Holland with some schoolmates, and spent summer holidays with my mother’s best friends, one who lived in Austria, and another who kept a villa near the border between Switzerland and Italy. So I had plenty of opportunities for adolescent fun outside Ireland and England.

If Etonians could make brief trips abroad, high-ranking foreigners could also visit Eton. In June 1953 came the spectacular coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, to which all monarchs or their representatives were invited. Japan’s Emperor Hirohito was not acceptable to British public opinion because of his role in the Pacific War, but Akihito, his very young son, was deemed fit to attend. We scholarship boys were told that Akihito would visit Eton, and that we should be well behaved and respectful. Actually, we were rather hostile in principle, since the war had ended only recently. But when Akihito arrived we were stunned. He was a small young man, only a little older than us, wearing simple dark clothes and walking between two gigantic Scottish soldiers, almost as if he had been arrested. He was almost silent, timid, insecure and very gentle. Suddenly, many of us felt that in some ways he was just like us.

In my senior year at Eton, I won a scholarship to go to Cambridge University. In those days, youngsters studied intensively to get in, but once there they were not expected to study very hard, and most of them (then mainly boys) spent their time drinking, playing cards or sports, going to the movies and looking for girls. Drugs, I think, did not feature at the time. Later, in America, I was surprised to find quite the opposite: high-school students do little work, while college students have to study hard if they are to do well in later life.

Cambridge in the 1950s was still quite conservative. Sociology had only recently been introduced as a discipline and was highly controversial. There was no political science, and anthropology was still in its infancy. The scholarship I had received was in the field of classical studies, but I soon decided I should switch to a field more useful for the future. Since Cambridge boasted a number of world-famous economists – Keynes, who already had passed away by the time I arrived, had studied and taught there – I chose to study economics. I quickly discovered that I had no talent for the subject, was easily bored, and did not do well in the final examinations for the first year. Rather weakly, I resolved to return to classical studies, learning from my seniors that the final examinations for the bachelor's degree were easier than the competitive examination I had taken to get into Cambridge in the first place.

So I spent most of my last two years in college reading whatever interested me. Mostly literature and history. I still have the notebooks in which I recorded everything I read. Though embarrassed by some of my choices, I am still impressed by the sheer number of books listed. Maybe this behaviour stemmed partly from my social immaturity: I was a shy boy with no social graces. I did not drink much, hated dancing (pre–rock-and-roll days), and had no idea how to talk to girls.

But Cambridge was important to me for two quite different reasons. Even though it was located in a small provincial town, it had what one could call an art-house repertory cinema. This was a revelation to me. At Eton we were not allowed to go alone to the movies, and in Ireland the available films were mostly westerns and gangster pictures. Now, in college, I was offered only the international best. I was overwhelmed by Japanese cinema, then at the height of its global prestige: Kurosawa, Mizoguchi and Ozu, of course, but also other directors of the same generation. This is where my lifelong love affair with Japanese culture began. Revolutionary Soviet films from the 1920s and 1930s were another revelation, though not so sharp, since I had started learning Russian at Eton with the hope of reading Turgenev, Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Goncharov and Leskov (my favourites) in the original. It was a refreshing experience to compare what I read in Russian novels with what I saw in revolutionary Soviet cinema. France, Italy, Germany and Sweden (Ingmar Bergman) were also well represented. One of the best things about the Cambridge art-house cinema was that it showed a lot of black-and-white films, which came to form the base of my cinematic aesthetic. Even today, I find black-and-white much more real and alive than colour.

Frequent attendance at this cinema also initiated my political awareness.

In those days, after every film, the audience had to stand to attention while the national anthem was played to accompany Technicolor images of poor young Queen Elizabeth on horseback. This was a real ordeal. With tears in my eyes from *Tokyo Story*, or fire in my blood from *The Battleship Potemkin*, it was torture to endure this authoritarian monarchical nonsense. Quite soon, I learned how to make a dash for the exit just as the national anthem started, with plenty of irate patriots ready to grab me or hit me on the way out. So I became a naive but committed republican.

My second formative Cambridge experience occurred during the Suez Crisis of 1956, when British and French troops, colluding with the Israelis, invaded Egypt to block General Nasser's attempt to nationalize the body that regulated international traffic along the great French-built canal. I was not in the least interested in this crisis. However, one afternoon, as I was walking back to my room across one of the university's athletic fields, I noticed a small crowd of brown-skinned students making indignant protest speeches. So I stopped by to listen, simply out of idle curiosity. Suddenly, out of the blue, the protestors were assaulted by a gang of big English student bullies, most of them athletes. They were singing 'God Save the Queen'! To me this was incomprehensible, and reprehensible.

The protestors, mostly Indians and Ceylonese, were much smaller and thinner, and so stood no chance. Without thinking, I tried to intervene to help them, only to have my spectacles snatched off my face and smashed in the mud. I had never been so angry in my life. For the first time I had encountered English racism and imperialism. When, many years later, I came to write about nationalism for an English audience in *Imagined Communities*, I poured out, in the form of sarcasm, irony and innuendo, some of the rage I still felt. This was surely one reason why later I was attracted both to Marxism and to non-European anti-colonial nationalism.

Travel was also an expected part of university life. I visited Generalissimo Franco's Spain with friends and had the unusual experience of being arrested for indecent behaviour. We had gone swimming off the north coast in the usual English boy's swimming trunks. When we returned to land to dry off, two members of the Guardia Civil ran up and arrested us for showing naked chests and backs. Pleading that we were innocent tourists, we finally persuaded the policemen to let us go, but not before they had marched us down to a clothing shop where we had to buy hideous one-piece swim-suits, covering our bodies from the shins to the neck. My first experience of puritanical dictatorship!

Another strange experience occurred just after the bloody Soviet invasion of Hungary. The British Communist Party had chartered a train to take hundreds of young communists to the famous International Youth Festival of 1957 in Moscow. But general indignation over Hungary had affected the cadres, so that large numbers left the party, and of course pulled out of the trip. Since the BCP had invested a lot of money in the venture, they were forced to offer tickets to more or less anyone, regardless of party membership. My brother (by then at Oxford) and I leapt at this extraordinary chance to see fabled Moscow, the capital of the communist world. The package included free tickets to the opera, the ballet, the museums and many famous historical sites. The BCP leaders were not interested in having outsiders attend the endless political meetings, so I had a marvellous week with Mussorgsky, Glinka and Rimsky-Korsakov. I also managed to practise the little spoken Russian I had acquired.

The time finally came for me to leave Cambridge. My senior friends had told me that the examination for a BA in Classics was easier than the entry examination three years earlier. So I was given useless first-class honours. There followed a difficult six months at home. My brother tells me that I actually rejected an offer to teach classical studies at the University of Edinburgh. That this incident never registered in my memory was a sign of how little I wanted to pursue the Classics, or indeed to stay in Britain.

But I had no idea of what work I should pursue. My mother did her best to help. She had set her heart on my becoming a British diplomat, but I had no intention of ever working as a civil servant, let alone for the declining Empire. She then used the network of my father’s surviving friends (with commercial interests in the Far East) to look for a job for me in business. This prospect was even more unwelcome. As the months passed she became more and more impatient, and the tension between us steadily increased.

Then, once again, I had a stroke of luck. I had kept in touch with a number of my Eton scholarship friends, and one day received a letter from one of them, Richard Kennaway, who held a position at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. He told me that, while waiting for a summons from the British colonial service the following year, he had found temporary employment as a teaching assistant in Cornell University’s department of government (i.e. political science). Would I be interested in taking his place? I knew my mother would be supportive, if only to get me out of the house and into a job, even a temporary one. But I had never taken a single course in politics, and had no teaching experience at all. With cynical laughter, my friend replied that this would not matter. American students would be impressed with my

English accent, and if I read intensively I could stay ahead of them by a week or two.

At this point I talked with my brother, who had long been very political, and who knew much more about America than I did. Definitely I should go, he said. I should also read the newspapers and watch some television. A civil war was about to break out in Indonesia, where the local communist party (PKI) had the largest membership in the world outside the communist-ruled regions. However, the CIA was backing anti-communist warlords, and conservative regional politicians were trying to overthrow Soekarno, the left-leaning nationalist president. By chance, Cornell's department of government employed a young professor, George Kahin, who was the world's leading expert on contemporary Indonesia, and had been an active supporter of the anti-colonial armed struggle of 1945–49.

So I decided to give Cornell a try, and Kennaway quickly secured me a post as a teaching assistant. I was just twenty-one years old.

The trip to the United States was something special. I took the huge liner Queen Mary, on one of her last five-day Atlantic crossings. On landing in New York, I took the train to Ithaca. It was early January 1958, and the town was waist-deep in snow.

There is no need to recall all the good luck that befell me in the first twenty-one years of my life. My only real, though major, misfortune, was losing my poor father when he was only fifty-three years old, and I myself just nine. But there is perhaps a larger picture, to which I have alluded only in passing. I would be inclined to say that this picture had both geographical and temporal aspects.

Geographically, I was being prepared (without realizing it) for a cosmopolitan and comparative outlook on life. On the brink of puberty I had already lived in Yunnan, California, Colorado, independent Ireland, and England. I had been raised by an Irish father, an English mother and a Vietnamese nurse. French was a (secret) family language; I had fallen in love with Latin; and my parents' library contained books by Chinese, Japanese, French, Russian, Italian, American and German authors.

There was also a useful feeling of being marginal. In California I was laughed at for my English accent, in Waterford for my American idioms, and in England for my Irishisms. One can read this negatively, as indicating a life without roots, without a firm identity. But one can also read it positively, by saying that I had multiple attachments, to Ireland, to England (in some ways),

and, through literature and cinema, to many other places around the globe. Hence, later on, it was easy for me to become deeply attached, through language, to Indonesia, Siam and the Philippines.

Although the Thai and Indonesian languages have no linkages and belong to quite different linguistic ancestries, both have long had a fatalistic image of a frog who lives all its life under half a coconut shell – commonly used as a bowl in these countries. Sitting quietly under the shell, before long the frog begins to feel that the coconut bowl encloses the entire universe. The moral judgement in the image is that the frog is narrow-minded, provincial, stay-at-home and self-satisfied for no good reason. For my part, I stayed nowhere long enough to settle down in one place, unlike the proverbial frog.

I should explain here why I prefer to use ‘Siam’ rather than ‘Thailand’. The traditional name of the country was always Siam – which explains why (in English) we speak of ‘Siamese twins’ and ‘Siamese cats’. It was changed to ‘Thailand’ in the late 1930s by the nationalist military dictator Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram. After the end of the Second World War, civilians were briefly returned to power, and reintroduced ‘Siam’. In 1947, the military seized power again, and held it for the next twenty-five (Cold War) years. This time ‘Thailand’ was thoroughly institutionalized.

Controversy over the name still continues. Critics of ‘Thailand’, mostly liberals and moderate leftists, dislike the identification of the land with the ‘Thai’, who are only one of the over fifty ethnic groups in the country, though the dominant one. They believe that the name encourages narrow-minded and repressive attitudes towards minorities, especially the Malay Muslims in the far south. Those who dislike ‘Siam’ argue that it is too identified with the pre-modern, undemocratic, feudal era. I share the sentiment of the former critics and thus use ‘Siam’ as the country’s name, with some exceptions for well-established names of organizations.

I grew up in a time when an older world was coming to an end. I took my fine, old-fashioned education for granted, having no idea that I was a member of almost the last cohort to benefit from it. This education was designed, quite conservatively, to reproduce, if you like, a bearer of an upper-middle-class tradition. With this kind of general education, a boy could still expect eventually to become a senior civil servant, a member of the political oligarchy, or a respected teacher in the old style.

But the peaceful social revolution inaugurated by the postwar Labour governments was to create a mass of new high schools and universities much better adapted to the Cold War, American domination, commercial

globalization and the decline of Empire. Youngsters needed to learn economics, business management, mass communications, sociology, modern architecture and science (from astrophysics to professional palaeontology). There was little use anymore for amateurism. Even the language was changing. The kind of old-fashioned BBC English I had learned to speak was under attack as class-ridden, and was gradually being replaced by more demotic versions. No one any longer saw much point in memorizing poetry at all, let alone poetry in languages other than English.

Schools were changing too. The era of regular beatings, by teachers and older boys, was coming to an end. All-boy schools were under increasing democratic pressure to become coeducational, with the obvious consequences both positive and negative. I think that I was in the next to last cohort educated (and self-educated) through books, radio and black-and-white films. No television, almost no Hollywood, no video games, no internet. Not even typing, which I only started to learn in America after reaching adulthood.

In a dim way, I could even sense this change in my own family. My brother was educated the same way as I had been. But my sister, seven years younger, and eventually a graduate from Oxford, was part of a new world just coming into being. Even between me and my more politically advanced and intelligent brother there was a marked difference. One measure of this was America. Until I actually went to the US, I had absolutely no interest in the place at all. I knew no American history, read almost none of the great American novelists, was increasingly bored or annoyed by American movies, and, as an ardent classical piano player, had only scorn for American pop music, about which I knew nothing. My brother, however, who had to endure my banging away at Bach and Schubert, retaliated with fortissimo playing of records of Latin American rumbas, and later Elvis Presley. I have to admit that even today, in spite of long residence in the US, many wonderful American friends, and an attachment to Black music of all sorts, I still feel, if not alienated, at least detached from American society and culture. But … my father had left behind a 1920s edition of *Moby Dick*, fantastically illustrated by the brave communist Rockwell Kent. Herman Melville is still my no. 1 great novelist.

There is one other, more professional, sense in which I was part of a ‘last cohort’. I arrived in the US in 1958, just before American university life underwent a fundamental change, analogous to what occurred in the UK. In the early and middle 1960s, the great machine that we call ‘theory’ was beginning to become visible. It began with the now antique ‘behaviourist’ revolution. Although I do not think that ‘theory’ came very naturally to a

pragmatic, down-to-earth people, it had crucial effects. It made each discipline more eager to distinguish itself from its sisters and to set about inventing its own jargon.

When I studied in the US, this change was barely under way, so none of my teachers complained if I took courses in history or anthropology. But by the late 1960s this was already becoming difficult. The irony is that, thirty years later, American scholars started to talk eagerly about multidisciplinary approaches without realizing that these might have already existed more than a generation earlier.

This is not to say that the changes that occurred after I reached adulthood were not positive in many respects. All I want to emphasize is that I finished my studies just as those changes were setting in. Coming out of the last generation before they became normalized, I was in a position to observe them from a distance, rather than being formed by them.

Chapter 2

Area Studies

As it turned out, fate worked out differently than I originally expected. It did not take long for me to be enticed by the beautiful natural setting of Cornell, and by George Kahin's lecture classes on Indonesia, Southeast Asia and US policies in Asia. By the end of my first year at Cornell, I realized that I had finally decided what I wanted to do in life: become a professor, do research, write and teach, and to follow in Kahin's footsteps in my academic and political orientations. I will say more later about Kahin, who was not only an excellent scholar but also a man of conviction and energy.

So I stayed on. My mother was happy that I had finally settled down, though she complained about my being so far away from her and my brother and sister. So I wrote to her nearly every week, and every year returned home for Christmas and during the summer holidays. She wrote back to me regularly too, and my aunt Celia sent me clippings of crossword puzzles which were generally more difficult to solve than their American counterparts.

Though I was attracted by Kahin's lectures on Southeast Asia early on in my stay at Cornell, it took me a few months to adjust to American graduate student life, and still longer to understand how unique a place Cornell University was in those days, with its Southeast Asia program. To explain the nature of this uniqueness, it is necessary to leave Cornell for a while and consider the sudden rise, after the Second World War, of what the Americans came to call area studies.

Before Pearl Harbor the United States had been isolationist, despite its aggressive policy of worldwide economic expansion. It will be remembered that despite Woodrow Wilson's strenuous efforts, the US had rejected membership of the League of Nations. It had only one significant colony, the Philippines, and was often embarrassed, as a former colony itself, to be in the game of 'European' and Japanese colonialist imperialism. By the mid-1930s, a schedule had already been set for Filipino independence in 1946. America had a huge, modern navy, but an insignificant army and air force. Its direct political interventions were mainly confined to what it regarded, under the

Monroe Doctrine, as its ‘own backyard’: Central and South America, a part of the Caribbean, and a big chunk of the Pacific. The American scholarly world mirrored this larger picture. Since so many Americans originated from Europe, and since the prestige of European scholarship was high, there were plenty of US scholars who studied the main countries of Western Europe – the UK, France, Germany and Italy. The Soviet Union was also studied because it was regarded as a powerful ideological enemy. In Asia, the only countries of general concern were China and Japan. The latter was studied mainly because of its military power, which threatened to rival America’s in the Pacific region. In the case of China, a strong early interest was stimulated by the large number of American missionaries who worked there from the end of the nineteenth century. In the late 1940s, as the Chiang Kai-shek regime fell apart, many Chinese scholars, reactionary and liberal, first class and mediocre, fled to the US and there substantially increased the influence of anti-communist sinology. Unlike scholars from Japan or other Asian countries, many of them entertained particular political agendas. Allying with American scholars of China with similar ideological perspectives, they were to form a major and influential faction in American academic associations with Asia.

There was some work done on India, but it was mainly confined to books read by students of Sanskrit, influenced by European Orientalism, rather than works on contemporary colonial India. Almost no one, except an anthropologist or two, studied Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia or Southeast Asia. For Southeast Asia (except for the Philippines) the number of serious specialists could be numbered on one hand: Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson (Bali), Cora Dubois (Alor) and Rupert Emerson (Malaya). As late as 1958, when I began studying in the Cornell department of government, the small faculty was dominated by Americanists. One professor handled the Soviet Union, another Western Europe. George Kahin was responsible for the whole of Asia. No one taught Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa or the Middle East.

The Second World War changed everything in a very dramatic fashion. The US suddenly became the world hegemon. Germany and Japan were completely defeated, and Britain and France, though on the winning side, were so drained by the costs of their participation that their position as world imperialist powers rapidly declined. By the 1960s, their colonial empires had largely disappeared. Only the Soviet Union remained, and it was still a regional rather than global power. Where America had stayed out of the League of Nations, it now became the central organizer of the United Nations,

symbolized by the location of its headquarters in New York. Under these new conditions, the more powerful American elites became acutely aware of how little they knew about many parts of the world in whose politics they now expected to play a key role. All the more so since decolonization was happening at a furious pace in both Asia and, a little later, in Africa.

The rise of area studies in the postwar United States directly reflected the country's new hegemonic position. The state began to put a lot of financial and other resources into the study of *contemporary* politics and economics in countries outside Western Europe, much less into studies of history, anthropology, sociology, literature and the arts. As the Cold War set in, there was a growing interest in policy studies, particularly with regard to the threat, real or imagined, of what was still understood as 'world communism'. In this expansion of scholarship the driving forces were the CIA, the State Department and the Pentagon. But very large private institutions, especially the Rockefeller and Ford foundations, also played an important role, partly offsetting the 'policy' focus of the state.

Senior officials in these foundations, often highly educated people who had grown up under the long reign of President Franklin Roosevelt, were more liberal in their outlook than state functionaries, and somewhat less obsessed with combating 'world communism'. Many of them believed in the importance of deeper, historically based scholarship, which was more likely to develop healthily in open universities than in state-related agencies. They were also much more aware of the need for long-term planning, and the urgency of developing adequate research libraries and the efficient teaching of languages which, before the war, had barely been studied.

How was 'Southeast Asia' seen by Western eyes? The Chinese written language had long contained the word *nan-yang*, a vague geographical term meaning something like 'southern region' but also connoting 'water'. It thus signified the southern region oriented from Beijing and reachable via waterway or seaway. At various times it could refer to China's own southeastern coastal provinces, the Philippine and Indonesian archipelagos, and the Malay peninsula – but not land-accessible Burma and Laos. In Japanese, its cognate, *nampo*, acquired in the Meiji period a clearer and more political meaning, covering Southeast Asia as we know it today, but also a large part of the Western Pacific over which Japan was to rule as a mandate after the First World War.

The first Western scholar to use the term 'Southeast Asia' in a fully modern sense was the great Burma expert John Furnivall, who published his

Welfare and Progress in Southeast Asia in 1941, just before the outbreak of the Pacific War. But the decisive change came during the war, with the creation of Louis Mountbatten's Southeast Asia Command, an Allied force designed to 'liberate' all of Southeast Asia except the American Philippines – which was left to Washington. The SEAC not only (briefly) restored British colonialism in Burma, Malaya and Singapore, but played a major role in aiding similar efforts by the Dutch in today's Indonesia, and the French in Indochina. Still, the Command was abolished soon after the war came to an end.

'Southeast Asia' initially came into permanent general use via the United States, which, like Japan before it, had ambitions to dominate the entire region between India and China. The European empires had been content to divide the region among themselves, and focused their concerns on their own colonies. This big political change inevitably had a fundamental impact on scholarship.

Before the war, almost all the best studies concerning different parts of Southeast Asia were the work of scholarly colonial bureaucrats, not professors in metropolitan universities. These bureaucrats lived in particular colonies for many years, often knew some of the local contemporary or classical languages, and sometimes married or had affairs with native women. (A small minority were homosexuals, but had to hide this as much as possible.) They usually regarded their scholarly work as a kind of hobby, and were mainly interested in archaeology, music, ancient literatures and history. On the whole, these were fields in which they could say what they wanted. Undertaking political or economic studies was less popular because the authors usually had to toe the line of the colonial regime.

Most importantly, they normally studied only one colony – the one to which they were assigned – and had little interest in, or knowledge of, the others. The one major scholar who wrote a systematic comparative work, John Furnivall (*Colonial Policy and Practice*, dealing with British Burma and Dutch Indonesia), did so only after leaving the bureaucracy. Thus by the 1950s and early 1960s, fine American work on Southeast Asia was still so scarce that my generation had to depend a lot on the scholar-bureaucrats, and learn to read French or Dutch to do so. We all read Furnivall and Luce on Burma, Mus and Coedès on Indochina, Winstedt and Wilkinson on Malaya, and Schrieke, Pigeaud and van Leur on Indonesia.

This pattern was almost completely reversed in postwar America. From then on, virtually all the scholarship on the region was conducted by

professors and graduate students, with little or no bureaucratic experience behind them. Their occupation and busy schedules meant that they could rarely spend any real length of time in the field. Many of the first generation never acquired a solid mastery of languages such as Burmese, Vietnamese, Khmer, Tagalog, or even Thai and Malay-Indonesian. A number did marry Southeast Asian women, but they usually took their wives back to the United States.

There was also a major shift in disciplinary foci, reflecting the priorities of the US state. Political science became very important, followed by economics, then anthropology (Washington was interested in tribal and minority rebellions) and modern history. Serious interest in literature and the arts was rare.

One other feature of the American scene is also worth a brief mention. Except in the case of the Philippines, the US possessed almost no colonial archives from which scholars could work, which naturally encouraged a focus on the contemporary. In the UK, the Netherlands and France, the vast imperial-colonial archives were a major resource, so that for a long time, even after decolonization, young Dutch scholars worked mostly on Indonesia, French on Indochina, and British on Malaya, Singapore and Burma, and on historical rather than contemporary questions. It took more than a generation for European scholars to become accustomed, intellectually and institutionally, to what the Americans were pioneering.

‘Southeast Asian studies’ in America began with initiatives by the Ford and Rockefeller foundations to create the necessary institutional space for specialist academic work. At the end of the 1940s and in the early 1950s, two universities, Yale (1947) and Cornell (1950), were given substantial funds as well as institutional backup to found multidisciplinary Southeast Asia programs, establishing new professorships, developing libraries, setting up professional language-training courses, and awarding grants and fellowships for fieldwork.

These two universities were selected primarily because of the leadership talent available in the difficult early years. The first director of Cornell’s program was the anthropologist Lauriston Sharp, who had studied the Australian aborigines in the 1930s, but during the war had been temporarily recruited to the State Department and assigned to work on Southeast Asia. He developed a special interest in ‘uncolonized Thailand’ and, after returning to Cornell, founded the subsidiary Cornell Modern Thai Project.

Sharp recruited two crucial figures. John Echols, a professor of language

and linguistics who was familiar with more than a dozen languages, had originally been interested in Scandinavia, and was posted to neutral Sweden during the war to gather intelligence. After the war he became very interested in Indonesia, and compiled the first English language dictionary of *bahasa Indonesia*. It was he who mainly developed the teaching of Southeast Asian languages at Cornell, and in time the university was capable of teaching all the major vernaculars of the region. Echols was an extraordinary man in quite another way. Almost single-handedly, he built in the Cornell Library the largest collection of texts on Southeast Asia in the world, devoting the later part of his life to this monumental task without any personal financial inducements. This collection was a major reason why faculty recruited into the program very rarely moved to other universities, and why first-class students flocked to the Cornell campus.

The second central figure, George Kahin, was another remarkable man. In the last years before the Pacific War he had been an undergraduate at Harvard and there became very interested in international affairs, including those of the Far East. If Sharp and Echols were not very political, Kahin was the opposite. It is a good indication of his progressive thinking and personal courage that he became politically active immediately following the attack on Pearl Harbor. The attack provoked a violent reaction against Japanese-Americans settled along the West Coast, most of whom were rounded up and put in horrible internment camps for the duration of the war. Unscrupulous and racist businessmen on the West Coast took the opportunity to refuse to pay their debts to the internees, making their fate even worse. Kahin joined a brave Quaker initiative to use legal and other means to force these people to pay their debts, in a political climate that made such action seem almost unpatriotic.

When the young Kahin joined the US Army he was trained to be parachuted behind Japanese lines in Indonesia and Malaya. Needless to say – if one knows the Pentagon – in the end he was sent to Italy instead. But his training led him to an abiding interest in Indonesia, and, on demobilization, he went back to school as a graduate student, setting off for political fieldwork in Indonesia in 1948, right in the middle of the long, armed struggle for independence. He became a close friend of many prominent Indonesian nationalists, found his way through Dutch lines to visit many parts of the archipelago, sent back pro-Indonesian articles to American newspapers, and later lobbied the US Congress to support the Indonesians against the Dutch.

Kahin arrived at Cornell in 1951, just before his classic *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* was published, the first great American scholarly

work on contemporary Southeast Asian politics. He was a crucial recruit to Cornell because he was a political scientist at a time when the American focus on Southeast Asia was primarily political, and so there were many youngsters interested in studying under him. The move unfortunately came at the height of the McCarthy era, and Kahin's right-wing enemies in the State Department took away his passport for a number of years on the false grounds that he was friendly to Indonesian communism.

With the support of Sharp, Kahin helped bring two other important, and utterly different, people into the Southeast Asia program. One was the economist and economic historian Frank Golay, who had been recruited into naval intelligence during the war, and had developed an interest in the Philippines. He was an orthodox economist, and quite conservative in many ways, but his discipline was important, his concern for the Philippines solid, and he was a good teacher. Second was Claire Holt, a truly romantic and extraordinary woman. Born to a rich Jewish family in Riga, she grew up in the last years of Russian Tsardom, so that her mother language was Russian. After the Bolshevik Revolution, the family moved to Sweden, and she ended up as a reporter and newspaper critic on dance, especially ballet, first in Paris and later in New York.

After her husband was killed in a freak accident, she set off with a friend on a trip to the Orient. But while in Dutch colonial Indonesia she fell in love with the place and the peoples, and promptly studied Javanese dancing to a high level of proficiency. She also became the lover of the brilliant German archaeologist Wilhelm Stutterheim, and through him became thoroughly knowledgeable about Indonesia's pre-colonial civilizations. Then tragedy reoccurred in her life. After the Nazi invasion of Holland in the spring of 1940, Stutterheim, along with all other Germans in the colony, was interned. When the Pacific War broke out, the Dutch colonial regime decided to move the internees to British India. But Stutterheim's ship was sunk by Japanese planes off the coast of Sumatra, and everyone on board died.

After returning to America, Claire was recruited to teach Malay and Indonesian languages to young diplomats and intelligence officials. She stayed till the McCarthy era, which so enraged and depressed her that she quit. Kahin, who already knew her, seized the chance to bring her to Cornell, where she remained till her death in 1970. She had no academic credentials, so could not become a professor, but she was a fine teacher of *bahasa Indonesia*, with an encyclopaedic knowledge of colonial society, Indonesia's cultures and its performing arts. She was the only member of the program who had actually lived for many years in any part of Southeast Asia. She was

also the only woman, and the only person who was really interested in the arts.

The Yale Southeast Asia Program was smaller but had some advantages over Cornell. Its founding father was Karl Pelzer, an emigré Austrian agricultural economist who had worked in colonial Indonesia, specializing in the study of the colony's vast plantations. But the key figure, till his too-early death, was Harry Benda, a Czech Jew who as a young man had pursued a career in business in prewar Java. During the Japanese Occupation he was put in an internment camp and barely survived. On his release in 1946, he made his way to the US, and ended up writing a brilliant doctoral dissertation at Cornell on the relationship between Japanese and Muslims in prewar and wartime Indonesia. He was one of Kahin's first students, though he was the slightly older man. It says something for the fluidity of academic life in those days that his dissertation in political science was no barrier to him becoming a professor of history at Yale.

Pelzer and Benda gave the Yale program a 'European' culture and outlook in contrast to a more 'American' Cornell. But the two programs were in driving distance of one another, the faculties were friendly to each other, and by the time I arrived at Cornell, the universities took turns hosting tough language classes during the summer.

The four teachers who influenced me most as a graduate student formed a wonderfully diverse constellation of characters, talents and interests. Claire Holt and Harry Benda were my fellow Europeans, and very interested in history and culture. Benda had a gifted mind, a thoroughly sceptical outlook on life, and a restless temperament. He worked at being 'unconventional' in his thinking. He was loyal to the US but never really felt himself part of it. Claire Holt was very special to me, and I spent many hours at her house, asking her about art, dance, archaeology and Javanese life. Sometimes we would read Russian poetry aloud together. She was not at all academic, and helped me not to become too embedded in academic culture.

Kahin and Echols were two perfect American gentlemen, kind, gentle, morally upright, and devoted to their students. Echols introduced me to modern Indonesian literature and gave me an abiding love of dictionaries. Still today, the favourite shelf in my personal library is filled only with dictionaries of many kinds. And every time I go to the fabulous library collection that bears his name, I think of his selfless dedication. Kahin formed me politically, with his progressive politics, his activist commitment to justice at home and in the rest of the world, and his tolerance of honest difference.

Sharp and Kahin were both intelligent academic politicians who recognized the power of disciplinary departments in American universities. They also understood, better than Pelzer and Benda at Yale, that the long-term growth and stability of Southeast Asia programs depended on new faculty being integrated, intellectually and financially, into these departments. New, young professors in America are on trial for their first six years, during which they can be dismissed very easily. In the sixth year, at the latest, they come up for an intensive review of their teaching and publication records. If they pass, they move up in rank from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor, and get lifetime tenure, meaning that they cannot be dismissed except for criminal activity or serious sexual scandals.

The Sharp-Kahin strategy therefore involved two stages. The first was to find youngsters capable of securing tenure by showing strong disciplinary credentials. (Usually departments were not much interested in Southeast Asia as such.) Having located such youngsters they would then use Rockefeller and Ford money to pay the salaries of these young scholars for a few years, on the understanding that if they did well from a disciplinary viewpoint, they would be moved over to their department's regular salary budget. The second step was to make sure the youngsters did a lot of undergraduate teaching on subjects having nothing to do with Southeast Asia. In my case, I taught subjects like 'Traditions of Socialism', 'Politics in the British Commonwealth', 'The Political Role of the Military', or 'Politics and Literature'. This involved a lot of work, but it protected the program from lapsing into isolation and Orientalism. The crucial thing was that every professor in the program should have a firm base in a discipline, and be able to teach many more subjects than just Southeast Asia.

It was still quite hard to realize these goals in the 1950s, but the situation changed greatly in the 1960s. First, the Russians' achievement in putting an astronaut into space ahead of the Americans alarmed many politically powerful people and institutions in the US. Part of the humiliation was attributed to the backwardness of American universities. But there were wider anxieties as well: the war in Korea, the rising power of Mao's China, the growing crisis in Indochina, wars in South Asia, instability in the Middle East, and so on. Starting around 1960, a huge amount of money was poured into the universities in the form of scholarships, language courses and the like. Area programs like Cornell's Southeast Asia Program for the first time began to receive a lot of money from the state.

This change created a clear semi-generational break among the students. The whole time I was a graduate student, my classmates and I never received

any scholarships; we paid for our education by working as teaching assistants to professors with large classes. We took this for granted, assumed it was good practice for the future, and even quite enjoyed it. By 1961, the number of graduate students had visibly increased, most had scholarships, and some were rather annoyed if they were forced (for their own good) to teach.

By the second half of the 1960s the looming catastrophe in Vietnam, and, for undergraduates still liable for military conscription, the prospect of fighting in Indochina, created the powerful, campus-based anti-war movement and generated an enormous interest in Southeast Asia. All of a sudden, right across the country and including almost all the more important universities, there was a great demand for Southeast Asia–related courses, to which university administrators had to respond. Faculty positions opened up all over the place and almost any student who got a PhD connected to Southeast Asian studies had little trouble finding a good job.

I was very fortunate to finish my dissertation on the eve of the Tet Offensive. Against normal recruitment rules – which require competitive candidacies, extensive interviews, and hostility to 'nepotism' – I walked into an assistant professorship without any interviews and without any outside candidate being considered.

Although the Cornell Southeast Asia Program was usually under strong pressure to reach out to undergraduates, in its heart it thought of itself as mainly oriented to graduate students. The formal requirements were not very demanding. Every semester all students had to study one of Southeast Asia's vernaculars, and were encouraged to learn French or Dutch if they were interested in Indochina or Indonesia. All students had to take at least two so-called Country Seminars, which over a three-year period rotated between the major countries of the region. These seminars, often taught by two faculty members, and often using guest teachers for particular topics, were supposed to involve intensive multidisciplinary work on, say, Burma's history, politics, sociology, economy, anthropology, religion, international relations, and maybe arts and literature. Burma-bound students were to have a thorough immersion in 'Burma studies', and like students specializing on other countries would learn how to think comparatively.

Aside from language courses and the Country Seminars, students would take a range of other courses which were almost always defined as comparative and pan-Southeast Asian: for example, 'Comparative Decolonization', 'Hill Tribes in Southeast Asia', 'Rural Development in Southeast Asia', 'Communism in Southeast Asia', and so on. This

comparative framework, necessitated by the Southeast Asian studies format, was in complete contrast to the European tradition of one-country specialization. I was lucky to have experienced it, and it had a great influence on my later thinking about the region and about the world.

A final, less structured part of the teaching program was inviting foreign scholars. Sometimes they would be invited to teach for a whole semester or even a year. Usually they would come as visiting fellows, or as one-day speakers at the weekly lunchtime 'brown-bag' meetings of the faculty and students. I remember being fascinated by the visit of Nishijima Shigetada, who was a legend for his activities in the last days of the Japanese Occupation of Indonesia. He is said to have been bitten by leftist ideology in his youth and was sympathetic to the Indonesian nationalists, but Kahin knew him now as the agent of a giant oil corporation, and felt he was an opportunist. Nishijima spoke in rapid-fire Indonesian in the 'brown-bag' meeting and lived up to his reputation as a man of mystery. Visits by former Burmese prime minister U Nu and Cambodian monarch Norodom Sihanouk were hardly less intriguing.

Having experienced the often authoritarian university traditions of their own countries, many foreign students in the program were surprised and pleased by the close and democratic relations between professors and students. In seminars students were encouraged to express their own opinions, often received detailed comments on their papers, and never had the impression that they were being exploited as informal research assistants for the professors' projects in the countries of their origin.

In my time, and indeed until long afterwards, the students were a diverse cluster. Initially, in the 1950s, all the countries of Southeast Asia were accessible to various degrees. After that period Burma closed its doors, as for a long time did the countries of Indochina. There were dictatorships in Indonesia, the Philippines and Singapore, and an authoritarian regime in Malaysia, which in 1963 secretly provoked the Malays into anti-Chinese violence in Kuala Lumpur. Kahin especially wanted to have close contact with bright young Southeast Asians, and found the means to bring a good number to Cornell.

Hence in the late 1950s I had Burmese, Filipino, Vietnamese and, especially, Indonesian classmates. For us this was a marvellous chance to learn first-hand about our countries of interest, to build friendships, and to have our prejudices challenged. Furthermore, Cornell's location in a very small town meant that students were together all the time, not just in the

classroom and library, but in shops, bars, restaurants and the local parks. Many of us shared apartments with Southeast Asians, sometimes even learning to cook in the process.

The novelty and high reputation of the program, and its considerable financial resources, meant that we also had many students from non–Southeast Asian countries: the UK, Australia, France, Japan, the Netherlands, Canada, Switzerland, and so forth. It all felt very international.

Finally, there was a peculiar contingent for which Kahin was primarily responsible. A strong and thoughtful critic of American foreign policy, he was inclined to explain its stupidities and violence as resulting from simple ignorance. He therefore believed that one of the program's missions was to enlighten the state. In those days he had a wide set of contacts in Washington, and encouraged both the State Department and the Pentagon to send promising young officials and officers destined to serve in Southeast Asia to study at Cornell for a year or two, alongside the regular graduate students. I am sure this contingent was genuinely influenced by the Cornell experience, but not nearly as much as Kahin hoped. As the years passed, and especially during the Vietnam War, their numbers shrank drastically and they eventually almost disappeared.

I think it was partly this amazing jumble of students, in constant everyday contact with one another, that built strong bonds of solidarity that lived on long after the youngsters graduated. This is why the legend of the 'Cornell Mafia' still survives today, and why Cornell was so unusual compared to most other, later centres for Southeast Asian studies, where American students were usually in the great majority.

There are nevertheless two strongly related reasons for offering a critique of Southeast Asian studies in the United States, based on my experience at Cornell. The first is that the Cornell program was generally regarded as the best of its kind, with the most varied and outstanding faculty, by far the largest library, and the most extensive language offerings. The second is that when in the 1960s other universities established comparable programs, many of the younger professors they hired had been trained at Cornell. It is reasonable to suppose, then, that a critique of Cornell would apply a fortiori to its various later competitors.

My criticism concerns the marked imbalance between the disciplines. Even today, it is hard to find any Southeast Asian sociologists, beyond a handful of excellent demographers. The study of contemporary Southeast Asia rested on two pillars, political science and anthropology, which shared

few intellectual interests or common methodologies, and which for a long time focused on national political elites or on rural villages and small ethnic minorities, leaving a huge gap in between. The major exception was the outstanding sinologist-cum-sociologist G. William Skinner, who, unable to get access to Mao's China, and uninterested in Taiwan, studied the Chinese communities in Siam and Indonesia in books that are still valuable today, half a century on. I do not think that this lack was the fault of Cornell's program, but rather of American sociology as a whole, which was primarily interested in the United States and relied on statistical methods difficult to use in countries where for decades reliable statistics were hard to come by.

The second major imbalance was between the social sciences and the humanities. A significant background factor in this imbalance was the concept of 'Southeast Asia' itself, which implied an exclusive communality. But the reality was hard to find. Eight different good-sized countries, Muslim, Buddhist, Catholic, Confucian-Taoist; colonized by Spaniards in the sixteenth century, by the Dutch in the seventeenth, by the French and the British in the nineteenth, and by the Americans in the twentieth, with Siam semi-colonized by the British; significant literatures in mutually incomprehensible languages such as Burmese, Mon, Thai, Khmer, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Malay, Javanese, Old Javanese, Sanskrit, Arabic and several others. This was in huge contrast with East Asia, which covered only three countries sharing a good deal in terms of moral order, religious outlook and literary genres; and with South Asia, comprising four countries with long-standing, even if sometimes hostile, religious, economic and classical literary connections, but all colonized by the same imperial power.

Had the institutional concept of 'Southeast Asia' not existed, Vietnam could have been included in East Asia studies thanks to its millennial ties to China, while much of the rest of western Southeast Asia could have been linked to South Asia, since its indigenous cultural base was deeply influenced (via Sanskrit and Pali) by southern India and Sri Lanka. And the Philippines could have been attached to Latin American studies.

Many students of Southeast Asia at Cornell were encouraged to 'minor' in Chinese studies because of the great importance of Chinese immigrant communities in almost every Southeast Asian country, but very few actually learned Chinese very well. Almost no one was encouraged to learn about either Sri Lanka or India, let alone the Middle East. I cannot think of a single program student who seriously studied Arabic or Hindi.

The enormous heterogeneity of 'Southeast Asia' made it extremely hard to

train even the most brilliant students who might be interested in classical literatures, classical musics, and classical plastic arts. That the great modern composer Debussy admired a Javanese *gamelan* orchestra, and borrowed from it in the final period of his career, gave this music wide prestige. In the 1970s a core of gifted American students, taught by Javanese masters, worked to get jobs in music departments, including that of Cornell. But the music of Siam, Vietnam and Burma was not so valued. The classical literatures required a thorough knowledge of either Sanskrit or classical Chinese, and people with these skills usually preferred to study India or China. Until quite recently, Southeast Asian art history, in the few places where it was taught, concentrated on Indonesia, Siam and Vietnam.

In the last fifteen years, however, there has been a significant change. There is now very little interest in antiquity, but rather in modernity of a special kind, mediated mainly by American popular culture, especially pop music, film and writing or translations in English. This has made it possible to teach quite novel courses (in English), on, say, ‘Southeast Asian Film’, ‘Southeast Asian Popular Culture’, ‘Southeast Asian Fiction’, ‘Contemporary Southeast Asian Art’, and so on. The cost is that substantial knowledge of antiquity is being lost.

This cost is also visible in history. At Cornell, Southeast Asian history was for a long time divided between ancient (pre-colonial) history, magisterially presided over by the British Orientalist Oliver Wolters, and modern history. Today the division is no longer temporal but geographical: mainland versus island modern history. The same pattern is visible in most of the rest of the US’s Southeast Asia programs. One cannot help thinking that this reflects the general American focus on what is contemporary, recent, popular and accessible by US standards. The phenomenon of motorcycle gangs in Kuala Lumpur is, as it were, comprehensible by those standards, but not the fire-walk ritual in Bali, thus the latter is dropped from scholarly pursuits.

A second critical observation arises from my present position as an old man, long retired. It concerns the academic tendency to focus on one country, which looks a bit like the pattern of the late colonial period.

The great charm of Southeast Asian studies in the 1950s and 1960s was that it seemed like something completely new, so that students felt like explorers investigating unknown societies and terrains. The region was barely mentioned in American high-school textbooks, except for a little bit on the Philippines and on the fighting there during the Second World War. This was

also the period of decolonization and the rise of new nations with world-famous nationalist leaders like Soekarno, U Nu and Ho Chi Minh. Probably inevitably, we were almost all drawn into a close attachment to the nationalism of the country we chose to study. This attachment was also influenced by language. Indonesia, Siam and Vietnam were the only major countries which could not be studied seriously through English and/or French. My Indonesianist friends and I were enormously proud of being pioneers in achieving fluency in *bahasa Indonesia*, and the same was true for our Thai-speaking classmates. This linguistic attachment bound us all the more closely to 'our countries'. Classmates studying Burma and Malaysia could get away with English, those working on the Philippines with American, and those engaged with Vietnam with French and English. It was not till much later that one found youngsters fluent in Tagalog, Vietnamese, Khmer or Burmese.

The emotional attachment to 'our countries' also had political effects of which we were not very conscious. My Indonesianist comrades were generally on the left to different degrees because that was the climate in Soekarno's post-revolutionary Indonesia. (Or were we attracted to Indonesia by its leftist politics?) Students going to Thailand were much more conservative, since there the 'only game in town' was conservative military-monarchical domination. This divergence was to have serious consequences at the height of the Vietnam War, when almost everyone studying Indonesia or Vietnam was strongly against the war, while those working on Thailand initially supported it. A gradual polarization took place among the faculty, which had serious effects on the morale of the program for some years after. It should be added that this emotional attachment to the individual countries we studied made it psychologically very difficult to study any other, aside from the linguistic problems involved.

Here I have to say I owe a strange debt to the tyrant General Suharto, who expelled me from Indonesia in 1972 and kept me out till after his downfall in 1998. For this reason I was forced to diversify, studying Thailand mainly between 1974 and 1986, and the Philippines from 1988 to the present. I am grateful to him for forcing me beyond the 'one country' perspective. Had I not been expelled, it is unlikely that I would ever have written *Imagined Communities*. But I was a very unusual case, almost unique until very recently, with the exception of Yale's James Scott, who was forced to work on Malaysia because the military in Burma banned all foreign scholars who were interested that country.

By the 1960s, the programs at Cornell and Yale were no longer unique, even though their influence, mediated through alumni who secured jobs in

other universities in the US and abroad, remained quite strong. Over time, comparable programs were created at big universities in Berkeley, Los Angeles, Seattle, Honolulu, Madison and Ann Arbor. Japanese students at Cornell, such as the late Nagazumi Akira, Goto Kenichi, Kato Tsuyoshi, Shiraishi Aiko and Shiraishi Takashi, played key roles in reviving and transforming Japanese scholarship on Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia. Former Australian Cornell students, led by the late Herbert Feith, built programs based on the Cornell model, which were reinforced by an influx of Americans in the late 1970s and 1980s (to be discussed later). In London, the famed School of Oriental and African Studies started to shake off its colonial past and broadened its teaching beyond the former British colonies. In this process Ruth McVey, my brilliant senior classmate, was decisive. France, the Netherlands, Germany and Scandinavia moved in the same direction. This meant that 'Southeast Asian studies' gradually became internationalized, though with different traditions and specializations. One should add that, in the process, the proportion of women, as students and later as professors, rose impressively almost everywhere.

Southeast Asian studies in the US had a much more dramatic history than in any other country because of America's global power, ambitions and phobias. One reason why Southeast Asian studies got a head start in the US in the late 1940s and early 1950s was that the region abutted China, where, by the end of 1949, Mao Tse-tung had taken power and effectively driven the West out. But in that same period, Southeast Asia was unique in witnessing the rapid rise in almost every country of powerful, usually armed, local communist parties. There can be no doubt that a crucial reason for this peculiarity was the brief but pivotal 'Japanese period'. The Japanese not only brought down all the colonial regimes in the region, humiliating and imprisoning the 'white' colonials, and encouraging an identification with Asia. They also, for their own reasons, mobilized the local populations for the war effort, trained and armed indigenous auxiliary militaries, and largely destroyed the prewar economies. Japanese military brutality and economic exactions gradually turned the mobilized populations against Japan and towards the left. When Japan was abruptly defeated, after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a power vacuum emerged in Southeast Asia that was favourable to the rise of the left, which had not collaborated with the Imperial Japanese forces. No other region in the world had this profile.

The US actively worked to counteract this trend, with the formation of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), and open and covert

interventions in Burma, Indochina, Indonesia, the Philippines and even Siam. American state anxiety about Southeast Asia increased rapidly in the 1960s with the disastrous Vietnam War, which later engulfed both Laos and Cambodia. The irony was that this war, which Southeast Asia scholars mostly opposed, was also the source of the rise of well-funded Southeast Asia programs across the US. But after the American defeat in 1975–76, there was a popular revulsion, and for a long time few people wanted to think about Southeast Asia. State and private financial support began to dry up. Excellent students of the region who were unlucky enough to finish their PhDs in the late 1970s and early 1980s found it very difficult to get academic jobs in America. Many moved to Australia, the UK, New Zealand or Canada. Others were forced to seek careers in the civil service, the diplomatic corps, UN agencies, big corporations and even the CIA. Besides, not only Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia but also Burma were now completely closed to American researchers. Enrolments fell, and new students, often as interested in MAs as in PhDs, were less focused on scholarly careers and more on practical training for professional work in medicine, development assistance and so forth. It was really not till the late 1980s, when Southeast Asia emerged – briefly, and only in some places – as a newly industrializing tiger economy (following Japan, Korea and Taiwan), that Southeast Asian studies really made a comeback. In the field of political science, ‘political economy’ became all the rage.

By comparison with other area studies, Southeast Asian studies, by its very novelty, came to be threatened by a serious structural problem which has only recently been resolved. When the small founding generation of scholars began to retire in the 1980s, it often happened that universities decided not to replace them, but rather to invest in other fields and specializations. More importantly, the bulk of academic specialists on Southeast Asia had been recruited, very young, during the Vietnam War and the Great Boom. Most of this generation did not start to retire till near the end of the twentieth century. The result was a kind of ‘lost generation’ – highly qualified youngsters who could not get the jobs they deserved because of the peculiar top-heavy age structure of the faculty pyramid (in long-established fields, with normal pyramids, they would have had little trouble). Hence it was common to find programs in the early 1990s with distinguished elderly professors and excellent young ones, and very few people in between.

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This chapter has mainly been about global political and economic changes, large institutions and structures, and educational policies in connection with

the development of the Southeast Asia program at Cornell University. To provide a link between the first chapter and the one that follows, on my experiences doing fieldwork in different parts of Southeast Asia, let me conclude here with some personal recollections.

At the beginning I felt very lost. In the Cornell department of government I was expected not only to help teach undergraduates comparative politics, American politics (America evidently could not be compared!) and political theory – about which I knew next to nothing – but to take graduate courses in these fields as well. I was a real ‘baby’, only twenty-one years old, extremely ignorant, and with no competence at all in any Southeast Asian language. But student solidarity was amazingly strong. The older students were really like elder brothers and sisters, patiently teaching me, guiding me, teasing me, and boosting my frail morale. We were together all the time in the classroom, the library, and of course the bars. Looking back, I realize that I learned as much from my fellow students as from my teachers, whom I usually met only in the classroom or the office. The teachers were very kind but extremely busy, and I didn’t feel like imposing myself.

The Southeast Asia program was something else, because Kahin had the brilliant idea of asking the president of the university, whom he knew well, to allow him to use an abandoned fraternity house as the office space for the Cornell Modern Indonesia Project he had just started. Kahin got some of his students to put in steel pillars to hold up the sagging floors. He kept a downstairs office for himself, but the rest of the three-story building was turned over to the senior students of the program, whether they were Indonesianists or not. The lunchtime ‘brown-bag’ meetings were held here too. This crumbling building, which became legendary as ‘102 West Avenue’, somehow survived till the 1980s, when it was torn down to make way for a parking lot. So we had our own building, which was socially and psychologically very important.

When I arrived, Kahin had organized a team of his senior students to produce a book called *Governments and Politics of Southeast Asia* under his editorship, the first such book published anywhere. So ‘baby Anderson’, who spent a lot of time chatting in the building, had everyday contact with senior students, some just back from Vietnam, Burma, the Philippines or Indonesia, who were full of fabulous stories and eager to share them. The core group in the building, however, were the Indonesianists, Herbert Feith, John Smail, Ruth McVey and Dan Lev, along with Selo Soemardjan, the already middle-aged secretary to the sultan of Jogjakarta, and a wise, kind and extremely friendly man. Ruth McVey stood out, not only by her intelligence and wide

knowledge – she had early on been a Sovietologist and was fluent in Russian – but also because she was a woman. In those days Southeast Asia program members were 90 per cent male. Everyone was very nice to the ‘baby’.

One other aspect of my intellectual life in those days was something that today is really hard to imagine. There was little to read on Southeast Asia that was in English and of high quality. (I did not learn to read Dutch till after I went to Indonesia.) There was of course Kahin’s previously mentioned masterpiece. There was Benda’s book, already mentioned too. In 1960, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s best book, *The Religion of Java*, became available, as well as shorter pieces by the same author. Neither Kahin nor Benda were especially interested in Java, and neither knew any Javanese. But Geertz opened my eyes to ‘culture’, Javanese culture, in a powerful way, which connected up with my European ‘cultural education’. There were also Bill Skinner’s studies of Chinese communities in Siam and Indonesia. Almost nothing first-class was available on post-independence Burma, Malaysia, Vietnam or Cambodia, except a few articles here and there. Even if we wanted to research, for example, Indonesian politics, there were few helpful studies available in English. The result was that we found ourselves in the position of anthropologists, studying things that were still largely unknown while relying on our curiosity, observation and daily chatting. That is why, all my life, I have kept up reading in anthropology and have been greatly influenced by it.

Meantime, I was taking and enjoying classes in *bahasa Indonesia* under the supervision of John Echols and two Indonesian students. How happy I was to be studying an Asian language, with rules and sounds that did not exist in ‘my Europe’! I did not know then what I discovered later – that three years of classroom language study is not worth six months of immersion in foreign everyday life.

Early in 1961, Kahin insisted that I draw up a thesis proposal. As I hesitated, he said, ‘Why don’t you look at the Japanese Occupation and its impact on Indonesian society and politics?’ I knew what he was after. The only weak chapter in his *Nationalism and Revolution* was the one on the Occupation, because there was almost nothing published on the period when he wrote his dissertation, and he had had to rely mainly on interviews. So I thought, why not? The Occupation only lasted three and a half years, so it must be manageable! Besides, from my teen years I had been (superficially) interested in Japan. My mother and I used to quarrel gently about this – she was strongly pro-China and down on Japan, and as a teenage rebel in the claws of Genji, I had to insist that Japan was more interesting than China.

Chapter 3

Fieldwork

For most scholars, their first experience of doing fieldwork is decisive. One never again has quite the same sense of shock, strangeness and excitement. Later in my career I spent years studying, and living in, Thailand and the Philippines, both of which fascinated me and both of which I loved. But Indonesia was my first love. I can speak and read Thai and Tagalog, but Indonesian is really my second language, and the only one in which I can also write fluently, and with the greatest pleasure. Sometimes, I still dream in it.

I arrived in Jakarta late in December 1961 and stayed till April 1964. When my plane landed, in the dark, the rainy season had begun, and I remember vividly the ride into town with all the taxi's windows open. The first thing that hit me was the smell – of fresh trees and bushes, urine, incense, smoky oil lamps, garbage and, above all, food in the little stalls that lined most of the main streets.

My senior classmate Dan Lev, before returning to Ithaca, had arranged for me to lodge in the house of the welcoming and kindly widow of a Supreme Court judge. She lived in a large and comfortable house at the end of what was then a 'high-class' street named after the national hero Prince Diponegoro. Two of her grown children were still living with her, and her household included a cook, a maid and a young boy gardener and errand-runner.

The story of Prince Diponegoro goes back to the early nineteenth century. When Napoleon incorporated the Netherlands into France, London decided to seize the Dutch East Indies. Stamford Raffles, agent of the East India Company, ruled Java from 1811–16. When the Napoleonic wars finally ended, Britain returned Java at the price of Dutch holdings in the Cape and Ceylon. Ruined financially by the Continental System, the Dutch government was in a weak position to enforce its power in the Indies. Prince Diponegoro of the little Jogjakarta kingdom took advantage of this situation to rebel and raised a large army to fight the Dutch from 1825–30. But when he was defeated and exiled, he wrote that his aim was to 'conquer Java', a fact little known by present-day Javanese.

The day after my arrival in Jakarta, the late Ong Hok Ham, well known to all Indonesianists, dropped by to visit. He was then still a student in the University of Indonesia's history department, but had worked for Skinner as a research assistant. He invited me to hang out with three of his Javanese student friends in a dormitory for boys at the University of Indonesia's old campus in Rawamangun. Any illusion that I was good in Indonesian disappeared immediately. But since the friends knew little English we did our collective best to understand each other. Ong had explained to them that although I was studying in an American university I was Irish. This helped a lot since they knew that Ireland had had to fight for its independence, while, like most Indonesian nationalists at that time, they regarded Americans with suspicion.

They gave me a delicious, simple dinner, but intentionally did not warn me about *tjabe rawit*, the tiny green or red peppers that set fire to one's tongue. They were impressed that I struggled to be brave and not spit the peppers out. Then the torrential rain started again. Ong said it was impossible to get to my lodgings, and there was no telephone handy, so we had better sleep with his friends. They handed me a small towel and a spare *sarong*, and showed me how to use the Indonesian-style bathroom. I took to the *sarong* like a duck to water, and in spite of swarms of mosquitoes, I slept like a log.

The next morning I returned 'home' and apologized effusively to my landlady for staying out on my second night in Indonesia and not informing her. But she brushed the apologies aside. The monsoon was like that, she said. You could get stuck anywhere, and boys will be boys. This was my first experience of 'culture shock'. I felt that I had been rude by my European standards, but she did not at all feel the same way. Later I came to realize the huge difference between how unmarried men and women were treated in Indonesian society: the young men were free to do what they wanted, but the young women were watched, guarded and kept at home as much as possible.

The next shock was quite different, and wholly pleasant. Opposite the house there was a triangular, unused open space covered with weeds, grasses and mud. In the afternoons, a gang of little kampong boys, aged between eight and twelve, would gather there to play soccer. They would begin by tossing a coin, and the losing side would solemnly take off their shorts (they wore no underwear). That was how they told one side from another. Of course they had no goalposts. But they brought along four little brothers and sisters, still at the crawling rather than the running stage, and used them carefully as moving goalposts.

This was my introduction to two aspects of the lives of ordinary Indonesian children. The first was easy public nudity for boys until they reached puberty – something unimaginable in Ireland or the US. The second was the intimacy between siblings. From a very early age Indonesian children have to help the younger ones, and to respect and obey their elder brothers and sisters. My landlady explained the custom by saying: if you are older you have to give in to the young ones, give them what they want, love them and protect them; if you are younger you have to do what your older sisters or brothers tell you. This seemed contradictory, but it really worked. While in Indonesia I rarely saw the children in a family fighting with each other, exactly the opposite of my own experience. Rory and I fought constantly – to our mother's annoyance – till we went off to Eton.

A third shock was my first contact with madness. I was walking past a crowded market one day when I noticed a strange figure surrounded by a swarm of giggling and screaming little boys. It was a completely naked young woman, unwashed, with very long tangled hair reaching to her behind. Mostly, the market people paid her no attention, or, if in a good mood, gave her little gifts of food. When I asked a vendor who the woman was, she said, 'Poor thing! Some man broke her heart and she went mad. Her parents try to clothe her, but she always tears off any clothing.' Later, I would come across mad men, also naked and dirty, and people would say the same kind of thing. I began to reflect that maybe these poor creatures, who did no one any harm, were better off than mad people in Europe and America, who, in those days, were shut away for years in isolated asylums. Here they could go where they pleased, and society casually fed them.

My immediate difficulty was language. I quickly learned that the kind of formal Indonesian I had studied at Cornell was textbook stuff that people only used in formal situations. My new friends laughed at the way I tried to talk, and children didn't understand a word I said. After about three months, I was really depressed, feeling that I was making no progress at all. Later I realized that it was like learning to ride a bicycle: when you start you fall off all the time, but then suddenly, one magic day, you get the feel of it, and even start cycling without using your hands. Suddenly, in the fourth month, I found I could speak fluently without any hesitation. I was so happy I could have cried. I could now conduct interviews in the language. I do not blush easily, but when an old lady I was interviewing said to me, 'I see that you know how to use *padahal* [close to 'even though'] perfectly, so you are thinking in Indonesian', I went red in the face with pleasure. But the difficulties did not stop there.

Like many educated members of her generation, my landlady spoke to her children and her friends in Dutch. She also used it when she did not want me to understand what she was saying, just like my parents speaking in French when they did not want us to know what they were talking about. At Cornell, Dutch was not then regularly taught. So I taught myself the language, not to speak it, but to read and understand. It was not too hard, since I knew some German, which is like a more difficult version of Dutch. But I did it in a way that I repeated many years later when I decided to learn Spanish. I took a large, difficult and fascinating book, and stumbled through it line by line, almost word for word, with a big dictionary at my side.

The book I chose, and which influenced me more deeply than any other book about Indonesia, was Theodoor Pigeaud's encyclopaedic *Javaanse Volksvertoningen*, or 'Javanese Popular Performances', published in the 1930s. Pigeaud was not a nice man; jealous of the prestige of Stutterheim, Claire Holt's brilliant lover, he had tried to have her expelled from the colony on the grounds of 'immoral behaviour'. But he was a great scholar. The book's title did not do it justice, since its author included a huge amount of comparative material on the Javanese people's closest neighbours, the Sundanese, Madurese and Balinese. It included an astonishing compilation of information on folktales, legends, masks and mask-dances, spirit possession, the puppet-theatre, and travelling troupes of actors and clowns. It was a revelation to me of the depth and complexity of traditional Javanese culture outside the royal courts. Even better, Pigeaud mapped all the local variations, peculiarities and specializations, district after district. Nothing I had learned at Cornell prepared me for this.

Through the book I fell in love a second time, this time with 'Java' rather than Indonesia. I have put the word in quotation marks, because 'my' Java was not even the whole thing. Officially, 90 per cent of Javanese were Muslims, meaning that they were circumcised (if boys), married and buried according to Muslim rites. But especially in the interior and the south of the island, the residues of a grand Hindu-Buddhist past, as well as enduring shamanism, animism and mysticism, were very strong. People would talk to me about 'white' (devout Muslims) and 'red' (nominally Muslim, but basically traditional) Javanese who were often very hostile to each other. Although I got to know a lot of serious Muslims, and loved going to traditional mosques, 'my' Java was definitely 'red'. Later on, many scholars would rightly criticize me for this bias.

Though it had nothing to do with my thesis topic, I took lessons in elegant Javanese from the first great Western-trained Javanese scholar, Professor

Poerbatjaraka. When I first went to see him in his simple little house, I noticed that one of the white plastered walls of his study was covered with bright red splashes, as if some terrible murder had just been committed there. Within a few minutes, I was enlightened. As he chatted kindly, I saw that his few remaining teeth were bright red, and moments later he spat a huge stream of red spittle against the wall. He was chewing the age-old Southeast Asian stimulant, betel-juice mixed with lime-dust.

Soon I was taking private lessons in Javanese music from Poerbatjaraka's younger brother, Pak Kodrat, one of the two most distinguished musicians of his generation. Unwittingly, Pak Kodrat introduced me, in real life rather than in books, to the complexity of Javanese culture and language. I used to speak to him in Indonesian, using the term of respect for an older man (Pak). But for a while he clearly didn't know how to address me, because he was thinking in Javanese. Young Javanese did not address adults by their personal names. He was old enough to be my grandfather, so he could and should have called me *anak* or *nak*, meaning 'child', and I would have been very happy if he had done so, because I really revered him. But in his eyes I was 'white' and highly educated, and I was paying him for the lessons. The way out came when he saw how much I loved him, and he felt fond of me too, so he started calling me *putro*, which literally means 'son', but which in High (feudal) Javanese is the word used by lower-status old people to address the sons of aristocrats. I hated the word, but my old teacher would not budge.

Beyond that, I spent a lot of time going to performances of Javanese music, shadow-plays, mask-dancing, spirit possession, and so on, crisscrossing Java over and over again. That I was able to do all this, as well as get on with my research, was the product of a (for me) piece of good fortune. To go to Indonesia, I was given a quite small grant, which was supposed to support me for a year and a half, a ridiculously short time to do any kind of important fieldwork, let alone master the local language. But in 1962, Indonesia was hit by a tide of inflation that seemed to accelerate month by month. Since the dollar was still a stable and respected currency, by using the black-market exchange rate, as all foreigners then did, I managed to stretch the money out for two and a half years. This extension made it possible to allay Kahin's supportive concern about the progress of my research. I usually tried to inform him about current politics, while following my Javanese mania.

A large part of my work on Indonesia turned on the relationship between politics and culture. For my generation this was something odd. My classmates and close friends were mainly interested in things like democracy,

law, communism, constitutions, economic change, and so on. Most anthropologists, following Clifford Geertz, were interested in local cultures, but in an anthropological sense (social norms, traditions, etc.), and not much concerned with politics. My time in Indonesia attached me to the people in a direct and emotional way, but also laid the foundations for the 'culturalist' streak that would appear later in *Imagined Communities*.

As for my dissertation itself, I divided my time and energy between the National Museum, which had a vast, worm-eaten collection of newspapers and magazines from the 1940s, and miscellaneous interviews. In the National Museum's collection I discovered magazines from the late colonial period, the Japanese Occupation and the Revolution. One was called *Djawa Baroe* (New Java), the main organ of Sendenbu, the Japanese military government's propaganda service. Naturally, given its nature, it was full of ridiculous lies. But how beautiful it was, perhaps the most beautiful magazine ever produced in Indonesia.

Nothing like this had ever happened under Dutch rule. The odd thing about the magazine was the representation of the Japanese themselves. On one side there were romantic pictures of handsome young Japanese pilots with their airplanes, as well as images of Mount Fuji and cherry blossoms. On the other hand, there were eerie photos of unsmiling Japanese generals, including Tojo, wearing spectacles and funny moustaches, and dressed in ugly floppy hats and baggy army uniforms.

Nonetheless, the photos were genuinely artistic, reflecting the beauty of Indonesia and Indonesians: lovely photos of children playing, women working in rice-fields, Muslims praying and young Javanese men in thin shorts, practising how to handle the military use of bamboo spears. They reminded me of Japanese prints and made me realize the genuine elements of attraction between Indonesians and Japanese, despite all the everyday cruelties. On their experiences during the Japanese Occupation, people I talked to often told me that Japanese people were better than the Dutch, in that both were arrogant, but the Japanese could also be very polite. This duality clearly puzzled them, but I sensed that they themselves must have felt some affinity to the Japanese, irrespective of the usual assertion that they only endured the Occupation in order to achieve their own future independence. The contents of the magazine, written in both Indonesian and Japanese, were also food for thought: a weird mix of Japanese imperialist cynicism and a sincere Pan-Asian solidarity.

The most enjoyable part of my fieldwork was doing interviews. In those

days Jakarta was still a fairly small ex-colonial capital city, with distinct neighbourhoods, often divided by ethnic wards. There were not that many cars or buses, no flyovers and no tollways. *Betjaks* – three-wheeled rear-driven pedicabs that carry the passenger in front – were still used by everyone, even people in high positions (at least for short distances), and they were allowed even on the busiest streets. It was not until the early Suharto period that the dreadful Governor of Jakarta, Ali Sadikin, began banning them from more and more streets to make way for officials and the wealthy, car-owning middle-class. I had acquired a little Vespa, and soon got to know almost all parts of the capital. I thought of it as 'my town'.

There were very few foreigners around. It was also a pretty 'democratic' capital. One of the basic messages of the prewar nationalist movement had been equality among citizens, symbolized by the adoption of a simple lingua franca. Based on Malay and used as a cross-ethnic language of trade, it would become the future national language. The huge advantage of this choice was that the language was both egalitarian by nature and belonged to no single important ethno-linguistic group.

The egalitarian impulse had been greatly strengthened in the process of the Revolution of 1945–49, which was a social leveller and represented an onslaught on feudal traditions. *Bung* (brother), a popular term of address during the Revolution, was still widely used as a term of address between men of the same age. There were few rich Indonesians, and those occupying the best houses in the Menteng neighbourhood were high officials who simply took them over when the Dutch were finally expelled in 1957.

One sign of this egalitarianism could be seen in a street near where I lived; after dark, the sidewalks would suddenly fill with chess players. These people (always male) came from all strata of society. Businessmen played with clerks, high officials played with *betjak* drivers, and so on. I used to join them quite often, not so much for the chess itself as for the opportunity, while playing, to interview quite informally the people I was 'challenging'. This egalitarianism disappeared under the Suharto regime, but while it lasted it was for me a revelation.

My teenage years had largely been spent in the class-ridden, hierarchical society of the United Kingdom. You could immediately tell what class people belonged to simply by listening to their accents. Snobbery was pervasive, and the cultures of the aristocracy, the upper and lower middle classes, and the working class were quite distinct. Ireland was not so bad, but the class structure there was still a powerful influence on culture and everyday life. For

this reason, Indonesia was for me a kind of social heaven. Without self-consciousness, I could talk happily with almost anyone – cabinet ministers, bus drivers, military officers, maids, businessmen, waitresses, schoolteachers, transvestite prostitutes, minor gangsters, and politicians. I quickly discovered that the frankest and most interesting interviewees were ordinary people rather than the gradually emerging elite.

The country had been under martial law from 1957 till May 1963. There were no elections, and the press was partly censored, yet there were only a handful of political prisoners, and they lived quite comfortably. But the country was very divided, and the atmosphere sometimes tense. At the same time, I could talk to people right across the political spectrum – communists, socialists, nationalists on both left and right, different types of Muslims including some just out of jail for armed rebellion, Chinese, policemen and soldiers, local royalty and elderly bureaucrats. I told them that I was studying the late Japanese period and the early Revolution, which were topics still fresh in the minds of almost everyone.

I had many strange experiences in the process, none stranger than my interviews with two brothers, the elder of whom was a member of the Communist Party's Politburo, while the younger was head of Army Intelligence. (It was hard to imagine anything like this in 'the West'.) Engineer Sakirman, a very short, round little man, had led a popular left-wing armed militia in Central Java during the Revolution. At first he was a little suspicious of me, but as soon as he realized that I was genuinely interested in his political youth, he warmed up and told me a lot. The younger brother, General Parman, looked much like his sibling, but was quite different in outlook. When I went to his house to ask for an appointment, I was astonished to find him in his garage, happily playing with an expensive electric toy train system, as if he were ten years old. He told me he would pick me up that night.

He arrived in an old Volkswagen with tinted windows and escorted me to what I later realized was an intelligence safe-house in the Tanah Abang neighbourhood. From the outside it looked like a run-down storage building. As soon as we started talking, I realized that he thought I was from the CIA, since he boasted that he had such good spies inside the Communist Party that he learned within hours of the Politburo's decisions. It took him quite a while to realize that I was just a student, not a spy. But then he talked intelligently about his early military experience in the Heiho, an adjunct of the Japanese Occupation Army, sometimes used for fighting in the Pacific, but more often for manual labour in defence construction. It seemed he quite enjoyed it.

Later, some of my most instructive interviews were with Indonesian soldiers who had been trained by the Japanese military as either regular troops, guerrillas (in case the Allies arrived) or intelligence operatives. All had great respect for their Japanese trainers, while being thoroughly against the Occupation itself for obvious nationalist reasons. Years later I read a very funny memoir by a general, who claimed that the only thing he disliked about his training was the communal toilet, which was fed by a down-flowing mountain stream. The Japanese insisted on defecating upstream, so that what he called their stinking *sosis* (sausages) floated past the Indonesians defecating farther down.

There was only one thing that bothered me from the start: the question of race. I had never thought of myself as 'white', but in a society only recently liberated from colonialism, I found myself too often addressed as *Tuan* (Master), as the Dutch colonialists had insisted on being called, and some people were embarrassingly deferential to an unimportant foreign student simply because of the colour of my skin. Quite soon, this led to my making a small but lasting contribution to the Indonesian language. Looking at my skin, which was not white but pink-grey, I realized that it was close to the skin colour of albino animals (water buffaloes, cows, elephants, and so on), for which Indonesians used the casual term *bulai* or *bulé*. So I told my young friends that I and people who looked like me should be called *bulé*, not *putih* (white). They loved the idea and passed it around among other students they knew. Gradually it spread to the newspapers and magazines until it became part of everyday Indonesian language.

I was very amused, more than ten years later, when a 'white' colleague from Australia wrote me an innocent letter complaining how racist Indonesians were, and how he hated being called a *bulé*. So I asked him to take a look at his own skin in the mirror, and see if he really wanted to be called *Tuan*. I also told him I had invented the new meaning of the term in 1962 or 1963. When he refused to believe me, I said: 'You are an experienced historian of Indonesia. I bet you $100 that you cannot find *bulé*, in the sense of "white" people, in any document before 1963.' He didn't take the bet.

Interviewing people outside Jakarta was even more fun. Most of these conversations took place in Java, though I went to Bali several times, and once, for two weeks, to North Sumatra. Travelling outside Java (except to Bali) was then very difficult. Ships were few, and dangerously old and overloaded. There was only one airline, owned by the state, and seats were hard to get since so many were taken by military personnel and busy officials. The regional rebellion that broke out in the spring of 1958 had not been

entirely suppressed. In fact, even in Java, the radical Muslim Darul Islam rebellion, already more than ten years old, was still very strong in highland West Java. I was always told how dangerous it was to go to the city of Bandung, especially by night – I would surely be murdered by the DI. In fact, it was not dangerous at all, and I went many times. An unspoken agreement between the DI and the military gave the latter control over the main roads by day, while the DI took over at nightfall.

Travelling in rural Java required some toughness and ingenuity. There was a great variety of means of transportation beyond the railways: buses, trucks, horse and buggies, ponies, oxcarts and canoes. In the highest elevations, there were only ponies. Raised in horse-mad Ireland, riding was easy for me. But my favourite form of transportation was always the truck. At Cornell, I had become used to hitch-hiking over long distances, to Washington, Philadelphia, New York and Boston. Drivers happily gave rides to young people, and hitch-hikers never feared they would be killed by those who picked them up. In Java, in those distant days, hitch-hiking (*ngompreng*) was commonplace, and I suspect that the truck drivers were amused to see a young *bulé* sticking out his thumb by the side of the road. If the driver was alone, you could sit next to him for hours and enjoy fantastic conversations about ghosts, bad spirits, football, politics, evil police, girls, shamans, underground lotteries, astrology, and so on. Otherwise, you climbed up into the open space at the back, especially good after sunset when you could stand with the cool wind blowing in your face.

One night a kind truck driver dropped me and some friends at a point about two miles from the Borobudur, a magnificent Buddhist stupa built in the tenth century AD and regarded as the largest in the world. We walked the rest of the way by the light of the full moon and slept till dawn on the great stupa's highest terrace, next to the Enlightened Ones. No guards, no hotels, no loud music, no vendors, no tickets. Blissfully serene, like it might have been a thousand years earlier. On another occasion, I and some other student friends were picked up by a truck which appeared to be loaded with foul-smelling manure. The driver brought out some mats so we could sit or sleep without getting filthy. We were stopped many times at checkpoints, but as soon as the police smelled the stink, and saw a young *bulé* dozing on top of the filth, they let the driver through. Only when we got off at the outskirts of Malang city did the amused driver thank us for our help. Under about a foot of manure, there was a huge stack of illegal raw rubber. Thus I started to learn about smuggling.

It might be a good idea, at this point, to say something more specific

about interviewing in those days. First of all, language. Indonesian was the universal language, used for almost all my interviews. Dutch-educated interviewees would often break into Dutch or use Dutch words to show off their higher status. Sometimes it was tricky to decide whether to pretend not to know any Dutch, or to know more Dutch than I really did. With my many Javanese interviewees, it often helped if I dropped in some Javanese words or expressions. The best way to use these languages was for jokes. Most Indonesians have a strong comic sense, and cross-language jokes always melt any social ice.

I had expected to find that it would be harder to interview women than men, until I discovered how socially important women were, and why. As in most parts of Southeast Asia, Javanese descent is bilateral, so that the mother's family is just as important as the father's, and the mother's family 'buys' the son-in-law, who usually goes to live with his wife's parents. (Divorce was also very easy.) In some places, children almost always had their own names, sometimes only one, and, except in some aristocratic circles, these names had no connection with those of their parents. Teknonymy was a normal practice, such that if a child was given the name Samin, the parents would be addressed socially not by their own names, but as Father or Mother of Samin. Women usually had their own incomes, and controlled them. Hence women were easy to interview, and were specially good on the subjects of political marriages and family trees.

In those days there were no laptops or even electric typewriters; tape recorders, though they existed, were deadly for any frankness or social ease. (I never used them.) One therefore had to either memorize all interviews and immediately rush back 'home' to type them up on a manual typewriter, or use longhand. My own method of memorization was to think in terms of topics, and perhaps scribble them down unobtrusively during the interview: Dutch habits, good Japanese, money, weapons, radio, corruption, and so on. It was terrific training for the ears and the memory.

In retrospect, perhaps for me the most important interviews I conducted were two long talks in April 1962 with former Rear Admiral Maeda Tadeshi, in the old-fashioned, mosquito-ridden, colonial-era Hotel des Indes. Before the war he had been stationed in England, so knew some English. He had also learned some Indonesian while stationed in Jakarta during the war. So we talked in a mix of languages. He was almost the first Japanese I had ever spoken to, and I could not have been more lucky. He was impressively dignified (even in only his underwear, because it was the hottest part of the hot season), a real gentleman, modest, frank and charming. (God knows what

he thought of the young *bulé*.) From books on modern Japan I had learned that from the late nineteenth century there had been two different perspectives on the country's rapid military expansion in Asia. One believed in conquests in order to build an empire as vast those of the Europeans. The other, dubbed Pan-Asianism, believed in Japan's mission to liberate Asia from the West.

In 1935 Britain had decided to separate Burma from the Raj, and enacted a special constitution. Dr Ba Maw, a skilled politician, became the country's first (native) prime minister under the British Governor. After falling from power in 1939, thanks to a British-rigged election, he made contact with some Pan-Asianist military lobbyists. In January 1941, Japan's Prime Minister Tojo announced in the Diet that 'if the Burmese offer to co-operate with Japan in establishing the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, Japan would gladly grant independence to the Burmese'. The British were driven out of Burma a year later by the Japanese Army, accompanied by a Burma Independence Army mainly recruited from Burmans living in Siam. In July 1943, a treaty of alliance between Japan and Burma was signed in the emperor's palace, and Dr Ba Maw became the head of state.

Something not too different happened in the Philippines at the same time. The US allowed Manuel Quezon to become the first elected president in 1935, and promised independence in 1946. But when the Japanese Occupation took place and Quezon fled to the US, along with most Americans, Senator José Laurel became president, with the same kind of status as Dr Ba Maw in Burma, and the promise of a speedy independence. Nothing like this happened in Indonesia. In late 1943 Prime Minister Koiso promised independence only 'some time', and there was never an Indonesian head of state. With the downfall of Hitler in April 1945, Tokyo realized that Japan was facing total defeat, and officers in Indonesia assumed that they should fight to the death for the sake of the emperor. But there were others, including Maeda Tadeshi, who believed they should fulfil the promise of independence as fast as they could, whatever the cost.

The end came when American atomic bombs obliterated Hiroshima on August 6 and Nagasaki three days later. On August 15 the emperor announced on the radio his immediate surrender. On September 2, he ordered all armed personnel to lay down their weapons.

Maeda was among those who argued successfully that most of the Japanese armaments should be quietly passed to the Indonesian leaders of the PETA, trained from 1943 to fight with the Japanese if and when the Allies attacked (which did not happen). Without an army, the country would relapse

into a Dutch colony. He also believed that the country had to have an effective head of state, in the person of Soekarno. But on August 16, a small group of young radicals kidnapped Soekarno and Mohammad Hatta, his respected no. 2. The youngsters believed that the pair had no courage, and would not announce a Republic of Indonesia. It was Maeda who connected with the radicals and persuaded them to release the victims, and further managed to arrange a compromise meeting between all parties in his house. But he retired to bed without interfering. Late on the morning of August 17, Soekarno and Hatta announced the birth of a free Indonesia. Maeda made sure that the army would not make any trouble.

Maeda was quite frank that the war had been a stupid disaster (this was in line with the Japanese Navy view of the folly of the Japanese Army), and that he had seen his role as head of the Kaigun Bukanfu (naval liaison office) in Jakarta as helping Indonesia to become independent, in line with the early idea that Japan should promote the liberation of Asia, not its conquest and insertion into the Japanese Empire.

The best thing about the interviews Maeda gave me was that he spoke in detail about what he had tried to do, failed to do and managed to do, under very difficult circumstances. He was modest about his role in the complicated process whereby Indonesia was able to declare its independence on 17 August 1945. What he did feel proud of was simply that he had intervened to convince the army leaders to let the Indonesians make their own decisions. He had deliberately absented himself from the final discussions about the independence declaration among the Indonesians. Later, when I interviewed Indonesians who had worked with Maeda and the Kaigun Bukanfu, including the soft-hearted communist and independence leader Wikana, I learned that they had great respect for him, even if they hated the Occupation regime.

My talks with Maeda were pivotal for three different reasons. In the first place, he made me start to think about Japan in a more complicated way than before. Kahin had done his best to help the unfortunate Japanese-Americans on the West Coast, but he had been trained to fight against Japan, while I was still a child during the Second World War. This generational and cultural difference showed up in my first academic essay, ‘Japan, the Light of Asia’, which described the cruelty and exploitation of the Occupation regime, but also showed why the Indonesian Revolution was incomprehensible without acknowledgement of the Japanese contribution. In the second place, Maeda made me think, for the first time, about the roles of individuals. Third, and most important of all, he made me gradually change my thesis topic.

Originally I had planned to treat the Japanese Occupation simply as a short self-standing epoch in the series of Late Dutch Colonialism, Japanese Occupation, Revolution, Constitutional Democracy, Guided Democracy. But the more I looked at the evidence, the more I started to rebel against the neat sequences of events, and eventually resolved to break the mould. I had to think about the connections between the Japanese Occupation and the Revolution. This was why my dissertation deliberately bridged the two, looking closely at 1944–46. In those days, when scholarly attention was focused on high-level elites, it was understandable why the Revolution and the Occupation were seen as opposites. But below the elites? It was out of this puzzle that my thesis of the 'Pemuda Revolution' (Revolution of the Youth) emerged, which argued, rightly or wrongly, that the tidal force behind the Revolution was neither the nationalist political elite nor a social class, but a generation, formed by its complex experiences under Japanese imperialist rule.

It is a great tribute to Kahin's affection for his students, his modesty and his intellectual broadmindedness, that he not only strongly supported a student whose dissertation argued against some of his own theses in *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*, but also helped to ensure its speedy publication. In fact, both of us were partly wrong because we did not understand Japanese, and had no access to many Japanese documents. Almost half a century later, David Jenkins, a great friend of mine and the leading historian of the Indonesian military, has shown, using countless documents and personal interviews in Japan, that it was high-ranking Japanese officers in Java who made the Revolution actual.

In the course of the Potsdam Conference between July 17 and early August 1945, the zone of MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Command was abruptly turned over to Mountbatten's Southeast Asia Command (including Burma, Malaya, Indonesia and Indochina). Mountbatten, however, did not have the soldiers, transportation, weaponry or effective knowledge of local political movements necessary to exercise control over the region. Thus it was not until September 15 that some of his officers arrived in Java. In the month between the Indonesian Declaration of Independence and this landfall, the top Japanese commanders had the time to provide secretly to the Indonesian revolutionaries 72,000 light arms, more than a million rounds of ammunition, many mortars and field artillery. Jenkins rightly observes that, without this help, the Revolution would not have been possible, and Mountbatten would not have given up on the idea of occupying all Java and returning the island to the Dutch.

My fieldwork came to an end in April 1964, and I spent the summer in Holland studying the Dutch documents on the Japanese Occupation and the Revolution that finished off colonialism in Indonesia. It happened that just that summer the leftist Provo Movement broke out in Amsterdam. It was the precursor of the militant 1960s movements in Germany, France, America, Japan, the UK and many other countries. The Provos included left intellectuals, students, bohemians, anarchists, the homeless and a few bombers, and they were famous for mocking the government, the monarchy, the police and the big capitalists. For example, they sent a big helium balloon, marked with insults to the powerful, to the top of the vast central railway station. The police had only two options: either climb awkwardly up high firemen's ladders or shoot the balloon. Either way the crowds coming to work would laugh their heads off. When not doing research, I followed the activities and manifestos of the Provos with interest.

I returned to Cornell in August, just as President Johnson was exploiting the so-called Gulf of Tonkin incident as an excuse for a massive assault on Vietnam in February 1965. From then on, the anti-war movement spread throughout the universities. At Cornell, Kahin himself was a powerful critic of Johnson's foreign policy, and most of his graduate students followed his path.

Meantime the political and economic situation in Indonesia was rapidly degenerating. The generals controlled the big companies and plantations, and were organizing all the anti-communist groups. The Communist Party was strong, but since 1950 it had been committed to electoral politics and had no armed capacity. Soekarno continued to protect the party, but he was getting weaker. In the early hours of October 1, believing that a coup d'état against Soekarno was near, soldiers led by angry officers killed five top generals, denouncing the top brass as corrupt, sexually immoral and ignorant of the life of ordinary soldiers.

General Suharto took charge of the army and crushed the rebels late the same day. The next day all newspapers and television channels were shut down except those controlled by the military. On October 3, Suharto announced that the killings were the work of the communists. There followed massacres of anyone who was a party member or a suspected sympathizer. The killings went on for three months, carried out by the military but also by thousands of armed Muslims. At least 500,000 leftists died, and many others were tortured and sent to Suharto's gulags, which covered the whole country.

Three of us Cornellians decided to work together to analyze what had

happened. Ruth McVey had been an expert on the Soviet Union before turning to study the history of the Indonesian Communist Party, the oldest in Asia. She had known many communists while doing field-work in Indonesia. Fred Bunnell and I were still graduate students. We were lucky in that Cornell's library had a mass of Indonesian newspapers and magazines published right up to September 30. We dropped everything else for three months to work on a confidential 'Preliminary Analysis of the October 1, 1965, Coup in Indonesia', and completed it in the first week of 1966.

Since our analysis provisionally argued that the cause of the 'attempted coup' could be traced to internal conflicts in the Indonesian military – and not, as Suharto and his cohorts insisted, the Communist Party – we tried to keep the document secret, except for a few scholars whom we trusted, for fear that Indonesian Cornell graduates or known Indonesian friends of ours would be arrested, tortured, even killed – despite the fact that none of these people knew what we were doing. But the 'Preliminary Analysis' leaked out after two months, and both Suharto's men and the US State Department (who were actively supporting Suharto and delighted by the destruction of the communists) were furious.

It so happened that in the summer of 1965, Ruth, Fred and I had had the idea of creating of a biannual journal about Indonesia. Kahin was very supportive of the project. We used the first issue (April 1966) to publish a long series of documents from all kinds of groups. We did not expect a long life for the journal, but it has lasted for fifty years.

In 1972 I knew the Indonesian Embassy in Washington would never give me a visa, so while on a visit to London I asked for an interview with the ambassador there, General Adjie. After a nice chat about his role in the Revolution, he politely offered to help. When I mentioned the visa he immediately arranged it. Thus I was able to return to Indonesia, although, as it turned out, only very briefly. While there I came across a copy of the Intelligence Agency's newspaper which denounced four enemies of the country. To my amazement and laughter, they were identified as the *Wall Street Journal* (which had exposed massive military corruption), Moscow's TASS, Peking's *Renmin Ribao* and Cornell. It took the authorities more than two weeks to find out that I had arrived in Jakarta. When they finally did, I was kicked out, and remained banned from the country for the next twenty-seven years, until the fall of the Suharto dictatorship.

Once expelled, I knew it would be a very long time before I would be let back in the country, so I had to think about what to do next. I seriously

considered moving to Sri Lanka, which had caught my imagination from childhood. But then, in 1973, came news from Siam of the fall of the Sarit-Thanom-Praphat military dictatorship, which had lasted since 1958. A civilian government headed by the former rector of Thammasat University, Professor Sanya Thammasak, was installed, which ended censorship, granted trade unions, peasant unions and student associations the right to organise, and set about creating a democratic constitution.

It was a very exciting time, not only for Thais, but for someone who had just been punished by the Indonesian military dictatorship. I had many Thai friends who had studied at or near Cornell, especially Charnvit Kasetsiri, who eventually became, for a short time, the rector of Thammasat. A year's leave was coming up (the 1974–75 academic year), so I decided to go to Siam to learn the language and start some research.

It was an utterly different experience from being in Indonesia in 1962–64. I was now almost forty years old, and a very busy professor rather than a carefree student. I knew not a word of Thai, and my acquaintance with the history and culture of Siam was quite thin. But it was good to be back learning, not teaching. Every morning I would motorcycle to the American University Alumni (AUA) in downtown Bangkok to take my language lessons with a small group of other foreigners, Japanese, Americans, English and so on. As always, the women learned much faster than the men, because they were said to be much less embarrassed by making mistakes.

In the process, I became very conscious of something that I had barely noticed before: how Americans organized the teaching of Southeast Asian languages. The lessons were entirely focused on useful everyday speech. 'Where is the post office?' 'How much is a haircut?' 'Your little son is very cute.' Learning to *read* Thai was for later, and optional. You could soon see why. With the exception of a middle-aged Japanese businessman, none of my classmates had ever learned to use a non-Roman writing system, and so Thai orthography seemed exceptionally hard.

The school had no interest whatever in Thai literature, or indeed anything 'beautiful' about the Thai language. The contrast with European language-teaching could not have been greater. Classical Latin and Greek were 'dead' languages, no longer spoken, so we youngsters at Eton were focused entirely on reading works of very high literary quality. French, German and Russian were taught in the same spirit. I could read and write French very well, but could speak it only in the most primitive way.

I learned a lot at the AUA but always felt deprived. In the end I had to

teach myself to read, with the help of friends. I was lucky to be able to stay with (now Professor) Charnvit, his sister, his brother-in-law and his nieces, and they usually tried to help me practise. I think their influence is one reason why, when I came to write *In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in Siam in the American Era* (1985), my first book on Thailand, it was mainly about contemporary Thai fiction and how it was changing in response to deep social and economic changes, current political conflicts, and the influence of the United States.

I cannot say that in that first year in Siam I did any serious or focused research. My Thai was still too primitive, and the language lessons took up most of my days and energies. What I did manage to do was to read thoroughly almost all the English-language scholarship on Siam (in those days there was still not very much), and to follow and clip the newspapers for the future writing of political science articles.

As mentioned earlier, the country's politics from late 1973 to early 1975 were exhilarating. The repression imposed by almost continuous right-wing military regimes since 1947 was gone for the time being. Many important left-wing books banned by the dictators were now republished and widely greeted. Political parties mushroomed, and two or three of them were, to varying degrees, left of centre. When the first free elections in almost three decades were held, it was still possible for a very young and poor teacher, who campaigned on his bicycle, to get elected. This never happened again. Some of my former Cornell classmates had begun to come to prominence as politicians and, I am glad to say, joined one or other of the progressive parties, including the sociologist Dr Boonsanong Punyodyana. Students were extremely active politically, again in a leftward direction. These were the years when a new kind of popular music was created, the Songs for Life, which we quickly learned to sing.

But there were two dark clouds in the otherwise bright political sky. Far the darkest was the impending American defeat in the Vietnam War. In Bangkok, the CIA station chief was spreading the word that if the Indochina states fell to communism, the next 'domino' would be Thailand, where a local communist guerrilla force had been gaining strength from the end of the 1960s. All this created a growing panic among right-wing groups, including the royals, who by the middle of 1975 started to go on the offensive with increasingly violent means.

The second cloud was the huge American presence in the country: almost 50,000 military personnel, stationed at dozens of military bases, set up mainly

for the purpose of bombing communist-controlled areas in Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia and supporting the right-wing groups in those countries. The social consequences of this presence quickly became very obvious: the novel spread of heroin addiction, unwanted mixed-race children, organized prostitution on an unprecedented scale, the Americanization of popular culture, and so on. Japan's close (if competitive) association with the US also led to boycott campaigns against Japanese businesses, and against Japanese investment in what was becoming known as 'sex tourism', with its 'industrial-scale' massage parlours.

Out of this came a new kind of anxious nationalism which was confined neither to the left nor the right. The pressure was so great that Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj, a moderate conservative, arranged for the withdrawal of all American troops and opened diplomatic relations with 'Red' China.

After I had left for home, assassinations of leaders of progressive worker and peasant organizations, leftist students and even mildly left politicians became increasingly frequent. Cornell's Dr Boonsanong, secretary-general of the moderate Socialist Party of Thailand, was gunned down outside his suburban home in the spring of 1976. The denouement came on October 6 the same year, when plain-clothed border police under royal patronage, together with a mob of right-wing thugs, attacked Thammasat University and murdered, in broad daylight, dozens of youngsters. The military toppled the existing moderate civilian government, and an extremist regime, led by a senior judge very close to the royal family, took over. Hundreds of people were arrested and thousands fled to the countryside, where they found shelter with the communist guerrillas.

When I tried to get American Thai specialists to join me in signing a strong letter of protest to be sent to the *New York Times*, not a single one consented. Aside from myself, the only co-signers were my revered teacher Kahin, Dan Lev, my fellow Indonesianist, Jim Scott of Yale, starting his magnificent series of comparative studies of peasant resistance in Southeast Asia, and the China specialist Jerome A. Cohen. I am sure most of the specialists were horrified by the murders, but they lived in fear of not being allowed back into their beloved Siam if they opened their mouths. I learned the same lesson only a few years later, after Suharto's bloody attempt to annex the ex-Portuguese colony of East Timor. The number of Indonesianists in America who published anything critical could be found on one hand – and for the same reason. I was 'lucky' enough to be banned from Indonesia, so it was not hard for me to write and lobby for the East Timorese.

But history always has its surprises. I had fully expected to be banned from Siam, especially after I published a long and bitter analysis of what had happened, entitled ‘Withdrawal Symptoms: Social and Cultural Aspects of the October 6, 1976 Coup’.* Yet this did not happen.

In 1977, the extremist government of Judge Thanin Kraivixian was overthrown by a moderate group of generals led by Kriangsak Chomanan, who quickly opened diplomatic relations with victorious Hanoi, invited Deng Xiaoping to visit Bangkok, released political prisoners, and offered complete amnesty to all guerrillas who agreed to lay down their arms. Bangkok, and surely the Palace, was stunned when the newspapers printed a photograph of Kriangsak personally cooking a good home lunch for the ‘Bangkok 18’, a group of young political prisoners arrested after the Thammasat massacre. They had organized a play about two workers hanged by right-wing thugs, who claimed that the workers’ faces had been made to resemble that of the Crown Prince.

Meantime the solidarity and confidence of the guerrillas were severely damaged by the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978 and the destruction of the Pol Pot regime, and Peking’s futile and conscienceless attempted invasion of northern Vietnam. Most of the former students who had taken refuge with the guerrillas accepted Kriangsak’s offer of amnesty. Cornell’s Southeast Asia Program benefited from this, since several of the most intellectually outstanding of these ‘returnees’ came to study there in the early 1980s. About that time, the Thai Communist Party collapsed, leaving the country in moderate conservative hands. Since then there has not been a single leftist party in Siam.

Having been ‘forced’ to go to Siam, I was also ‘forced’ to start thinking comparatively. Everything I noticed in Siam led me to ask new questions about Indonesia. Siam had never been legally colonized, and its political culture was Buddhist, monarchical, and, for the most part, politically conservative; Indonesia was an Old Colony, mainly Muslim, republican, and, until 1965, generally to the left of centre. It had a proud popular nationalist tradition that was almost completely absent in Siam. How to compare them, and within what framework? It was out of these two ‘field-work’ experiences that in 1983, at the age of forty-seven, I came to publish the first edition of *Imagined Communities*.

I had not been much interested in the Philippines until after my return to Cornell from Indonesia in 1964. About the time I became a professor (in 1967), Joel Rocamora arrived at Cornell with a very unusual project in mind.

In those days it was virtually unheard of for any Southeast Asian student to study any country other than his own. But Joel was a young Filipino nationalist who had not only been impressed by Soekarno and the long Indonesian nationalist movement, but had even visited the country before his hero fell. As Kahin already had far too many advisees, he asked me to be Rocamora's chief mentor. We were close to the same age, so we soon became very good friends, often speaking in Indonesian to each other. In the 'wild' late 1960s, we also went to many parties together, and Joel introduced me to marijuana, which, unfortunately, had no effect upon me. The parties did however convince me that I could dance – a major cultural breakthrough. Thanks to him, I began to get to know the other Filipino students and to engage with Philippine history and politics. I was very proud to supervise his brilliant study of the Indonesian Nationalist Party.

Looking back, I think the beginning of my fieldwork on the Philippines began during the two weeks I spent there in the spring of 1972, on my way to Indonesia. The atmosphere was quite tense, as Ferdinand Marcos was nearing the end of his last constitutional term as president and most people were sure that he would soon install himself indefinitely as dictator (which indeed happened the following September). Rocamora took me to meet his cousin Francisco Nemenzo (who had met my brother, Rory, while studying in England). Nemenzo was then head of the youth arm of the still legal Old Communist Party (from which José Maria Sison, a professor at the University of the Philippines, had broken away to form a Maoist underground party and a significant guerrilla force). Nemenzo suggested that I spend two nights in Cabiao, Pampanga, where the Old Party was still strong, and which during the Japanese Occupation and after had been an important base for the anti-Japanese, left-wing Hukbalahap guerrillas. 'You will have the chance to meet some terrific revolutionary veterans there, and they will expect you to make a speech to the cadres', he said, as he assigned two sweet teenage boys to take me there. For 'security', we travelled north by night.

My first night in a Filipino village was a memorable one. The veterans were very welcoming, liquor was passed around, and we chatted till after midnight. They spoke some English, and the two boys, well educated, did a lot of translation. It was mostly a matter of reminiscences, but I noticed a lot of words that sounded like Indonesian or Javanese. When I asked what these words meant, they almost always turned out to have the same sense as their 'Indonesian' counterparts. This astonished us all and made us even more cheerful. The next day I had to give my speech, and I was a bundle of nerves. I spoke about Suharto's massacre of the Indonesian Communist Party, and

had the diplomatic sense to say that Marcos seemed to be heading in the same direction. Filipinos on the left should be prepared! It seemed to go down well, and in the evening there was more jollity, until the boys and I quietly slipped back to Manila. Some years later, I discovered to my horror that when Nemenzo broke with the Old Party, those same two sweet boys were murdered by the veterans on party orders.

So long as Marcos was in power, I had no intention of returning to the Philippines. Rocamora, however, was arrested there in September 1972. After spending some time in prison he was grudgingly released thanks to the lobbying of his rich American-Jewish father-in-law, a personal friend of the chairman of the US Senate's Foreign Affairs Committee. He went back to America and spent many years there organizing on behalf of Sison's Maoist New Communist Party, of which he eventually became, for a while, a senior member. We were thus able to stay in touch, and he kept me well-informed about what was going on.

By the mid-1980s, many of my best new students, expecting the fall of Marcos, were studying the Philippines. When he fell in February 1986, they hurried to Manila. By that time, Siam had become very quiet politically, and I did not, for the time being, feel like writing about the country. So I stopped off for a short second visit to the Philippines, mainly to see old friends and keep an eye on the students starting out on their fieldwork. But I became sufficiently excited to start thinking about doing some serious research on the country.

There was, however, also a theoretical motivation on my part. Though the country had strong linguistic affinities with Indonesia, was republican, and had a long nationalist and revolutionary tradition, it was strikingly different in two central respects. The first of these was religion. The Roman Catholic sect of Christianity had, over four centuries, established deep roots in most parts of the country. Here there was a certain attraction and repulsion, since I had grown up in Roman Catholic Ireland. Neither of my parents was Catholic, but a very conservative form of Catholicism completely dominated the country. If it was familiar to me for this reason, I did not find it in the least attractive, despite the snuff box from Pope Pius IX in our house. My Irish (mostly literary) heroes were either Protestants or atheists. But how interesting it would be to see what a Southeast Asian 'cousin' of Ireland was like!

The second difference was that the Philippines had been colonized twice, and by two completely different empires: one Catholic and Spanish, which was the only European empire to collapse in the nineteenth century; the other

a Protestant and American world-hegemon. Since I lived in the US, should I not try to study the American form of imperialism and its consequences?

In 1987, aged fifty-one, I started learning the difficult Tagalog language under the excellent teachers at Cornell. Learning a new language in one's fifties is hard, and I have to say that, even today, I do not read Tagalog easily, and my spoken language is pretty basic. But it was fun. The following year, after five years without a break as director of Cornell's Southeast Asia Program, I got permission to take eighteen months off to do my first real research on the Philippines. By that time, however, I realized that I could not bear to write about American colonialism and imperialism. Almost all the 'American-language' scholarship focused on the American period and its aftermath. US scholars preferred to do this for linguistic reasons, as well as, perhaps with mixed feelings, nationalist ones – on the premise that, although the US colonized the Philippines, its colonialism was more benevolent than that of other colonizing powers. Filipino scholars focused on the period for some of the same reasons, but in their case in response to a growing anti-American nationalist sentiment. Otherwise there were only a few Japanese scholars, mostly writing in a language I could not read. And there were practically no Spanish scholars interested at all.

Ever since my 1957 arrest by Franco's Guardia Civil locals for indecent behaviour on Spain's north coast, I had always enjoyed reading about Spain, and wished I knew the language. From my earliest days teaching on Southeast Asia, I had always got my students to read English translations of José Rizal's brilliant, late-nineteenth-century Spanish-language novels. Now appeared an opportunity to make up for lost time. I would teach myself to read (if not speak) Spanish by arming myself with dictionaries and reading, line by line, Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, in the way I had used *Javaanse Volksvertoningen* two decades earlier to learn Dutch. The task turned out to be fairly easy thanks to my knowledge of Latin and French.

My Filipino fieldwork was basically historical, and I spent a lot of time in Manila's libraries. I wanted above all to get into the minds and hearts of the great generation of Spanish-speaking intellectuals and activists who were behind Asia's first militant nationalist movement. But despite this historical focus I had not lost my passion for exploration and adventure. I was very lucky to find a superb mentor in Ambeth Ocampo, who for me was a living encyclopaedia on the nineteenth-century Philippines. We made countless trips together to well-known and, better still, little-known historical sites in Luzon, putting landscape back into history. Ocampo was, and still is, catholic in his interests: architecture, painting, poetry, folk culture, food, old customs,

forgeries, religion, murders, as well as politics. He was (and is) also completely fluent in Spanish. Later on I travelled all over the country with my great friend Henry Navoa, a very bright man with little formal education who trained me in understanding everyday life among ordinary people.

I began to realize something fundamental about field-work: that it is useless to concentrate exclusively on one's 'research project'. One has to be endlessly curious about everything, sharpen one's eyes and ears, and take notes about anything. This is the great blessing of this kind of work. The experience of strangeness makes all your senses much more sensitive than normal, and your attachment to comparison grows deeper. This is why fieldwork is also so useful when you return home. You will have developed habits of observation and comparison that encourage or force you to start noticing that your own culture is just as strange – provided you look carefully, ceaselessly compare, and keep your anthropological distance. In my case, I began to get interested in America, everyday America, for the first time.

Most scholars, myself included, manage to go back, regularly or irregularly, to the country, if not the region, city or village, where they did their original fieldwork. This revisiting encourages a widening and deepening of their knowledge and the opening up of new perspectives. When people ask me what happens if one cannot follow up on youthful fieldwork, I reply that one can always turn to the study of nearby countries, in my case Siam and the Philippines. When I am asked how I maintained my ties with Indonesia, I like to say it was possible only because of the help of five people.

The first of them is Ben Abel, a Ngadju Dayak from Central Kalimantan (Borneo), who is still to this day my dearest friend. Ben came to Cornell under unusual and unhappy circumstances. He had been a student at the department of economics in his local university, and at the same time served as an assistant to its rector because he was good at speech writing. He was then assigned (more or less) by the rector to help, as translator and research assistant, one of our anthropology students who wanted to do her dissertation on the Ngadju. In due course, she married him and brought him back to the US. He worked for a while as a gas station attendant, but unfortunately the marriage broke down, leaving Ben in a deep depression. In an effort to help, I managed to get him a job in the grand Echols Collection on Southeast Asia in the Cornell graduate library. He took to the work like a duck to water, but also used it as an opportunity to read a great deal of the Indonesian materials that poured in. Because he is interested in almost every aspect of his country, he has developed a vast network of personal contacts and sources, both inside and outside Indonesia. Today, I am sure he is the best-known Southeast Asian

librarian in the world.

Ben got married again, this time very happily. He and his wife, Eveline Ferretti, an ecologist with Indonesian ties, moved into the house next to mine, where they raised two lovably naughty German-Indonesian-American boys. He has constantly kept me abreast of developments in Indonesia, put Kalimantan on my radar, and given me countless ideas and leads. Thanks to the generosity and broadmindedness of the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies at Kyoto University, he was able to spend six months in Japan, continuing his own research and getting to know many interested Japanese scholars and students.

Second and third were two young brothers, Benny and Yudi, whom I brought to America as adopted sons and put through late high-school and college education. They are sons of an old friend from my student days. For a long time, before their English was fluent, we always spoke in Indonesian at home, so that my command of *bahasa Indonesia* did not deteriorate. They gave me many glimpses of the experiences and thinking of youngsters from small towns who grew up under the Suharto regime, to which I would never otherwise have had access. We had many years of happiness together, and through them my old affection for Indonesia remained strong.

Fourth and fifth were Pipit Rochijat Kartawidjaja and I Gusti Njoman Aryana (aka ‘Komang’), two ‘eternal students’ in Berlin. I first met them in the mid-1980s in Amsterdam, when, after a long journey by car, they arrived to join the audience for a talk I was giving on the fatal ‘coup’ of October 1965 and its consequences. Their appearance immediately caught my eye. Pipit was dressed entirely in black and had the wicked smile of an experienced troublemaker. The Balinese-handsome ‘Komang’ (which means ‘third child’ in Balinese), with his long bushy black hair, beard and moustache, looked like a late-nineteenth-century anarchist or an early-twentieth-century Bolshevik (later we took to calling him ‘Aryanovich’). They asked me to come to Berlin to give a similar talk, and it was there that I got to know them well.

In those days, before the fall of Soviet and East European communism and the reunification of Germany, Berlin was an odd place, still divided by the Wall, and an island of fun surrounded by a decaying East Germany. Because it was so far from West Germany, and its future uncertain, the West German political and business elite shunned it, and it became largely a student half-city. Whole floors of prewar mansions could be rented cheaply, and Komang in particular had a gorgeous multi-room apartment, shared with his German wife, which became a meeting place for disaffected Indonesian students. The

Suharto dictatorship was represented only by a small, corrupt consulate, effectively headed by an agent of Bakin, the state intelligence apparatus.

Supported by Komang, Pipit created and led the only aggressively successful defiance of the Suharto regime anywhere. When the consulate tried to put pressure on recalcitrant students by endlessly delaying the renewal of their passports, Pipit borrowed a small baby from one of his married friends, made sure it was not fed, and took it to the consulate. A gentle pinch of the infant's behind produced screams of hunger and rage which so alarmed the bureaucrats that they hurriedly renewed the passports simply to get some peace and quiet. When Pipit became the target of menacing anonymous midnight telephone calls, he hit back by phoning, separately, the Bakin agent and his wife in the small hours to inform each of them of the adulteries their spouses were committing. The anonymous calls then stopped.

The two youngsters and their friends also produced a torrent of scabrous mimeographed bulletins, full of scandalous news and sarcastic articles about the Suharto clique. These they first sent to the lower consulate staff (who enjoyed them very much), and only later to the Consul himself. Pipit was and is an amazingly gifted and fearless satirical writer. He believes that 'everything can be said' and is brave enough to carry it out. His articles, written in a mixture of formal Indonesian, Jakarta slang and Low Javanese, exploited Javanese wayang-lore, Sino-Indonesian kung-fu comic books, scatology and brazenly sexual jokes to make his friends laugh their heads off and his consular enemies shake with impotent rage.

The most important of his articles was one I later translated as 'Am I PKI [Indonesian Communist Party] or non-PKI?' In this searing personal text, Pipit described, with plenty of black humour, his brush with the massacres of the left in 1965. His kindly Muslim father had been the manager of a large state-owned sugar estate in East Java and was harassed by the local communist-controlled sugar workers' union. As a teenager very loyal to his father, Pipit was furious with the PKI and also with some of his high school friends who ended up as executioners in the autumn of 1965.

But the horror haunted him. In his article he described how regular customers at the local brothel stopped going there when they saw the genitals of communists nailed to the door, and he recalled rafts piled high with mutilated corpses which floated down the Brantas river through the town of Kediri, where he lived. He had come to Germany to study electrical engineering, but influenced by radical German students he soon abandoned his studies for a career as a vocal enemy of the Suharto tyranny. Later he was

able to use his friendships with people in the Socialist Party to help block moves by the consulate to punish Indonesian students who stepped out of line.

Meeting Pipit, Komang and their friends was for me very exhilarating. We became very close and have remained so till today. I learned a lot from them both about how to write engagingly in Indonesian, and began to write in the same sardonic mixed-language style they used. We agreed that, under the political circumstances, we would write about everything political in sexual terms, and everything sexual in political language. For example, General Benny Moerdani, commander-in-chief of the Indonesian National Army in the mid-1980s, 'got erections' from imagining he might be made vice president of Indonesia. One result was that I worked briefly as a satirical columnist for an Indonesian weekly before military intelligence clamped down on the publication.

In 1967 Sudisman, the last secretary-general of the PKI, was finally arrested and sentenced to execution by a high military court. I attended the trial every day, and was very impressed by Sudisman's courage and dignity, and by his last defence speech. I got a copy of the speech, translated it into English, and had it published quickly in Australia. In one acid passage the secretary-general spoke of the many colonels who never became generals, whom he nicknamed 'Moss Colonels'.

These five men and boys gave me friendship, 'fathership' and political solidarity, as well as teaching me a great deal. Thanks to them, I was able to continue some kind of useful Indonesian fieldwork over the twenty-seven years of my banishment. In the process, I came to realize that nothing is better for a scholar than being blessed with such deep and enduring attachments, which are often so much more valuable than lonely library research.

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* Published in the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 9:3 (July–September 1977), pp. 13–30. A belated follow-up was my only book on Siam, *In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in Siam in the American Era* (Bangkok: Duang Kamon, 1985).

Chapter 4

Frameworks of Comparison

In my early days at Cornell, use of the concept of ‘comparison’ was still somewhat limited. I do not mean that comparisons were never made; they were made all the time, both consciously and (more often) unconsciously, but invariably in a practical way and on a small scale. Even today, in the Cornell College of Arts and Sciences, there is only one department (comparative literature) that uses the term in its title, and this department did not exist in the early 1960s when I left for Indonesia to undertake fieldwork.

Historians, anthropologists, economists and sociologists rarely thought systematically about comparison at all. The political science department was a partial exception, since it had a subsection called ‘comparative government’, to which I belonged. But the comparisons my classmates and I studied were primarily focused on Western Europe. The reason for this was understandable. European countries had for centuries interacted with one another, learned from one another, and competed with each other. They also believed that they shared a common civilization based on antiquity and different Christianities. Comparisons seemed both simple and relevant.

For me, the odd thing was that comparative government did not cover the US itself, which was the preserve of a different subsection called American government. On one level, this division was easy to understand in practical terms. The undergraduate students, thinking about future careers as politicians, bureaucrats, lawyers and so on, were overwhelmingly interested in courses about their own country’s politics. The same ‘nationalist’ interest can be found in most countries. My department was dominated by Americanists because of student demand. A less obvious factor was the pervasive ‘frog under the coconut shell’ mentality created by what I call ‘official nationalism’. The US has two important neighbours, Mexico and Canada, but there were no courses on these countries’ politics, and, right up to the point of my retirement in 2001, it was rare to find a student who could name either the president of the former or the prime minister of the latter.

One of the central myths of American nationalism has long been ‘exceptionalism’ – the idea that US history, culture and political life are by

definition incomparable. The US is not like Europe, not like Latin America, and absolutely not like Asia. Needless to say, this fancy is absurd. In different ways, depending on which countries in what periods are relevant, the US is perfectly comparable, especially with Europe, South America, Japan and the British Dominions of the Empire (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and so on). Another aspect of this perspective is its deeply ingrained provincialism. Hence the strong resistance to the logical case for including American politics within comparative politics.

One could plausibly add two other factors that are more specific. The first is the institutional history of the study of politics in the United States. One clear relic of this history is that there are still a number of political science departments that call themselves departments of government (Harvard and Cornell among them). Their lineage derives from the merging of law (mostly 'constitutional' law) and public administration, both eminently concerned with the practicalities of governance. In Europe the lineage was quite different: departments of philosophy, sociology, economics and politics based on the grand tradition of Machiavelli, Smith, Constant, Ricardo, Hegel, Marx, de Tocqueville, Weber and so on. My department had a subsection called Political Theory, which was usually taught by a European scholar. Its range extended from Plato to Marx, but included no Americans.

The second factor is that Americans are a practical and pragmatic people, not naturally given to grand theory. A quick glance across the social sciences and humanities for the 'great theorists' of the past century makes this abundantly clear, whether in philosophy (Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Derrida, Foucault, Habermas, Levinas, etc.), history (Bloch, Braudel, Hobsbawm, Needham, Elliott), sociology (Mosca, Pareto, Weber, Simmel, Mann), anthropology (Mauss, Lévi-Strauss, Dumont, Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard) or literary studies (Bakhtin, Barthes, de Man, etc.). All these foundational figures are European. The grand American exception is Noam Chomsky, who revolutionized the study of linguistics, and, perhaps to a lesser extent, Milton Friedman in economics, though Keynes may last longer. Of course, this does not mean that contemporary US universities are not obsessed with 'theory', only that the 'theory' either comes from outside America, is modelled on economics (which has a strong theory-orientation important for understanding the functioning of modern society), or is underpinned by America's egalitarianism: 'everyone', so to speak, 'can and should be a theorist', though history shows that individuals genuinely capable of producing original theory are rare. My own experience as a student at Cornell occurred before 'political theory' really took hold. My thesis (1967) could almost have been written in a

history department. But by then what was later remembered as the era of ‘behaviourism’, understood as making the study of politics ‘scientific’, was on the rise.

The thirty-five years I spent as a Professor of Government at Cornell taught me two interesting lessons about US academia. The first was that ‘theory’, mirroring the style of late capitalism, has obsolescence built into it, in the manner of high-end commodities. In year X students had to read and more or less revere Theory Y, while sharpening their teeth on passé Theory W. Not too many years later, they were told to sharpen their teeth on passé Theory Y, admire Theory Z, and forget about Theory W. The second lesson was that – with some important exceptions like the work of Barrington Moore, Jr. – the extension of political science to comparative politics tended to proceed, consciously or unconsciously, on the basis of the US example: one measured how far other countries were progressing in approximating America’s liberty, respect for law, economic development, democracy, etc. Hence the rapid rise, and equally rapid fall, of an approach that today looks pretty ‘dead’ – modernization theory.

Needless to say, there was often an openly stated Cold War objective behind this kind of theory. Namely, to prove that Marxism was fundamentally wrong! In its innocence, this kind of ‘look at me’ theory typically ignored such embarrassing things as the very high rates of murder and divorce in the US, its hugely disproportionate Black prison population, persistent illiteracy and significant levels of political corruption, and so on.

Nonetheless, there is no doubt in my mind that my experience as a graduate student unconsciously prepared me for later comparative work. My duties as a teaching assistant in American politics and (European) comparative politics obliged me to study a great many texts that I would not otherwise have read. The undergraduates in those days were 90 per cent American and knew very little about Europe. To help them, I found it useful to make constant comparisons between the US, the UK, France and Germany. I myself took graduate courses on the Soviet Union, Asia, the US and Western Europe. Finally, the format of the Southeast Asia program forced me not only to start thinking across the region in a comparative sense, but also to read across disciplines, especially anthropology, history and economics. At the time, I did not have a high level of consciousness about all this – it was all fun because it was so new to me.

My gradual introduction to comparative thinking, however, was quite bookish and ‘intellectual’ until I went to Indonesia. There, for the first time,

my emotional and political leanings came into play in my work. Yet the main effect was not to make me think more theoretically in any general sense. Rather I found myself becoming a kind of Indonesian (or Indonesian-Javanese) nationalist, and feeling annoyed when I ran into bullying American officials who clearly looked down on Indonesians, had no time for Soekarno and were very anti-communist, to the point that when Soekarno angrily uttered his famous anti-American phrase, 'To hell with your aid!', I felt like cheering.

It was still from within this framework that I wrote my first explicitly comparative work, a long article entitled 'The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture', published in 1972 in a book titled *Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, edited by Claire Holt. This essay had an unlikely origin. One day, as I was sitting in my office with the door open, two senior professors walked by, chatting loudly on their way to lunch. The man doing most of the talking was Allan Bloom, who much later published a best-seller called *The Closing of the American Mind*. He was a rather fascinating and even intimidating figure. Unashamedly effeminate, and clearly favouring his male over his female students, he was nonetheless a charismatic conservative lecturer, and a first-class scholar in the field of political theory (Plato to Marx). At the University of Chicago he had been among the top students of Leo Strauss, the famous political émigré from Nazi Germany and a principled philosophical conservative, many of whose pupils (especially bright and ambitious Jews) went on to lead the neo-conservative movement in American political life under Reagan and the two Bushes, as well as in the best universities.

What I overheard Bloom say was this: 'Well, you know that the ancient Greeks, even Plato and Aristotle, had no concept of "power" as we know it today.' This casual, lunch-hour comment seeped into my mind and stayed there. It had never occurred to me that the two philosophical masters, whom we were always told to revere as the founders of 'Western Thought', had no idea of power in their heads. Dubious at first, I rushed to the library to consult a Classical Greek dictionary. I could find 'tyranny', 'democracy', 'aristocracy', 'monarchy', 'city', army', etc., but no entry for any abstract or general concept of 'power'.

This set me thinking about power in the context of Java and Indonesia. Not long before there had been a heated polemic between the Swiss journalist Hubert Luethy and Clifford Geertz, in the notorious CIA-supported magazine *Encounter*. It took place between late 1965 and early 1966, when the massacres of the communists and their sympathizers were raging in Indonesia after the attempted coup of 1965. Luethy had started it by writing an acerbic

essay on the ‘irrationality’ of Indonesian political life and discourse. Properly annoyed, Geertz replied with a stinging retort entitled ‘Are the Indonesians Mad?’, which strongly defended Indonesian rationality, not on theoretical grounds but on the basis of his long experience of doing fieldwork in Java. Geertz was already a famous figure at the time, and the dominant influence in American anthropology; along with Kahin and Benda he was one of the three most important senior figures in Indonesian studies. As a good Indonesian nationalist I was of course on Geertz’s side, but I was starting to think about a more systematic and historical study of ‘rationality’ in terms of political theory.

It so happened that my favourite Indonesian fellow student in the mid-1960s was a middle-aged, white-haired historian called Soemarsaid Moertono, whom we all affectionately called ‘Mas Moer’. ‘Mas’ is a Javanese term of address, a little more formal than ‘big brother’ but close to its meaning. He was a real old-fashioned Javanese gentleman, a fine historian, a kind and witty man, a natural democrat, and with an endearingly childish side to him. He would often tell us the story of the first morning that he woke up in Ithaca to find the town blanketed in snow. He was so enchanted by this strange beauty that he hopped out of bed barefooted, ran downstairs in his *sarong*, and jumped happily into the snow, completely forgetting that it was ice-cold. Our student offices were next door to each other, so we chatted all the time, and he showed me the drafts of his MA thesis on aspects of traditional Javanese royal rule (published eventually as *State and Statecraft in Old Java*). He knew the Javanese sources very well, and there were dozens of riveting and strange passages in his text. No doubt the strangest of all was the story, solemnly related in the chronicles, of what happened at the death in 1703 of Amangkurat II, an unsuccessful Javanese monarch of the late seventeenth century who had not designated an heir. As the claimants and courtiers surrounded his deathbed, one of them, Prince Puger, noticed that the dead king’s penis was erect and at its tip there was a glowing drop of liquid. He rushed to drink it up, and the penis subsided. The chronicler added that this showed that the *tédja*, or magic light of kingship, had passed to the prince, who became Amangkurat III.

Since I was quite sure that the Javanese were as rational as anyone else, I wondered what basic assumptions must have been in play to make this odd story reasonable. Remembering Bloom’s remark, it occurred to me that, like Plato, the Javanese might have no abstract concept of power as a relationship strictly between human beings. Conversations with Moertono confirmed that this was the case, yet at the same time they had a clear concept of ‘concrete’

power, a kind of *mana* immanent in the cosmos, and detectable in magical objects, spirits and human beings (including their sexual organs).

This seemed to me the key which could open the door to pursuing Javanese rationality step by step, social field by social field (taking in bureaucracy, diplomacy, taxation, agriculture, etc.), and help explain the behaviour and aspirations that Luethy had deemed irrational. One could then go back to the West and see many similarities prior to the arrival of Machiavelli, the first Western philosopher of politics to exclude anything 'divine' or 'magical' from his thinking. (From what assumptions did his rationality derive?) It was also probable that in many parts of Asia one could find an outlook not too distant from that of the pre-modern Javanese. The irony was that Bloom and Moertono, on the same campus at the same time, were entirely unaware of each other's existence.

When writing the final version of 'The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture' – conceived as a study in comparative political philosophy – I tried to anticipate and forestall the easy reaction of most Western readers: 'Well, the Javanese were and are primitive, and we are not.' Luckily, I had help from Max Weber, who introduced the concept of 'charisma' into modern sociology, though he had great difficulty in explaining it clearly and systematically. Hitler, Reagan, Mao, Evita Peron, de Gaulle, Soekarno, Gandhi, Fidel Castro, Lenin and Khomeini: what rationality lay behind their hold on people's imaginations? Was there a substratum of old ways of thinking about 'power' (*mana*, tédja) even in cultures that thought of themselves as completely modern? Much later on I was gratified to learn that Reagan never made important decisions before his wife had telephoned her fortune-teller, and that the top leaders of today's Chinese Communist Party eagerly consult astrologers and *feng shui* masters – out of the limelight, of course.

The two main points I want to make about this article are, first, that I began making comparisons from a nationalist point of view, and within an East versus West framework long popular among Orientalists – but in this comparison I wanted to show that the Javanese or Indonesians can be seen as just as 'rational' as Westerners and other peoples, so long as we understand the basic assumptions of their thinking. Second, that taking this approach occurred by sheer chance: I happened to be both Bloom's junior colleague and Moertono's friend.

For the next ten years, however, I really did nothing seriously comparative, and when I returned systematically to the question of comparisons, my outlook and interests were completely different. Even a brief

look at ‘The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture’ (1972) and *Imagined Communities* (1983) will immediately reveal how far apart they are. For sure, it was partly a matter of age. In 1972, I was thirty-six years young, still untenured, and recently expelled from Indonesia. In 1983, I was forty-seven years old, a full professor, newly appointed director of Cornell’s Southeast Asia Program, and busy with the study of Siam. But the age difference was by no means the most important factor. Here I would like to jot down some notes about three powerful influences on me over that decade – in no special order.

I was fortunate to have a more intelligent, slightly younger brother, known to the world as Perry Anderson, but within the family by his original Irish name, Rory. For a long time after I left for America, we did not keep in touch very well, except via my mother and sister. After graduating from Oxford in history, I think in 1959, he plunged into Marxist politics and intellectual life. Along with some of his Oxford friends, he quickly moved to work at the recently established *New Left Review*, to revive and modernize a leftist politics in the UK that had long become fossilized under the uninspiring aegis of the British Communist Party.

The founders of the *NLR* were Edward Thompson, the great radical historian of rural and working-class England, and the Caribbean social thinker Stuart Hall, who would later become known as the founder of cultural studies. The ‘Young Turks’ had only affection and respect for Hall, but relations with Thompson were often difficult. He was a brilliant man, but English to his bones, and in some ways a ‘Little Englander’ with a traditionalist hostility to the intellectual traditions of Continental Europe. My brother and his friends believed strongly that British intellectual isolation had to be broken out of by 1) a massive importing (in translation) of the works of key Marxists beyond the Channel: Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Althusser, Debray, Adorno, Benjamin, Habermas, Bobbio and many others; and 2) making the *NLR* as internationalist as possible in the problems it addressed.

Eventually a furious Thompson left, and the young generation took over. At the same time, Rory was busy working on his gigantic project of reframing the whole of ‘Western history’, which led to his path-breaking books *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (1974) and *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (1974), both of them fundamentally comparative. As a ‘good brother’, I read these books with awe and pride. They showed an encyclopaedic historical knowledge, a mastery of classical prose, and a formidable capacity to sustain a complex but clear argument across hundreds of pages, hundreds of years and dozens of countries.

From 1974 I started to read the *NLR* from cover to cover and was profoundly re-educated in the process. Here I came into contact with the work of Walter Benjamin, which had a decisive impact on me, as readers of *Imagined Communities* will immediately recognize. On visits to London, I began to meet the *NLR* circle and make friends among them. I liked and respected no one more than Tom Nairn, the Scottish nationalist-Marxist who in 1977 published his polemic *The Break-up of Britain*, which caused a real uproar and led to a stinging attack from Eric Hobsbawm, then the leading figure among the older generation of Marxist historians.

During this process, my brother and I became close again, as we have remained till this day, and he was my key counsellor in preparing the final version of *Imagined Communities*. Had I not had a brother like him, I am not sure what would have become of me. Through Rory and his friends at the *NLR*, I became more internationalist and no longer just an Indonesian nationalist.

The second major influence on me was my Cornell contemporary and close friend James Siegel, who is today, in my opinion, the most arrestingly original anthropologist in the US. He had been one of Clifford Geertz's last students before the famous man, enraged by the rowdy student radicalism of the late '60s, abandoned teaching for an aerie at Princeton's Institute for Advanced Studies, where for a long time he was practically the only social scientist. Jim and I had done fieldwork in Indonesia at the same time, he in Atjeh and I in Java. We first met in Medan, a city in northern Sumatra, in the spring of 1964, and immediately became friends. His thesis, published later as *The Rope of God*, was unlike any anthropological work previously written on Indonesia, and has always been one of my favourites.

How he came to Cornell is an interesting story in itself. Around 1967, an anthropology post came up at Cornell for a young Southeast Asianist, and Jim, among a number of others, applied. In those radical days, candidates were no longer interviewed only by professors, but also by graduate students. When the final decision had to be made, most of the faculty were in favour of James Peacock, who had written a thesis on *ludruk*, the popular urban theatre of East Java, which he characteristically called *Rites of Modernization*, and which was published with the same title. This kind of Parsonian title did not help his cause with the students, for whom 'modernization' was an abandoned fetish. They voted overwhelmingly for Jim, and the faculty gave in.

Jim was and still is one of my best friends. We often taught courses together, including one seminar in which we insisted that every student speak

in Indonesian! It was he who seriously introduced me to high-class anthropology, including the inspiring Africanist work of the British Catholic Victor Turner. He also made me read Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, an extraordinary account of the history of 'representation' in the West from Homer to Proust. Our favourite class was a joint seminar on the fiction of Indonesia's great writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer, who was then still in one of Suharto's gulags. Careful, close-up reading of fiction with a group of excellent students was quite new for me. Thanks to Jim, I began to think about how I could use my early training in Classical and Western European, as well as Indonesian, literature for a new kind of analysis of the relations between 'imagination' and 'reality' in the study of politics.

The third influence came from students in the Southeast Asia program. They had little interest in the formal American concept of a giant Southeast Asia zone as such. But they acquired smaller types of solidarity among themselves. Anger at the long grim dictatorships in Buddhist Siam and Burma, Islamic Indonesia, the Catholic Philippines, etc., moved the youngsters to rejection. In English they could exchange information that was heavily suppressed in their home countries. They got used to making new comparisons that they had never before imagined.

As for the comparisons typical of *Imagined Communities*, they were shaped by the book's polemical intentions. Almost all the important 'theoretical' works written on nationalism after the Second World War were written and published in the UK (Miroslav Hroch's pioneering comparative study of 'small nationalisms' in Central and Eastern Europe, written in German in Communist-governed Prague, had to wait a long time to be translated into English). Almost all were written by Jews, though of widely different political outlooks. On the far right was Elie Kedourie, who was born and raised in the old Jewish community of Baghdad, moved to London as a young man, and came under the influence of Michael Oakeshott, then Britain's best-known conservative political philosopher. On the moderate right was Anthony Smith, a British-born practising Orthodox Jew, who taught history in London throughout a long career. Convinced that the Jews were the most ancient of nations, he consistently argued that modern nationalism grew out of long-standing ethnic groups. On the liberal left was the philosopher, sociologist and anthropologist Ernest Gellner, a Czech Jew born in Prague, who made his way to London just after the end of the war. A sturdy Enlightenment liberal, he pioneered the so-called constructivist view of nationalism, arguing that it was strictly a product of industrialization and modernity. On the far left was the grand historian Eric Hobsbawm, of partial

Jewish descent, born in colonial Egypt and substantially educated in pre-Nazi Austria. Hobsbawm was a constructivist as well as a communist, and made a striking contribution to the growing debate on nationalism in the UK with *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), a collection he compiled with Terence Ranger. The odd man out was Tom Nairn, strictly Scottish, and a New Left Marxist radical.

All these people lived either in London or in nearby Oxford or Cambridge, and they all, more or less, knew each other. All except Nairn were very attached to the UK, partly because it was largely uncontaminated by fascism and violent anti-Semitism, and partly because the state, including England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, was felt to be more like supranational (if now defunct) Austro-Hungary than standard European nation-states such as France, Italy and Sweden. All these men were basically Europe-oriented, even if Gellner studied in the Maghreb and learnt some Arabic, while Kedourie wrote a lot about his native Iraq, and obviously knew Iraqi Arabic well.

This then was the wide, but very 'British' circle at which *Imagined Communities* was aimed. The debate was really triggered by Nairn's polemical *The Break-up of Britain*, which argued that the UK was a fossilized, conservative and imperialistic relic of the past, doomed to break up into its four constituent underlying nations, with Scotland leading the way. The book was strongly attacked, especially by Hobsbawm, who declared that no true Marxist could be a nationalist; Marxism had been committed from the start to internationalism. I liked the book very much, for its own sake, but also as an Irishman (Southern Ireland, after centuries of English colonial rule, had only won its independence, by armed struggle, in 1922). I did not think of *Imagined Communities* as a strictly academic book, and it never occurred to me at the time that it would eventually have a wide international audience.

Many people have complained that *Imagined Communities* is a difficult book and especially difficult to translate. The accusation is partly true. But a great deal of the difficulty lies not in the realm of ideas, but in its original polemical stance and its intended audience: the UK intelligentsia. This is why the book contains so many quotations from, and allusions to, English poetry, essays, histories, legends, etc., that do not have to be explained to English readers, but which are likely to be unfamiliar to others. There are also jokes and sarcasms only the English would find amusing or annoying. For fun I always titled British rulers as if they were ordinary people, e.g. Charles Stuart for Charles I, but used the standard format for foreign kings (Louis XIV). A radical English feminist once wrote to complain about this 'discrimination'.

Of course I was pleased. When in the late 1980s two of my best students, Shiraishi Takashi and Shiraishi Saya, decided to translate the book into Japanese, I reminded them that it was not originally intended for Japanese readers, so that they should feel free to substitute appropriate Japanese quotations, allusions and jokes where they liked. I think they were happy to have this freedom.

Imagined Communities was formed in a wider polemical framework than *The Break-up of Britain*. The first target was the Eurocentrism I saw in the assumption that nationalism was born in Europe and then spread out in imitated forms to the rest of the world. But it was also plain to me that nationalist movements had their historical origins in North and South America, as well as Haiti, and that these movements could not be explained on any 'ethnic' or linguistic basis.

The second target was traditional Marxism and liberalism. Nairn had rightly argued that this kind of Marxism had largely sidestepped nationalism, and had never been able to explain its vast world-historical power. But he had not really attempted to offer a Marxist solution to the problem. I had become convinced that a solution was possible if one took into account the peculiarity of printed books, which began to be published in large quantities in Europe in the sixteenth century. Books were certainly commodities produced by early capitalism, but they were also containers and purveyors of ideas, emotions and imaginings, unlike beer or sugar. Classical liberalism had the same failings.

The final target was a powerful tradition that treated nationalism as if it were just another 'ism' alongside liberalism, Marxism, socialism, conservatism, etc. – i.e. purely a system of ideas, or an ideology. This way of looking at nationalism could not begin to explain its enormous emotional power, and its ability to make people willing to die for its sake.

This framework of the book helps to explain some typical forms of comparison that I employed, which were radically different from those used within the East-West format of 'The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture'. Where before I had been interested mainly in difference, this time I concentrated on similarity. The long chapter 'Creole Pioneers', on the Americas, is a good example. Most of the existing work on nationalism in the US either simply insisted on its exceptionality or linked it to British traditions. So I decided to compare the early US with the welter of new nationalisms in Spanish America and put it at the end of the chapter rather than at the start. I enjoyed anticipating the annoyance that would be caused by calling Franklin

and Jefferson ‘Creoles’, as if they were simply an extension of patterns everywhere visible south of the US border, and commenting that Simón Bolívar was a more impressive figure than George Washington. In the same manner, I deliberately brought together Tsarist Russia with British India, Hungary with Siam and Japan, Indonesia with Switzerland, and Vietnam with French West Africa. (Many years later I enjoyed classifying Taiwanese nationalism as a late form of Creole nationalism.) These comparisons were intended to surprise and shock, but also to ‘globalize’ the study of the history of nationalism. Although I still like them, they are not much like the kind of comparisons done in mainstream ‘comparative government’, which are usually based on statistics and surveys.

It was not until much later, in fact after I finally retired, that I began to recognize the fundamental drawback of this type of comparison: that using the nation and nation-states as the basic units of analysis fatally ignored the obvious fact that in reality these units were tied together and crosscut by ‘global’ political-intellectual currents such as liberalism, fascism, communism and socialism, as well as vast religious networks and economic and technological forces. I had also to take seriously the reality that very few people have ever been ‘solely’ nationalist. No matter how strong their nationalism, they may also be gripped by Hollywood movies, neoliberalism, a taste for *manga*, human rights, impending ecological disaster, fashion, science, anarchism, post-coloniality, ‘democracy’, indigenous peoples’ movements, chat-rooms, astrology, supranational languages like Spanish and Arabic, etc. My realization of this serious flaw helps to explain why my *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-colonial Imagination* (2005) focused not only on global anarchism towards the end of the nineteenth century, but also on global forms of communication, especially the telegraph and the steamship.

Because my framework had now changed, so did the style of the comparisons. Although ‘The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture’ and *Imagined Communities* were very different works, they had in common a strong longitudinal thrust. In the former, the reader moves across three centuries of Javanese history, while in the latter she is taken from the invention of print-capitalism in the fifteenth century to the anti-colonial movements of the mid-twentieth. In *Under Three Flags* the dominant impulse is latitudinal. The basic time-frame is marked, not by centuries, but by decades, just four of them between 1861 and 1901. What interested me most was how political and literary developments such as anarchism and avant-garde writing were visibly linked, in what Walter Benjamin called

‘homogeneous, empty time’, in Brazil, Cuba, the UK, Belgium, Italy, France, Spain, Germany, Russia, South Africa, Japan, China, Oceania and the Philippines.

This kind of study required a new kind of narrative structure, more like that of a novel serialized in a newspaper than the ordinary type of scholarly historical work. The reader is invited to leap back and forth between Naples, Tokyo, Manila, Barcelona, Paris, Rio de Janeiro, Brussels, St Petersburg, Tampa and London. The emphasis is on contemporary learning, communications and coordination in connection with ideologies and political activism, thanks to the speed of telegraphic communication across state and national boundaries. Some Frenchmen were learning from some Americans and Belgians, some Chinese from some Filipinos and Japanese, some Italians from some Spaniards and Russians, some Filipinos from some Germans and Cubans. And so on.

While the general stress was on simultaneity and similarity, nonetheless the core of the book is an analysis of the contrast between global anarchism and local nationalisms. The nicest emblem for this contrast emerges from an investigation of the big wave of assassinations during the period, stretching from Buffalo, New York, to Harbin, Manchuria. Nationalist assassins always tried to kill ‘their own’ hated state leaders, while anarchist assassins very often targeted not only their local oppressors but notorious political leaders in other countries.

It is important to recognize that comparison is not a method or even an academic technique; rather, it is a discursive strategy. There are a few important points to bear in mind when one wants to make a comparison. First of all, one has to decide, in any given work, whether one is mainly after similarities or differences. It is very difficult, for example, to say, let alone prove, that Japan and China or Korea are basically similar or basically different. Either is possible depending on one’s angle of vision, one’s framework, and the conclusions towards which one intends to move. (In the jingoist years on the eve of the First World War, when Germans and Frenchmen were encouraged to hate each other, the great Austro-Marxist theoretician Otto Bauer enjoyed baiting both sides by saying that contemporary Parisians and Berliners had far more in common than either had with their respective medieval ancestors.) In the present chapter I have thus tried, as perhaps offering a useful example, to show how the comparative works I wrote between the early 1970s and the 2000s reflected, in their real difference, changing perspectives, framings and (political) intentions.

A second point is that, within limits of plausible argument, the most instructive comparisons (whether of difference or similarity) are those that surprise. No Japanese will be surprised by a comparison with China, since it has been made for centuries, the path is well trodden, and people usually have their minds made up beforehand. But a comparison of Japan with Austria or Mexico might catch the reader off her guard.

A third reflection is that longitudinal comparisons of the same country over a long stretch of time are at least as important as cross-national comparisons. One reason for this has to do with the power of a certain kind of textbook-style national history that does not disdain myths and has a vested interest in continuity and perpetuating an ancient 'national identity'. Scots who want to believe and insist that they have long been oppressed by the English do not like to be reminded that London was ruled by a Scottish dynasty through most of the seventeenth century; likewise many Japanese do not take kindly to the suggestion that their country's earliest 'emperors' may have been partly Korean in origin. Hence scholars can profit immensely by reading widely in ancient history.

A fourth point is that it is good to think about one's own circumstances, class position, gender, level and type of education, age, mother language, etc., when doing comparisons. But these things can change. When you start to live in a country whose language you understand barely or not at all, you are obviously not in a good position to think comparatively, because you have little access to the local culture. You feel linguistically deprived, lonely and even isolated, and you hunt around for some fellow nationals to stick with. You cannot avoid making comparisons, but these are likely to be superficial and naive. But then, if you are lucky, you cross the language wall, and find yourself in another world. You are like an explorer, and try to notice and think about everything in a way you would never do at home, where so much is taken for granted. You can no longer take your class position, your education, even your gender, for granted. What you will start to notice, if your ears and eyes are open, are the things you can't see or hear. That is, you will begin to notice what is not there as well as what is there, just as you will become aware of what is unwritten as well as what is written. And this works both for the country you are living in and the one from which you came.

Often it starts with words. Indonesian, for example, has a special word, *gurih*, for the taste of rice ('deliciously pungent' according to one dictionary). If you come from England, you are then startled to realize that the taste of rice can't be described with a designated English word. On the other hand, Indonesian has no word like the English 'sepia' for the beautiful colour of old

photographs. The same is true of concepts. Javanese has a word, *longan*, for the empty space under a chair or bed, which English does not.

Such a period of struggling with a new language is especially good for training oneself to be seriously comparative, because there is not yet any automatic lovely translation of foreign words into the language in your head. You gradually get to know enough to notice more, and yet you are still an outsider. If you then stay on long enough, things get taken for granted again, as they were back home, and you tend to be much less curious and observant than before. You start to say to yourself, for example, ‘I know Indonesia inside out.’ The point being that good comparisons often come from the experience of strangeness and absences.

Chapter 5

Interdisciplinary

Prior to the French Revolution, universities were neither numerous nor very important. Students played no significant role in European politics until the upheavals of 1848. That year was marked not only by the publication of Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*, but also by a wave of rebellions by radicals, liberals and especially young nationalists against the dominant conservative Habsburg, Hohenzollern, Romanov and Ottoman empires controlling Central and Eastern Europe. Generally speaking, the contours of intellectual life were shaped by a class structure dominated by clergy and to a lesser extent by the aristocracy. Clergy and especially aristocrats were usually rich and did not need to work to make a living. If they became interested in intellectual study, clergy could do so in a monastery and aristocrats with their own money. The infrastructural costs were not great. The major monasteries had well-stocked libraries, it did not cost a great deal for aristocrats to build a good personal library, and newspapers were fairly cheap. Bourgeois intellectuals, if they did not have adequate private incomes, depended on the patronage of aristocrats. In the eighteenth century, Samuel Johnson's famous dictionary of the English language was written by hand, and entirely by Johnson himself – something inconceivable today. Universities were often sleepy places.

The big changes really came about with the onset of industrial capitalism and the economic and political rise of the bourgeoisie in Western Europe in the nineteenth century. The rapid progress of industrialization, based on constant scientific and technological innovation, demanded a much more systematic and subdivided study of the hard sciences, which led to the setting up of specialized journals for the exchange of information and ideas. An increasing number of vocabularies had to be developed for physics, chemistry, biology and so forth, and these 'languages' quickly became too opaque for everyday intellectuals to keep up with and comprehend. One could say that this was all a result of the general, and increasingly rapid, division of labour in industrial societies. It applied less, however, in the case of what today we call, wishfully, the 'social sciences' and the humanities. Well into the twentieth century an educated person could still read important books on

economics, sociology, anthropology, history, psychology, politics and even philosophy without too much difficulty.

In the wake of industrialization came the vast expansion of the functions of the modernizing and rationalizing state: ministries of health, education, agriculture, labour, science, culture, information and so on, as well as countless specialized boards for trade, immigration, urban planning and the like. Aristocrats were far too few in number to be able to staff these proliferating bureaucracies, even had they wished to do so. The required influx of bureaucrats therefore had to come from the bourgeoisie or middle class, who needed access to a better and more modern education. Education thus took on a new importance and required serious reformation, for which the state, for the first time in history, assumed a central responsibility. In this process the various German states were in the vanguard, and became a model for much of Europe and eventually the United States. The change took a special form in the latter, since the country had never had a real aristocracy.

The imposition of a ‘rationally ordered’ array of disciplines did not, however, come easily or quickly, especially in the humanities and social sciences. In the UK, for example, the prestige of classical studies remained high until after the Second World War. ‘Gentlemen’ were supposed to know their classics as part of a proper civilized upbringing. But classical studies was a jumble of history, archaeology, literary studies, philosophy, philology and art history. Oriental studies, less prestigious but still important, had the same jumbled content. Literature was divided up unscientifically between English, French, German, Italian and Russian. Anthropology – born out of colonial and folklore studies and eventually supported by Malinowskian fieldwork – arrived late, essentially after the First World War. Sociology, though stronger in Germany and France, did not become fully accepted in UK universities till after 1945. In many places anthropology and sociology were regarded as aspects of a single discipline. Thanks to the prestige of David Hume and Adam Smith, politics and economics were also intertwined. History was divided up by era and by country, categories about which there was nothing scientific, while philosophy was a mix of bits of mathematics, linguistics, intellectual history and politics.

It is significant that in the UK, until quite recently, a PhD was not thought at all necessary for securing a university teaching position or for doing first-class research. When at Cambridge in the mid-1950s, I would quite often hear older teachers ridiculing the American ‘mania’ for PhDs as simply a mindless imitation of German practice. Before the unification of the German states in the latter half of the nineteenth century, they each had their own universities

to train future bureaucrats and professors. Those who wanted to teach at these universities needed to obtain doctorates, and thus there were many doctors in Germany. British universities, on the other hand, were usually built on the chair system, where there was only one full professor in a department. Once a new professor was appointed, there was not much need for other members of the department to write dissertations. This was one reason why British scholars tended to look down on German and especially American scholars who considered a PhD as a professional requirement and a means of social mobility. Another reason was that not many scholars really believed that even economics or sociology could be said to be truly 'scientific' in a hard sense; they were considered more like practical fields, not too different from, say, Oriental studies. Some people, perhaps nostalgically, claim that scholarship in those days was basically interdisciplinary. But this is arguably anachronistic: for study to be interdisciplinary there have to be disciplines in the first place. Disciplines did not become crucial to scholarship until they were embedded in the institutions and social structures of universities. Three important developments can be identified as operative in this process.

One was the setting up of professional associations and journals which claimed by their very names to 'represent' the national plenitude of disciplines: for example, the American Historical Association (1884) had its *American Historical Review* (1895), the American Economic Association (1885) its *American Economic Review* (1911), the American Anthropological Association (1902) its *American Anthropologist* (1888, initially published by the Anthropological Society of Washington), and the American Political Science Association (1903) its *American Political Science Review* (1906). (Interestingly, my great friend Kato Tsuyoshi tells me that this development and its timing were virtually the same in Japan as in America.) Inevitably, since the distinguished scholars who dominated the editorial boards of these journals had their own prejudices and formed their own cliques, scholars who were excluded or marginalized quickly founded professional journals of their own, in the same discipline but with different prejudices and followers. Since publishing articles in refereed journals was important in deciding whether young professors got tenure and promotion, the number of journals proliferated massively, most with disciplinary claims. A senior colleague and close friend of mine once laughingly calculated that the average readership of an article in a refereed journal was between two and three people.

The second important development was the restructuring of power within universities. The most obvious sign of this was the financial system that gave discipline-based departments far the largest budgetary allocations.

Appointments and tenure decisions were almost exclusively in departmental hands. This power turned out in many cases to have rather conservative, and sometimes amusing, consequences. Within departments power was typically in the hands of elderly professors who had sometimes passed their prime and, when they realized as much, were mistrustful of the work of young scholars with new skills and interests.

Thirdly, the departments were based on the pleasant notion that disciplines were scientific divisions within the broad field of scholarly knowledge, and that what marked each division was a basic common discourse. In fact, this idea is a fiction, since scholarly knowledge changes all the time and in many different directions. For example, when anthropology departments started to be created in the US they included archaeology and evolutionary biology. As archaeology became a highly technical field in which chemistry was an important element, and as 'the rise of man' took scholars ever further back in time towards 'hominid' and required a strong grasp of biology, anthropology lost contact with those other disciplines.

Cultural anthropologists had the same problems with evolutionary biology as did archaeologists, and evolutionary biologists with advanced kinship studies and comparative religious systems. They did not usually read each other's articles, which in any case were published in quite different journals. In effect, where they survived, such departments hung on as mainly administrative and budgetary shells.

An anecdote from my own experience at Cornell may be enlightening here. One day the dean of Arts and Sciences summoned me, along with a nice mathematician whom I did not know, and assigned us to look into a serious problem in the department of psychology. The immediate occasion was the department's rejection of tenure for a popular and productive young professor, who had appealed against the decision. The dean also informed us that for ten years the department had not granted tenure to anyone. When the two of us investigated, we found a fascinating situation. The tenured faculty was evenly divided between three groups that had almost nothing in common, other than mutual dislike and lack of understanding. The behaviourist psychologists studied mice and rats, and had close ties with the biological sciences. Another group was firmly attached to the theories of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, and to the legacy of Sigmund Freud. The third group, who called themselves social psychologists, studied such things as why people who witness the same automobile accident have such different stories to tell.

It quickly became clear why no one had been tenured in ten years: any

candidate would be vetoed by the two blocs who were not interested in, or despised, the remaining bloc to which the candidate was seen to be attached. Even in my own department it was increasingly clear that those who worked with complex mathematical models and equations and those who studied Plato or Nietzsche simply did not understand what each other wrote and were often not keen to try.

I no longer remember what the dean decided to do. But I have a strong hunch that he promised that if the young social psychologist under review was given tenure, he would give the department two new positions (one for rats, one for Lacan, so to speak). At the same time, the dean understood there would be enormous resistance to splitting the department or moving some faculty members to a different discipline. Institutional inertia, fears of budget cuts, anticipated loss of 'positions' in the short and long term, all played a role in the internal struggles.

These problems were magnified by two large social transformations surrounding universities, one quantitative, the other qualitative. In 1900, just under 30,000 bachelor degrees were awarded in the US, representing less than 2 per cent of Americans of graduating age. By 2005, the number of awarded BAs had risen to just under one and a half million, and 36 per cent of young Americans had such degrees. But the climb did not take place evenly, decade by decade. Up to the end of the Second World War, a college education was still something enjoyed largely by the children of the rich and the well connected. In the two prosperous decades that followed, however, there was a vast expansion of universities and enrolments (today there are over 1,400 four-year colleges and universities in the country), and a much wider aspiration to the benefits of a college degree. The social force behind this change was the huge number of Americans mobilized during the war, which included for the first time large groups of Blacks and women who had earlier suffered discrimination. The veterans formed a powerful political lobby demanding that their sacrifices for the country be recognized by the provision of massive funding for their college education. The lobbying resulted in the passage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, informally known as the G.I. Bill.

The immediate consequence of the increasing student enrolment was a rapid expansion of the professoriat. I have described earlier how tiny the Cornell department of government was when I arrived in 1958 – only eight professors, all men. Over the next fifteen years it almost quadrupled in size, and was no longer entirely male.* Still, it was a small department for a top-level university. Equivalent departments in places like Harvard and Berkeley

had seventy professors or more. Departmental meetings were thus difficult to manage, and close ties between professors harder to institute and maintain.

Qualitatively, one major response to these quantitative changes was a new ideology of ‘professionalism’, which began to replace the older scholarly traditions derived from Europe. At one level, the shift was marked by big changes in requirements for graduate students. When I first came to America, my fellow students and I had to pass reading-proficiency examinations in French and German (the other traditional world-languages of scholarship) to get our PhDs. By the early 1970s, an alternative option was made available: choosing either French or German or a year-long course in statistics. Eventually no foreign languages were required, except for those students planning fieldwork overseas.

Before leaving for Indonesia in 1961 I had to pass five examinations (in comparative politics, political theory, American politics, American political sociology and Asian politics), set by individual professors, over five consecutive days. Fifteen years later, students took only two examinations in politics, standardized by a committee of professors, and these could be taken months apart. These younger students worked just as hard as we had done, but they were being trained ‘professionally’, i.e. in standardized courses close to those offered in other good universities, with the much same reading lists, and with a strong emphasis on ‘current theory’ (which would soon be replaced by others). I say ‘professionally’ because they were being *trained*, rather than educated in a general sense, the idea being to make them competitive in what began to be called ‘the academic job market’ after finishing their dissertations. Passing such examinations and gaining a PhD were coming to be regarded as professional qualifications, in the same way that aspiring doctors and lawyers had to pass professional examinations to be licensed to practise medicine and law.

At another level, professionalization and the huge expansion of departments led to a big change in departmental culture. As described earlier, in my early student days, my classmates and I worked every semester as teaching assistants, so we had close contact with both undergraduates and our few professors. We picked our chief advisors on the basis of their interests and expertise. A decade later, funded by generous fellowships, the number of graduate students had greatly increased, and they did much less undergraduate teaching. This was not a matter of laziness or selfishness – they were watching their professors and being acculturated to professionalism.

As departments expanded, the top professors tended to leave the teaching

of the big undergraduate courses to junior faculty and concentrate on seminars for graduate students. In turn this process created a striking asymmetry in the choice of chief advisors, who were typically confined to the five or six best-known (elderly) professors. Graduate students calculated that these 'big names' would be of great help in getting jobs. Finally, there were no strong incentives for taking courses in other disciplines, which would do little to boost a youngster's chances in the job market, and might even make him or her look 'amateurish'.

In spite of all this, there were significant countervailing forces at work. For a long time, these were most prominently represented by area studies, which, as mentioned earlier, both the national government and educationally concerned private foundations supported, financially and otherwise. Already in the 1950s, for example, Cornell had programs for China–Japan, Southeast Asia, and South Asia and Latin America; later programs came into being for Western Europe, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and so on. Cornell also had, from prewar days, a small department of Asian studies, mainly housing students and teachers interested in pre-modern Chinese and Japanese history, literatures and religious systems. Literature and history used to mean patently those of Europe, and accordingly it was not possible to encompass their Asian variants in the departments of literature or of history. In the UK they were covered in Oriental studies, but in the US they were lumped together in departments of Asian studies.

All the area studies programs mentioned above were cross-disciplinary to varying degrees, and many had their own publications, courses and weekly 'brown-bag' lunchtime meetings. What I mean by 'cross-disciplinary' here refers to the situation where a program includes professors of different disciplinary backgrounds among its faculty members, and graduate students are allowed to choose three members of their dissertation committee from across these disciplinary divides. It is different from 'multidisciplinary', which usually refers to a scholar of a particular disciplinary background incorporating other concepts and disciplines into his or her analyses.

At the national level there were also associations (again with their own journals) such as the Association for Asian Studies, which held large annual conventions with dozens of panels and hundreds of papers. Nonetheless the atmosphere was different to that of the standard disciplinary convention, a key aspect of which was job-hunting – students would expect their chief advisors to introduce them and praise them to influential senior colleagues at other universities, and also hoped to be interviewed as candidates for vacancies. Almost no students went to the AAS convention expecting to be interviewed

or to make ‘key contacts’, since area studies programs only rarely had jobs in their own gift. So the atmosphere was less tense, the panels more varied, and the fun livelier. More like a mass annual vacation.

To get what they wanted, the programs were heavily dependent on backing from outside the universities and from intelligent university administrators. Among the area programs themselves, there were also big power differences that changed over time. Up to the American defeat in Indochina, the Southeast Asia programs were quite influential, and also commanded strong undergraduate followings. In the late ‘70s and ‘80s, when the US was briefly alarmed by Japan’s extraordinary economic success, Japan studies did well. China studies, traditionally strong anyway, became very powerful once the country opened up to American scholars. South Asian studies was much weaker, partly because people tended to think of the region as somehow ‘still British’, but mainly because Washington was not much worried about it. India was the ‘biggest democracy in the world’, except during the brief martial law regime of Indira Gandhi, and thus a fine counterweight to what was then thought of as ‘Red China’. A final factor was that both India and Old Pakistan increasingly imposed restrictions on foreign scholars, especially Americans: visas were harder to get, and more and more topics were declared too sensitive to be investigated.

I do not think that the tension between disciplines and area studies was altogether a bad thing. There was usually room for compromises and accommodations since there was lots of money around till the 1990s, and universities were still expanding. There were plenty of scholars who thrived in both environments. But the prestige of area studies in the end depended on their ability to produce Big Names. China-Japan studies had John Fairbank and Edwin Reischauer; Southeast Asia, Clifford Geertz and George Kahin; South Asia, Suzanne Rudolph and her husband.

The area studies programs (especially those concerned with Asia) nonetheless had one important card up their sleeves: ‘foreign students’, who multiplied when what people loosely call ‘globalization’ set in. These students did not include Western Europeans, who were wishfully regarded as ‘just like us’. Rather, as more and more Thais, Latin Americans, Indonesians, Japanese, Filipinos, Koreans, Indians, Sri Lankans, and later Iranians, Africans and Arabs arrived to study, there was at first, as I remember it, a mild nativist reaction. I used to hear some of my colleagues complain that ‘this an American university for Americans’, and ‘these Asians can’t speak English, don’t understand lectures, are useless as teaching assistants, and won’t think theoretically’. But in time they got used to the foreign students (some of

whom did exceptionally well) and even became fond of them. By the late 1980s, my department even hired Asians as professors.

It took longer for Japanese universities to see the benefits of bringing in foreign students; above all, the benefits for Japanese students themselves. In terms of the relationship between disciplines and area studies, postwar Japan offers an interesting contrast. It seems that, from early on, the institutionalization of the disciplines and area studies in Japan took a different form than it did in the US. One could describe it as a process of segregation rather than unequal integration. In the best universities, the institutional power of the disciplines was even greater than in the US, probably because modern Japanese education, initiated in the Meiji era under strong German influence, is, though excellent in many ways, more hierarchically structured than its cousin across the Pacific. Thus it was not easy to establish cross-disciplinary area studies programs. In the face of this, the Ministry of Education's policy-makers, recognizing the political, economic and foreign policy potential of area studies, decided to set up a congeries of separate institutes, or specialized colleges both inside and outside the existing universities, where area studies people could congregate (even if their prestige was lower than that of professors in the mainstream universities).

Furthermore, in postwar Japan, for a long time there existed no very wealthy and influential foundations comparable to those of Rockefeller, Ford and Mellon, which had provided the money and political support that allowed area studies to be institutionalized in the big American universities. However, the Japanese system had its advantages, of which the most important was real autonomy for area studies scholars. The disadvantage was that since these specialized institutes got their money and power from the Ministry of Education alone, it was sometimes hard for them to resist Ministry pressure to follow policy fads. It also meant that the intellectual cultures of the disciplines and the institutes did not often usefully cross-fertilize each other.

Finally, one of the important effects of the turmoil in American universities during the 'radical '60s' was the rise of what is today called 'identity politics'. The pioneers were militant Black students who demanded that university authorities set up Black Studies programs, hire more Black professors, and recruit more Black students. They were quickly followed by militant feminists and gays and lesbians, who convincingly argued that the standard curriculum either ignored or marginalized their historical roles and the centuries-old discrimination they had suffered.

In the 1970s, various ethno-racial minorities joined the tide, including

Native Americans and the American-born children of first-generation immigrants from Central and South America as well as many countries in East, Southeast and South Asia. In response to the demands of the latter, and taking into account their relatively small numbers, universities started setting up Asian-American Studies programs and hiring young professors capable of teaching courses adapted to their students' identity interests. Only a few of these 'amalgamated' programs were very successful. Filipino-American students, for instance, shared few interests with Samoan-American, Chinese-American or Thai-American students. They wanted to take courses primarily on their countries of origin.

The expansion at Cornell had already encouraged the department to hire a China specialist before I returned to Ithaca. The year I was made a junior professor (1967) also saw the appointment of a Latin Americanist trained at Yale. A little later arrived a specialist on India, who was also interested in feminist politics. Over the next five years I was too absorbed in developing new courses, managing a program for advising undergraduates, and keeping up with Indonesia under the Suharto regime to get much involved in the department as such.

At the time I came up for tenure review, in 1971–72, it would have been hard to get rid of me, since the Vietnam War was still raging, Kahin was an influential and respected sponsor, and – a key requirement – my dissertation was being published by Cornell University Press. Still, a senior colleague said to me later: 'I didn't finish your book, though it looks well done. Isn't it just history? Where is the theory? But I was interested your idea of power in Javanese culture, especially as you spoke about Machiavelli, Hobbes, Marx and Weber.' In fact, no one was much interested except Kahin, and I felt myself to be something of an outsider. Later, I heard from students that a gifted senior said to them: 'Anderson has a good mind, but he is basically an area studies person', which meant someone second-class. I didn't mind this judgement because I too saw myself as basically an area studies person.

When *Imagined Communities* was published by Verso in London, the curious thing was its contrasting initial reception on opposite sides of the Atlantic. In those distant days the UK still had a 'quality press' – meaning that there were good newspapers to which leading intellectuals and scholars regularly contributed, as both critics and essayists. To my surprise and pleasure the book was warmly reviewed by Edmund Leach, Cambridge's famous anthropologist, the prominent Irish politician and political historian Connor Cruise O'Brien, and the up-and-coming Jamaican Marxist Winston James. Of course, they were all familiar with the long debate on nationalism

in the UK and so could ‘situate’ my contribution.

In the US, the book was almost completely ignored. In a way, this was fair enough, since I hadn’t written the book for Americans in the first place. Besides, in the US, nationwide quality presses are not common. However, one old European émigré political scientist, writing for the professional *American Political Science Review*, did review it, and deemed it worthless apart from its catchy title.

This situation began to change rapidly at the end of the 1980s, with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Like all empires, the American empire needs enemies. ‘Dangerous nationalism’ (which of course did not include American nationalism) emerged to fill the vacuum left by the evaporation of ‘the communist threat’. I vividly remember receiving a frantic telephone call from a high official at the Kennan Institute, one of the key centres for Soviet studies. He begged me to fly down and give a talk at his institute. When I asked why – since I knew very little about the Soviet Union or Russia – he astonished me by saying, ‘Soviet studies are finished, money is not coming in anymore, and our students can’t get jobs. Everything in the former Soviet Union today is about nationalisms, and almost no one here has ever studied them. You are among the few people in the country who can help us get back on our feet.’ I didn’t go.

A second factor was that, mainly by word of mouth, *Imagined Communities* had caught on in departments of history, sociology, anthropology and, strangely enough, English and comparative literature, and was being widely used as a graduate-level textbook. Political science was the one obvious exception, but eventually it had to yield to student demand for courses on nationalism, which, amazingly enough, did not exist almost anywhere in the US. As a result, in my fifties, I found my position completely changed. Suddenly I became a ‘theorist’, not just an area studies figure. I was even urged to teach a graduate course on the ‘theory of nationalism’, which I had never previously considered doing. To my amusement, the students who took the course came not only from political science, but from history, anthropology, comparative literature and sociology.

It was fun teaching ‘The Theory and Practice of Nationalism’, because I forced the young anthropologists to read Rousseau, political scientists a nineteenth-century Cuban novel, historians Listian economics, and sociologists and literary comparativists Maruyama Masao. I picked Maruyama because he was a political scientist, an Asian/Japanese, and a very intelligent man who read in many fields and had a fine sense of humour and

history. Luckily he had been translated into English. It was plain to me that the students had been so professionally trained that they did not really understand each other's scholarly terminology, ideology or theory. My task as a teacher was thus to break down these barriers to scholarly communication.

The idea of 'interdisciplinary studies' started to be talked about at around the same time. In its origins I suspect that this new interest reflected frustrations about the evident misfits between fields of scholarship and the conservative institutional power of departments claiming to represent disciplines. Discipline-based departments tend to have a vested interest in the maintenance of the status quo, yet fields of scholarship may not fit within the existing departmental boundaries because they are likely to change their contours in response to developing historical situations, societal needs or researchers' academic interests. This is especially so in our age, when rapid social, economic, political and technological changes are everywhere apparent. Hence the misfits arise, and moreover expand. However, there were other signs of increased interdisciplinarity, as bits of different disciplines combined with each other. Interesting fields such as cultural studies and postcolonial studies blossomed. There was also the optimistic idea that interdisciplinary studies would help create bridges between disciplines and area studies. 'Fashion' also played an important if short-lived role.

If the general idea of interdisciplinary studies was attractive, it was also vague and open to very different interpretations. The two most basic views could be crudely described as follows. The first took off from the Latin prefix *inter-*, which was read as meaning 'in between'; in other words, researchers lodged themselves in the big empty spaces 'between' disciplines. If, for example, you wanted to study the elaborate, often poetic slang of Filipino transvestites in its political, social, historical and economic contexts, would there be adequate space in these disciplines for this kind of work to be carried out? Is there a discipline of gender studies that could help you? Why not? People working along these lines produced a lot of interesting and valuable material, borrowing from several disciplines in an ad hoc manner, but the studies themselves were often rambling, anecdotal and intellectually incoherent. For such people 'cultural studies' was a useful, prestigious rubric, but some did not fully realize that really good cultural studies are very hard to do.

The second view implied the difficult task of systematically combining the basic frameworks and tools of two or more disciplines. But such an approach required both a mastery of each discipline and a carefully considered supra-framework in which they could be handled. Only really

exceptional minds could do this work well. David Laitin's superior comparative work on the politics of language-policy and everyday language use is a good of example of how political science and social linguistics can be elegantly combined. Needless to say, the two 'basic views' sketched above represent the two ends of a spectrum, and many scholars have worked somewhere in between.

One has also to look at the intellectual culture in which a lot of youthful research is planned and financed. The US is again a good, if extreme, example. The funds to support dissertation research usually come from private foundations and/or governmental bodies. Success in securing funding typically depends on a good proposal, 'logical, tidy and tightly framed', since the referees for these institutions are usually prominent 'disciplinary' professors. The student grapevine fairly quickly spreads the word about 'what will work', which is why, if you sit on such panels of referees, you find that the proposals often look very much like each other.

In political science, students are supposed to come up with a hypothesis to be confirmed or disconfirmed within the coming year. This time limit is a bad idea, since it is too short to attempt anything rather difficult. The demand for a hypothesis is often a bad idea too, because it implies from the start that only two general answers are possible: yes or no. Scale is always a problem. If a student says he wants to study sexual ideology and practice in the Meiji period, he will usually be told something like this: 'Stick to sexual ideology, find an interesting decade, and confine yourself to Tokyo. Otherwise you will never finish and get a job.' This kind of advice is not unreasonable, given the real financial and market constraints, but it is not likely to encourage bold or ambitious work.

The ideal way to start interesting research, at least in my view, is to depart from a problem or question to which you do *not* know the answer. Then you have to decide on the kind of intellectual tools (discourse analysis, theory of nationalism, surveys, etc.) that may or may not be a help to you. But you have also to seek the help of friends who do not necessarily work in your discipline or program, in order to try to have as broad an intellectual culture as possible. Often you also need luck. Finally, you need time for your ideas to cohere and develop. As an illustration, the research that resulted in *Imagined Communities* began when I asked myself questions to which I had no answers. When and where did nationalism begin? Why does it have such emotional power? What 'mechanisms' explain its rapid and planetary spread? Why is nationalist historiography so often mythical, even ridiculous? Why are existing books on the subject so unsatisfactory? What should I be reading

instead?

I started out with only two certainties. Firstly, that part of the answer must lie with world-transforming capitalism. But Marx did not pay much attention to print-capitalism, while fine scholars like Elisabeth Eisenstein paid a lot of attention to print but not a lot to capitalism. So? Secondly, that another part of the answer had to involve the rejection of the standard European idea that nationalism developed out of old ethnic groupings, since this idea could not explain either the early nationalisms of the Americas, or the late nationalisms of the Third World anti-colonial movements. Rory advised me to read Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin's masterpiece *L'apparition du livre*, which described brilliantly and in enormous detail the early marriage of capitalism and print, and Jim Siegel kindly gave me a copy. The inspiring work of Victor Turner, particularly his unsettling semi-psychological concept of the 'pilgrimage', gave me the clue I was looking for as a key to the mystery of Creole and anti-colonial nationalism.

I had long been in love with Walter Benjamin's enigmatic 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', especially his difficult idea of 'homogeneous, empty time'. But I wasn't thinking of using it at all until Jim (again) gave me a copy of Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. The most fascinating sections were those on antiquity and the Middle Ages, which revealed a conception of time utterly alien to the modern world. This book then led me to the master French historian of the Middle Ages, Marc Bloch, and later to David Landes' then recent book on time and clocks.

Finally, a complete accident. I was talking casually with an Americanist friend of mine when the conversation turned to the topic of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which was a huge international success. He told me something very instructive about its domestic reception. Pro-slavery critics had mercilessly attacked the book as sheer fiction, if not pure lies. Mrs Stowe was so stung by these criticisms that she published a huge book containing all the documents on which she had relied for writing the novel. But very few people had any interest in buying it. This in turn made me think of Emile Zola's *Germinal*, Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, Eduard Douwes Dekker's *Max Havelaar* and a few other novels which had an enormous political impact when they were first published. They are still read today, and yet no one other than a professional historian is eager to read about the 'facts' on which these grand fictions were based.

Was there then a sense in which one could think of fictions as being more

real than reality? If so, then how could they seem so super-real? Was it only because of their content, or did it have something to do with the novel's inner form? Out of these odd influences I finally saw how Benjamin's notion of homogeneous, empty time might help me. The paradox of super-real fiction made it possible to think about nationalism along the same lines. So, a German political economist (Marx), three French historians (Bloch, Febvre and Martin), a British anthropologist (Turner), a German philologist (Auerbach), an American novelist (Stowe) and a German philosopher and literary critic (Benjamin) – all were crucial to the formation of *Imagined Communities*, yet none of them was particularly interested in nationalism. But in them collectively I found the tools I needed to solve (so I thought) the problem I had originally been incapable of grasping.

Can it properly be said that my book is interdisciplinary? Marx, Benjamin and Stowe, all long dead, were not professors, and I am not sure how far the three Frenchmen and Auerbach, all professors, thought of themselves as representing disciplines, even if Turner, in all probability, did. But *Imagined Communities* makes no systematic attempt at building a supra-disciplinary perspective (though Marxism is always there). Does the book then belong within one discipline? It certainly doesn't belong to history, since it is not based on archival or other primary sources. Political science? Only one or two political science books are mentioned in the bibliography. Nonetheless, it is all about a single political force, and the underlying framework comes directly out of my training in comparative politics.

There is still another way of thinking about interdisciplinary studies, which has been hinted at already. All disciplines, simply to be disciplines, have to think of themselves as having boundaries and certain kinds of internal rules, even if these change over time. In doing so, they follow the much larger logic of the ever-expanding division of labour in industrial and post-industrial societies. In principle there is nothing wrong with boundary formation and the creation of internal rules and standards, so long as they are consciously seen as practices pragmatically devised to further the whole field of scholarly endeavour.

The analogy with sports is clear: If you play tennis, you use a round ball and a net, and there are rules about the size of the former and the height of the latter, as well as demarcated spaces in which you can gain points. You are not allowed to hit the ball with your arms, legs or head. If you play football, the ball has to be much bigger, and you need to have goalposts of a specific, arbitrarily decided height; you may use your head and legs, but not your hands. The space in which you play is much larger than in tennis, is

differently demarcated, and the rules governing ‘scoring’ are quite detailed. But these rules have also changed over time. If you like playing both tennis and soccer you have to know the different formats and rules. No one thinks of playing ‘intersports’, and everyone knows when he or she is no longer playing the game.

This kind of consciousness is much less common in academia, because academic life is supposed to be about seeking truth rather than having fun (the boundaries and rules are set up for this purpose). When I first suggested to my colleagues that we should offer a course on the history of political science, and found that no one thought it a good idea, I interpreted the resistance in practical terms. Perhaps they thought we had no one who could devise and teach such a course? It turned out that this was not necessarily the case. The problem was how to interpret the relationship between ‘political’ and ‘science’. If one emphasized *political* and bracketed ‘science’, then the course would have to start with Plato and continue through to, say, Fukuyama. But if one did the reverse, the history would not go back much more than a hundred years, when the term was invented in the context of a very American merger between public administration and constitutional law. The department would have found it difficult to come to an agreement on this. In spite of the complete failure of my proposal, I think all disciplines should offer at least one really good course on their histories, however conceived, to make students thoroughly aware of the origins and zigzag development of the intellectual walls that largely define them.

Of course there are alternative methods for breaking down disciplinary fences. One is to introduce into the graduate curriculum, forcibly if necessary, fine works in other disciplines or even outside all standard disciplines, especially if these are written by foreigners. The students will then not only pick up some different technical vocabulary and learn new concepts, but will have chance to look at their own (nationally inflected) disciplines from the outside and in a comparative manner. Another method is to try to develop courses that will attract students from different disciplines and, if possible, nationalities. In my experience, students often learn as much from discussions and arguments among themselves as they do from listening to professors. Nothing is more likely to get students to stop thinking creatively than a combination of national egotism and disciplinary myopia.

And what of audience, style and creativity? It is obvious that graduate students start their training by writing papers for their teachers. Prior to that, their writing may be clear and even elegant, or clumsy and muddled, depending partly on talent but mostly on what they have learned in high

school and as undergraduates. They are not yet inside the discipline, and they usually write, however naively, as persons. Anyone can read what they compose. But graduate students in the disciplines, especially if professionalism is well advanced, change their writing style fundamentally. As they proceed in their studies, they discover some key things about their future readerships. They are typically told that they are supposed to write primarily for other members of their disciplines, colleagues, editors of disciplinary journals, potential employers and eventually their own students. Their prose should reveal immediately the guild to which they belong.

The influence of this environment can be very strong, and is most visible in the use of (current) disciplinary jargon, excessive citations of previous works in the discipline which do not enlighten the reader but simply perform the rites of membership, and conformity to a kind of impoverished standardized language. Writing for a large, generally educated public, so they are often told, inevitably entails simplification, 'popularization' and lack of technical sophistication (that is, it is too easily comprehensible). They also learn that whenever possible the books they eventually write should be published by university rather than commercial presses, since this will ensure that their pre-publication reviewers will be people like themselves, not unpredictable outsiders. Hence, consciously or unconsciously, they are encouraged to employ a prose style which is often much worse than the one they used in high school or as undergraduates. Many continue to write in this way until they retire.

Furthermore, in most universities the everyday power of the disciplinary departments encourages members to take themselves very seriously, such that you feel that the word 'discipline' – whose history goes back to the self-punishing rigours of medieval monks intent on subjugating the body as the enemy of the soul – should really always be spelled with a capital D. 'Frivolity' and irrelevant digressions are therefore frowned upon. I learned this lesson quite soon after I arrived at Cornell. Still thinking like an undergraduate, in my early papers I included jokes and sarcasms in the main text and, in the footnotes, anecdotes and digressions I had enjoyed in my reading, as well as personal comments. In a friendly way, my teachers warned me to stop writing like this: 'You are not at Cambridge now, and you are not writing a column for a student magazine. Scholarship is a serious enterprise, anecdotes and jokes rarely have scholarly value, and no one will be interested in your "personal opinions".' It was really hard for me to accept this advice, as in previous schools I had always been told that, in writing, 'dullness' was the thing to be avoided at all cost. Later I sometimes frivolously thought:

‘Now I understand what traditional Chinese foot-binding must have felt like.’ But eventually, at least after gaining tenure, I escaped. *Java in a Time of Revolution* (respectably published by Cornell University Press) has no jokes, few digressions and not many ‘personal comments’. But *Imagined Communities* (published ‘commercially’ by Verso) is full of them.

The obvious point is that breaking down unnecessarily high disciplinary walls usually improves a scholar’s prose, decreases dullness, and opens the way to a much wider potential readership. This does not mean ‘dumbing down’. Books by great stylists like Joseph Schumpeter, Marc Bloch, Maruyama Masao, Eric Hobsbawm, Ruth Benedict, Theodor Adorno, Louis Hartz and many others are often difficult, but they are always a pleasure to read.

To the last page of this chapter, my friend Yoshi adds the following comment:

> We think and express ourselves by language if we are novelists or scholars. Between the two, novelists, or generally speaking artists, are usually more innovative and creative than scholars because they are supposed to break out of conventional ideas and expressions. In contrast, scholars tend to become complacent in their world, surrounded and protected by their disciplinary jargons. Jargons can be a blessing and a curse at the same time. Their use facilitates communication among scholars and certifies the professional credentials of their users. But they may also become a prison which constrains the way scholars conceive and express ideas. Thus the question of audiences and prose style goes beyond the simple question of not being dull; it is closely connected with creativity and innovation. It is in this context that the significance of interdisciplinary studies must be appreciated.

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* In 1969 women in the US held 17.3 per cent of professorships, by 2008 the figure was almost 40 per cent, according to the *New York Times* (3 July 2008).

Chapter 6

Retirement and Liberation

In 1986 the US federal government passed a law which in principle prohibited forced retirement based on advanced age. Thereupon retirement ceased to be applied to tenured university professors. It was lucky, however, that Cornell University had instituted a ‘phased retirement’ system a few years before my heart attack in 1996, at the age of sixty. I decided to take advantage of this and follow the advice of my doctors, partly to make way for younger scholars. Thus, for the next five years, before full retirement, I taught only half the academic year, stopped accepting new graduate students, and quit all administrative work. It then became possible for me to start spending about half of each year at Cornell and the other half in Southeast Asia. At that point I was still banned from Indonesia, so I decided to settle in Bangkok, in easy reach of the capitals of Southeast Asia, and not too far from Taiwan, Japan and India. In this way, I could still work hard at Cornell’s magnificent library in the summer and autumn, yet escape Ithaca’s long dark winters and icy springs.

Two nice events showed me that many people thought my career was coming to an end. In 1998, the American Association of Asian Studies awarded me its annual prize for ‘distinguished lifetime achievement’. A friend suggested that in my acceptance speech I should say something about Asian studies and, more generally, area studies. I told the audience that what differentiated area studies specialists from scholars in other disciplines was the emotional attachment we feel to the places and people we study. I then gently pushed my two teenage adopted Indonesian sons, Benny and Yudi, to stand beside me on the platform to show what I meant. The assembled Asianists responded with sympathetic applause. I felt like crying with happiness.

In 2000 I was awarded the annual Fukuoka prize for academic contributions to the study of Asia, which is usually given to someone on the verge of retirement, or over it. By a piece of luck, the grand prize that year was awarded to the great Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer, who had been imprisoned by the Suharto dictatorship for twelve years without trial in

the penal colony on the island of Buru. In fact, Pramoedya had been repeatedly nominated for this award in the last decade of the Suharto dictatorship, but Fukuoka was too afraid of the Japanese Foreign Ministry, and the Foreign Ministry too afraid of Suharto, to give the Indonesian his well-deserved due.* Thanks finally to the Fukuoka committee, however, we now had a chance to be together for several days, after years of semi-clandestine correspondence.

For many men, retirement is, initially at least, a rather painful time. The days can seem very long without a regular work schedule, frequent drinking sessions with colleagues and friends, and regular trips to the golf course. But teachers and scholars are often an exception to the rule. If they no longer teach, they can attend conferences, give speeches, contribute papers, pen reviews and even write books. Many also keep in close touch with former graduate students, since the teacher-student bond is something one can find the whole world over. In this way, academic retirees can also follow new trends, look for new research agendas, and find new problems to ponder over. In fact, they have more time to think than their younger colleagues, who are immersed in administration, committee assignments, teaching, advising, and sometimes buttering up the government officials in control of research funds. Retirees can also, if they wish, free themselves from disciplinary and institutional constraints, and return to projects left undone in the distant past.

I have pursued a number of avenues since my retirement in 2001. As a teenager, I had often dreamed of being a novelist, though I soon realized I had no talent. But when I started on the project that eventually became *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-colonial Imagination* (2005), my childhood literary instincts were reawakened. I had always felt a strong political sympathy with anarchists, and for a time had taught Cornell undergraduates about Bakunin and Kropotkin. But it was only when I realized that the period in Philippine history that interested me most – the last two decades of the nineteenth century – coincided almost exactly with the period between Marx's death and Lenin's rise, when international anarchism was at the height of its prestige and influence, that I began to see a way to 'globalize' early anti-colonial nationalisms.

I was also feeling rather suffocated by a nativist turn in Philippine nationalist historiography. Before the 1960s, it had basically been a sort of conventional historiography principally based on Spanish or American archival materials and other documents. Afterwards, it began to criticize the colonialist and imperialist biases in these documents and propose a 'nativist' history based on 'our materials', such as oral history. This inward-oriented

historiography largely excluded the rest of the world, except for colonial Spain and especially imperialist America, which were to be condemned. Gradually, however, I found myself discovering all kinds of filiations between first-generation Filipino nationalists and Brazilian, French and Spanish anarchists, Cuban nationalists, Russian nihilists, Japanese novelists and liberal leftists, French and Belgian avant-garde writers and painters, and so on. Many were linked by the telegraph, the first communications technology by which messages could be sent round the world in a very short time.

It then occurred to me that the best way to write up the research material was to employ the methods, if not the gifts, of nineteenth-century novelists: rapid shifts of scene, conspiracies, coincidences, letters, and the use of different forms of language (e.g. mixing formal and informal languages, standard speech and dialect). I had always been fond of these novelists' habit of giving elaborate, suspense-filled or enigmatic titles to their chapters, and so decided to follow suit in an entirely unscholarly manner. Even the title, *Under Three Flags*, which has mystified many readers, is a sort of homage to my childhood reading. Rory and I were addicted to an endless, late-nineteenth-century series of books-for-boys written by a British super-imperialist called G. A. Henty. The usual hero of these novels is a brave, moral and sexless English boy whose adventures take him all over the world (a sort of ancestor to Tintin, without the humour). One of our favourites was titled *Under Two Flags*, in which the hero ends up working as a cabin-boy on both an English and a French ship.

Nineteenth-century novels were often heavily illustrated, so for the first time in my life, I included a lot of photographs in my novelistic academic work, including a terrific one of the admirable Suehiro Tettyo with beard and bow tie in a three-piece suit. Raised on the island of Shikoku, at the age of twenty-six he joined the staff of the liberal metropolitan newspaper *Tokyo Akatsuki Shimbun*, and quite soon rose to become its editor-in-chief. He became famous for his newspaper's attacks on the Meiji government's suppression of democracy and free speech, and naturally was put in prison. There he wrote a novel that was a huge success with the young. On his release, he set off to study the political systems of Europe and the US, and on the ship taking him to San Francisco met no other than José Rizal, the leader of the Filipino nationalist movement and a great novelist. On their journey across the Pacific, the American continent and the Atlantic, they became friends.

On his return to Japan, Tettyo wrote a big book, titled *Remains of the Storm*, in which the hero – of Japanese ancestry, but living for a time in the

Philippines – was clearly a mirror of Rizal's courage, intellect and suffering. He became a liberal member of the Diet and later its speaker. But while still young he died of cancer, only a few months before Rizal was executed in Manila.

A second return to my youth was a renewed passion for film. As a full-time professor under a lot of pressure, I had little opportunity to follow contemporary films, and in any case remote Ithaca was largely under the permanent miasma of Hollywood. But around the time of my semi-retirement, there began the spectacular rise of Asian films of the highest quality from Iran to Korea, Japan to Malaysia and Siam, with the grand Taiwan trio of Edward Yang, Hou Hsiao-hsien and Tsai Ming-liang at the centre. No one interested me more than the young Thai genius Apichatpong Weerasethakul, who won two top Cannes prizes in three years for his *Blissfully Yours* and *Tropical Malady*. The latter film consists of two connected halves, the first about a romance between a young soldier and a young villager and the second about a strange encounter in the forest between the soldier and the villager turned 'tiger-shaman'.

The irony is that Apichatpong's films have never been allowed a normal commercial run in Siam itself, and he has been locked in a running battle with the imbecilic censors in Bangkok. So, for fun, I wrote a long article about *Tropical Malady* itself, but especially about the reactions of different audiences (villagers, arrogant and ignorant Bangkok know-it-alls, students, middle-class families, teenagers, etc.). It turned out that people in the countryside understood better what the film had to say than urban intellectuals. In July 2006 the article was translated by my former student Mukhom Wongthes as '*Sat Pralaat arai wa*?' (What the heck is this beast?) in *Silapa Wattanatham*. Three years later the text was republished as 'The Strange Story of a Strange Beast: Receptions in Thailand of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Sat Pralaat', in James Quandt's edited collection *Apichatpong Weerasethakul*. Later I also joined, in a quiet way, the fight against the imbeciles. It was in this way that I first met Apichatpong, with whom I soon became close. (The deliciously unacademic cover for the Thai translation of *Imagined Communities* was designed by my new friend.)

It so happened that when Apichatpong came to fame, just after the military coup d'état in 2006, there arose a quartet of Thai female intellectuals, artists and activists such as I had never met before. Idaroong (na Ayutthaya), a long-time activist and formidable intellectual, created and edited *Aan* (READ!), a journal to my mind far better than any other public intellectual journal in Southeast Asia. She was close friends with May Ingawanij, raised

largely in London, now an excellent teacher at Westminster College, and far the best writer on avant-garde films from across Southeast Asia; and Mukhom Wongthes, now an outstanding and withering social critic in her country. I wanted to write for *Aan*'s readers, but my written Thai was miserable, so the three friends took turns in translating my English-language articles. The most difficult text was an analysis of Anocha (aka Mai) Suwichakompong's stunning avant-garde film with the enigmatic title *Mundane History*.

Meanwhile I discovered to my astonishment that there was virtually no contact, intellectual or otherwise, between Thai scholars and the world of Thai filmmakers and artists. I find this situation rather curious, but have learned several interesting things about it. Most of the leading scholars in Siam work at prestigious state universities – in other words they are at some level bureaucrats. They have titles, they are mostly Bangkokians, and they have access to the higher political circles. They regard themselves as part of the national elite. The filmmakers and artists, on the other hand, typically come from the provinces, do not have advanced academic degrees, and make a living by their wits and talents. This may explain why so few Thai academics have seen an Apichatpong film, and know his name only from the prizes he has won around the world.

It occurred to me that the same situation probably prevailed for the same reasons in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. (For different reasons – for example, because of increasing academic and artistic professionalization – a comparable divide seems to exist in parts of Europe and North America.) In any case, for the first time in my life, I now have good filmmaker friends – thanks to the luck of retiring at the right time and in the right place. This experience has also helped me look at the world of universities through a reversed telescope. What once almost entirely filled my vision now seems much smaller, more distant, and less important.

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The third retirement interest of mine also has its roots in my student youth. When I was in Jakarta in 1962–64, one of my favourite routines was to pay a weekly visit to a street famous for its long line of second-hand bookstalls. It was the perfect time to accumulate, quite cheaply, an interesting personal library. When the Dutch who had remained in Indonesia after independence were finally expelled at the end of 1957, many of them sold off their libraries, which were too large and heavy to take back to Holland. Most of these books, some very valuable, were in Dutch, which few Indonesians under twenty-five understood any longer. In the early 1960s, inflation was already very high, so

that people living on fixed salaries could only survive by corruption or by selling off possessions, including old books and magazines. Commonly, when elderly book-collectors died, their children, uninterested in their parents' hobbies, did the same thing with their inherited libraries.

One day, I found an extraordinary book called *Indonesia dalem api dan bara* (Indonesia in Flames and Embers), published in 1947 in the Dutch-occupied East Java city of Malang, by a writer using the pen-name Tjamboek Berdoeri, which means 'a whip into which thorns are imbedded'. It contained a brilliant, funny and tragic first-person account of the writer's experiences during the last year of the old colonial regime, the three and a half years of the Japanese Occupation, and the first two years of the armed Revolution (1945–47). Even today, it is still far the best book written by an Indonesian about this period of great turmoil.

When I asked my friends about the book, it turned out that only one of them had ever heard of it, let alone read it, and this person had no idea who 'Tjamboek Berdoeri' really was. I tried many times to get a second copy, but with no success. I promised myself that one day I would try to track down Tjamboek Berdoeri, but had neither the time nor the contacts to fulfil this promise before I was expelled from Indonesia in 1972. But I did not forget it. When I returned to Cornell in 1964, I donated my copy to the library's rare books section, fearing that no other copy existed in the world. (Only forty years later did our expert librarians track down two copies in Canberra, and one in Amsterdam.) When I was finally allowed back into the country in 1999, I decided to renew my search for Tjamboek Berdoeri, and to solve the mystery of why a brilliant book written in 1947 had been completely forgotten by 1963 and was never republished.

With the help of my Javanese labour activist friend Arief Djati, and after many false starts, I eventually discovered that Tjamboek Berdoeri was Kwee Thiam Tjing, a well-known Sino-Indonesian journalist and columnist during the final twenty years of the Dutch colonial regime. With the additional help of some Sino-Indonesian friends, the two of us managed to get the book republished in 2004, with a huge number of footnotes to help modern readers with no experience of the colonial era.

Kwee – we got used to calling him Opa (Grandpa) among ourselves – came from an old East Java Chinese family stretching back many generations. Born in 1900, he was among the very few Chinese youngsters of his time to be educated wholly in Dutch-language schools, but he never went beyond high school because there was no university in the vast colony. (At the end of

his life he laughingly recalled how he often got into fights with his Dutch and Eurasian classmates, and thus was one of the very few ‘natives’ who had the luck to beat up a white boy now and then without being punished.) After a brief and unhappy experience working in an import-export firm, he turned to journalism, where he enjoyed immediate success. He worked for various newspapers till the arrival of the Japanese, who suppressed the entire press except for a very few newspapers sponsored by the military authorities themselves.

During the Occupation and after, he worked as the head of a local branch of the Japanese-installed Tonarigumi neighbourhood association, officially created in 1940 for mutual help and national mobilizations, but originally born out of the Gonin Gumi of the Edo period, also set up for mutual help but mainly for spying on behalf of the authorities. (This set of associations still survives today in the Indonesian term *Rukun Tetangga* [Neighbourly Local Group].) He did his best to protect Dutch women and children in his neighbourhood when their men were imprisoned and often killed.

After 1947, we largely lost sight of him until 1960, when he went abroad for the first time in his life, following his daughter, her husband and children to Kuala Lumpur. In 1971, he returned to Indonesia, and began to write a serialized autobiography for the Indonesian newspaper *Indonesia Raya*, which was banned by Suharto in January 1974. He died a few months later. Arief and I edited the serialized stories into a successful book, published in 2010 with the title *Mendjadi Tjamboek Berdoeri* (Becoming a whip with thorns). The more research we did, the more the mystery of the disappearance of Kwee’s 1947 masterpiece became understandable. We concluded that there were two primary factors, which are so interesting that they are worth detailing here.

The first was that *Indonesia dalem api dan bara* is written in an extraordinary combination of languages. While the basic language is Indonesian, parts are written in the Chinese dialect of Javanese used in East Java, and the text includes many phrases in a cunning parody of colonial Dutch and Hokkien Chinese, as well as a sprinkling of words in English and even Japanese. The one language Kwee never used was Mandarin. He was proud of the fact that he could not read Chinese characters, and felt himself to be an Indonesian patriot. He was sent to jail in early 1926 for defending an unsuccessful rebellion by the Atjehnese of north Sumatra the previous year. In late 1926, the young Indonesian Communist Party started a hopeless rebellion, and Kwee watched the cadres enter Jakarta’s Tjipinang prison just as he was being released. He had been imprisoned for political reasons by the

colonial authority a few years earlier than Soekarno, who in 1945 would become the first president of Indonesia.

The use of all these languages (which makes the book almost impossible to translate) was not casual or random. Kwee typically switched languages for satirical purposes, or to give a flavour of the conversation of the people he observed during those years. Sometimes he would also use the technique for poetic or tragically ironical purposes. For example, in one place he uses the complex expression ‘Of Romusha, of Tjaptun’. It is a mixture of the doubled Dutch word ‘of’ (meaning ‘either/or’), the Japanese ‘Romusha’ (forced labourers recruited during the Japanese Occupation) and the Hokkien ‘Tjaptun’ (ten guilders). It was a bitter remark, saying that ‘money is the best lawyer in hell’. Elsewhere, he describes a grim scene in which revolutionaries are torturing or killing fellow Indonesians suspected of spying for the Dutch. He writes gruesomely that the sound of the battering of the victims’ heads was like that of the metallic *kenong* and *kempul* (key instruments in the Javanese *gamelan* orchestra).

The second factor was a consequence of the Republic of Indonesia’s entry into the United Nations, accompanied by the Republic’s efforts to create a modern state worthy of international recognition. On the one hand, the new state, proud of its national identity and ‘world status’, successfully imposed a monopolistic version of Indonesian, which even during the National Revolution had been variable, depending on the social or regional backgrounds of its speakers. The state now frowned upon any contamination by other languages, including even Javanese. The spelling-system was also standardized – something the colonial regime had tried to impose without much success. Hence Kwee’s spectacular cosmopolitan polyglot prose was no longer acceptable. On the other hand, the state’s education apparatus peddled a version of pre-1950 history which almost completely ignored the role of the Chinese minority, and insisted on a heroic past for the Indonesians, and a diabolical one for the Dutch.

Kwee’s book is clearly written by a patriot, but also by a clear-eyed humanist. In it we find excellent, idiotic, pitiable and repulsive Dutch, cruel and tender-hearted Japanese, corrupt and generous Chinese, selfless Indonesian patriots, and sadistic ‘revolutionaries’ who tortured and murdered some of Kwee’s own relatives on the eve of the Dutch attack on Malang in the summer of 1947. In the political atmosphere of the 1950s and ‘60s very few people from any group wanted to read an honest, disconcerting and complicated book of this kind. So, to use a modern phrase, it was ‘disappeared’. Later, the Suharto regime’s heavy repression of the Chinese

community – shutting down their press, suppressing their schools, banning much of their writing and excluding them almost completely from politics – made the ‘disappearance’ still more profound. (In the thirty-two years of his dictatorship Suharto never gave a Chinese a ministerial post till just before his fall. On the other hand, he cultivated the dozen or so Chinese billionaires who had no political power at all.) Only after the downfall of the regime was it possible to have Kwee’s masterpiece republished, and even, to some extent, appreciated.

What I hope to do now is to write something I have never tried: a literary-political biography, largely based on Kwee’s autobiographical writings and the several hundred articles we discovered he had written between 1924 and 1940. Its main focus will not be on Kwee’s literary and political activities as such, but rather on the interlocked relationship between the two. The idea is to try to reimagine the ‘colonial cosmopolitanism’ of that era, created by a huge tide of urbanization, capitalist expansion, new means of communication and rapidly expanding education (including self-education). Kwee spent most of his time in Surabaya, the large coastal commercial centre which was full of Javanese, Madurese, Outer Islanders, Dutch, Hokkiens, Hakkas, Cantonese, Jews, Yemenis, Japanese, Germans and Indians, and included Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Taoists and Buddhists. They picked up bits of each other’s languages for use when they needed to interact, read each other’s newspapers, and had sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile relations with one another. In many ways it was a perfect environment for cross-cultural and cross-language creativity.

In 2012 came *The Fate of Rural Hell: Asceticism and Desire in Buddhist Thailand*, originally a long article in *Aan* and later a small book published in English by Naveen Kishore’s Seagull publishing house in Calcutta. I had always wanted to do some amateurish anthropology, and now the time had come. Early in the 1970s I had gone on the first of many visits to see a large and very strange Buddhist temple, about two hours driving west of Bangkok. Inside, the abbot had built symbols of Islam (cement camels), of Taoism and Mahayana Buddhism from Japan, of Hinduism from India, and even symbols with hints of Christianity – but with Siam’s Theravada Buddhism very much on top. Stranger still, outside he had built more than a hundred cement statues of the dead being tortured in Hell for their sins, situated in a kind of garden museum, surrounded during the daytime by vendors, tourist buses and food-stalls. Almost all the statues were completely naked – a Theravada humiliation for the tormented (usually veiled in temples by tactful fiery murals). Even more strangely, in the abbot’s office there were two glass

cabinets, one containing a (Thai) skeleton, the other a copy of Donatello's spectacular *David*, but clad in a reddish pair of underpants exposing David's now substantial penis. Each statue of the tormented had a label explaining the sins of the character represented. My friends May and Mukhom carefully drew up a list of them all. The weirdest find was a village woman punished for forcing her husband to cook the domestic rice. On the other hand, there were no statues of corrupt monks, venal police, lying politicians, brutal soldiers, evil capitalists, etc. Why? No doubt out of fear.

After the abbot's death, other temples started to imitate him, invariably creating Disney-like little Hells which scared nobody, though they no doubt brought in some cash. The old abbot's statues quietly turned into erotica for teenagers and foreign tourists. Was Rural Hell dying out? I was struck by the strange symbolic presence of the Great Religions inside the temple, and the absence of any Christian, Muslim, Hindu or Taoist being tortured in the Garden of Hell. It suddenly came to me that all these religions had their own Hells, reserved strictly for themselves: no Christians in Islamic Hell, no Muslims in Hindu Hell, no Hindus in Christian Hell, etc. The old abbot's architecture somehow recognized both the other Great Religions and their own responsibility for punishing their own sinners in the after-life – and no one else. Theravada Buddhism would handle only the sins of its own believers.

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In 2014 Cornell's Southeast Asia Program kindly published *Exploration and Irony in Studies of Siam over Forty Years*, with a really perceptive introduction by our then director and Siam expert, Tamara Loos. In the same year, my young Spanish friend Carlos Sardiña Galache, an excellent journalist on the current horrors of racism in Burma, and Ramon Guillermo, a first-class Filipino professor, worked with me on a translation from the Spanish of a curious and very funny work called *The Devil in the Philippines According to the Chronicles of the Early Spanish Missionaries*, published by Anvil Publishing in Manila. It was written in 1887 by Isabelo de los Reyes (then a twenty-three-year-old journalist), the founder of Philippines' folklore research. It is useful to recall that though the term 'folklore' was coined in 1846 by *The Athenaeum*, the first scholarly Folklore Association in the world was founded in England in 1878 when Isabelo was fourteen years old. Perhaps as a trendy teenager he was thrilled by the novelty of this 'science' and plunged into fieldwork in various parts of Luzon.

Very soon he was corresponding with European folk-lorists in Germany,

Portugal, Italy and England, and especially with progressive Spaniards in Madrid and Seville. He discovered that the science of folklore was a perfect instrument for use against the Catholic orders that had dominated Spanish colonialism as far back as the late sixteenth century. All he had to do was to take the mass of 'official' superstitions of the missionary chroniclers and put them in the same category as paganism's imaginary – as merely interesting myths, miracles and legends – under the microscope of the rationalist new science.

He was also cunning enough to give his original text the title *El Diablo en Filipinas*, suggesting that Satan only arrived his country with the earliest conquistadors. He pointed out that the various spirits known by the indigenous population were all local, and so were never referred to as Satan. On the other hand, it was easy to see that, thanks to the Papacy and the Roman and Spanish Inquisitions – with their enormous power, vast bureaucracies, elaborate hierarchies, executioners, and agents all over the world – Satan had to be imagined as following suit with his own demonic bureaucracy and the terraced ranks of evil giants, wicked dwarves, alluring sirens, witches, sorcerers and cunning shamans.

No wonder that in the 1890s, as Filipino revolutionary nationalism became a threat to the colonial regime, Isabelo was arrested, sent by ship to Barcelona in chains, and imprisoned in the sinister Montjuich Prison, where dozens of anarchists were tortured and sometimes executed. He became great friends with many of them, and when he was finally released and able to return home, his suitcase contained works by Bakunin, Kropotkin and Malatesta, as well as Darwin and Marx.

All my life I have been excited by the difficulties and pleasures of translation. But Eka Kurniawan's novels and short stories are in a class of their own, far above all authors in Southeast Asia that I know. His works have been translated into Japanese, American, French and now, in 2015, into English-English by Verso. When he learned of my fascination with his narrative and my admiration for the 'unbelievable' prose in *Lelaki Harimau* (Man Tiger), he asked me if I would help Labodalih Sembiring with the translation. Dalih is a mutual friend of ours, also a novelist, and good at English after living for some time in Australia. I spent about four months of constant frustration and laughter at the job. I had the foolish idea that I was in complete command of *bahasa Indonesia*, but on every page I had to rush to the best *bahasa* dictionaries, as well as Javanese and Sundanese (Eka was born and raised in a remote village on the border between the latter two languages). How beautiful, poetic and sophisticated his sentences were. The problem was how

to be loyal to both author and reader. The first European novel he had read was Knut Hamsun's terrifying *Hunger*, and he had learned technically from Colombia's Gabriel García Márquez, but he was haunted by the rural traditions he had trusted in his childhood, the horrendous anti-communist massacres in 1965–66 before his birth, and the consequences of the brutal urbanization of his childhood. The biggest problem was how to use English, now an urban and self-satisfied language, to make things so remote also frightening, tragic and understandable.

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* Unsurprisingly, but depressingly, the Fukuoka prize committee of 2000 made no mention of its predecessors' cowardice.

Afterword

If the reader cares to consult the indexes of any two dozen important scholarly books, the odds are very high that she or he won't find an entry for 'luck'. Academics are deeply committed to such concepts as 'social forces', 'institutional structures', 'ideologies', 'traditions', 'demographic trends' and the like. They are no less deeply committed to 'causes' and the complex 'effects' that follow from them. Within such intellectual frameworks there is little room for chance.

Once in a while I would tease my students by asking them if any of their friends or relatives had ever been involved in a motor accident. In response to a positive reply, I would then ask: 'Do you really mean it was an accident?' And they would usually answer with something along the lines of: 'Yes! If Grandma had stayed chatting in the shop five minutes longer, she wouldn't have been knocked down by the motorcyclist'; or, 'If the motorcyclist had left his girlfriend's house five minutes earlier, Grandma would still have been chatting in the shop.' Then I would ask them: 'So how do you explain the fact that over the Christmas holidays the authorities can predict fairly well how many Americans will be killed in accidents? Let's say that the actual number turns out to be 5,000. The authorities will have looked at statistical trends over past Christmases and predicted, say, 4,500 or 5,500, not 32 or 15,000. What "causes" these predictions about "accidents" to be so good?' Once in a while a clever student would reply that the answer is probability theory, or 'statistical probability'. But in what sense can 'probability' be understood as a 'cause'? More than a century ago, Emile Durkheim faced the same problem when he studied the most lonely of all human acts: suicide.

The point is that we have not yet managed to eliminate chance and accident, let alone luck, in our everyday thinking. We do try to explain bad luck. For this reason or that, because of this person or that, I had this or that bad luck. Yet we cannot explain how good luck intervenes either in our scholarship or in our daily life. This is why, in the preceding account of my life as a scholar and intellectual, I have put such emphasis on my general run of good fortune: the time and place of my birth, my parents and ancestors, my

language, my schooling, my move to the US and my experiences in Southeast Asia. It makes me feel like the grandpa who stayed to chat with the shopkeeper five minutes longer.

At the same time, chance does not knock on our door if we do nothing but wait patiently in the shop. Chance often comes to us in the form of unexpected opportunities, which one has to be brave or foolhardy enough to seize as they flash by. This spirit of adventure is, I believe, crucial to a really productive scholarly life. In Indonesia, when someone asks you where you are going and you either don't want to tell them or you haven't yet decided, you answer: *lagi tjari angin*, which means 'I am looking for a wind', as if you were a sailing-ship heading out of a harbour onto the vast open sea. Adventure here is not of the kind that filled the books I used to enjoy reading as a boy. Scholars who feel comfortable with their position in a discipline, department or university will try neither to sail out of harbour nor to look for a wind. But what is to be cherished is the readiness to look for that wind and the courage to follow it when it blows in your direction. To borrow the metaphor of pilgrimage from Victor Turner, both physical and mental journeys are important. Jim Siegel once told me: 'Ben, you are the only one among my friends and acquaintances who reads books unrelated to your own field.' I took this as a great compliment.

Scholars, especially younger ones, need to know as much as possible about their changing academic environment, which offers them great privileges but at the same time tends to confine them or leave them stranded. In the G8 countries most professors are very well paid, have plenty of free time and opportunities for travel, and often have access to the general public through newspapers and television. What they usually lack is closeness to their countries' rulers. It is true that in the US there have been some high-profile political professors – such as Kissinger, Brzezinski, Summers and Rice – but the huge country has more than 1,400 universities, and the capital city has no first-class model. In poor or medium-rich countries, professors are often less well paid, but they enjoy superior social status and access to the media, and, especially if they work in capital-city universities, are able to develop close contacts with the circle of their rulers. In both environments, if for different reasons, they have a high degree of security with regard to their futures. Their high salaries and high security are justified on the grounds of defending 'academic freedom' and ensuring professionalism. The first claim is a good and classic justification, so long as the professors practise it themselves – which they do not always do. The second is more recent and more ambiguous, since it depends on qualifications set by senior professors,

requires long periods of disciplinary apprenticeship, and is marked by a jargon which is increasingly hard for intelligent laymen to grasp. Furthermore, professions are notoriously self-protective, and this outlook can encourage conservatism, conformism and idleness.

Professionalism is also increasingly accompanied by changes in the philosophy and practice of higher education. Active state intervention is visibly increasing almost everywhere, as policy-makers attempt to square the intake, processing and production of students and professors with the 'manpower needs' of the 'labour market', and respond carefully to demographic trends. More and more states make efforts to tie research grants to the state's own policy agenda. (In the US today, for example, a huge amount of money is being poured into 'terrorist studies' and 'Islamic studies', much of which will be wasted on mediocre or mechanical work.) Corporate intervention, direct or indirect, benign or malign, has been on the rise for some time, even in the social sciences and humanities. Professionalization is also having its effect on undergraduate education, where the older idea that youngsters aged between eighteen and twenty-one should be gaining a broad and general intellectual culture is in decline, and students are encouraged to think of their college years as mainly a preparation for their entry into the job market. It is highly likely that these processes will be difficult to reverse or even slow down, which makes it all the more important for universities and their inhabitants to be fully conscious of their situation and to take a critical stance towards it. I think I was very lucky to have grown up in an era when the old philosophy, in spite of its being conservative and relatively impractical, was still strong. *Imagined Communities* was rooted in that philosophy, but a book of its type is much less likely to emerge from contemporary universities.

In the America of the 1950s, when there were huge institutional pressures to conform to the prejudices and ideology of the Cold War state, far the bravest, funniest and most intelligent comic strip was Walt Kelly's *Pogo*. Set in the swamps of Florida, its cast of animals included caricatures of dangerous politicians, opportunist intellectuals, apolitical innocents and good-hearted but comical average American citizens. Its hero, little harmless Pogo, is the only genuinely thoughtful figure, and to this animal Kelly gave the masterfully funny and telling line: 'We have met the enemy, and it is us.' It is just this sceptical, self-critical stance which I think scholars most need to cultivate today. It is easy enough to despise politicians, bureaucrats, corporate executives, journalists and mass media celebrities. But it is much less easy to stand back intellectually from the academic structures in which we are

embedded and which we take for granted.

Young scholars will have to think seriously about the consequences of the interacting processes of nationalism and globalization, both of which have a way of limiting horizons and simplifying problems. Let me then draw to a close with some remarks about nationalism in relation to the peculiarity of Europe.

In its heyday, Europe had two unique and inestimable intellectual advantages compared with other parts of the world. The first was its self-conscious inheritance of Graeco-Roman antiquity. The Roman Empire was the only state ever to rule a large part of today's Europe for a long period – even if this era is extremely remote in time. But it was not a 'European' state, since it controlled the entire Mediterranean littoral, a large part of today's Egypt and Sudan, and much of the Middle East, and it did not rule Ireland, Scandinavia or much of northeastern Europe. Furthermore, over time, it drew its emperors from many parts of the Mediterranean world. No European state or nation has had any chance of claiming exclusive inheritance from this extraordinary polity, nor has any of Christianity's multiple sects. The Empire is not available for nationalist appropriation, not even by Italy. Here there is a huge contrast with China and Japan, and probably also India, where antiquity is easily nationalized. The ancient history of the Japanese islands is inseparable from their relations with mainland China and the Korean peninsula, but it can be nationalized as 'Japanese history'.

Even better, a substantial part of the extraordinary philosophical and literary production of Graeco-Roman Antiquity survived into early modern times, thanks to monkish copyists in the West, but also to Greek-speaking Christian Arab scribes under the rule of Byzantium. As time passed, their translations into Arabic allowed Muslim thinkers in the 'Maghreb' and Iberia to absorb Aristotelian thought and pass it on to 'Europe'. This inheritance offered 'Europe' intellectual access to worlds (Greek and Roman) which in profound ways were alien to Christian Europe: polytheistic religious beliefs, slavery, philosophical scepticism, sexual moralities contrary to Christian teachings, ideas about the formation of personhood from the bases of law and so on. Direct access to these worlds depended on a mastery of two languages which for different reasons were both difficult and alien. Ancient Greek not only had its own orthographic system, but also borrowed heavily from languages then used in today's Middle East and Egypt. (Though a kind of Greek survived into modern times, it was profoundly changed by Byzantine Christianity and by centuries of Turkish-Ottoman rule.) Ancient Latin in its most advanced forms is grammatically and syntactically far more difficult and

complex than any of the major European languages of today. Better still, it gradually became ‘dead’. That is, neither ancient Greek nor ancient Latin belonged to any of the countries in Europe.

For all these reasons (and others I have not mentioned), Graeco-Roman antiquity brought Difference and Strangeness to European intellectual and literary life right through till the middle of the twentieth century. Just as in fieldwork, this awareness of Difference and Strangeness cultivated intellectual curiosity and enabled self-relativization. There were city-states and democracy in ancient Greece. The Roman Empire was much larger than any other state in European history, and as its ruins were spread almost all over Europe, one could recognize its greatness no matter where one might be. The literature, medicine, architecture, mathematics and geography of Graeco-Roman antiquity were clearly more sophisticated than those of medieval Europe. And all of them were products of pre-Christian civilizations, products which had pre-dated the appearance of ‘messianic time’. While China and Japan tried to bar Difference and Strangeness with their ‘closed-door’ policies, Europe came to hold antiquity in high regard and adopted it self-consciously as its intellectual heritage.

Students today may read Plato and Aristotle, Sophocles and Homer, Cicero and Tacitus, which is all to the good, but they typically read them in translation – in the everyday national languages which they take for granted; hence Difference and Strangeness have been drastically reduced. Egyptian students cannot read hieroglyphics, Arab students are unlikely to read Aristotle in the version from which their Christian ancestors made their early translations, and not many Japanese or Chinese can read Pali-language Buddhist texts.

Europe’s other great intellectual advantage was due to its small size, the lack or porosity of its geographical and conceptual boundaries, and its history of military, economic and cultural competition between a range of medium or small polities in close propinquity. Especially since the early modern period, which saw the development of print-capitalism and the Reformation, Europe was further divided by vernaculars and religions. Coupled with technological advancement in the production of weapons, rivalry and conflict deepened, which in turn fed into the intensification of competition in various fields. War, travel, trade and reading kept polities of divergent sizes in constant, if often hostile, contact (above all, trade in peacetime was amply facilitated by rivers and ports). Characteristic of this situation is the relation of English to Dutch. Most English people today have no idea that hundreds of English words come from what the huge *Oxford English Dictionary* categorizes as Old Dutch, but

they treasure the hostile expressions ‘Dutch courage’ (bravery based on drunkenness), ‘Dutch treat’ (inviting a woman to dinner and insisting that she pay half the bill) and ‘Dutch wives’ (solid, hard bolsters for comfortable sleeping). On the other hand, dead Latin for some centuries kept European intellectuals in touch with each other, especially once print-capitalism set in. For about two centuries after the invention of modern movable-type printing in the mid-fifteenth century, more books were printed in Latin than in any vernacular language, and Latin was generally understood by European intellectuals. Hobbes and Newton wrote and published in Latin and thus could extend their influence over large parts of Europe.

Difference and Strangeness were built into this political disorder engendered by rivalry and conflict. The rediscovery of antiquity in the Renaissance period eventually destroyed the Church’s monopoly of Latin. This new situation opened antiquity to non-clerical intellectuals who were free from the Church’s dogma. These developments were then to lead to increasing competition between European countries to advance their knowledge of antiquity and beyond. Before the late seventeenth century, when some French intellectuals began to claim the superiority of their civilization, none of the European countries denied that the civilization of antiquity was superior to its own, and they competed against each other to learn more about it in order to be civilized. Whether in wartime or peacetime, no country could boast that it was the centre of civilization, a European version of ‘sinocentrism’ as it were, and throw its head back declaring it was no. 1. Innovation, invention, imitation and borrowing took place incessantly between different countries in the fields of culture (including the knowledge of antiquity), politics, global geography, economics, technology, war strategy and tactics, and so on.

Nothing like this existed in East Asia, nor even South Asia. In East Asia, China and Japan both set up their geographical and cultural boundaries and often attempted to shut out the ‘barbaric’ outside world with drastic closed-door policies. The necessity of competition with other countries over politics, economics, technology and culture was only scarcely felt. Southeast Asia was probably the closest parallel to Europe. It was diverse in terms of culture, language, ethnicity and religion. Its diversity was further magnified by the historical lack of a region-wide empire (which was associated with frequent political turmoil), and later by the colonial rule of various Western powers. It also resembled Europe in its openness to the outside world through trade.

Because Europe, after Rome, never experienced a single stable master, it remained an arena of conflict, cooperation, commerce and intellectual

exchange between many medium-sized and small states, and became the logical place for the birth of linguistic/ethnic nationalism, typically directed from below against despotic dynastic regimes. Though European nationalism adopted key ideas from the Creole nationalism of the Americas, it was deeply affected by early-nineteenth-century Romanticism, which was foreign to its Creole predecessors. It had huge appeal for outstanding poets, novelists, dramatists, composers and painters. It was also quite aware of, and felt solidarity with (though not always, of course), other popular nationalisms as fellow movements for the emancipation of the people from despotic dynasties – a solidarity later expressed institutionally in the League of Nations, the United Nations, and many other forms.

After the world wars of the twentieth century, however, many young nationalisms typically got married to greybeard states. Today, nationalism has become a powerful tool of the state and the institutions attached to it: the military, the media, schools and universities, religious establishments, and so on. I emphasize tools because the basic logic of the state's being remains that of *raison d'état* – ensuring its own survival and power, especially over its own subjects.* Hence contemporary nationalism is easily harnessed by repressive and conservative forces, which, unlike earlier anti-dynastic nationalisms, have little interest in cross-national solidarities. The consequences are visible in many countries. One has only to think of state-sponsored myths about the national histories of China, Burma, both Koreas, Siam, Japan, Pakistan, the Philippines, Malaysia, India, Indonesia, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Vietnam or Sri Lanka for Asian examples. The intended effect is an unexamined, hypersensitive provinciality and narrow-mindedness. The signs are usually the presence of taboos (don't write about this!, don't talk about that!) and the censorship to enforce them.

For a long time, different forms of socialism – anarchist, Leninist, New Leftist, social-democratic – provided a 'global' framework in which a progressive, emancipationist nationalism could flourish. Since the fall of 'communism' there has been a global vacuum, partially filled by feminism, environmentalism, neo-anarchism and various other 'isms', fighting in different and not always cooperative ways against the barrenness of neoliberalism and hypocritical 'human rights' interventionism. But a lot of work, over a long period of time, will be needed to fill the vacuum. To explore what can be done and to carry out its findings is a task to which young scholars can make vital contributions.

Hegemonic powers tend to posit 'human rights' as a universal, abstract and global value to be invoked at their liking. In contrast, civil rights

movements which seek equal rights for the citizens of a nation cannot easily be denied by the state, and they have indeed succeeded in expanding political and socio-economic rights, as seen in the US in relation to Blacks and women, even though it has taken many years to bring about genuinely emancipatory changes. In this regard ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’ still hold many possibilities.

From this angle one can also see the value of ‘area studies’, provided they are not too urgently steered by the state (rebellious Indonesians like to call the state the *siluman* – a scary spectre), which, when faced with political or economic difficulties, is prone to fan nationalism and a sense of crisis among its people. The fact that young Japanese are learning Burmese, young Thais Vietnamese, young Filipinos Korean, and young Indonesians Thai is a good omen. They are learning to escape from the coconut half-shell, and beginning to see a huge sky above them. Therein lies the possibility of parting with egotism or narcissism. It is important to keep in mind that to learn a language is not simply to learn a linguistic means of communication. It is also to learn the way of thinking and feeling of a people who speak and write a language which is different from ours. It is to learn the history and culture underlying their thoughts and emotions and so to learn to empathize with them.

When I arrived at Cornell in 1958 I had to learn in a hurry how to type my seminar papers, with four fingers, on a manual typewriter. For distribution to other students, we typed on a kind of green gelatin paper, which allowed us to erase small errors with white paint, and then run off the corrected final text on a simple mimeograph machine. Changing anything was a slow and painful matter, so we had to think carefully before typing. Often we worked from long-hand drafts. Today, working on a computer, we can change anything and move anything in a matter of seconds. The decline in sheer pain is a blessing, but it is worth remembering that the pearl is produced by an oyster in pain, not a happy oyster with a laptop. I am not sure that today’s seminar papers show any stylistic improvement over the products of forty years ago.

In those days libraries were still sacred places. One went into the ‘stacks’, dusted off the old books one needed to read, treasured their covers, sniffed their bindings, and smiled by their sometimes strange, outdated spellings. Then came the best part, randomly lifting out books on the same shelf out of pure curiosity, and finding the most unexpected things. We were informally trained how to think about sources, how to evaluate them, compare them, dismiss them, enjoy them. Chance was built into the learning process. Surprise too.

Today, libraries are trying monomaniacally to digitalize everything, perhaps in the expectation that eventually books will become obsolete. Everything will be findable ‘online’. Randomness is perhaps disappearing, along with luck. Google is an extraordinary ‘research engine’, says Google, without irony in its use of the word ‘engine’, which in Old English meant ‘trickery’ (as is reflected in the verb ‘to engineer’) or even ‘an engine of torture’. Neither Google nor the students who trust it realize that late-nineteenth-century books feel this way in one’s hands, while early-twentieth-century books feel that way. Japanese books are bound one way, Burmese books another. Online, everything is to become a democratically egalitarian ‘entry’. There is no surprise, no affection, no scepticism. The faith students have in Google is almost religious. Critical evaluation of Google? We do not yet teach it. Many students have no idea that even though Google ‘makes everything available’, it works according to a program.

One effect of ‘easy access to everything’ is the acceleration of a trend that I had already noticed long before Google was born: *there is no reason to remember anything, because we can retrieve ‘anything’ by other means*. When I was a graduate student, I used to enjoy decorating my seminar papers with quotations from poems that I had either been taught to learn by heart, or which I had fallen in love with in a random way. Without thinking much about it, I memorized poems I liked, and often recited them to myself in the shower, on the bus, in the aeroplane or whenever I could not get to sleep. Memorized this way, the poems were lodged deep in my consciousness, not the meaning so much as the sound, the cadences, the rhymes. My fellow students were amazed and pitying. ‘What’s the point? You can just look them up!’ They were right, but even Google will not give you the sheer ‘feel’ of, say, Rimbaud’s dizzying ‘Le Bateau ivre’.

Around 2007 I went to Leningrad to help with an advanced class on nationalism for young teachers at various Russian provincial universities. Over the decades my spoken Russian had almost disappeared, except for ‘Good morning’, ‘Thank you very much’, and ‘I love you’. But to show some solidarity, I started to recite the final stanza of a beautiful poem by Vladimir Mayakovsky, a radical who committed suicide under the early Stalinist regime. To my astonishment, all the students immediately recited along with me:

Svetit vsegda	Shine always,
Vestit vezde	Shine everywhere,

Do dnei poslednikh dontsa	To the depth of the last day!
Svetit –	Shine –
I nikakih gvozdei!	And to hell with everything else!
Vot lozung moi –	That’s my motto –
I solntsa!	And the sun’s!

I was in tears by the end. Some of the students too. They were still part of an oral culture, which Google is helping to end. But there is at least one reservoir untouched – unknown hand-written letters kept in family attics or trunks, that sometimes live secretly for decades or even centuries.

Google is a symbol, maybe innocent, of something much more ominous: the global domination of a degraded (American) form of English. In the US itself, today, it is commonplace to read theoretical works for which the bibliographic foundations are all in American English and published in the United States. If there are foreign works cited, the references are often to American translations made sometimes two decades after the original publication in Japanese, Portuguese, Korean or Arabic. It is as if they have no value till they are available in American. This is not entirely an American invention, as it has its roots in the UK’s world domination between roughly 1820 and 1920. But the UK was still part of Europe, and references to books published in German, French and Italian were still completely normal. But today, more and more scholars feel that they have to publish in American. In itself this may be acceptable, even natural as long as it does not affect our consciousness. But the effect is that more and more scholars in different countries feel that unless they write in American they will not be recognized internationally, and at the same time American scholars become lazier about learning any foreign languages except those they have to acquire for the purposes of fieldwork. Here one sees the huge difference between dead Latin and live American. The émigré political scientist Karl Deutsch might be right: ‘Power means not having to listen!’

‘Globalization’ of this kind is of course resisted too, and one of the most powerful weapons in the struggle is nationalism. There are thousands of excellent scholars in many countries, politically opposed to American hegemony, who, as a matter of principle, write only in their mother-tongues either solely for their compatriots or, if their languages have a wider readership (e.g. Spanish, Russian, Portuguese, French, Arabic and a few

others), for a limited transnational public. Many others write in their mother-language for apolitical reasons: they can express themselves best in the language, or they are too lazy to master another. There is nothing terribly wrong with any of this, and much that is good. But it does risk the obvious perils of not being exposed to the views of good foreign readers, or of falling into narrow-minded nationalism.

Nationalism and globalization do have the tendency to circumscribe our outlook and simplify matters. This is why what is increasingly needed is a sophisticated and serious blending of the emancipatory possibilities of both nationalism and internationalism. Hence, in the spirit of Walt Kelly as well as Karl Marx in a good mood, I suggest the following slogan for young scholars:

> Frogs in their fight for emancipation will only lose by crouching in their murky coconut half-shells.
>
> Frogs of the world unite!

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* This is not to deny that contemporary nationalism does not still contain a powerful emancipatory and egalitarian element – the huge modern gains in relation to the position of women, ethnic minorities, gays and lesbians, for example, would have been unimaginable without its help.

On the Typeface

A Life Beyond Boundaries is set in Monotype Fournier, a typeface based on the designs of the eighteenth-century printer and typefounder Pierre Simon Fournier. He in turn was influenced by the constructed type designs of the Romain du Roi, commissioned by Louis XIV in 1692, which eschewed the calligraphic influence of prior typefaces in favour of scientific precision and adherence to a grid.

With its vertical axis, pronounced contrast and unbracketed serifs, the Fournier face is an archetype of the ‘transitional’ style in the evolution of Latin printing types – situated between the ‘old style’ fonts such as Bembo and Garamond and the ‘modern’ faces of Bodoni and Didot. Other distinguishing features include the proportionally low height of the capitals and the lowercase ‘f’, with its tapered and declining crossbar.

The italics, which were designed independently, have an exaggerated slope with sharp terminals that retain the squared serifs in the descenders.

The Fournier design was commissioned as part of the Monotype Corporation’s type revival programme under the supervision of Stanley Morison in the 1920s. Two designs were cut based on the ‘St Augustin Ordinaire’ design shown in Fournier’s *Manuel Typographique*. In Morison’s absence, the wrong design was approved, resulting in the typeface now known as Fournier.

Index