Imagined Communities
Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism

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Introduction

Perhaps without being much noticed yet, a fundamental transformation in the history of Marxism and Marxist movements is upon us. Its most visible signs are the recent wars between Vietnam, Cambodia and China. These wars are of world-historical importance because they are the first to occur between regimes whose independence and revolutionary credentials are undeniable, and because none of the belligerents has made more than the most perfunctory attempts to justify the bloodshed in terms of a recognizable Marxist theoretical perspective. While it was still just possible to interpret the Sino-Soviet border clashes of 1969, and the Soviet military interventions in Germany (1953), Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), and Afghanistan (1980) in terms of - according to taste - 'social imperialism,' 'defending socialism,' etc., no one, I imagine, seriously believes that such vocabularies have much bearing on what has occurred in Indochina.

If the Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Cambodia in December 1978 and January 1979 represented the first large-scale conventional war waged by one revolutionary Marxist regime against another,1 China's assault on Vietnam in February rapidly confirmed

1. This formulation is chosen simply to emphasize the scale and the style of the fighting, not to assign blame. To avoid possible misunderstanding, it should be said that the December 1978 invasion grew out of armed clashes between partisans of the
that this trend will not continue. Nor is the tendency confined to the socialist world. Almost every year the United Nations admits new members. And many 'old nations,' once thought fully consolidated, find themselves challenged by 'sub'-nationalisms within their borders - nationalisms which, naturally, dream of shedding this sub- ness one happy day. The reality is quite plain: the 'end of the era of nationalism,' so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight. Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time.

But if the facts are clear, their explanation remains a matter of long-standing dispute. Nation, nationality, nationalism - all have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyse. In contrast to the immense influence that nationalism has exerted on the modern world, plausible theory about it is conspicuously meagre. Hugh Seton-Watson, author of the best and most comprehensive English-language text on nationalism, and heir to a vast tradition of liberal historiography and social science, sadly observes: 'Thus I am driven to the conclusion that no "scientific definition" of the nation can be devised; yet the phenomenon has existed and exists.' Tom Nairn, author of the path-breaking The Break-up of Britain, and heir to the scarcely less vast tradition of Marxist historiography and social science, candidly remarks: 'The theory of nationalism represents Marxism's great historical failure.' But even this confession is somewhat misleading, insofar as it can be taken to imply the regrettable outcome of a long, self-conscious search for theoretical clarity. It would be more exact to say that nationalism has proved an uncomfortable anomaly for Marxist theory and, precisely for that reason, has been largely elided, rather than confronted. How else to explain Marx's failure to explicate the crucial adjective in his memorable formulation of 1848: 'The proletariat of each country

2. Anyone who has doubts about the UK's claims to such parity with the USSR should ask himself what nationality its name denotes: Great Brito-Irish?

5. See his 'The Modern Janus', New Left Review, 94 (November-December 1975), p. 3. This essay is included unchanged in The Break-up of Britain as chapter 9 (pp. 329-63).
must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie. How else to account for the use, for over a century, of the concept ‘national bourgeoisie’ without any serious attempt to justify theoretically the relevance of the adjective? Why is this segmentation of the bourgeoisie— a world-class insofar as it is defined in terms of the relations of production— theoretically significant?

The aim of this book is to offer some tentative suggestions for a more satisfactory interpretation of the ‘anomaly’ of nationalism. My sense is that on this topic both Marxist and liberal theory have become etiolated in a late Ptolemaic effort to ‘save the phenomena’; and that a reorientation of perspective in, as it were, a Copernican spirit is urgently required. My point of departure is that nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word’s multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind. To understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy. I will be trying to argue that the creation of these artefacts towards the end of the eighteenth century was the spontaneous distillation of a complex ‘crossing’ of discrete historical forces; but that, once created, they became ‘modular,’ capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and to be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations. I will also attempt to show why these particular cultural artefacts have aroused such deep attachments.


7. As Aira Kemiläinen notes, the twin ‘founding fathers’ of academic scholarship on nationalism, Hans Kohn and Carleton Hayes, argued persuasively for this dating. Their conclusions have, I think, not been seriously disputed except by nationalist ideologues in particular countries. Kemiläinen also observes that the word ‘nationalism’ did not come into wide general use until the end of the nineteenth century. It did not occur, for example, in many standard nineteenth century lexicons. If Adam Smith conjured with the wealth of ‘nations,’ he meant by the term no more than ‘societies’ or ‘states.’ Aira Kemiläinen, Nationalism, pp. 10, 33, and 48–49.

CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

Before addressing the questions raised above, it seems advisable to consider briefly the concept of ‘nation’ and offer a workable definition. Theorists of nationalism have often been perplexed, not to say irritated, by these three paradoxes: (1) The objective modernity of nations to the historian’s eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists. (2) The formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept—in the modern world everyone can, should, will ‘have’ a nationality, as he or she ‘has’ a gender—vs. the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestations, such that, by definition, ‘Greek’ nationality is sui generis. (3) The ‘political’ power of nationalisms vs. their philosophical poverty and even incoherence. In other words, unlike most other isms, nationalism has never produced its own grand thinkers: no Hobbeses, Tocquevilles, Marxes, or Webers. This ‘emptiness’ easily gives rise, among cosmopolitan and polylingual intellectuals, to a certain condescension. Like Gertrude Stein in the face of Oakland, one can rather quickly conclude that there is ‘no there there’. It is characteristic that even so sympathetic a student of nationalism as Tom Nairn can nonetheless write that: ‘“Nationalism” is the pathology of modern developmental history, as inescapable as “neurosis” in the individual, with much the same essential ambiguity attaching to it, a similar built-in capacity for descent into dementia, rooted in the dilemmas of helplessness thrust upon most of the world (the equivalent of infantilism for societies) and largely incurable.’

Part of the difficulty is that one tends unconsciously to hypostatize the existence of Nationalism-with-a-big-N (rather as one might Age-with-a-capital-A) and then to classify ‘it’ as an ideology. (Note that if everyone has an age, Age is merely an analytical expression.) It would, I think, make things easier if one treated it as if it belonged with ‘kinship’ and ‘religion’, rather than with ‘liberalism’ or ‘fascism’.

In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following.

8. The Break-up of Britain, p. 359.
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definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.

It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. Renan referred to this imagining in his suavely back-handed way when he wrote that ‘Or l’essence d’une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun, et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses’. With a certain ferocity Gellner makes a comparable point when he rules that ‘Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist.’ The drawback to this formulation, however, is that Gellner is so anxious to show that nationalism masquerades under false pretences that he assimilates ‘invention’ to ‘fabrication’ and ‘falsity’, rather than to ‘imaging’ and ‘creation’. In this way he implies that ‘true’ communities exist which can be advantageously juxtaposed to nations. In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined. Javanese villagers have always known that they are connected to people they have never seen, but these ties were once imagined particularistically – as indefinitely stretchable nets of kinship and clientship. Until quite recently, the Javanese language had no word meaning the abstraction ‘society.’ We may today think of the French aristocracy of the ancien régime as a class; but surely it was imagined this way only very late. To the question ‘Who is the Comte de X?’ the normal answer would have been, not ‘a member of the aristocracy,’ but ‘the lord of X,’ ‘the uncle of the Baronne de Y,’ or ‘a client of the Duc de Z.’

The nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind. The most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation in the way that it was possible, in certain epochs, for, say, Christians to dream of a wholly Christian planet.

It is imagined as sovereign because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm. Coming to maturity at a stage of human history when even the most devout adherents of any universal religion were inescapably confronted with the living pluralism of such religions, and the allomorphism between each faith’s ontological claims and territorial stretch, nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so. The gate and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state.

Finally, it is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.

These deaths bring us abruptly face to face with the central problem posed by nationalism: what makes the shrunk imaginings of recent history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal sacrifices? I believe that the beginnings of an answer lie in the cultural roots of nationalism.

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9. Cf. Seton-Watson, Nations and States, p. 5: ‘All that I can find to say is that a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one. We may translate ‘consider themselves’ as ‘imagine themselves’.


12. Hobhawm, for example, ‘fixes’ it by saying that in 1789 it numbered about 400,000 in a population of 23,000,000. (See his The Age of Revolution, p. 78). But would this statistical picture of the noblesse have been imaginable under the ancien régime?
Cultural Roots

No more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers. The public ceremonial reverence accorded these monuments precisely because they are either deliberately empty or no one knows who lies inside them, has no true precedents in earlier times.¹ To feel the force of this modernity one has only to imagine the general reaction to the busy-body who 'discovered' the Unknown Soldier's name or insisted on filling the cenotaph with some real bones. Sacrilege of a strange, contemporary kind! Yet void as these tombs are of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly national imaginings.² (This is why so many different nations

1. The ancient Greeks had cenotaphs, but for specific, known individuals whose bodies, for one reason or another, could not be retrieved for regular burial. I owe this information to my Byzantinist colleague Judith Herrin.

2. Consider, for example, these remarkable tropes: 1. 'The long grey line has never failed us. Were you to do so, a million ghosts in olive drab, in brown khaki, in blue and grey, would rise from their white crosses, thundering those magic words: Duty, honour, country.' 2. 'My estimate of [the American man-at-arms] was formed on the battlefield many, many years ago, and has never changed. I regarded him then, as I regard him now, as one of the world's noblest figures; not only as one of the finest military characters, but also as one of the most stainless [sic]... He belongs to history as furnishing one of the greatest examples of successful patriotism [sic]. He belongs to posterity as the instructor of future generations in the principles of liberty and
have such tombs without feeling any need to specify the nationality of their absent occupants. What else could they be but Germans, Americans, Argentinians...?

The cultural significance of such monuments becomes even clearer if one tries to imagine, say, A Tomb of the Unknown Marxist or a cenotaph for fallen Liberals. Is a sense of absurdity avoidable? The reason is that neither Marxism nor Liberalism are much concerned with death and immortality. If the nationalist imagining is so concerned, this suggests a strong affinity with religious imaginings. As this affinity is by no means fortuitous, it may be useful to begin a consideration of the cultural roots of nationalism with death, as the last of a whole gamut of fatalities.

If the manner of a man's dying usually seems arbitrary, his mortality is inescapable. Human lives are full of such combinations of necessity and chance. We are all aware of the contingency and ineluctability of our particular genetic heritage, our gender, our life-era, our physical capabilities, our mother-tongue, and so forth. The great merit of traditional religious world-views (which naturally must be distinguished from their role in the legitimation of specific systems of domination and exploitation) has been their concern with man-in-the-cosmos, man as species being, and the contingency of life. The extraordinary survival over thousands of years of Buddhism, Christianity or Islam in dozens of different social formations attests to their imaginative response to the overwhelming burden of human suffering—disease, mutilation, grief, age, and death. Why was I born blind? Why is my best friend paralysed? Why is my daughter retarded? The religions attempt to explain. The great weakness of all evolutionary/progressive styles of thought, not excluding Marxism, is that such questions are answered with impatient silence. At the

freedom. He belongs to the present, to us, by his virtues and his achievements.' Douglas MacArthur, 'Duty, Honour, Country,' Address to the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, May 12, 1962, in his A Soldier Speaks, pp. 354 and 357.

3. Cf. Regis Debray, Marxism and the National Question,' New Left Review, 105 (September–October 1977), p. 29. In the course of doing fieldwork in Indonesia in the 1960s I was struck by the calm refusal of many Muslims to accept the ideas of Darwin. At first I interpreted this refusal as obscurantism. Subsequently I came to see it as an honourable attempt to be consistent: the doctrine of evolution was simply not compatible with the teachings of Islam. What are we to make of a scientific

same time, in different ways, religious thought also responds to obscure intuitions of immortality, generally by transforming fatality into continuity (karma, original sin, etc.) In this way, it concerns itself with the links between the dead and the yet unborn, the mystery of re-generation. Who experiences their child's conception and birth without dimly apprehending a combined connectedness, fortuity, and fatality in a language of 'continuity'? (Again, the disadvantage of evolutionary/progressive thought is an almost Heraclitean hostility to any idea of continuity.)

I bring up these perhaps simplminded observations primarily because in Western Europe the eighteenth century marks not only the dawn of the age of nationalism but the dusk of religious modes of thought. The century of the Enlightenment, of rationalist secularism, brought with it its own modern darkness. With the ebbing of religious belief, the suffering which belief in part composed did not disappear. Disintegration of paradise: nothing makes fatality more arbitrary. Absurdity of salvation: nothing makes another style of continuity more necessary. What then was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning. As we shall see, few things were (are) better suited to this end than an idea of nation. If nation-states are widely conceded to be 'new' and 'historical,' the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important,

materialism which formally accepts the findings of physics about matter, yet makes so little effort to link these findings with the class struggle, revolution, or whatever. Does not the abyss between protons and the proletariat conceal an unacknowledged metaphysical conception of man? But see the refreshing texts of Sebastiano Timpanaro, On Materialism and The Freudian Slip, and Raymond Williams' thoughtful response to them in 'Timpanaro's Materialist Challenge,' New Left Review, 109 (May–June 1978), pp. 3–17.

4. The late President Sukarno always spoke with complete sincerity of the 350 years of colonialism that his 'Indonesia' had endured, although the very concept 'Indonesia' is a twentieth-century invention, and most of today's Indonesia was only conquered by the Dutch between 1850 and 1910. Preeminence among contemporary Indonesian nation's national heroes is the early nineteenth-century Javanese Prince Diponegoro, although the Prince's own memoirs show that he intended to 'conquer [not liberate!] Java,' rather than expel 'the Dutch.' Indeed, he clearly had no concept of 'the Dutch' as a collectivity. See Harry J. Benda and John A. Larkin, eds., The World of Southeast Asia, p. 158; and Ann Kumar, 'Diponegoro (1778–1855)' Indonesia,
glide into a limitless future. It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny. With Debray we might say, 'Yes, it is quite accidental that I am born French; but after all, France is eternal.'

Needless to say, I am not claiming that the appearance of nationalism towards the end of the eighteenth century was 'produced' by the erosion of religious certainties, or that this erosion does not itself require a complex explanation. Nor am I suggesting that somehow nationalism historically 'supersedes' religion. What I am proposing is that nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being.

For present purposes, the two relevant cultural systems are the religious community and the dynastic realm. For both of these, in their heydays, were taken-for-granted frames of reference, very much as nationality is today. It is therefore essential to consider what gave these cultural systems their self-evident plausibility, and at the same time to underline certain key elements in their decomposition.

THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

Few things are more impressive than the vast territorial stretch of the Ummah Islam from Morocco to the Sulu Archipelago, of Christendom from Paraguay to Japan, and of the Buddhist world from Sri Lanka to the Korean peninsula. The great sacral cultures (and for our purposes here it may be permissible to include 'Confucianism') incorporated conceptions of immense communities. But Christendom, the Islamic Ummah, and even the Middle Kingdom—which, though we think of it today as Chinese, imagined itself not as Chinese, but as central—were imaginable largely through the medium of a sacred language and written script. Take only the example of Islam: if Maguindanao met Berbers in Mecca, knowing nothing of each other's languages, incapable of communicating orally, they nonetheless understood each other's ideographs, because the sacred texts they shared existed only in classical Arabic. In this sense, written Arabic functioned like Chinese characters to create a community out of signs, not sounds. (So today mathematical language continues an old tradition. Of what the Thai call + Rumanians have no idea, and vice versa, but both comprehend the symbol.) All the great classical communities conceived of themselves as cosmically central, through the medium of a sacred language linked to a superterrestrial order of power. Accordingly, the stretch of written Latin, Pali, Arabic, or Chinese was, in theory, unlimited. (In fact, the reader the written language—the farther it was from speech—the better: in principle everyone has access to a pure world of signs.)

Yet such classical communities linked by sacred languages had a character distinct from the imagined communities of modern nations. One crucial difference was the older communities' confidence in the unique sacredness of their languages, and thus their ideas about admission to membership. Chinese mandarins looked with approval on barbarians who painfully learned to paint Middle Kingdom ideograms. These barbarians were already halfway to full absorption. Half-civilized was vastly better than barbarian. Such an attitude was certainly not peculiar to the Chinese, nor confined to antiquity. Consider, for example, the following 'policy on barbarians' formulated by the early-nineteenth-century Colombian liberal Pedro Fermín de Vargas:

To expand our agriculture it would be necessary to hispanicize our Indians. Their idleness, stupidity, and indifference towards normal endeavours causes one to think that they come from a degenerate race which deteriorates in proportion to the distance from its origin... it would be very desirable that the Indians be extinguished, by miscegenation with

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13 (April 1972), p. 103. Emphasis added. Similarly, Kemal Atatürk named one of his state banks the Eti Banka (Hittite Bank) and another the Sumerian Bank. (Seton-Watson, Nations and States, p. 259). These banks flourish today, and there is no reason to doubt that many Turks, possibly not excluding Kemal himself, seriously saw, and see, in the Hittites and Sumerians their Turkish forebears. Before laughing too hard, we should remind ourselves of Arthur and Boadicea, and ponder the commercial success of Tolkien's mythographies.

5. Hence the equanimity with which Sinicized Mongols and Manchus were accepted as Sons of Heaven.
the whites, declaring them free of tribute and other charges, and giving them private property in land.\(^6\)

How striking it is that this liberal still proposes to 'extinguish' his Indians in part by 'declaring them free of tribute' and 'giving them private property in land', rather than exterminating them by gun and tomahawk as his heirs in Brazil, Argentina, and the United States began to do soon afterwards. Note also, alongside the condescending cruelty, a cosmic optimism: the Indian is ultimately redeemable — by impregnation with white, 'civilized' semen, and the acquisition of private property, like everyone else. (How different Fernán's attitude is from the later European imperialist's preference for 'genuine' Malays, Gurkhas, and Hausas over 'half-breeds,' 'semi-educated natives,' 'wogs', and the like.)

Yet if the sacred silent languages were the media through which the great global communities of the past were imagined, the reality of such apparitions depended on an idea largely foreign to the contemporary Western mind: the non-arbitrariness of the sign. The ideograms of Chinese, Latin, or Arabic were emanations of reality, not randomly fabricated representations of it. We are familiar with the long dispute over the appropriate language (Latin or vernacular) for the mass. In the Islamic tradition, until quite recently, the Qur'an was literally untranslatable (and therefore untranslated), because Allah's truth was accessible only through the untranslatable true signs of written Arabic. There is no idea here of a world so separated from language that all languages are equidistant (and thus inter-changeable) signs for it. In effect, ontological reality is apprehensible only through a single, privileged system of re-presentation: the truth-language of Church Latin, Qur'anic Arabic, or Examination Chinese.\(^7\)

And, as truth-languages, imbued with an impulse largely foreign to nationalism, the impulse towards conversion. By conversion, I mean not so much the acceptance of particular religious tenets, but alchemic absorption. The barbarian becomes 'Middle Kingdom', the Riff Muslim, the Ilongo Christian. The whole nature of man's being is sacrally malleable. (Contrast thus the prestige of these old-world-languages, towering high over all vernaculars, with Esperanto or Volapük, which lie ignored between them.) It was, after all, this possibility of conversion through the sacred language that made it possible for an 'Englishman' to become Pope\(^8\) and a 'Manchu' Son of Heaven.

But even though the sacred languages made such communities as Christendom imaginable, the actual scope and plausibility of these communities can not be explained by sacred script alone: their readers were, after all, tiny literate reeds on top of vast illiterate oceans.\(^9\) A fuller explanation requires a glance at the relationship between the literati and their societies. It would be a mistake to view the former as a kind of theological technocracy. The languages they sustained, if abstruse, had none of the self-arranged abstruseness of lawyers' or economists' jargons, on the margin of society's idea of reality. Rather, the literati were adepts, strategic strata in a cosmological hierarchy of which the apex was divine.\(^10\) The fundamental conceptions about 'social groups' were centripetal and hierarchical, rather than boundary-oriented and horizontal. The astonishing power of the papacy in its nookday is only comprehensible in terms of a trans-European Latin-writing clerisy, and a conception of the world, shared by virtually everyone, that the bilingual intelligentsia, by mediating between vernacular and Latin, mediated

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7. Church Greek seems not to have achieved the status of a truth-language. The reasons for this 'failure' are various, but one key factor was certainly the fact that Greek remained a living demotic speech (unlike Latin) in much of the Eastern Empire. This insight I owe to Judit Herrin.

8. Nicholas Brakespear held the office of pontiff between 1154 and 1159 under the name Adrian IV.

9. Marc Bloch reminds us that 'the majority of lords and many great barons [in mediæval times were administrators incapable of studying personally an account.] *Feudal Society*, I, p. 81.

10. This is not to say that the illiterate did not read. What they read, however, was not words but the visible world. 'In the eyes of all who were capable of reflection the material world was scarcely more than a sort of mask, behind which took place all the really important things; it seemed to them also a language, intended to express by signs a more profound reality.' Ibid. p. 83.
between earth and heaven. (The awesomeness of excommunication reflects this cosmology.)

Yet for all the grandeur and power of the great religiously imagined communities, their unselfconscious coherence waned steadily after the late Middle Ages. Among the reasons for this decline, I wish here to emphasize only the two which are directly related to these communities’ unique sacredness.

First was the effect of the explorations of the non-European world, which mainly but by no means exclusively in Europe ‘abruptly widened the cultural and geographic horizon and hence also men’s conception of possible forms of human life.’ The process is already apparent in the greatest of all European travel-books. Consider the following awed description of Kublai Khan by the good Venetian Christian Marco Polo at the end of the thirteenth century:12

The grand khan, having obtained this signal victory, returned with great pomp and triumph to the capital city of Kanbalu. This took place in the month of November, and he continued to reside there during the months of February and March, in which latter was our festival of Easter. Being aware that this was one of our principal solemnities, he commanded all the Christians to attend him, and to bring with them their Book, which contains the four Gospels of the Evangelists. After causing it to be repeatedly perfumed with incense, in a ceremonious manner, he devoutly kissed it, and directed that the same should be done by all his nobles who were present. This was his usual practice upon each of the principal Christian festivals, such as Easter and Christmas; and he observed the same at the festivals of the Saracens, Jews, and idolaters. Upon being asked his motive for this conduct, he said: ‘There are four great Prophets who are reverenced and worshipped by the different classes of mankind. The Christians regard Jesus Christ as their divinity; the Saracens, Mahomet; the Jews, Moses; and the idolaters, Sogomombar-kan, the most eminent among their idols. I do honour and show respect to all the four, and invoke to my aid whichever amongst them is in truth supreme in heaven.’ But from the

manner in which his majesty acted towards them, it is evident that he regarded the faith of the Christians as the truest and the best…

What is so remarkable about this passage is not so much the great Mongol dynasty’s calm religious relativism (it is still a religious relativism), as Marco Polo’s attitude and language. It never occurs to him, even though he is writing for fellow-European Christians, to term Kublai a hypocrite or an idolater. (No doubt in part because in respect to number of subjects, extent of territory, and amount of revenue, he surpasses every sovereign that has heretofore been or that now is in the world.) And in the unselfconscious use of ‘our’ (which becomes ‘their’), and the description of the faith of the Christians as ‘truest,’ rather than ‘true,’ we can detect the seeds of a territorialization of faiths which foreshadows the language of many nationalists (‘our’ nation is ‘the best’—in a competitive, comparative field).

What a revealing contrast is provided by the opening of the letter written by the Persian traveller ‘Rica’ to his friend ‘Ibben’ from Paris in 1712:14

The Pope is the chief of the Christians; he is an ancient idol, worshipped now from habit. Once he was formidable even to princes, for he would depose them as easily as our magnificent sultans debase the kings of Iremetia or Georgia. But nobody fears him any longer. He claims to be the successor of one of the earliest Christians, called Saint Peter, and it is certainly a rich succession, for his treasure is immense and he has a great country under his control.

The deliberate, sophisticated fabrications of the eighteenth century Catholic mirror the naïve realism of his thirteenth-century predecessor, but by now the ‘relativization’ and ‘territorialization’ are utterly selfconscious, and political in intent. Is it unreasonable to see a paradoxical elaboration of this evolving tradition in the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini’s identification of The Great Satan, not as a

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heresy, nor even as a demonic personage (dim little Carter scarcely fitted the bill), but as a nation?

Second was a gradual demotion of the sacred language itself. Writing of mediaeval Western Europe, Bloch noted that 'Latin was not only the language in which teaching was done, it was the only language taught.'\(^\text{15}\) (This second 'only' shows quite clearly the sacredness of Latin - no other language was thought worth the teaching.) But by the sixteenth century all this was changing fast. The reasons for the change need not detain us here: the central importance of print-capitalism will be discussed below. It is sufficient to remind ourselves of its scale and pace. Febvre and Martin estimate that 77% of the books printed before 1500 were still in Latin (meaning nonetheless that 23% were already in vernaculars).\(^\text{16}\) If of the 88 editions printed in Paris in 1501 all but 8 were in Latin, after 1575 a majority were always in French.\(^\text{17}\) Despite a temporary come-back during the Counter-Reformation, Latin’s hegemony was doomed. Nor are we speaking simply of a general popularity. Somewhat later, but at no less dizzying speed, Latin ceased to be the language of a pan-European high intelligentsia. In the seventeenth century Hobbes (1588–1678) was a figure of continental renown because he wrote in the truth-language. Shakespeare (1564–1616), on the other hand, composing in the vernacular, was virtually unknown across the Channel.\(^\text{18}\) And had English not become, two hundred years later, the pre-eminent world-imperial language, might he not largely have retained his original insular obscurity? Meanwhile, these men’s cross-Channel near-contemporaries, Descartes (1596–1650) and Pascal (1623–1662) conducted most of their correspondence in Latin; but virtually all of Voltaire’s (1694–1778) was in the vernacular.\(^\text{19}\) After 1640, with fewer and fewer books coming out in Latin, and more and more in the vernacular languages, publishing was ceasing to be an

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international [sic] enterprise.\(^\text{20}\) In a word, the fall of Latin exemplified a larger process in which the sacred communities integrated by old sacred languages were gradually fragmented, pluralized, and territorialized.

THE DYNASTIC REALM

These days it is perhaps difficult to put oneself empathetically into a world in which the dynastic realm appeared for most men as the only imaginable 'political' system. For in fundamental ways 'serious' monarchy lies transverse to all modern conceptions of political life. Kingship organizes everything around a high centre. Its legitimacy derives from divinity, not from populations, who, after all, are subjects, not citizens. In the modern conception, state sovereignty is fully, flatly, and evenly operative over each square centimetre of a legally demarcated territory. But in the older imagining, where states were defined by centres, borders were porous and indistinct, and sovereignties faded imperceptibly into one another.\(^\text{21}\) Hence, paradoxically enough, the ease with which pre-modern empires and kingdoms were able to sustain their rule over immensely heterogeneous, and often not even contiguous, populations for long periods of time.\(^\text{22}\)

20. Ibid., pp. 232–33. The original French is more modest and historically exact: 'Tandis que l’on édite de moins en moins d’ouvrages en latin, et une proportion toujours plus grande de textes en langue nationale, le commerce du livre se morcelle en Europe.' L’Apparition du Livre, p. 356.

21. Notice the displacement in rulers’ nomenclature that corresponds to this transformation. Schoolchildren remember monarchs by their first names (what was William the Conqueror’s surname?), presidents by their last (what was Ebert’s Christian name?). In a world of citizens, all of whom are theoretically eligible for the presidency, the limited pool of ‘Christian’ names makes them inadequate as specifying designators. In monarchies, however, where rule is reserved for a single surname, it is necessarily ‘Christian’ names, with numbers, or sobriquets, that supply the requisite distinctions.

22. We may here note in passing that Nairn is certainly correct in describing the 1707 Act of Union between England and Scotland as a ‘patrician bargain,’ in the sense that the union’s architects were aristocratic politicians. (See his lucid discussion in The Break-up of Britain, pp. 136ff.) Still, it is difficult to imagine such a bargain being

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\(^{15}\) Bloch, Feudal Society, I, p. 77. Emphasis added.


\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 321.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 330.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., pp. 331–32.
One must also remember that these antique monarchical states expanded not only by warfare but by sexual politics—of a kind very different from that practised today. Through the general principle of verticality, dynastic marriages brought together diverse populations under new apices. Paradigmatic in this respect was the House of Habsburg. As the tag went, *Bella gerant alii tu felix Austria nube!* Here, in somewhat abbreviated form, is the later dynasts’ titulature.23

Emperor of Austria; King of Hungary, of Bohemia, of Dalmatia, Croatia, Slavonia, Galicia, Lodomeria, and Illyria; King of Jerusalem, etc; Archduke of Austria [sic]; Grand Duke of Tuscany and Cracow; Duke of Loth [a] ringia, of Salzburg, Styria, Carinthia, Carniola, and Bukovina; Grand Duke of Transylvania, Margrave of Moravia; Duke of Upper and Lower Silesia, of Moderna, Parma, Piacenza, and Guastalla, of Auschwitz and Sator, of Teschen, Friaul, Rugus, and Zara; Princely Count of Habsburg and Tyrol, of Kyburg, Görz, and Gradiska; Duke of Trient and Brizen; Margrave of Upper and Lower Lusitania and in Istria; Count of Hohenems, Feldkirch, Bregenz, Sonnenberg, etc.; Lord of Triste, of Cattaro, and above the Windisch Mark; Great Voyvod of the Voyvodina, Servia... etc.

This, Jász justly observes, was ‘not without a certain comic aspect... the record of the innumerable marriages, hucksters and captures of the Habsburgs.’

In realms where polygyny was religiously sanctioned, complex systems of tiered concubinage were essential to the integration of the realm. In fact, royal lineages often derived their prestige, aside from any aura of divinity, from, shall we say, miscegenation?24 For such

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mixture were signs of a superordinate status. It is characteristic that there has not been an ‘English’ dynasty ruling in London since the eleventh century (if then); and what ‘nationality’ are we to assign to the Bourbons?25

During the seventeenth century, however—for reasons that need not detain us here—the automatic legitimacy of sacrificial monarchy began its slow decline in Western Europe. In 1649, Charles Stuart was beheaded in the first of the modern world’s revolutions, and during the 1650s one of the more important European states was ruled by a plebeian Protector rather than a king. Yet even in the age of Pope and Addison, Anne Stuart was still healing the sick by the laying on of royal hands, cures committed also by the Bourbons, Louis XV and XVI, in Enlightened France till the end of the ancien régime.26 But after 1789 the principle of legitimacy had to be loudly and self-consciously defended, and, in the process, ‘monarchy’ became a semi-standardized model. Tennö and Son of Heaven became ‘Emperors.’

In far-off Siam Rama V (Chulalongkorn) sent his sons and nephews to the courts of St. Petersburg, London and Berlin to learn the intricacies of the world-model. In 1887, he instituted the requisite principle of succession-by-legal-primogeniture, thus bringing Siam into line with the “civilized” monarchies of Europe.27 The new system brought to the throne in 1910 an erratic homosexual who would certainly have been passed over in an earlier age. However, inter-monarchic approval of his ascension as Rama VI was sealed by the attendance at his coronation of princes from Britain, Russia, Greece, Sweden, Denmark—and Japan.28

reaction to the news of his erratic heir-apparent’s murder: ‘In this manner a superior power has restored that order which I unfortunately was unable to maintain’ (ibid., p. 125).

23. Oscar Jász, The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy, p. 34.

24. Most notably in pre-modern Asia. But the same principle was at work in monogamous Christian Europe. In 1910, one Otto Forst put out his Ahnertafel Seiner Kaiserlichen und Königlichen Hoheit des durchleuchtigsten Herr Erzherzogs Franz Ferdinand, listing 2,047 of the soon-to-be-assassinated Archduke’s ancestors. They included 1,486 Germans, 124 French, 196 Italians, 89 Spaniards, 52 Poles, 67 Danes, 20 Englishmen/women, as well as four other nationalities. This ‘curious document’ is cited in ibid., p. 136, no. 1. I can not resist quoting here Franz Joseph’s wonderful

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25. Gellner stresses the typical foreignness of dynasties, but interprets the phenomenon too narrowly: local aristocrats prefer an alien monarch because he will not take sides in their internal rivalries. Thought and Change, p. 136.


As late as 1914, dynastic states made up the majority of the membership of the world political system, but, as we shall be noting in detail below, many dynasts had for some time been reaching for a 'national' cachet as the old principle of Legitimacy withered silently away. While the armies of Frederick the Great (r. 1740–1786) were heavily staffed by 'foreigners', those of his great-nephew Friedrich Wilhelm III (r. 1797–1840) were, as a result of Scharnhorst's, Gneisenau's and Clausewitz's spectacular reforms, exclusively 'national-Prussian.'

**APPREHENSIONS OF TIME**

It would be short-sighted, however, to think of the imagined communities of nations as simply growing out of and replacing religious communities and dynastic realms. Beneath the decline of sacred communities, languages and lineages, a fundamental change was taking place in modes of apprehending the world, which, more than anything else, made it possible to 'think' the nation.

To get a feeling for this change, one can profitably turn to the visual representations of the sacred communities, such as the reliefs and stained-glass windows of mediaeval churches, or the paintings of early Italian and Flemish masters. A characteristic feature of such representations is something misleadingly analogous to 'modern dress'. The shepherds who have followed the star to the manger where Christ is born bear the features of Burgundian peasants. The Virgin Mary is figured as a Tuscan merchant's daughter. In many paintings the commissioning patron, in full burgher or noble costume, appears kneeling in adoration alongside the shepherds. What seems incongruous today obviously appeared wholly natural to the eyes of mediaeval worshippers. We are faced with a world in which the figuring of imagined reality was overwhelmingly visual and aural. Christendom assumed its universal form through a myriad of specificities and particularities: this relief, that window, this sermon, that tale, this morality play, that relic. While the trans-European Latin-reading clerisy was one essential element in the structuring of the Christian imagination, the mediation of its conceptions to the illiterate masses, by visual and aural creations, always personal and particular, was no less vital. The humble parish priest, whose forebears and frailties everyone who heard his celebrations knew, was still the direct intermediary between his parishioners and the divine. This juxtaposition of the cosmic-universal and the mundane-particular meant that however vast Christendom might be, and was sensed to be, it manifested itself vanously to particular Swabian or Andalusian communities as replications of themselves. Figuring the Virgin Mary with 'Semitic' features or 'first-century' costumes in the restoring spirit of the modern museum was unimaginable because the mediaeval Christian mind had no conception of history as an endless chain of cause and effect or of radical separations between past and present. Bloch observes that people thought they must be near the end of time, in the sense that Christ's second coming could occur at any moment: St. Paul had said that 'the day of the Lord cometh like a thief in the night.' It was thus natural for the great twelfth-century chronicler Bishop Otto of Freising to refer repeatedly to 'we who have been placed at the end of time.' Bloch concludes that as soon as mediaeval men 'gave themselves up to meditation, nothing was farther from their thoughts than the prospect of a long future for a young and vigorous human race.'

Auerbach gives an unforgettable sketch of this form of consciousness:

29. More than 1,000 of the 7,000–8,000 men on the Prussian Army's officer list in 1806 were foreigners. 'Middle-class Prussians were outnumbered by foreigners in their own army; this lent colour to the saying that Prussia was not a country that had an army, but an army that had a country.' In 1798, Prussian reformers had demanded a 'reduction by one half of the number of foreigners, who still amounted to about 50% of the private...'' Alfred Vagts, *A History of Militarism*, pp. 64 and 85.

30. For us, the idea of 'modern dress,' a metaphorical equivalencing of past with present, is a backhanded recognition of their fatal separation.


If an occurrence like the sacrifice of Isaac is interpreted as prefiguring the sacrifice of Christ, so that in the former the latter is as it were announced and promised and the latter 'fulfills'... the former, then a connection is established between two events which are linked neither temporally nor causally—a connection which it is impossible to establish by reason in the horizontal dimension... It can be established only if both occurrences are vertically linked to Divine Providence, which alone is able to devise such a plan of history and supply the key to its understanding... the here and now is no longer a mere link in an earthly chain of events, it is simultaneously something which has always been, and will be fulfilled in the future; and strictly, in the eyes of God, it is something eternal, something omnitemporal, something already consummated in the realm of fragmentary earthly event.

He rightly stresses that such an idea of simultaneity is wholly alien to our own. It views time as something close to what Benjamin calls Messianic time, a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present. In such a view of things, the word 'meanwhile' cannot be of real significance.

Our own conception of simultaneity has been a long time in the making, and its emergence is certainly connected, in ways that have yet to be well studied, with the development of the secular sciences. But it is a conception of such fundamental importance that, without taking it fully into account, we will find it difficult to probe the obscure genesis of nationalism. What has come to take the place of the mediaeval conception of simultaneity—along—time is, to borrow again from Benjamin, an idea of 'homogeneous, empty time,' in which simultaneity is, as it were, transverse, cross—time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar.

Why this transformation should be so important for the birth of the imagined community of the nation can best be seen if we consider the basic structure of two forms of imagining which first flowered in-

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34. Ibid., p. 265. So deep—lying is this new idea that one could argue that every essential modern conception is based on a conception of 'meanwhile'.

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Europe in the eighteenth century: the novel and the newspaper. For these forms provided the technical means for 're—presenting' the kind of imagined community that is the nation.

Consider first the structure of the old—fashioned novel, a structure typical not only of the masterpieces of Balzac but also of any contemporary dollar—dreadful. It is clearly a device for the presentation of simultaneity in 'homogeneous, empty time,' or a complex gloss upon the word 'meanwhile'. Take, for illustrative purposes, a segment of a simple novel—plot, in which a man (A) has a wife (B) and a mistress (C), who in turn has a lover (D). We might imagine a sort of time—chart for this segment as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time:</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Events:</td>
<td>A quarrels with B</td>
<td>A telephones C</td>
<td>D gets drunk in a bar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>B shops</td>
<td>A dines at home with B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and D make love</td>
<td>D plays pool</td>
<td>C has an ominous dream</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notice that during this sequence A and D never meet, indeed may not even be aware of each other's existence if C has played her cards right. What then actually links A to D? Two complementary conceptions: First, that they are embedded in 'societies' (Wessex, Lübeck, Los Angeles). These societies are sociological entities of such firm and stable reality that their members (A and D) can even be described as passing each other on the street, without ever becoming acquainted, and still be connected. Second, that A and D are—

35. While the *Princesse de Clèves* had already appeared in 1678, the era of Richardson, Defoe and Fielding is the early eighteenth century. The origins of the modern newspaper lie in the Dutch gazettes of the late seventeenth century; but the newspaper only became a general category of printed matter after 1700. Fevre and Martin, *The Coming of the Book*, p. 197.
36. Indeed, the plot's grip may depend at Times I, II, and III on A, B, C and D not knowing what the others are up to.
37. This polyphony decisively marks off the modern novel even from so brilliant a forerunner as Petronius's *Satyricon*. Its narrative proceeds single file. If Encolpius bewails his young lover's faithlessness, we are not simultaneously shown Gito in bed with Ascalus.
imagined communities

embedded in the minds of the omniscient readers. Only they, like God, watch A telephoning C, B shopping, and D playing pool all at once. That all these acts are performed at the same clocked, calendrical time, but by actors who may be largely unaware of one another, shows the novelty of this imagined world conjured up by the author in his readers’ minds. The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history. An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000-odd fellow-Americans. He has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity.

The perspective I am suggesting will perhaps seem less abstract if we turn to inspect briefly four fictions from different cultures and different epochs, all but one of which, nonetheless, are inextricably bound to nationalist movements. In 1887, the ‘Father of Filipino Nationalism’, José Rizal, wrote the novel Noli Me Tangere, which today is regarded as the greatest achievement of modern Filipino literature. It was also almost the first novel written by an ‘Indio.’ Here is how it marvellously begins:

Towards the end of October, Don Santiago de los Santos, popularly known as Capitan Tiago, was giving a dinner party. Although,

contrary to his usual practice, he had announced it only that afternoon, it was already the subject of every conversation in Binondo, in other quarters of the city, and even in [the walled inner city of] Intramuros. In those days Capitan Tiago had the reputation of a lavish host. It was known that his house, like his country, closed its doors to nothing, except to commerce and to any new or daring idea.

So the news coursed like an electric shock through the community of parasites, spongers, and gatecrashers whom God, in His infinite goodness, created, and so tenderly multiplies in Manila. Some hunted polish for their boots, others looked for collar-buttons and cravats. But one and all were preoccupied with the problem of how to greet their host with the familiarity required to create the appearance of longstanding friendship, or, if need be, to excuse themselves for not having arrived earlier.

The dinner was being given at a house on Anloague Street. Since we do not recall the street number, we shall describe it in such a way that it may still be recognized—that is, if earthquakes have not yet destroyed it. We do not believe that its owner will have had it torn down, since such work is usually left to God or to Nature, which, besides, holds many contracts with our Government.

Extensive comment is surely unnecessary. It should suffice to note that right from the start the image (wholly new to Filipino writing) of a dinner-party being discussed by hundreds of unnamed people, who do not know each other, in quite different parts of Manila, in a particular month of a particular decade, immediately conjures up the imagined community. And in the phrase ‘a house on Anloague Street’ which we shall describe in such a way that it may still be recognized, the would-be recognizers are we-Filipino-readers. The casual progression of this house from the ‘interior’ time of the novel to the ‘exterior’ time of the [Manila] reader’s everyday life gives a hypnotic confirmation of the solidity of a single community, embracing characters, author and readers, moving onward through calendrical time. Notice too the tone. While Rizal has not the faintest idea of his

38. In this context it is rewarding to compare any historical novel with documents or narratives from the period fictionalized.
39. Nothing better shows the immersion of the novel in homogeneous, empty time than the absence of those prefatory genealogies, often ascending to the origin of man, which are so characteristic a feature of ancient chronicles, legends, and holy books.
40. Rizal wrote this novel in the colonial language (Spanish), which was then the lingua franca of the ethnically diverse Burelain and native elites. Alongside the novel appeared also for the first time a ‘nationalist’ press, not only in Spanish but in such ‘ethnic’ languages as Tagalog and Ilocano. See Leopoldo Y. Yabes, ‘The Modern Literature of the Philippines,’ pp. 287-302, in Pierre-Bernard Lafont and Denis Lombard (eds), Littératures Contemporaines de l’Asie du Sud-Est.
had no command of Spanish, and was thus unwittingly led to rely on the instructively corrupt translation of Leon Mara Guerrero.
42. Notice, for example, Rizal’s subtle shift, in the same sentence, from the past
readers’ individual identities, he writes to them with an ironical intimacy, as though their relationships with each other are not in the smallest degree problematic.43

Nothing gives one a more Foucauldian sense of abrupt discontinuities of consciousness than to compare Noli with the most celebrated previous literary work by an ‘Indio’, Francisco Balagtas (Baltazar)’s Pinagdaanang Buhay ni Florante at ni Laura sa Cavanting Albania [The Story of Florante and Laura in the Kingdom of Albania], the first printed edition of which dates from 1861, though it may have been composed as early as 1838.44 For although Balagtas was still alive when Rizal was born, the world of his masterpiece is in every basic respect foreign to that of Noli. Its setting—a fabulous mediaeval Albania—is utterly removed in time and space from the Binondo of the 1880s. Its heroes—Florante, a Christian Albanian nobleman, and his bosom-friend Aladin, a Muslim (‘Moro’) Persian aristocrat—remind us of the Philippines only by the Christian-Moro linkage. Where Rizal deliberately sprinkles his Spanish prose with Tagalog words for ‘realistic’, satirical, or nationalist effect, Balagtas unseotlinconsciously mixes Spanish phrases into his Tagalog quatrains simply to heighten the grandeur and sonority of his diction. Noli was meant to be read, while Florante at Laura was to be sung aloud. Most striking of all is Balagtas’s handling of time. As Lumbera notes, ‘the unravelling of the plot does not follow a chronological order. The story begins in medias res, so that the complete story comes to us through a series of speeches that serve as flashbacks.’45 Almost half of the 399 quatrains are accounts of Florante’s childhood, student years in Athens, and subsequent military exploits, given by the hero in conversation with

Aladin.46 The ‘spoken flashback’ was for Balagtas the only alternative to a straightforward single-file narrative. If we learn of Florante’s and Aladin’s ‘simultaneous’ pasts, they are connected by their conversing voices, not by the structure of the epic. How distant this technique is from that of the novel: ‘In that same spring, while Florante was still studying in Athens, Aladin was expelled from his sovereign’s court . . . .’ In effect, it never occurs to Balagtas to ‘situate’ his protagonists in ‘society,’ or to discuss them with his audience. Nor, aside from the mellifluous flow of Tagalog polysyllables, is there much ‘Filipino’ about his text.47

In 1816, seventy years before the writing of Noli, José Joaquín Fernandez de Lizardi wrote a novel called El Periquillo Sarniento [The Itching Parrot], evidently the first Latin American work in this genre. In the words of one critic, this text is ‘a ferocious indictment of Spanish administration in Mexico: ignorance, superstition and corruption are seen to be its most notable characteristics.’48 The essential form of this ‘nationalist’ novel is indicated by the following description of its content:49

From the first, [the hero, the Itching Parrot] is exposed to bad influences—ignorant maids inculcate superstitions, his mother indulges his whims, his teachers either have no vocation or no ability to

46. The technique is similar to that of Homer, so ably discussed by Auerbach, Minos, ch. 1 (‘Odysseus’ Scar”).
47. ‘Paalam Albiniang pinamamayan ng casama, t, lupit, bangis caliluhan, acong tangulan mo, i, cusa mang pinatay sa iyo, i, maliangi ang panghahisangyag.’ ‘Farewell, Albania, kingdom now of evil, cruelty, brutishness and deceit! I, your defender, whom you now murder. Nevertheless lament the fate that has befallen you.’

This famous stanza has sometimes been interpreted as a veiled statement of Filipino patriotism, but Lumbera convincingly shows such an interpretation to be an anachronistic gloss. Tagalog Poetry, p. 125. The translation is Lumbera’s. I have slightly altered his Tagalog text to conform to a 1973 edition of the poem based on the 1861 imprint.
48. Jean Franco, An Introduction to Spanish-American Literature, p. 34.
49. Ibid., pp. 35–36. Emphasis added.
discipline him. And though his father is an intelligent man who wants his son to practise a useful trade rather than swell the ranks of lawyers and parasites, it is Periquillo’s over-foimd mother who wins the day, sends her son to university and thus ensures that he will learn only
superstitious nonsense… Periquillo remains incorrigibly ignorant:
despite many encounters with good and wise people. He is unwilling
to work or take anything seriously and becomes successively a priest, a
gambler, a thief, apprentice to an apothecary, a doctor, clerk in a
provincial town… These episodes permit the author to describe hospitals,
prisons, remote villages, monasteries, while at the same time driving home
one major point—that Spanish government and the education system
courage parasitism and laziness… Periquillo’s adventures several
times take him among Indians and Negroes…

Here again we see the ‘national imagination’ at work in the
movement of a solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a
fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside.
This picturesque tour d’horizon—hospitals, prisons, remote villages,
monasteries, Indians, Negroes—is nonetheless not a tour du monde. The
horizon is clearly bounded: it is that of colonial Mexico. Nothing
assures us of this sociological solidity more than the succession of
pluralus. For they conjure up a social space full of comparable
prisons, none in itself of any unique importance, but all representative
(in their simultaneous, separate existence) of the oppressiveness of this
colony.50 (Contrast prisons in the Bible. They are never imagined as
typical of this or that society. Each, like the one where Salome was
bewitched by John the Baptist, is magically alone.)

Finally, to remove the possibility that, since Rizal and Lizardi both
wrote in Spanish, the frameworks we have been studying are
somehow ‘European’, here is the opening of Semarang Hitam [Black
Semarang], a tale by the ill-fated young Indonesian communist-
nationalist Mas Marco Kartodikromo,51 published serially in 1924:52

50. This movement of a solitary hero through an adamantine social landscape is
typical of many early (anti-)colonial novels.
51. After a brief, meteoric career as a radical journalist, Marco was interned by
the Dutch colonial authorities in Boven Digul, one of the world’s earliest
concentration camps, deep in the interior swamps of western New Guinea. There he
died in 1932, after six years confinement. Henri Chambert-Loir, ‘Mas Marco

CULTURAL ROOTS

It was 7 o’clock, Saturday evening: young people in Semarang never stayed
at home on Saturday night. On this night however nobody was about.
Because the heavy day-long rain had made the roads wet and very
slippery, all had stayed at home.

For the workers in shops and offices Saturday morning was a time of
anticipation—anticipating their leisure and the fun of walking around
the city in the evening, but on this night they were to be
disappointed—because of lethargy caused by the bad weather and the
sticky roads in the kampungs. The main roads usually clogged with
all sorts of traffic, the footpaths usually teeming with people, all were
deserted. Now and then the crack of a horse-cab’s whip could be heard
spurring a horse on its way—or the clip-clop of horses’ hooves pulling
carriages along.

Semarang was deserted. The light from the rows of gas lamps shone
straight down on the shining asphalt road. Occasionally the clear light
from the gas lamps was dimmed as the wind blew from the east…

A young man was seated on a long rattan lounge reading a
newspaper. He was totally engrossed. His occasional anger and at
other times smiles were a sure sign of his deep interest in the story. He
turned the pages of the newspaper, thinking that perhaps he could find
something that would stop him feeling so miserable. All of a sudden he

PROSPERITY

A destitute vagrant became ill
and died on the side of the road from exposure.

The young man was moved by this brief report. He could just imagine
the suffering of the poor soul as he lay dying on the side of the road…
One moment he felt an explosive anger well up inside. Another
moment he felt pity. Yet another moment his anger was directed at

Kartodikromo (c. 1890–1932) ou L’Education Politique,’ p. 208, in Littératures con-
temporaines de l’Asie du Sud-Est. A brilliant recent full-length account of Marco’s
career can be found in Takashi Shimura, An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java,
1912–1926, chapters 2–5 and 8.

52. As translated by Paul Tickell in his Three Early Indonesian Short Stories by Mas
the social system which gave rise to such poverty, while making a small group of people wealthy.

Here, as in *El Periquillo Sarniento*, we are in a world of plurals: shops, offices, carriages, kampungs, and gas lamps. As in the case of *Noli*, we-the-Indonesian-readers are plunged immediately into calendrical time and a familiar landscape; some of us may well have walked those ‘sticky’ Semarang roads. Once again, a solitary hero is juxtaposed to a socioscape described in careful, *general* detail. But there is also something new: a hero who is never named, but who is frequently referred to as ‘our young man’. Precisely the clumsiness and literary naivety of the text confirm the unselfconscious ‘sincerity’ of this pronominal adjective. Neither Marco nor his readers have any doubts about the reference. If in the jocular-sophisticated fiction of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe the trope ‘our hero’ merely underlines an authorial play with a(ny) reader, Marco’s ‘our young man,’ not least in its novelty, means a young man who belongs to the collective body of readers of Indonesian, and thus, implicitly, an embryonic Indonesian ‘imagined community.’ Notice that Marco feels no need to specify this community by name: it is already there. (Even if polylingual Dutch colonial censors could join his readership, they are excluded from this ‘ownness,’ as can be seen from the fact that the young man’s anger is directed at ‘the,’ not ‘our,’ social system.)

Finally, the imagined community is confirmed by the doubling of our reading about our young man reading. He does not find the corpse of the destitute vagrant by the side of a sticky Semarang road, but imagines it from the print in a newspaper.53 Nor does he care the slightest who the dead vagrant individually was: he thinks of the representative body, not the personal life.

It is fitting that in *Semarang Hitam* a newspaper appears embedded

in fiction, for, if we now turn to the newspaper as cultural product, we will be struck by its profound fictiveness. What is the essential literary convention of the newspaper? If we were to look at a sample front page of, say, *The New York Times*, we might find there stories about Soviet dissidents, famine in Mali, a gruesome murder, a coup in Iraq, the discovery of a rare fossil in Zimbabwe, and a speech by Mitterrand. Why are these events so juxtaposed? What connects them to each other? Not sheer caprice. Yet obviously most of them happen independently, without the actors being aware of each other or of what the others are up to. The arbitrariness of their inclusion and juxtaposition (a later edition will substitute a baseball triumph for Mitterrand) shows that the linkage between them is imagined.

This imagined linkage derives from two obliquely related sources. The first is simply calendrical coincidence. The date at the top of the newspaper, the single most important emblem on it, provides the essential connection—the steady onward clocking of homogeneous, empty time.54 Within that time, ‘the world’ ambles sturdily ahead. The sign for this: if Mali disappears from the pages of *The New York Times* after two days of famine reportage, for months on end, readers do not for a moment imagine that Mali has disappeared or that famine has wiped out all its citizens. The novelistic format of the newspaper assures them that somewhere out there the ‘character’ Mali moves along quietly, awaiting its next reappearance in the plot.

The second source of imagined linkage lies in the relationship between the newspaper, as a form of book, and the market. It has been estimated that in the 40-odd years between the publication of the Gutenberg Bible and the close of the fifteenth century, more than 20,000,000 printed volumes were produced in Europe.55 Between 1500 and 1600, the number manufactured had reached between

53. In 1924, a close friend and political ally of Marco published a novel titled *Rasa Merah* [Feeling, Free/The Feel of Freedom]. Of the hero of this novel (which he wrongly attributes to Marco) Chambert-Loir writes that ‘he has no idea of the meaning of the word “socialism”;’ nonetheless he feels a profound malaise in the face of the social organization that surrounds him and he feels the need to enlarge his horizons by two methods: *travel and reading.* (‘Mas Marco’, p. 208. Emphasis added.) The Itching Parrot has moved to Java and the twentieth century.

54. Reading a newspaper is like reading a novel whose author has abandoned any thought of a coherent plot.

55. Fevre and Martin, *The Coming of the Book*, p. 186. This amounted to no less than 35,000 editions produced in no fewer than 256 towns. As early as 1480, presses existed in more than 110 towns, of which 50 were in today’s Italy, 30 in Germany, 9 in France, 8 each in Holland and Spain, 5 each in Belgium and Switzerland, 4 in England, 2 in Bohemia, and 1 in Poland. ‘From that date it may be said of Europe that the printed book was in universal use.’ (p. 182).
150,000,000 and 200,000,000.66 From early on... the printing shops looked more like modern workshops than the monastic workrooms of the Middle Ages. In 1455, Fust and Schoeffer were already running a business geared to standardised production, and twenty years later large printing concerns were operating everywhere in all [sic] Europe. 57 In a rather special sense, the book was the first modern-style mass-produced industrial commodity. 58 The sense I have in mind can be shown if we compare the book to other early industrial products, such as textiles, bricks, or sugar. For these commodities are measured in mathematical amounts (pounds or loads or pieces). A pound of sugar is simply a quantity, a convenient load, not an object in itself. The book, however— and here it prefigures the durables of our time—is a distinct, self-contained object, exactly reproduced on a large scale. 59 One pound of sugar flows into the next; each book has its own eremitic self-sufficiency. (Small wonder that libraries, personal collections of mass-produced commodities, were already a familiar sight, in urban centres like Paris, by the sixteenth century.) 60

In this perspective, the newspaper is merely an 'extreme form' of the book, a book sold on a colossal scale, but of ephemeral popularity.

61. As the case of Semang Hitam shows, the two kinds of best-sellers used to be more closely linked than they are today. Dickens too serialized his popular novels in popular newspapers.

62. 'Printed materials encouraged silent adherence to causes whose advocates could not be located in any one parish and who addressed an invisible public from afar.' Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, 'Some Conjectures about the Impact of Printing on Western Society and Thought,' Journal of Modern History, 40: 1 (March 1968), p. 42.

63. Writing of the relationship between the material anarchy of middle-class society and an abstract political state-order, Nairn observes that 'the representative mechanism converted real class inequality into the abstract egalitarianism of citizens, individual egotisms into an impersonal collective will, what would otherwise be chaos into a new state legitimacy.' The Break-up of Britain, p. 24. No doubt. But the representative mechanism (elections?) is a rare and movable feast. The generation of the impersonal will is, I think, better sought in the diurnal regularities of the imagining life.
everyday life. As with *Noli Me Tangere*, fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the specific origins of nationalism, it may be useful to recapitulate the main propositions put forward thus far. Essentially, I have been arguing that the very possibility of imagining the nation only arose historically when, and where, three fundamental cultural conceptions, all of great antiquity, lost their axiomatic grip on men's minds. The first of these was the idea that a particular script-language offered privileged access to ontological truth, precisely because it was an inseparable part of that truth. It was this idea that called into being the great transcontinental sodalities of Christendom, the Islamic Ummah, and the rest. Second was the belief that society was naturally organized around and under high centres—monarchs who were persons apart from other human beings and who ruled by some form of cosmological (divine) dispensation. Human loyalties were necessarily hierarchical and centripetal because the ruler, like the sacred script, was a node of access to being and inherent in it. Third was a conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable, the origins of the world and of men essentially identical. Combined, these ideas rooted human lives firmly in the very nature of things, giving certain meaning to the everyday fatalities of existence (above all death, loss, and servitude) and offering, in various ways, redemption from them.

The slow, uneven decline of these interlinked certainties, first in Western Europe, later elsewhere, under the impact of economic change, 'discoveries' (social and scientific), and the development of increasingly rapid communications, drove a harsh wedge between cosmology and history. No surprise then that the search was on, so to speak, for a new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together. Nothing perhaps more precipitated this search, nor made it more fruitful, than print-capitalism, which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.

### The Origins of National Consciousness

If the development of print-as-commodity is the key to the generation of wholly new ideas of simultaneity, still, we are simply at the point where communities of the type 'horizontal-secular, transverse-time' become possible. Why, within that type, did the nation become so popular? The factors involved are obviously complex and various. But a strong case can be made for the primacy of capitalism.

As already noted, at least 20,000,000 books had already been printed by 1500, signalling the onset of Benjamin's 'age of mechanical reproduction.' If manuscript knowledge was scarce and arcane lore, print knowledge lived by reproducibility and dissemination. If, as Febvre and Martin believe, possibly as many as 200,000,000 volumes had been manufactured by 1600, it is no wonder that Francis Bacon believed that print had changed 'the appearance and state of the world.'

One of the earlier forms of capitalist enterprise, book-publishing

1. The population of that Europe where print was then known was about 100,000,000. Febvre and Martin, *The Coming of the Book*, pp. 248–49.
2. Emblematic is Marco Polo's *Travels*, which remained largely unknown till its first printing in 1559. Polo, *Travels*, p. xiii.
felt all of capitalism’s restless search for markets. The early printers established branches all over Europe: ‘in this way a veritable “international” of publishing houses, which ignored national [sic] frontiers, was created.’ And since the years 1500–1550 were a period of exceptional European prosperity, publishing shared in the general boom. ‘More than at any other time’ it was ‘a great industry under the control of wealthy capitalists.’ Naturally, ‘book-sellers were primarily concerned to make a profit and to sell their products, and consequently they sought out first and foremost those works which were of interest to the largest possible number of their contemporaries.’

The initial market was literate Europe, a wide but thin stratum of Latin-readers. Saturation of this market took about a hundred and fifty years. The determinative fact about Latin—as aside from its sacrality—was that it was a language of bilinguals. Relatively few were born to speak it and even fewer, one imagines, dreamed in it. In the sixteenth century the proportion of bilinguals within the total population of Europe was quite small; very likely no larger than the proportion in the world’s population today, and—proletarian internationalism notwithstanding—in the centuries to come. Then and now the bulk of mankind is monoglot. The logic of capitalism thus meant that once the elite Latin market was saturated, the potentially huge markets represented by the monoglot masses would beckon. To be sure, the Counter-Reformation encouraged a temporary resurgence of Latin-publishing, but by the mid-seventeenth century the movement was in decay, and fervently Catholic libraries replete. Meantime, a Europe-wide shortage of money made printers think more and more of peddling cheap editions in the vernaculars.

The revolutionary vernacularizing thrust of capitalism was given further impetus by three extraneous factors, two of which contributed directly to the rise of national consciousness. The first, and ultimately the least important, was a change in the character of Latin itself. Thanks to the labours of the Humanists in reviving the broad literature of pre-Christian antiquity and spreading it through the print-market, a new appreciation of the sophisticated stylistic achievements of the ancients was apparent among the trans-European intelligentsia. The Latin they now aspired to write became more and more Ciceronian, and, by the same token, increasingly removed from ecclesiastical and everyday life. In this way it acquired an esoteric quality quite different from that of Church Latin in mediaeval times. For the older Latin was not arcane because of its subject matter or style, but simply because it was written at all, i.e. because of its status as text. Now it became arcane because of what was written, because of the language-in-itself.

Second was the impact of the Reformation, which, at the same time, owed much of its success to print-capitalism. Before the age of print, Rome easily won every war against heresy in Western Europe because it always had better internal lines of communication than its challengers. But when in 1517 Martin Luther nailed his theses to the chapel-door in Wittenberg, they were printed up in German translation, and ‘within 15 days [had been] seen in every part of the country.’ In the two decades 1520–1540 three times as many books were published in German as in the period 1500–1520, an astonishing transformation to which Luther was absolutely central. His works represented no less than one third of all German-language books sold between 1518 and 1525. Between 1522 and 1546, a total of 430 editions (whole or partial) of his Biblical translations appeared. ‘We have here for the first time a truly mass readership and a popular literature within everybody’s reach.’ In effect, Luther became the first bestselling author so known. Or, to put it another way, the first writer who could ‘sell’ his new books on the basis of his name.

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6. ‘Hence the introduction of printing was in this respect a stage on the road to our present society of mass consumption and standardisation.’ Ibid., pp. 259–60. (The original text has ‘une civilisation de masse et de standardisation,’ which may be better rendered ‘standardised, mass civilisation.’ L’Apparition, p. 394).
7. Ibid., p. 195.

8. Ibid., pp. 289–90.
10. From this point it was only a step to the situation in seventeenth-century
Where Luther led, others quickly followed, opening the colossal religious propaganda war that raged across Europe for the next century. In this titanic battle for men’s minds, Protestantism was always fundamentally on the offensive, precisely because it knew how to make use of the expanding vernacular print-market being created by capitalism, while the Counter-Reformation defended the citadel of Latin. The emblem for this is the Vatican’s *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*—to which there was no Protestant counterpart—a novel catalogue made necessary by the sheer volume of printed subversion. Nothing gives a better sense of this siege mentality than François I’s panicked 1535 ban on the printing of any books in his realm—on pain of death by hanging! The reason for both the ban and its unenforceability was that by then its realm’s eastern borders were ringed with Protestant states and cities producing a massive stream of smugglable print. To take Calvin’s Geneva alone: between 1533 and 1540 only 42 editions were published there, but the numbers swelled to 527 between 1550 and 1564, by which latter date no less than 40 separate printing-presses were working overtime.  

The coalition between Protestantism and print-capitalism, exploiting cheap popular editions, quickly created large new reading publics—not least among merchants and women, who typically knew little or no Latin—and simultaneously mobilized them for politico-religious purposes. Inevitably, it was not merely the Church that was shaken to its core. The same earthquake produced Europe’s first important non-dynastic, non-city states in the Dutch Republic and the Commonwealth of the Puritans. (François I’s panic was as much political as religious.)

Third was the slow, geographically uneven, spread of particular vernaculars as instruments of administrative centralization by certain well-positioned would-be absolutist monarchs. Here it is useful to remember that the universality of Latin in mediaeval Western Europe never corresponded to a universal political system. The contrast with Imperial China, where the reach of the mandarinal bureaucracy and of painted characters largely coincided, is instructive. In effect, the political fragmentation of Western Europe after the collapse of the Western Empire meant that no sovereign could monopolize Latin and make it his and only his language of state, and thus Latin’s religious authority never had a true political analogue.

The birth of administrative vernaculars predated both print and the religious upheaval of the sixteenth century, and must therefore be regarded (at least initially) as an independent factor in the erosion of the sacred imagined community. At the same time, nothing suggests that any deep-seated ideological, let alone proto-national, impulses underlay this vernacularization where it occurred. The case of ‘England’—on the northwestern periphery of Latin Europe—is here especially enlightening. Prior to the Norman Conquest, the language of the court, literary and administrative, was Anglo-Saxon. For the next century and a half virtually all royal documents were composed in Latin. Between about 1200 and 1350 this state–Latin was superseded by Norman French. In the meantime, a slow fusion between this language of a foreign ruling class and the Anglo-Saxon of the subject population produced Early English. The fusion made it possible for the new language to take its turn, after 1362, as the language of the courts—and for the opening of Parliament. Wycliffe’s vernacular manuscript Bible followed in 1382. It is essential to bear in mind that this sequence was a series of state, not ‘national,’ languages; and that the state concerned covered at various times not only today’s England and Wales, but also portions of Ireland, Scotland and France. Obviously, huge elements of the subject populations knew little or nothing of Latin, Norman French, or Early English. Not till almost a century after Early English’s political enthronement was London’s power swept out of ‘France’.

On the Seine, a similar movement took place, if at a slower pace.

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13. We should not assume that administrative vernacular unification was immediately or fully achieved. It is unlikely that the Guyenne ruled from London was ever primarily administered in Early English.
As Bloch wryly puts it, ‘French, that is to say a language which, since it was regarded as merely a corrupt form of Latin, took several centuries to raise itself to literary dignity’, only became the official language of the courts of justice in 1539, when François I issued the Edict of Villers-Cotterêts. In other dynastic realms Latin survived much longer — under the Habsburgs well into the nineteenth century. In still others, ‘foreign’ vernaculars took over: in the eighteenth century the languages of the Romanov court were French and German.

In every instance, the ‘choice’ of language appears as a gradual, unsystematic, pragmatic, not to say haphazard development. As such, it was utterly different from the self-conscious language policies pursued by nineteenth-century dynasts confronted with the rise of hostile popular linguistic-nationalisms. (See below, Chapter 6). One clear sign of the difference is that the old administrative languages were just that: languages used by and for officialdoms for their own inner convenience. There was no idea of systematically imposing the language on the dynasts’ various subject populations. Nonetheless, the elevation of these vernaculars to the status of languages-of-power, where, in one sense, they were competitors with Latin (French in Paris, [Early] English in London), made its own contribution to the decline of the imagined community of Christendom.

At bottom, it is likely that the esotericization of Latin, the Reformation, and the haphazard development of administrative vernaculars are significant, in the present context, primarily in a negative sense — in their contributions to the dethronement of Latin. It is quite possible to conceive of the emergence of the new imagined national communities without any one, perhaps all, of them being present. What, in a positive sense, made the new communities imaginable was a half-fortuitous, but explosive, interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity.

The element of fatality is essential. For whatever superhuman feats capitalism was capable of, it found in death and languages two tenacious adversaries. Particular languages can die or be wiped out, but there was and is no possibility of humankind’s general linguistic unification. Yet this mutual incomprehensibility was historically of only slight importance until capitalism and print created monoglot mass reading publics.

While it is essential to keep in mind an idea of fatality, in the sense of a general condition of irredeemable linguistic diversity, it would be a mistake to equate this fatality with that common element in nationalist ideologies which stresses the primordial fatality of particular languages and their association with particular territorial units. The essential thing is the interplay between fatality, technology, and capitalism. In pre-print Europe, and, of course, elsewhere in the world, the diversity of spoken languages, those languages that for their speakers were (and are) the warp and woof of their lives, was immense; so immense, indeed, that had print-capitalism sought to exploit each potential oral vernacular market, it would have remained a capitalism of petty proportions. But these varied idiolects were capable of being assembled, within definite limits, into print-languages far fewer in number. The very arbitrariness of any system of signs for sounds facilitated the assembling process. (At the same time, the more ideographic the signs, the vaster the potential

16. Ibid., p. 93.
17. An agreeable confirmation of this point is provided by François I, who, as we have seen, banned all printing of books in 1535 and made French the language of his courts four years later!
18. It was not the first ‘accident’ of its kind. Fevry and Martin note that while a visible bourgeoisie already existed in Europe by the late thirteenth century, paper did not come into general use until the end of the fourteenth. Only paper’s smooth plane surface made the mass reproduction of texts and pictures possible — and this did not occur for still another seventy-five years. But paper was not a European invention. It floated in from another history — China’s — through the Islamic world. The Coming of the Book, pp. 22, 30, and 45.
19. We still have no giant multinationals in the world of publishing.
20. For a useful discussion of this point, see S. H. Steinberg, Five Hundred Years of Printing, chapter 5. That the sign ought is pronounced differently in the words although, bough, lough, rough, cough, and hiccough, shows both the idiolectic variety out of which the now-standard spelling of English emerged, and the ideographic quality of the final product.
assembling zone. One can detect a sort of descending hierarchy here from algebra through Chinese and English, to the regular syllabaries of French or Indonesian.) Nothing served to ‘assemble’ related vernaculars more than capitalism, which, within the limits imposed by grammars and syntaxes, created mechanically reproduced print-languages capable of dissemination through the market. 21

These print-languages laid the bases for national consciousnesses in three distinct ways. First and foremost, they created unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars. Speakers of the huge variety of Frenches, Englishes, or Spanishes, who might find it difficult or even impossible to understand one another in conversation, became capable of comprehending one another via print and paper. In the process, they gradually became aware of the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their particular language-field, and at the same time that only those hundreds of thousands, or millions, so belonged. These fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community.

Second, print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation. As Fevre and Martin remind us, the printed book kept a permanent form, capable of virtually infinite reproduction, temporally and spatially. It was no longer subject to the individualizing and ‘unconsciously modernizing’ habits of monastic scribes. Thus, while twelfth-century French differed markedly from that written by Villon in the fifteenth, the rate of change slowed decisively in the sixteenth. ‘By the 17th century languages in Europe had generally assumed their modern forms.’ 22 To put it another way, for three centuries now these stabilized print-languages have been gathering a darkening varnish; the words of our seventeenth-century forebears are accessible to us in a way that to Villon his twelfth-century ancestors were not.

Third, print-capitalism created languages-of-power of a kind different from the older administrative vernaculars. Certain dialects inevitably were ‘closer’ to each print-language and dominated their final forms. Their disadvantaged cousins, still assimilable to the emerging print-language, lost caste, above all because they were unsuccessful (or only relatively successful) in insisting on their own print-form. ‘Northwestern German’ became Platt Deuts, a largely spoken, thus sub-standard, German, because it was assimilable to print-German in a way that Bohemian spoken–Czech was not. High German, the King’s English, and, later, Central Thai, were correspondingly elevated to a new politico-cultural eminence. (Hence the struggles in late-twentieth-century Europe by certain ‘sub-nationalities to change their subordinate status by breaking firmly into print–and radio.)

It remains only to emphasize that in their origins, the fixing of print-languages and the differentiation of status between them were largely unconscious processes resulting from the explosive interaction between capitalism, technology and human linguistic diversity. But as with so much else in the history of nationalism, once ‘there,’ they could become formal models to be imitated, and, where expedient, consciously exploited in a Machiavellian spirit. Today, the Thai government actively discourages attempts by foreign missionaries to provide its hill-tribe minorities with their own transcription-systems and to develop publications in their own languages: the same government is largely indifferent to what these minorities speak. The fate of the Turkie-speaking peoples in the zones incorporated into today’s Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and the USSR is especially exemplary. A family of spoken languages, once everywhere assemblable, thus comprehensible, within an Arabic orthography, has lost that unity as a result of conscious manipulations. To heighten Turkish–Turkey’s national consciousness at the expense of any wider Islamic identification, Atatürk imposed

21. I say ‘nothing served . . . more than capitalism’ advisedly. Both Steinberg and Eisenstein come close to theomorphizing ‘print’ as print as the genius of modern history. Fevre and Martin never forget that behind print stand printers and publishing firms. It is worth remembering in this context that although printing was invented first in China, possibly 500 years before its appearance in Europe, it had no major, let alone revolutionary impact — precisely because of the absence of capitalism there.

compulsory romanization. The Soviet authorities followed suit, first with an anti-Islamic, anti-Persian compulsory romanization, then, in Stalin's 1930s, with a Russifying compulsory Cyrillicization.

We can summarize the conclusions to be drawn from the argument thus far by saying that the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation. The potential stretch of these communities was inherently limited, and, at the same time, bore none but the most fortuitous relationship to existing political boundaries (which were, on the whole, the highwater marks of dynastic expansionism).

Yet it is obvious that while today almost all modern self-conceived nations — and also nation-states — have 'national print-languages', many of them have these languages in common, and in others only a tiny fraction of the population 'uses' the national language in conversation or on paper. The nation-states of Spanish America or those of the 'Anglo-Saxon family' are conspicuous examples of the first outcome; many ex-colonial states, particularly in Africa, of the second. In other words, the concrete formation of contemporary nation-states is by no means isomorphic with the determinate reach of particular print-languages. To account for the discontinuity — interconnectedness between print-languages, national consciousness, and nation-states, it is necessary to turn to the large cluster of new political entities that sprang up in the Western hemisphere between 1776 and 1838, all of which self-consciously defined themselves as nations, and, with the interesting exception of Brazil, as (non-dynastic) republics. For not only were they historically the first such states to emerge on the world stage, and therefore inevitably provided the first real models of what such states should 'look like', but their numbers and contemporary births offer fruitful ground for comparative enquiry.

23. Hans Kohn, *The Age of Nationalism*, p. 108. It is probably only fair to add that Kemal also hoped thereby to align Turkish nationalism with the modern, romanized civilization of Western Europe.

The Spectre of Comparisons
Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World

BENEDICT ANDERSON
Nationalism, Identity, and the Logic of Seriality

Wenn die Tiger trinkend sich im Wasser erblicken werden sie oft gefährlich.

Bertolt Brecht

The purposes of this essay are essentially three. The first, and most important, is to reframe the problem of the formation of collective subjectivities in the modern world by consideration of the material, institutional, and discursive bases that necessarily generate two profoundly contrasting types of seriality, which I will call *unbound* and *bound*. Unbound seriality, which has its origins in the print market, especially in newspapers, and in the representations of popular performance, is exemplified by such open-to-the-world plurals as nationalists, anarchists, bureaucrats, and workers. It is, for example, the seriality that makes the United Nations a normal, wholly unparadoxical institution. Bound seriality, which has its origins in governmentality, especially in such institutions as the census and elections, is exemplified by finite series like Asian-Americans, *beurs*, and Tutsis. It is the seriality that makes a United Ethnicities or a United Identities unthinkable. The second purpose is to draw as clear an analytic line as feasible between nationalism and ethnicity, and, in related, indirect fashion, between universality and “cosmopolitan” hybridity. The third is to dispose of such bogeys as “derivative discourses,” and “imitation” in understanding the remarkable planetary spread, not merely of nationalism, but of a profoundly standardized conception of polities, in part by reflecting on the everyday practices, rooted in industrial material civilization, that have displaced the cosmos to make way for the world. I will draw a good deal of my illustrative material from the *ci-devant* Third World, where the speed and scale of change experienced over the past century has been so rapid as to throw the rise of the two serialities into the highest relief.
SERIALITY UNBOUND

On February 29, 1920, in the little Central Java town of Delanggu, surrounded on all sides by gigantic colonial and local royal sugar plantations, the first-ever open-air public rally in the region took place. Among the speakers who addressed the probably bewildered but excited assembly of peasants and sugar-factory workers, none seems today, and perhaps was even then, more strangely striking than Haji Misbach, pious returned pilgrim from Mecca and ardent communist, with his dark face positioned between a gleaming-white pith helmet and a smartly tailored, Dutch-style white jacket. In the course of his speech, he bellowed the following:

The present age can rightly be called the *djuman balik boeno* [an ancient Javanese folk-expression meaning “age of the world-turned-upside-down”]—for what used to be above is now certainly under. It is said that in the country of Oostenrijk [Dutch for “Austro-Hungary”], which used to be headed by a Radja [Indonesian for “monarch”], there has now been a *balik boeno*. It is now headed by a Republic, and many *ambtenaar* [Dutch for “government official”] have been killed by the Republic. A former *ambtenaar* has only to show his nose for his throat to be cut. So, Brothers, remember! The land belongs to no one other than ourselves.

Indeed, Charles VII had renounced his imperial-dynastic rights in November 1918. A *balik boeno* of sorts had followed in both Vienna and Budapest. Béla Kun’s Hungarian Communist Party had taken power on March 21, 1919, and, in the four months before this regime collapsed in the face of Czech and Romanian invasions, it did summarily execute a substantial number of class enemies. But by November 25, the Allies had helped put into power Admiral Miklós Horthy, who proceeded to launch a terror of his own. Misbach was seven months (but only seven!) sadly out of date, whether he was aware of it or not.

Nonetheless, his words were in many ways as new to colonial Central Java as the rally that he was addressing, for he spoke to his audience with the fullest confidence in the existence of the country of Oostenrijk—for which his own language had as yet no name, and which he himself had never seen with his own eyes—on the other side of the “world.” Furthermore, the revolutionary events he described were depicted as simultaneous with events in Java, and thus, so to speak, co-ordinated within a single frame of time—the age of the world-turned-upside-down. This co-ordination allowed him to expect that what had just happened to *radja* and *ambtenaar* in Oostenrijk would imminently happen to their counterparts in the Netherlands Indies. What is still more startling, however, is Misbach’s use of the little word “a.” “A” *radja*, “a” *balik boeno*, “a” *Republic*, “a” *former* *ambtenaar*—in each case “a” shows that what follows will be a component of a single category-series which spans visible Java and invisible Oostenrijk. That the names of the categories could indifferently be Dutch-European, Indonesian Malay, or Javanese also indicates an understanding of life then very new; that languages are transparent to each other, interpenetrate each other, map each other’s domains—at an equal remove from, or proximity to, the material world. For this equality to be possible—and it was not possible during the youth of Misbach’s father—Dutch had to descend from its status as the language of colonial power, and Javanese from its position as the language of ancestral truth. Finally, one notes a deep, surely unconscious shift in the semantic load of *boeno*. Its prior meaning was something close to “cosmos,” a natural, vertical universe arranged hierarchically from the Deity, or deities, down through kings, aristocrats, and peasants, to fauna and flora and the landscapes in which they were embedded. It was a meaning that explains why petty Javanese princes called themselves by such grandiloquent titles as Paku Buwono (Nail of the Cosmos) and Hamengku Buwono (Upholder of the Cosmos) without finding the terminology at all ridiculous. But Misbach was clearly using *boeno* in the quite new sense of “world,” a horizontal universe of visible and invisible human beings from which volcanoes, demons, water buffalo, and divinities had vanished.

One can see vividly the abrupt character of the change involved by considering another Javanese/Netherlands Indies comparison. In *Imagined Communities*, I discussed an exemplary newspaper article of 1913 composed by Soewardi Soerjaningrat, Misbach’s aristocratic contemporary and anti-colonial comrade-in-arms.2 It was entitled “Als ik eens Nederlander was,” which can best be translated as “If I were, for the nonce, a Dutchman.” The purpose of the article was to point out the incongruity of Dutch colonials celebrating the Netherlands’ independence from Napoleonic subjugation while forcing the natives they themselves held in subjugation to contribute to the cost of the festivities.3 But we can also see that Soewardi’s sarcastic rhetoric

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3. Curiously enough, Soewardi failed to notice the comic and reactionary character of this commemoration. Instead of reminding Dutch men and women of their ancestors’ genuinely historic declaration of independence from Felipe II’s empire in 1581, or Madrid’s final acceptance of that independence in 1648, after decades of bitter fighting, it celebrated the Holy Alliance’s defeat of Napoleon, the Congress of Vienna’s imposition of a mediocrity monarchy on a people with a long republican tradition, and the forcible inclusion into the new kingdom of what is today’s Belgium.
took nonchalantly for granted this anonymous series: Dutchmen. By contrast, if one looks at the memoirs composed in imprisoned exile by his not-too-distant ancestral kinsman, Prince Diponegoro, who led so lengthy a military struggle against Dutch colonialism between 1825 and 1830 that he is today independent Indonesia’s premier historical hero, “the Dutch” as such never appear. His successful enemies are recorded, in feudal, manuscript style, by personal name and rank. And if these enemies are not part of the series “Dutchmen,” neither is he himself “a” Prince, or “a” Javanese.

There is another word absent from Diponegoro’s melancholy reflections, and that is anything that we could honestly translate as “politics.” This absence is not in the least idiosyncratic. In almost all of Asia and Africa, neologisms have had to be coined for this concept during the past hundred years, and the birthdate of each coinage is typically close to that of nationalism. For “politics” to become thinkable, as a distinctly demarcated domain of life, two things had to happen. (1) Specialized institutions and social practices had to be visible, and of a kind that could not heedlessly be glossed in the old vocabularies of cosmologically and religiously sustained kingship: to wit, general elections, presidents, censors, parties, trade unions, rallies, police, leaders, legislatures, boycotts, and the like—nations too. (2) The world had to be understood as one, so that no matter how many different social and political systems, languages, cultures, religions, and economies it contained, there was a common activity—“politics”—that was self-evidently going on everywhere.

Unlike, say, “industrialism,” or “militarism,” which, we know, were coined in Europe decades after the phenomena they attempted to denote were in motion, the vocabularies of “politics” almost always preceded their institutionalization in Asia and Africa. They were read about, then modelled from—hence so often the earliest indigenous mini-dictionaries were “how-to” glossaries to politics.

Newspapers

That such glossaries were typically circulated through early newspapers and periodicals allows one to consider the special character of the modelling process, and, as it were, the grammar that underlay it. This modelling worked more basically by serialization than by copying in any simple manner. In my 1983 discussion of the newspaper in the genesis of that apprehension of time required for the imagining of nations, I emphasized, one-sidedly I am now sure, the significance of the calendrical simultaneity of apparently random occurrences that each daily edition proffers to its readers. I completely missed two other interconnected principles of coherence. The first is that newspapers everywhere take “this world of mankind” as their domain and don’t matter how partially they read it. It would be contra naturam for a newspaper to confine its reports to events within the political realm in which it is published. Rwandan horrors in Tokyo’s newspapers, the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in Stockholm’s, the European Football Cup final in those of Rangoon, all seem absolutely natural in exactly the same way. The second is that this natural universality has been profoundly reinforced—everywhere—by an unself-conscious standardization of vocabulary which radically overrides any formal division in the newspaper between local and foreign news. This is not a recent development. In Misbach’s era, Peru, Austria-Hungary, Japan, the Ottoman Empire—no matter how vast the real differences between the populations, languages, beliefs, and conditions of life within them—were reported on in a profoundly homogenized manner. Ténin there might be inside Japan, but he would appear in newspapers everywhere else as (an) Emperor. Gandhi might be the Mahatma in Bombay, but elsewhere he would be described as “a” nationalist, “an” agitator, “a” [Hindu] leader, St. Petersburg, Caracas, and Addis Ababa—all capitals. Jamaica, Cambodia, Angola—all colonies.

This is not to say that real comparabilities did not exist, as everyday institutional modelling was going on furiously around the planet during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Rather, it was the case that the very format of the newspaper precluded anything else from being imagined, just the very randomness of its ceaselessly changing contents. One might even go so far as to say that the periodical appearance of the Lion of Judah and the Son of Heaven—physically invisible to more than two tiny groups of utterly separated courtiers and officials—to the simultaneous imaginations of millions of people around the world demanded their location in a single category series: monarchs. Series of this kind were quotidian universals that seeped through and across all print-languages, by no means necessarily in a unidirectional flow. To give only one example, when in the 1950s young Thai Marxists seized the term sakdina, which from medieval times had denoted, on bended knee, the traditional monarch-centred status-system in Siam, and then critically inverted its meaning, it seemed to them quite normal to use the same term in a universal sense, and thus write of the sakdina social system of

4. A substantial part of the text of these verse memoirs appears in Ann Kumar, “Dipanagara (1787–1855),” Indonesia, 13 (April 1972), pp. 69–118.

5. Imagined Communities, pp. 22–36.

6. The English translation of Bumi Manusia, the title of the first of the great Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s tetralogy of novels on the origins of Indonesian nationalism.
medieval Europe.\textsuperscript{7} \textit{Sakdina} and "feudal" stood in, as it were, for one another (just as, one can see, did \textit{balik boeono} and "revolution"). This does not mean that they meant exactly the same thing, but rather that from Bangkok and Birmingham two parallel series were stretching out across, and seamlessly mapping, a singular world. This example is also emblematic of the way in which from the start the new serial thinking could be operated diachronically up and down homogeneous, empty time, as well as synchronically, on the newspaper page.

It was from within this logic of the series that a new grammar of representation came into being, which was also a precondition for imagining the nation. The late colonial environment is an especially apt site for appreciating this development because one can there see how the logic was working in the same way, if in separate institutional milieux, among both white rulers and coloured ruled. To illustrate this process, let us continue for the moment with the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Netherlands Indies.

\textit{Market performance}

Up until this epoch all forms of popular indigenous theatre, including the well-known, traditional shadow-play, were grounded in a logic that one might call iconographic. The stories, presented by live actors or by puppets voiced over by puppeteers, were drawn from local legends or from episodes in the Mahabharata and Ramayana epics, which over the centuries had become so indigenized that only a tiny literate minority was aware of their Indic provenance. Not only were the stories thoroughly familiar to audiences, their presentation was iconographically fixed. Playbills were unimaginable because the characters were all meticulously differentiated by standardized body types, coiffures, costumes, speech styles, and gestural repertoires. There was only one Indra or Rama or Arjuna, who was recognizable the very second he came into stage view. Since there was no question of interpreting such figures, who were often understood as quite real beings outside the performance, the identities of actors, indeed often their genders, were a matter of indifference. Paradoxically enough, the iconographic rules governing what Rama could conceivably say were so strict that scripts were never thought of, and easy improvisation was the normal order of the day.

But towards the very end of the nineteenth century a new form of theatre crystalized in newspaper towns, which in its own idiosyncratic way drew on the vaudeville and operetta performances of travelling Eurasian and

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\textsuperscript{7} See the sophisticated discussion in Craig J. Reynolds, \textit{That Radical Discourse: The Real Face of Thai Peasalism Today} (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program, 1987).

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European troupes. When indigenous players began to stage, for saleable tickets, vernacular versions of \textit{The Merchant of Venice}, the draw was precisely the easy mystery of the exotic title (Venice? Where was it? But one could find it on any printed map of the "world"—which had no insets for Heaven or Hell).\textsuperscript{8} Shylock, like most of the characters in such dramas, could not be presented iconographically. There was as yet no convention as to how he should look, dress, talk, and move his body. No Jews had ever figured in traditional drama—no money-lenders either. Hence there was no way of playing Shylock except, quasi-sociologically, as a social type or combination of types. The actor (by now gender mattered) could no longer improvise, but required the help of script and rehearsal to be able to present a plausible Jewish usurer; and this plausibility depended on persuading audiences of the social verisimilitude of Shylock, in other words, his placeability, replaceability too, within such intersecting universal series as cruel money-lenders, doting fathers, and obsessive misers. Yet his representativeness were not only grounded in experienced colonial life—to be sure, everyone knew money-lenders, misers, and doting fathers personally, yet in the Indies Jews were few and almost invisible—they were also based in the kingdom of representation itself, the world of print. There fictive Shylocks, Hamlets, and Genevièves aligned themselves "grammatically" not only with real, serial capital cities, strikes, elections, and football matches, but also with pictorial advertisements, which are always unintelligible except as beguiling synecdoches for serial cornucopias of desirable commodities.

\textbf{SERIALITY BOUND}

Meanwhile, on high, serialization was advancing from a rather different direction. In 1920, just as Haji Misbach was campaigning for revolution in the sugar belt of Central Java, the colonial regime executed the first "scientific census" in its domain.\textsuperscript{9} Doubtless this came a bit late in world time, but not terribly late. The newly independent United States of America had been,

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\textsuperscript{8} See A. Th. Manussama, \textit{Komedie Staboonel de Oost-Indische Opera} (Batavia [Jakarta]: n.p., 1922) for a splendid account. Manussama offers a provisional repertoire of forty-three shows that, in a nice illustration of my argument above, are thoroughly cosmopolitan-local in thematic character: drawn from \textit{The Arabian Nights}, 9 from local tales and legends, 6 from Persia, 6 from India (Hindustan), 3 from China, and 10 from Europe (pp. 24–27). In this last group we find not only \textit{The Merchant of Venice} and \textit{Hamlet}, but also \textit{Genevieve} [Geneviève of Brabant], \textit{Somnambule} [La Somnambule], \textit{Roberson de duiker} [probably \textit{Robert de Duivel}, \textit{Robert the Devil}], and so on.

\textsuperscript{9} Peter Boomgaard, \textit{Population Trends, 1705–1942} (Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute, 1991), gives a good account of this endeavour, and the contrast it forms with previous enumerations for tax and corvee purposes.
with its rough-and-ready national population count of 1790, the first state to undertake proto-scientific and public-census activity—preceding France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom by a decade. But until 1850, the unit of enumeration was the household, and only the name of the household’s head was recorded. Not until 1880 was a central Census Office set up in Washington, and not until 1902 was this office renamed a bureau, made a permanent, full-time agency of the state. In a broader frame, one observes that it was only in 1853, in the immediate aftermath of the European nationalist upheavals of 1848, that the First International Statistical Congress, held in Brussels, adopted a resolution establishing the basic “scientific” requirements for achieving international comparability of census data and the standardization of census content and techniques.

That such a resolution had to be voted over and over at the Paris Congress in 1855, the London Congress in 1860, and the Florence Congress in 1867, indicates that all was not plain sailing with the statisticians’ political campaign to modernize and transnationalize the processing of population counts. We should probably not be surprised that it was only in the infancy of the League of Nations that the campaign more or less reached fruition, still less that this coincided with the very abrupt and rapid spread of suffrage for women.

As many observers have noted, not only is the taking of a census an elaborate, expensive, and thoroughly public affair, but, with some nonetheless quite predictable exceptions, census results are highly visible public texts. In principle, then, they should be open to the same kind of “grammatical” scrutiny that we have summarily applied to the newspaper and the popular theatre. In this light, I am inclined to focus on three peculiar aspects of the census’s conventions.

The first of these conventions is the impermissibility of fractions, or, to put it the other way round, a mirage-like integrity of the body. For example, if a simple, hypothetical classificatory system proposes to sort a population into, say, Blacks and Whites, and then runs into the messy reality that a substantial group is of ancestries mixed in varying proportions, one logical option would be to assign halves, quarters, eighths, and sixteenths to the Black and the White columns. But since the convention forbids this possibility, the practical choices are either arbitrary assignment to Black or White, or the proliferation of categories and subcategories—as it were, mulattoes, quadroons, and octoroons—in which mixedness, or fractionality, can resume integral status. Naturally, this does not at all mean that each countee does not anonymously reappear in dozens of other classificatory enumerations within the same census, in each instance as an integer, but it does mean that this complex fractionality is inscribed in invisible ink. In one lighting, every countee is an indivisible whole; in another, merely the site of a maze of intersecting series.

The second convention is anonymity. One might say that the names fully recorded in individual census forms are the highly classified sections of these documents that the state keeps jealously to itself. It is a matter for some amusement that in the United States this top secret classification lasts for seventy-two years. (Furthermore, one can be punished for “secretly” lying to the state on one’s schedule.) The convention of namelessness has two related reality effects, as Roland Barthes used to say. On the one hand, it shores up the census’s truth, in the sense that it becomes nigh impossible for anyone to match the census up with his or her world of personal knowledge and community acquaintance. On the other hand, through the equivalency of integers, it maps a stable (ten-year) social field, sealed by the imposing page-by-page row of identical totals. This nameless, tabularly crisscrossed field, is, say, Denmark, imagined serially, synchronically, and as a self-portrait.

The third convention, totality, contrasts vividly with the effervescent boundlessness of newspapers’ serial imaginings. Totality (nicely inflated to “universe” in the argot of social science) is in fact required for most secondary statistical computations. But it has a political ancestry of its own, which it may be useful briefly to recall. Up along one family line is William Petty (1623–87), Hobbes’s acolyte and Adam Smith’s John the Baptist, who won a certain posthumous immortality in 1691 with the publication of his Political Arithmetic, of which the comparable analytic units were then-existing political states. Up along another line was a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century “German” cameralist tradition of comparative study of Staaten, which eventually permitted Göttingen professor Gottfried Achenwall (1719–72) to coin, by derivation, the very term Statistik. New-minted, the term speedily crossed

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10. The reasons for the early start of the United States will be considered below.


12. Much of the above material I owe to Marc Ventresca of Stanford University.


14. Information kindly provided, over the telephone, by the New York City office of the Bureau of the Census.

15. As a ruthless young esprit fort, he had in 1654 been sent to Ireland by the Lord Protector to make a count of persons and property that could serve as the basis for systematic colonial exploitation and oppression.
the Channel and entered English with John Sinclair's 21-volume *Statistical Account of Scotland*, published—of course serially—between 1791 and 1799.\(^{16}\) In effect, before it was settled by the internal logic of statistics itself, the politically moated state of the age of enlightened absolutism had given “totality” its primal shape: just in time for the age of nationalism.

Statistical logic and politics, married in the census, sheared off every series at the same temporal edges (in the twentieth-century American census, the westward press of “females,” “Blacks,” and “medical practitioners” all end isomorphically on the coastline of the Pacific and the Bering Sea). But at the same time, by their mutual interaction, they created something that newspapers were ill-equipped to engender: serial, aggregable, counterposed majorities and minorities, which, starting as formal entities, were positioned in due course to assume political reality. (Here is the matrix from which, exactly in the 1830s when statistical associations were being formed in the anglophone states on both sides of the Atlantic, Alexis de Tocqueville commenced feverishly to imagine tyrannies that were ultimately census-grounded.\(^{17}\)

The linking bridge was, of course, the suffrage. The reason that the infant United States could so get the start of the majestic world was simply its novel republican and federal character. In the absence of monarchy and estates, it seemed that sovereignty could be manifested only in the will of the citizenry expressed through electoral processes. The national counting of 1790, and all later decennial countings up until the age of Haji Misbach, were designed primarily to ensure, arithmetically, the fair apportionment of electoral representation in the two houses of the national legislature. It was not that the numbers of voters in any obvious way matched the census count, but suffrageless females and male minors were assumed to be distributed evenly across the states, and thus the household head (whose name, as I have noted, was the only one the census recorded until 1850) could, in a statistical-apportionment sense, represent them. Slaves, however, were not distributed evenly. Property they might be, but Southern slave-owners were not eager to surrender the chance to count them, once every ten years, as persons. Hence the bizarre compromise arrangement—showing that William Petty’s political arithmetic had come fully into its own—whereby each unfree American recorded through the census was fractionally counted as three-fifths of a person for purposes of congressional reapportionment.

17. See the celebrated chapter XII in De la Démocratie en Amérique (Paris: Pagnier, 1859), pp. 226–34, especially at p. 230. “De nos temps, la liberté d’association est devenue une garantie nécessaire contre la tyrannie de la majorité” (emphasis added). Was a majority, let alone a tyrannical majority, seriously conceivable under the ancien régime?

Fanning out from the United States, electoralism exerted an ever-increasing influence on the style of census-taking, as notions of popular sovereignty spread, as the state acquired a welfare-and-development mission, and as the suffrage widened. It was not long before voters began to influence the very categories through which the machinery of enumerations whirled.\(^{18}\) There were, under the new conditions, for the first time good reasons to wish to be counted, if in a certain style, rather than to hope to be overlooked by the taxman who was the census-taker’s early shadow. By the beginning of the century the “electoral” mode of population enumeration had assumed such normalcy in the metropoles that it penetrated silently even into the colonial autocracies, where it could only have long-term subversive effects.

The Philippines affords a vivid example of this process. The first serious enumeration was undertaken in 1818.\(^{19}\) Its category roster included such strange, unelectoral bedfellows as: *difuntos* (the dead), *negros infieles* (infidel blacks), *tributos* (tribute-payers), *mestizos españoles* (persons of mixed Spanish descent), *morenos* (the brown-skinned), and *individuos contribuyentes* (individual taxpayers). Its devisers were clearly thinking, from on high, in primarily ecclesiastical and financial terms. The word *almas* (souls) and the primary opposition between *infieles* and *convertidos* (infidels and converted) showed up for the last, and first, time. Cross-category totals, the necessary basis for major/minority groupings, were scarce. There was no trace of territorialism, nor of the dozens of ethnolinguistic groups dotted across the islands.\(^{20}\) The next census, that of 1877, was completely secular and the shadow of the tax-collector had disappeared. The three simple axes on which the count was based marked the presence/absence of residents, their character as *españoles* or *extranjeros* (foreigners), and their skin colour: *blancos, pardos*, and *morenos*.\(^{21}\) Everything here breathed a backward, but definitely nineteenth-century, autocracy. The 1903 census, however, taken by the

18. This is probably the right place to remind the reader that, all the same, the census includes two contrasting types of series—the categorical and the scalar. The modal case of the first is gender, for which only two exclusive lifetime possibilities are open; the modal case of the second is income distribution, which proceeds by a long series of graded steps with fuzzy endings so that billionaires and paupers are made invisible. The scalar format offers every possibility for people to move up and down these steps in the course of their lives. From this arises the agreeable utopian idea of a census in which gender becomes scalar, with several graded steps, and income binary-categorical: as it were, divided simply between haves and have-nots.
19. It was sponsored, however, not by the colonial government but by the Ayuntamiento of Manila, and relied on the apparatus of the Church rather than the State for its implementation.
20. There was no real attempt to count the substantial Muslim and hill-tribe pagan populations residing within what on paper was the Spanish Philippines.
21. In the meantime, first Manila, then other ports, had been thrown open to international trade, so that foreigners were now appearing there for the first time. Furthermore, the arrival of the steamship made the presence/absence of residents a real question.
Americans within months of the official termination of their brutal war of conquest, was already structured proto-electorally in the peculiar American manner, categorizing (in alphabetic order) twenty-five so-determined “wild” or “civilized” native ethnolinguistic groups, five skin-colour tones from white through black, as well as a skein of birthplaces and, where relevant, citizenships. In the publicized pages of this census, the words Tagalog and Ilocano had, for the first time, numbers attached to them, which were perfectly available for Tagalog- and Ilocano-speakers to read. And the reality effect of the official census, its claim that what was being counted was, socially speaking, profoundly “there,” gave these figures a kind of calm monumentality. More striking still, with a category structure of this kind, the Americans in the Philippines, who could not imagine not counting themselves, since they so pre-eminently counted, appeared as a visible, sealed-in, numbered minority. Exactly the same thing happened in the 1921 census of the Netherlands Indies, and more generally in the twentieth-century colonial world. From a certain angle, one can see each of these censuses as smoking entrails from which the impending collapse of a particular colonialism lay ready to be deciphered.

PRACTICE

From the contrast between two styles of serialization—one, figured by the newspaper, unbound and unenumerated, the other, figured by the census, bound and numerated—the lineaments of two kinds of politicization and political practice emerge, both of which, however, show how basic to the modern imagining of collectivity seriality always is.

One can get a vivid sense of the dynamic of the first from the following passage, which I have translated from Dia Jang Menjerah (“She Who Gave Up”), a mesmerizing tale originally published in 1952 by the most celebrated of Indonesian writers, Pramoedya Ananta Toer. It describes how Is, teenage elder sister of the tale’s heroine, comes to join the radical organization Pesindo (Socialist Youth of Indonesia) in the revolutionary upsurge that followed immediately after the end of the brutal Japanese occupation of Indonesia (1942-45):

In such times too the rage for politics roared along like a tidal wave, out of control. Each person felt as though he, could not be truly alive without being political, without debating political questions. In truth, it was as though they could stay alive even without rice. Even schoolteachers, who had all along lived “neutral,” were infected by the epidemic rage for politics—and, so far as they were able, they influenced their pupils with the politics to which they had attached themselves. Each struggled to claim new members for his party. And schools proved to be fertile battlefields for their struggles. Politics! Politics! No different from rice under the Japanese Occupation. Soon enough courses followed. And those who had only just obtained an understanding of capitalism-socialism-communism competed to give lectures at food-stalls, on street corners, and in the buildings that snarled in each of their skulls. And Pesindo too sprang up in the barren, limestone soil of our village. By now, Is knew the society she was entering. She had found a circle of acquaintances far wider than the circle of her brothers, sisters and parents. She now occupied a defined position in that society: as a woman, as a typist in a government office, as a free individual. She had become a new human being, with new understanding, new tales to tell, new perspectives, new attitudes, new interests—newnesses that she had managed to pluck and assemble from her acquaintances. And all of this proceeded, untouched, amid the suffering of day-to-day existence.23

The circle of Is’s brothers, sisters, and parents is without series. But at the revolutionary moment, to which she makes her small contribution, she imagines herself, for the first time in her tender life, serially: as “a” woman, “a” typist, “a” free individual, “a” new human being. This serialization so transforms her consciousness that everything to her now glows new. But these series, in their plasticity and universality, can never appear in a census, and not merely because they cannot be enumerated and totalled.24 Furthermore, it is clear that she sees these series as of a kind, so that being a woman, a typist, and a new human being fulfill rather than counteract her commitment to the struggle for her country’s freedom. We understand, too, that the series mentioned are at any moment available for kaleidoscopic transformation, enlargement, and contraction. Nothing is fixed in fated stone. Tomorrow, she may become “a” revolutionary, “a” prisoner, “a” youth, “a” spy, indeed “a” nationalist in that boundless, but grounded, universal series that included, in 1946, Clement Attlee and Jawaharlal Nehru, but only and always on a provisional basis. And if Is understands herself now as a part of the world-in-motion, so to speak summoned by quotidian universals to battle, we too read her under the same signs. We may not share her young womanhood, her typing skills, her native language, her religion, or her culture, but

23. This story can be found in his collection Tjetra dari Blora [Tales of Blora] (Jakarta: Balaipustaka, 1952), p. 279.
24. One might think that “a” typist in “a” government office should be occupationally susceptible. But the whole passage shows that here “typist” is a planetary series.
she speaks to us not, ethnographically, as an informant, but as a member of series that are open to us if we wish to act on them.

It is crucial to note that most of the series into which she sees herself entering require, as their entrance fee, that she act, in both senses of that word. She will have to learn how to “do” a revolutionary member of Pesindo, as others had had to learn how to “do” Hamlet, or strike-organizer, or nationalistic. But she understands all this as emancipation, and the last thing on her mind is her identity or her roots. (We can from the start sense that she will sweep herself away towards subsequent tragedy.)

The logic of the modern census series appears to move in the opposite direction. One might initially pursue this logic by considering the primal act that censuses appear quietly to elicit: namely, voting. Under optimal conditions, this act requires joining a one-day queue of people, each taking his or her turn to go into an enclosed space as strangely private as a public toilet, and for which the drawn curtains seem to serve as decent clothing. Once inside, these people pull the same levers or write standardized words or signs on identical pieces of paper. At exactly that point they cease, whether they like it or not, to “be” voters, except in an ascriptive sense, until the next moveable feast comes around.

The extraordinary minimality and periodicity of the act of voting reminds us of how far the ballot is isomorphic with the census schedule in its refusal of fractions, its studied, aggregable anonymity, and its ensconcence, in due course, in strictly bounded totals. But this also shows us the basis of its real and symbolic political efficacy. This basis is *entitlement* (with all the ironic, antique overtones of its etymology). Before one can “do” voting, one must be entitled to do it, through an act of law of which one is never the singular beneficiary. And one is not simply “entitled” to vote; the very act of voting “entitles” someone else to act, on one’s behalf. This someone else, however, operates not by power of attorney, but as the representative of a bounded series. The finite numerology of such series in turn works within overlapping, stratified, majoritarian/minoritarian matrices. It is this that makes possible, for example, the quite normal situation that the minute elections are over, no one but political professionals acquires any importance to the exact numbers by which a winning candidate defeats her or his opponent, and even voters who voted against the winner feel completely entitled to make claims upon that winner on the morrow of her victory. Encapsulating each level of electoral majority is always a higher whole. Voters have always the totality—the “n” of entitled voters—in their minds.

Out of this framing have emerged, over the last half-century in particular, two signal consequences for the development of collective subjectivities. Both point in the same direction, if for somewhat different reasons.

The first is proportional entitlement, on the ground of “n.” As the twentieth-century electorally based service state multiplied its functions, and enlarged its welfare capabilities, the census, ever more elaborate, increasingly became the integrated data base from which every type of planning and budgetary allocation departed. Consequently, the census itself became the object of a more visible politicization. Take, for one extreme example, Nigeria, where for years a census was politically out of the question, precisely because of fears as to what it would show about the “true” numbers of the country’s self-imagined ethnic groups, and thus imply for the distribution of political power and economic benefits. For another, more agreeable case, note how voter pressure in the turbulent “long” 1960s led to the abolition of the census (the last was held in 1971) in the Netherlands, which to this day remains the one country in the world to have repudiated this powerful instrument of governmentality. 25

The turmoil over the United States census of 1980 is still more indicative of the degree to which census definitions of categories have hardened into essentialized political realities through their role in organizing the allocation of economic and other benefits and the expectations of such benefits. Of such categories none has proven more important than the ethnic, originally devised a century ago, in a pre-welfare age, to monitor disdainfully the flows of immigrants from different parts of Europe. After the shutting off of large new immigrations in the 1920s, however, these categories became, thanks to the revolution in communications, the bases for electoral mobilizations even at the national level. The powerful interlocking effects of census categorization and entitlement politics can be seen from the political emergence of such recent American imaginings as the Hispanic vote, and the Asian-American constituency, perhaps even in the electoral elision of race into ethnicity in the case of “Blacks.”

This kind of late twentieth-century political identification, in which the census and its young cousin the random-sample survey replace the neighbourhood and the home town, is not only of growing political importance, but enables us to see more clearly that fragile but sharp line between ethnicity and nationalism. Ethnic politics are played out on the basis of people’s prior *national* entitlement as voters, and are justified on the basis of proportionality within the framing of the existing census. When, or better if, a *sot-disant* ethnic group remagines itself as a nation (as, for example, has been happening with the Québécois), and seeks to acquire an independent state, then it

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discards this census in the name of a new one of its own figuring. It is exactly at the moment of independence, however, that the logic of proportionality re-emerges, within a new “n.”

The second consequence is reinforcement for identitarian politics. I noted earlier the essentialist implications of the bounded, numbered series that censuses best exemplify. But I suspect that the series operates in the same direction at another level. Consider it this way. Identity is logically a function of duality: it exists at the moment when “b” encounters “–b.” This is a dry, algebraic way to gloss Wole Soyinka’s biting dismissal of Léopold Senghor’s series négritude: the Tiger has no need of Tigritude. In other words, Tigritude appears necessary only at the point where two uncertain beasts mirror themselves in each other’s exiled eyes.

The word exile is not employed here idly. We are all only too aware of how incessantly people speak, not merely of “seeking” “roots,” but of “exploring,” “finding,” and, alas, “coming close to losing” their “identities.” But these searches, which rhetorically move inward towards the site that once housed the soul, in fact proceed outward towards real and imagined censuses, where, thanks to capitalism, state machineries, and mathematics, integral bodies become identical, and thus serially aggregable as phantom communities.

In our time, moreover, such communities are no longer confined to the interiors of already-existing nation-states. As I have argued at greater length elsewhere, the revolutions in communications and transportation of the post-World War II era have combined with postindustrial world capitalism to produce cross-national migrations on an historically unprecedented scale.27

The same forces have worked to create “diaporic” collective subjectivities which are imagined, census-fashion, as bounded series. Few texts give one a more emblematic view of this transformation than the well-meaning Penguin Atlas of Diasporas:28 Opening with more than seventy pages devoted to a Jewish diaspora that begins in the eighth century before Christ, it proceeds through Armenians, Gypsies, Blacks, Chinese, Indians, Irish, Greeks, Lebanese, and Palestinians to end with Vietnamese and Koreans. In each case, the remarkable thing is the authors’ insistence on providing numerical totals and subtotals—so to speak Total world-Armenians and Total Armenians in France, in Georgia, in Australia, or in Argentina. No less instructively, these totals are calmly, if implausibly, rounded off: 42,000 “Indians” in Kenya in 1920, 40,000 “Jews” in Portugal in 1250. Is it necessary to underline that these countings were made by imperial state machineries for their own reasons and by their own peculiar logics, that it is quite uncertain how many of the 42,000 “Indians” in fact imagined themselves as such, and that there was every sort of ambiguity and arbitrariness involved in deciding who was a Jew in thirteenth-century Portugal? The truth is that an crass-historical atlas of this kind, far from depicting historical subjectivities, actually represents a certain contemporary vision of cosmopolitanism based on a quasi-planetary dispersion of bounded identities. Wherever the “Chinese” happen to end up—Jamaica, Hungary, or South Africa—they remain countable Chinese, and it matters very little if they also happen to be citizens of those nation-states. It would occasion no surprise if a book of this kind finds today a warm reception in circles whose members are attracted by the idea of finding themselves “in exile,” entitled to belong to ancient bounded communities which nonetheless stretch impressively across the planet in the age of globalization.

Whether any of this represents a meaningful cosmopolitanism seems to me very doubtful, since it is at bottom simply an extension of a census-style, identitarian conception of ethnicity, and lacks any universal grounding. Nothing offers a greater contrast with the young Javanese girl who imagined herself a “new human being,” not a member of a Javanese diaspora, and who enrolled herself, like Haji Misbach, as a firmly local member of the unbounded series of the world-in-motion.

Majorities and Minorities

It is easy to forget that minorities came into existence in tandem with majorities—and, in Southeast Asia, very recently. No indigenous language of the region has a traditional word for either concept. They were born of the political and cultural revolution brought about by the maturing of the colonial state and by the rise against it of popular nationalism. The former fundamentally changed the structures and aims of governance, the latter its legitimacy.

Unlike all its predecessors in Southeast Asia, the late colonial state imagined itself cartographically and juridically as a sovereign power within precisely marked geographic borders which, in turn, were ratified externally by international law. Hence its obsession with treaties, conventions, extraterritorialities, and boundary commissions. The other side of this subjection to international law—of which no better example exists than the solemn partitions of an Antarctica in which no people live—was an internal absolutism, a right of state, which stretched far deeper and wider than any earlier Southeast Asian domain. (Not for nothing did John Furnivall, greatest of Southeast Asian comparativists, speak of the “fashioning of Leviathan.”) Moreover, this right of state, which had its origins in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European monarchical absolutism, was backed in late nineteenth-century colonial Southeast Asia by an elaborate and sophisticated bureaucracy, invincible military might, and the eternally restless dynamism of industrial capitalism.

Just as the colonial state borrowed much from its monarchical European ancestors, so the nationalism of the twentieth century borrowed much from its antagonist, in the name of precisely the same doctrines that had swept Europe and the Americas earlier on. The People, newly conceived as a political entity in opposition to the colonial rulers, were to inherit their summary rights and, at the same time, to subject themselves, by the crucial mechanism of recognition, to the modalities of a new updated international law. The paradox expressed itself perfectly in each sovereign nation’s rush to join the United Nations and its covenants, protocol, affiliated organizations and language.

At the same time, the formal abstraction “colonial state in Southeast Asia” conceals an enormous variety of structures, capacities, and aims. The earliest European conquerors, the Portuguese, had already been marginalized by the Dutch in the seventeenth century, and thereafter hung on only in a remote cartographic half of little Timor. To this day, Portugal, like Ireland, remains a sort of Third World country in Europe. Spain, an imperial power in decline since the seventeenth century, was swept out of Southeast Asia before the end of the nineteenth century; its archaic pre-industrial domination of the Philippines left residues quite unlike those of other colonial powers. At the other extreme, the great industrial powers—Britain, France, the United States, and Japan—arrived in force only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but more than made up for their tardiness by the massive, rapid changes they instituted. Little Holland fell somewhere in between.

In addition, as is well known, there was little or no match between the European colonial states and the political entities that had existed previously in the region. The names are sufficiently revealing: the Philippines, named after the sixteenth-century Spanish monarch Felipe II, contained no substantial states except for a few, new Muslim sultanates, which continued to plague the Spanish to the end; the pseudoclassical compounds “Indonesia” and “Indochina” are modern inventions and map terrains covering, partly or fully, an extraordinary array of traditional kingdoms and principalities; Malaysia, whose -ia ending betrays its modernity, arose out of the last large British imperial garage sale. Even those colonies, such as Burma and Vietnam, that seem closest to direct descent from powerful, centralized pre-European states, in fact are quite remote from them. For most of its life, vast British Burma was a peripheral component of British India, and could have ended up as an eastern Kashmir. It would not have taken much for two major Vietnamese-speaking states to emerge in Indochina, as did two Malay-speaking states in the archipelago to the south. In the same way, Siam, though lucky to escape colonization, found itself inheriting whatever mix of territories the competing European powers left as residual buffers between themselves.

Given these circumstances, the Southeast Asian nationalist movements of the twentieth century faced formidable difficulties in their struggles against
Leviathan which should not be forgotten now that their leaders are mostly dead. Every advantage but one lay with the adversary—money, arms, scientific knowledge, external backing, and so forth. The rulers’ only critical weakness was that by their own racist doing they were extremely visible minorities, perhaps the first minorities in Southeast Asian history. The key point is that they were self-proclaimed (white) minorities who, by the turn of the century, were arriving from metropoles where majority rule had become the politically legitimate norm and, furthermore, a norm that was spreading rapidly into Asia through newspapers and classrooms. Thus, even in their own eyes, they were unavoidably becoming illegitimate. It is this more than anything else that explains why few twentieth-century colonies around the world had been defended with full imperial conviction and to the death.

From the viewpoint of the nationalists, many of whom were quite aware of this weakness—especially those who had spent some time in Europe itself—the central problem was to create a political majority, a large WE. The character, timing, and depth of this struggle did more than anything else to determine the policies of the post-World War II nation-states towards the new minorities within their colonialism-derived boundaries.

We should note from the start that the Europeans were quite naturally the first to think in these majority–minority terms. They were the first rulers of Southeast Asia who carried out censuses in which the fundamental classificatory grid was not taxpayer or conscript, but ethnic group. Many such ethnic groups in fact “disappeared” from successive censuses as European imaginings changed, but certainly almost all existed first and foremost in the minds of the Europeans. Precisely for this reason, the Europeans sought quite early to build “majority coalitions” around themselves, against groups they feared could seriously compete with them in majority terms.

To be valuable as coalition partners a certain size, power, modernity, and cohesion were required. Christianized groups are the best early examples precisely because they date back to before the era of ethnicity. Colonialists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries typically classified subject populations according to religion, not ethnicity, because enemies were conceived religiously. As the colonial rulers became less and less seriously Christian themselves, so groups once thought of as Christian were reclassified as ethnic. Good examples are the Moluccans in the Netherlands East Indies and the Karens in British Burma.

Today large numbers of those one might classify ethnologically as Moluccans and Karens are not Christian at all, but they are largely invisible.


The important groups have been those that were Christianized and then educated, favoured, and employed in the colonial armies and police forces against other similarly conceived ethnic groups: especially the hypothetically majority Burmans and Javanese. By the twentieth century it was their Moluccan-ness and their Karen-ness, rather than their Christianity, that was emphasized, in accordance with the general secularization of political categories. Christianity could also be deployed within the potential majority—as in Vietnam—or to create a supra-ethnic majority—as in the Philippines, where Moro Muslim southerners remained useful bogeymen to the end of Spanish rule. In every case, Christianity was offered a place, albeit subordinate, within the ruling coalition.

A second fateful coalition-building strategy was the creation of the “Chinese minority.” Here the exemplary early case is provided by the Dutch in Indonesia. We know from comparing United East India Company (VOC) and indigenous records of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that powerful persons whom local courts regarded simply as aristocratic officials were denounced by the VOC as “really Chinese.” The Company quickly developed a separate jurisprudence for these “Chinese” (who were clearly unaware of being such, being unable to read Chinese characters and speaking mutually unintelligible mainland languages if they spoke any non-indigenous language at all). Growing Company power meant increasing segregation of the Chinese in terms of legal status, required costuming and barbering, residence, possibility of travel, and so on. By the nineteenth century these policies had produced in Java a non-Chinese-speaking ethnic Chinese minority that increasingly was detached from any native coalition and hitched to Batavia’s wagon. Spanish policy in the Philippines used different means to achieve comparable ends. The case of Chinese assimilation into Siam’s ruling class, including the royal family, up until the twentieth century, shows clearly how unnatural colonial ethnic politics actually were. The intimate ties between wealthy Chinese and Malay rulers in pre-colonial nineteenth-century Malaya are a further case in point.

The last designated ethnicities recruited for colonialism’s majority game were those which had merely symbolic, quasi-juridical importance. Collectively, we can think of them as hill tribes, slash-and-burn swidden agriculturalists, “stone-age populations,” and so on. Typically, these were groups, real or census, that were numerically small, geographically remote and without valuable economic resources.

In the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries they were generally ignored, since they were not worth the cost of administering seriously. We can think of the Orang Asli in Malaya, the Papuans in the Netherlands Indies, and the mountain tribes in Luzon. In cases where they were mobilized by the
whites, it was characteristically at the last minute, to resist the majority nationalists. West Irian, cartographic half of New Guinea, is an exemplary case. The local populations, thin on the ground, scattered into hundreds of small communities speaking mutually unintelligible languages, were formally incorporated into the Netherlands Indies only in the twentieth century, and were then benignly neglected until the Indonesian nationalist revolution was on the eve of success. Thereafter, on the grounds that they were collectively part of a new non-Indonesian ethnic group (Melanesians, Papuans, Irianese, whatever), they were enlisted in the Dutch coalition. Members of the Dutch East Indies they could be, but not of Indonesia.

Between 1950 and 1963, the Dutch made frantic efforts, with some success, to create an Irianese ethnic—eventually nationalist—group. The irony is that the medium of their success was the Indonesian language! In less extreme and bizarre forms, one finds similar tactics deployed by the British on behalf of peripheral ethnicities in Burma and by the French of their Indochinese montagnards. The Dutch were also not unique in their attempts to exploit these peripheries after national independence. The Americans made cynical use of the montagnards against the Vietnamese communist forces, and of the Christian Moluccans against the Sukarno regime; international oil companies supplied ethnic rebellions in post-independence Burma, and Libyan and Malaysian Machiavellis assisted their Muslim brothers in the southern Philippines—as long as it suited their various books.

And, of course, there was class. In most parts of Southeast Asia the white minority attempted to create allies, with variable success, among the upper, comfortable classes of potential majorities, by turning them into either landlords or bureaucrats. Not that they could always be trusted. In the Philippines, some of the most energetic early nationalists were members of the wealthy Chinese-mestizo landlord class. On the other hand, in Malaya the old aristocracy, such as it was, came over almost wholesale.

It remains only to note that colonial ethnic politics also took, in its dying days, an important, specific institutional cast. When legislative institutions reluctantly began to be formed within the carapace of the absolutist colonial state, the white minorities frequently not only overrepresented themselves, but also created safe ethnic seats, rigging the electoral systems in various ways to achieve the required results. The argument was always that even though these ethnic groups were often small and scattered, as ethnic groups they needed peculiar, guaranteed representation. Phantom coalition-building occurred primarily because the representatives of these recognized ethnic groups were almost never genuinely elected. Rather they were designated by the colonial regime itself, usually from the most privileged, conservative, and collaborationist elements within each group.

In the long run, colonial ethnic politics could not be sustained on a census-jurisdictional basis alone, but required its own culture. And this culture always had a slippery basis. Almost everywhere, the new census classifications were sustained by a politico-moral geography. Potentially majority populations—Burmans, Vietnamese, Javanese—were categorized as unmanly, treacherous, aggressive, degenerate, and feudal. The coalition partners—the minorities—were categorized as honest, brave, truthful, sincere, and loyal. Endlessly reiterated, these stereotypes ultimately had their effect. The minorities quite often not only came to regard the new majorities as degenerate, unmanly, or treacherous but, more seriously, to regard themselves as honest, brave, truthful, and, alas, loyal. Thus phantom characterizations of new-found ethnicities quickly developed profound roots in rapidly changing political circumstances.

Just how slippery the categories actually were can be seen if one considers the specific cartographic stretch of the colonies. Had Burma been thoroughly incorporated into India, as it might easily have been, the Burmans would have become a minority coalition partner like the Pathans or Baluchis, and doubtless would also have ended up as honest, brave, and loyal. Had the Khmers not been incorporated into Indochine, one can be confident they would not have been pitied as passive, simple lotus-eaters, but degnated as proto-Pol Pots. In Malaya, the Malays played Karen and Khmer to the British; in Sarawak they played Burmans and Vietnamese to the Brooke White Rajahs.

Once again the Chinese are exemplary. Although it was not until the 1980s that some Southeast Asian Chinese realized what the Europeans had insisted upon since the seventeenth century—that they were, après tout, Chinese—their situations in post-independence Southeast Asia were foreshadowed by their colonial destinies. Segregated, occupationally specialized, accustomed to playing junior partner in ruling coalitions, they attempted frantically to adjust themselves to nationalist regimes with, where possible, the larger support of any available external power (the Chinese People’s Republic, Taiwan, the United States, Japan, the United Kingdom, and so forth) in their everyday roles as intermediaries for international capital.

It is essential to bear in mind the conditions of the colonial era when we turn to look comparatively at the rise of nationalism, since it was the colonial experience that profoundly shaped nationalism. Distinct cases are provided by the two Malay-speaking nations of the region, Indonesia and Malaysia. In the first case, one has to remember that the Netherlands East Indies was the only important colony in the world administered largely through an Asian language (the Dutch had too little confidence in the prestige of their own language and were too stingy to provide the investments in education needed to make Dutch an archipelago-wide administrative language). Administrative Malay could thus turn into bahasa Indonesia in the 1920s without much ado,
and already with a colony-wide constituency. The vast and archipelagic character of the colony, in which by the 1870s even the millions of Javanese had become a demographic minority, combined with the exceptionally conservative character of colonial policy, indicated to nationalists early on that the widest possible coalition had to be built. They were deeply divided ideologically—Muslims, secular nationalists, and communists—but they repeatedly tried to find a modus vivendi and recruited as widely as possible, making no distinction among ethnic groups. Young Chinese intellectuals and politicians also participated, as one stripe or another of nationalist—not primarily as Chinese. Energetic recruitment efforts were made even among the favoured Christian Moluccans, although without much success. If the nationalist movement had a non-white enemy, it was the collaborationist aristocracies that formed a key subordinate element in the Dutch majority. The colony was far more divided by class than any other conflict. The experience of the anti-colonial revolution simply deepened these tendencies. It is striking that in the only free elections held in Indonesia (1955), all budding ethnic parties did poorly and all four major ideological parties recruited among all ethnic groups. When postindependence ethnic antagonisms increased, some of them exploited by the United States, the armed insurrections that resulted were in all cases but one—the secessionist Republic of the (Christian) South Moluccas—aimed at improving the position of the ethnic group within Indonesia. In every case the government had genuinely national leaders from these ethnic groups on its side. Today, the basic character of Indonesian politics remains class conflict, with ethnic politics playing a minor role. One can see this aspect quite clearly by looking at the two most obvious exceptions, state policy vis-à-vis West Irian and the former Portuguese colony of East Timor. Indonesians of all ethnic groups consider Irian part of the motherland and Irianese as fellow Indonesians. Aware of their double identities as members of ethnic groups and of the nation, they see no reason why the Irianese cannot comfortably be the same. In the 1960s there was a genuine popular campaign for the liberation of fellow Indonesians in Irian from Dutch colonial control; when sovereignty was transferred in 1963, many idealistic people from all parts of the archipelago volunteered to serve the local populations. Even today, immigrants into West Irian come from many different regions, especially Sulawesi and the Moluccas. But with the military's rise to power after 1965—a military that for largely accidental reasons is now dominated by Javanese, but considers itself Indonesian—the inevitable conflicts between Irianese elites (encouraged by the Dutch to think of themselves as leaders of an incipient Papuan nation) and the regime in Jakarta, have been cast increasingly in ethnic perspective. The discovery of valuable mineral resources on the island has further encouraged a regime which at bottom represents class interests, to treat West Irian as it treats every other region with sultates of sizeable gain. In the same way, the Suharto regime's invasion of East Timor in 1975, and its brutal occupation since that date, had—and I believe still has—no substantial ethnic motivation. The regime believed that the leftist independence regime of Fretilin posed a threat to its power, and was determined to extinguish it at whatever cost to the local population. True, Suharto's regime may have been even more callous than it might otherwise have been precisely because it did not believe the East Timorese were Indonesians.

Malaysia presents a strongly contrasting case in which ethnicity completely dominates political life. The need for a massive labour force to work the sparsely inhabited peninsula's booming tin mines and rubber plantations led the British colonial authorities to import hundreds of thousands of Chinese (from southeast China) and Indians (from the Presidency of Madras) in the period 1870–1930. So great was the inflow that by the end of the pre-war period the immigrants outnumbered the indigenous populations of the peninsula and Singapore. The colonial regime thus attempted to build its twentieth-century administration by recruiting not merely the indigenous Malay upper class, but the Malay minority as a whole. Malay nationalism, such as it was, thus appeared two generations after Indonesian nationalism; it was aiming far more against the local Chinese than the whites; and the Malay language manifested itself as an ethnic rather than a supra-ethnic means of political communication. At all stages, the British worked closely with their local partners, quickly creating juridical and political administrative hierarchies based on ethnicity. Virtually every postindependence government of Malaysia have done follows directly in the line of colonial British policy. The great success of the British came in the immediate postwar period, when it was confronted with an armed insurrection of the Malay Communist Party. For reasons of social structure—the contingent ethnic composition of the plantation and mining labour force—this party recruited heavily among Chinese, but it did not consider itself an ethnic party and made serious attempts to enlist Malay peasants and the "tribal" Orang Asli of the mountainous interior. Seizing on this opportunity, the British branded the insurrectionaries as above all ethnics, and in fighting them played ethnic politics to the limit, most significantly disfranchising a large part of the Chinese community and enhancing the position of the conservative, collaborationist Malay leadership. Since a late, comfortably negotiated independence in 1957, politics have remained institutionally segmented along ethnic lines; every serious attempt to break this pattern has been ruthlessly repressed. But the outcomes have not, in fact, been as bad as one might have expected. Political killing in Malaysia has been far lower, even in proportion
to population, than in Indonesia. The Chinese near-majority has been too big, too economically important, and too well connected internationally to be seriously assaulted. Malay majority politics have led Malay political leaders to insist that the indigenous, non-Malay peoples of eastern Malaysia (Dayaks, Kadazans, etc.) are actually Malays, and to encourage the Malayization of the Orang Asli, not so much to oppress or suppress these people as to recruit them into the fancied Malay ethnic majority. It is certainly true that this poses threats to the identity of these recruits, but the intent at least is locally benign, and should be exploitable by these groups' more intelligent leaders.

With regard to the Chinese, the situation is more complex. It is a paradox of the extreme form of ethnic politics practised in Malaysia that the Chinese are essential to its maintenance—and not only for economic reasons. Strong class conflicts already are apparent within the Malay community, as the Malay elite has enriched itself at everyone's expense during the past two decades. Without the Chinese threat, these conflicts would certainly become the key fissure in Malaysian politics; thus, in a backhanded way, the Chinese are essential for the continuance of the present power structure. Nonetheless, continuing present political arrangement also strengthens the security apparatus of the state in a narrowly Malay manner; it also delays the arrival of a genuine civil society on the peninsula.

Between these polar cases lie Burma (on the Indonesian side) and the Philippines (on the Malaysian side). As in Malaysia, the British in Burma practised an unusually complex and ruthless form of ethnic politics. The colonial legislature included designated minority representatives chosen from restricted (mainly Indian and Chinese) electorates. Large parts of Burma were scaled off as so-called Scheduled Areas ruled directly and authoritatively by Rangoon, quite outside the legislative system. In these areas, inhabited by peoples the British decided were Chins, Kachins, or Shans, coalition-building was achieved through recruiting loyal, traditional leaders almost invariably among the most conservative, privileged sectors. In so far as the internal security system was manned by local personnel, these people were heavily recruited from census minorities, especially Karens (read Christian Karens). The colonial army was organized along ethnic lines as well.

As in Indonesia, the nationalist movement, originating in the urban centres, faced formidable difficulties in mobilizing a political majority, but it did so energetically as far as it could. It is very striking that in the colonial period there were no ethnic anticolonial parties or organizations. The final organizational form of this opposition, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, included people from every major minority group, including Indians and Chinese. Similarly, in the post-1945 era, the major opposition also recruited from all major ethnic groups. As in Indonesia, there was—with inevitable equivocations—an attempt to create bipartite identities; one could perfectly well be Arakanese, Mon, or Burman, as well as being Burmese, just as one could be Minangkabau, Balinese, or Javanese, as well as being Indonesian. In so far as there were indigenous targets of this nationalism, they included the fringe members of the British coalition, Burman bureaucrats, Christian Karen police officers, and Shan aristocrats.

But Burma differed from Indonesia in two central respects. On the one hand there was a real demographic majority, ethnically conceived: the Burmans in census terms outnumbered the combined total of all other ethnic groups and the Burmese language could not be as unambiguously super-ethnic as bahasa Indonesia was fortunate to be. On the other hand, Burma had the ill-luck not to be a free-floating archipelago. It bordered on India and East Pakistan (later Bangladesh), China, and Thailand, sharing minorities with each of these adjoining states. In different ways, and for different reasons, each of these neighbours participated in Burmese politics by offering sanctuary, funds, arms, or political support to contestants within the Burmese political arena.

It is also important to remember that the postwar independent Burmese state was extremely weak. Within a year of the assassination in 1947 of the Burmese nationalist hero Aung San by a rival Burman politician, the state was reduced to defending the capital city itself. It is striking that the opposition was not primarily ethnic at all, but came from two multi-ethnic communist parties, and from Christian Karen military personnel who temporarily received clandestine British military support and feared for their futures once the British were gone. All of these groups wanted power at the centre, not separation from it. Although these insurrectionaries were joined in the 1950s by other armed groups, including some with ethnic labels, drug-based warlords, and residual Kachiniang military refugees from the Chinese People's Republic, the impetus remained. Both the government and its enemies were in search of multi-ethnic coalitions. Only the elected U Nu government of 1960 made the clearly exclusionary mistake of attempting to make Buddhism the state religion, an error reversed by the Ne Win military regime after 1962.

As in Indonesia, the deeper lines of conflict in Burma remained those of class. It is often said that the radical programme of nationalization launched in 1962 was aimed at the Indian and Chinese minorities; but in fact the assault was against the postcolonial middle class in general, including various Burman groups. The military regime sought to build a strong class base among peasants and workers across ethnic lines, and found itself up against many of those British-sponsored ethnic elites once sheltered within the
Scheduled Areas. Unsurprisingly, these elites attempted to defend their positions by defining themselves as the champions of ethnic identity against Burman domination.

To Burma, the Philippines forms a notable contrast. The country contains far more ethnolinguistic groups than Burma, but ethnicity as such has played only a minor role in its politics. To explain this situation two factors need to be kept in mind. First, more than three centuries of Catholic colonialism and evangelism produced a population by World War II that was 90 per cent Christian—a huge majority by any definition. Second, for reasons too complex to be explored here, colonial rule generated a powerful Chinese mestizo latifundist upper class, intermarried across ethnolinguistic lines and with common interests in dominating the country’s political and economic life. Indeed the Philippines is the only place in Southeast Asia where such a powerful, consolidated landed upper class exists. And precisely because of its power and ability to claim a huge majority base in Filipino Catholicism, it found it easy to acquire political independence from the Americans less than fifty years after the latter had seized the colony from the Spanish and the anti-Spanish revolutionaries. The same factors made the upper class indifferent to any need to build a strong coalition with the Muslim minorities in the south. Indeed it is striking that these people were mishandled, not as ethnicities, but as religious deviants. Unsurprisingly, this produced in the end one of the few genuinely secessionist movements of modern Southeast Asian history.

What may we conclude from the above? First and foremost, the politics of ethnicity have their roots in modern times, not ancient history, and their shape has been largely determined by colonial policy. (It is no accident that uncolonized Siam has the least violently ethnicized politics in the region.) Second, ethnicity is intricately tied to the deeper forces of religion and class. From this perspective it may be useful to think about minorities as being roughly divisible into three types, with correspondingly different problems and futures.

Of the so-called alien minorities, the most prominent example is Chinese. Now overwhelmingly concentrated in urban centres and the more advanced sectors of the local economies, their futures are inextricably tied to capitalism and capitalist society’s class structures. In the Catholic Philippines and Buddhist Siam they have made the necessary cultural adaptations to form a completely integrated element of those societies’ upper and middle classes. Thanks to British and Dutch colonial policies, this integration is much less complete in Indonesia and Malaysia, but in both countries the Chinese are absolutely essential to the functioning of the existing political-economic order and continue to hold economic power quite disproportionate to their numbers. The most important difference between the two is that in Indonesia demographic factors preclude the Chinese making ethnic claims as such, whereas the same factors in Malaysia encourage majoritarian hopes. It is only in this one major country of Southeast Asia that Chinese identity is a central political issue. Unsurprisingly the countries where the Chinese have fared worst have been the socialist states of Indochina and Burma, less because of their ethnicity than because of their class position.

The classification of coalition-worthy indigenous minorities refers to ethnolinguistic groups of sufficient demographic size and political and economic sophistication to be substantial players in national-level coalition politics. These very characteristics, however, usually mean that each group is internally divided according to class and, sometimes, religion. They invariably also mean that a group’s culture bears little relationship to what it was a century ago, and that its identity is a modern one, no matter how it is ideologized. Whether we are thinking of Kachins, Ilocanos, or Minangkabau, they have actively participated in national-level politics for a long time and in diverse coalitions, and have representatives in most ideological camps and social strata. It is difficult to imagine any form of national regime from which they would be excluded. Different regimes would only effect the types of strata by which their ethnicities would be articulated. At the same time, one should also expect that the degree of their prominence would vary over time, and according to the number of possible players in the national system. The greater the number (Indonesia) of players, the wider the possibilities for flexible coalition politics; the fewer (Malaysia, Burma), the greater the likelihood of asymmetric rigidities. All these groups are accustomed to a certain degree of bilingualism, since they have participated substantially in the modern educational system and modern politics. Their futures do not seem too dark; they are needed—politically, ideologically, educationally, and often economically.

Outside this category fall all those groups which, because they are small in numbers, geographically remote from the political centre, marginal to the national economy, and lacking in western education, are insignificant to any conceivable majority. Typically, they have played no role in colonial nationalist politics and thus have no easy claims on postindependence nationalist regimes. Most commonly, the degree of their internal stratification is low, as is their occupational diversity. Few of their members can be found in the national universities or in the officer corps of national armies. National communist parties have in some cases cultivated them, but this has often opened them to heavy repression. It is thus difficult for them to have a foot, let alone an important foot, in every camp.

In most cases their humble wish is simply to be left alone, or to make quiet, slow adaptations to the outside world. But this outside world—not merely the nation-state, but more importantly the great engines of planetary
power—will not leave them be. They may sit on valuable mineral or forest resources coveted by the outside; their subsistence agriculture may be regarded as ecologically destructive by international bureaucrats and national planners; demographic pressures may push lowlanders up into their mountain retreats; and they may be unlucky enough to live on sensitive borders between rival nations or rival world blocs. Their very isolation leaves them unacquainted with the ceremonies of private property, the techniques of coalition politics, and even the organizational methods required for modern self-defence. The irony is that typically they are not ethnic groups; to survive they may have to learn to think and act as such (much as the ethnic group American Indian or Native American has had to be imagined recently to defend a heterogeneity of groups otherwise threatened with extinction). Yet the costs of going ethnic, that is, participating in ethnic majority politics and economics within the nation-state, are not to be underestimated. Often it means becoming Christian (in Siam or Indonesia) or Muslim (in Malaysia). Almost always it means the end of the kind of cultural autonomy and self-contained integrity they once enjoyed. Nothing better illustrates this bitter paradox than the appearance of Irianese and East Timorese ethnic, and potentially national, identities in the last two decades. These identities are American Indian in that they occlude and submerge non-ethnic local identities in the very process of attempting to defend them. Such identities may, under ill-starred circumstances, invite conscious oppression rather than malign neglect, but they also open the way to developing a necessary political and economic bargaining power. Perhaps this is, at the end of the twentieth century, the only way out.