

SOJOURN *Symposium*

***A Life Beyond Boundaries: A Memoir.* By Benedict R. O’G. Anderson. London: Verso, 2016.**

Review essays by John Sidel, Danilyn Rutherford and Michael Montesano, with an introduction from Hui Yew-Foong and Kathleen Azali, and an excerpt from Benedict Anderson’s final book.

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Unimagined Solidarity — Notes on an Indonesian Funeral: Hui Yew-Foong and Kathleen Azali

Benedict Richard O’Gorman Anderson died on 13 December 2015 in East Java, Indonesia. The news spread swiftly — through Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp messages and email — from multiple sources that those who received it considered reliable. Nevertheless, the news was unbelievable, not so much in the sense that the fact was suspect, but in the sense that we found it difficult to habituate ourselves to the fact. In writing about Javanese death practices, Jim Siegel, one of Anderson’s closest friends, started by saying that “[a] person is dead when he has been given up for dead by those closest to him” (Siegel 1983, p. 1). That is, the phenomenology of death includes both biological death and social death. Siegel adds that, in Java, the time lapse between the two is short, sometimes a matter of minutes. With Anderson, this was not the case. He was not given the “hurried, subdued, yet methodically efficient” Javanese funeral (Geertz 1973, p. 146), which would have been too short. Instead, he had an Indonesian funeral, and a unique one at that.

Anderson's body reposed at Rumah Duka Adi Jasa, a Chinese funeral parlour in Surabaya, starting 15 December. Chinese funerals typically take a few days, and so this arrangement allowed time for family and friends to come to the funeral from the United Kingdom, the United States, Japan, Thailand, the Philippines and other parts of Indonesia, among other places. The funeral rituals were held on the evening of 18 December, the cremation took place on 19 December, and the ashes were cast into the Java Sea on 20 December. Notes on the events of these days follow.

18 December — Funeral Rituals

I arrived in Surabaya to attend Anderson's funeral on 18 December. I was neither Anderson's student nor particularly close to him, but he had been generous to me and we had maintained an intermittent correspondence over the last few years. Since I was in the region, I decided to visit Surabaya and pay him my last respects.¹

On reaching the funeral parlour, I saw the familiar faces of former Cornell students who had studied with Anderson, and I met others associated with him in one way or another, often on a much deeper level than I. These varying degrees of intimacy with Anderson notwithstanding, on this occasion we all shared a sense of horizontal comradeship based on our relationships with him. In such a gathering, people tended to share spontaneously stories of their encounters with Anderson, which in turn found echoes in the experiences of those who were listening. It is these echoes that affirm the solidarity, not only among those who were present in Surabaya, but also among unknown others who can identify with these encounters in their own respective contexts.

Anderson's funeral was Indonesian, but in an unconventional way. Most people, at death, become religious subjects, because they are accorded religious rituals that facilitate their journey into the unknown. In Indonesia, this is particularly the case, since one cannot live or die as a non-religious subject. The Indonesian political subject is, following the founding state ideology of Pancasila, by definition religious. Moreover, with the purging of the Communists

at the onset of the Soeharto era in 1965–66 and into the 1970s, state discipline enforced the religiosity of Indonesian political subjects.

As a result, Indonesian funerals had to be religious, following any of the religions officially recognized by the state. Although Anderson was a foreigner, his funeral had to follow one of the templates offered by the funeral parlour, at least to a certain extent. A Catholic altar set-up was chosen, with Anderson's framed photograph placed in front of a crucifix and with a white candle on either side. Behind the altar was Anderson's open casket, marked religiously by a cross and a picture of the last supper.

But beyond this, Anderson's funeral did not conform to Indonesian conventions. Not one, but four religious services were performed, following four different religious traditions. The first was an abbreviated *tahlilan*, a *slamatan* ritual commonly performed on the



FIGURE 1 Anderson's Funeral Altar. Photograph by Hui Yew-Foong, December 2015.

day of death, which lasted about ten minutes.² It was performed by Aan Anshori, a noted activist associated with the Nahdlatul Ulama and a keen supporter of Gus Dur, former president Abdurrahman Wahid. Sporting a T-shirt that declared, “Yang mencintai Gus Dur tidak akan menjual namanya hanya untuk mendapatkan suara” (Those who love Gus Dur will not peddle his name just to gain votes), in a criticism of the antics of political candidates during the recent Indonesian regional elections, Aan used an anecdote involving Gus Dur to explain why he was going to offer Islamic prayers for “Pak Ben” (referring to Anderson). He related how, when asked if the prayer of someone from a religion other than Islam will be delivered to God, Gus Dur responded light-heartedly that if, like



FIGURE 2 Chinese Mahayana Buddhist priests chanting and performing rites before a Catholic altar. Photograph by Hui Yew-Foong, December 2015.

postal messages or email messages, such prayers did not get returned, then they had been delivered successfully.

This was followed by Mahayana Buddhist rituals performed by two Chinese priests. The rituals consisted mainly of the chanting of Buddhist sutras in a sing-song, soothing manner, with periodic performative movements such as bowing and walking around the coffin. Inasmuch as such rituals were supposed to facilitate the transition from death to rebirth for the deceased, the soothing, melodic repetition of the sutras had a comforting effect, helping the grieving come to terms with the fact of the death of a loved one.

The third set of rituals was conducted by a Theravada Buddhist monk. In comparison, they were much less performative, but more participatory, with the monk seated in a chair by the side leading those present in chanting a sutra. Towards the end of this ritual,



FIGURE 3 Theravada monk chanting sutras. Photograph by Hui Yew-Foong, December 2015.

loved ones were invited to participate in the act of pouring water from one receptacle into another. The monk explained that the water symbolized acts of kindness and asked those in attendance to remember to act in kindness, and to pray that “Pak Ben” would be reborn after the kind devotion and acts that he had performed during his life.

Finally, Father Alexius Kurdo Irianto, a priest well known in activist circles, led the funeral Mass and performed Catholic rituals. Thereafter, everyone was invited to approach the coffin and anoint Anderson’s body with perfumed oil before its ceremonial sealing. After the sealing of the coffin, those present were invited, in groups, to pose for photographs at the altar.



FIGURE 4 Theravada monk giving instructions on and explaining the ritual of pouring water. Photograph by Hui Yew-Foong, December 2015.

To have four different sets of religious rituals performed may be unconventional according to Indonesian practice. But it is in a sense very Indonesian in transcending the boundaries of particular religious communities and their practices. It reflected the Indonesia that Anderson loved, with its mix of cultures and languages that cannot be easily disentangled.³ Moreover, the different rituals allowed mourners of different religious persuasions to take part, following their own beliefs. After all, such rituals play the role not only of translating the dead between this world and the next but also of letting the living “give up for dead” those who have already died a biological death.

19 December — Cremation

The next day began at about 8:45 a.m. with eulogies,⁴ followed by rituals and prayers performed by Father Alexius. Wahyu Yudistira, Anderson’s adopted son, held his photo while leading the casket-bearers to the hearse. Just as the casket was lifted on to the hearse, Anderson’s brother and sister smashed on to the ground, in his case, a *kendi* (earthen pitcher) filled with water and, in hers, a watermelon. This combination of Javanese⁵ and Chinese⁶ traditions was meant to provide some cooling refreshment for the deceased in facing his afterlife, according to folk beliefs. There is also something final in such acts, as the smashing, just like death, is irreversible.

The hearse then headed off to the Eka Praya Crematorium, situated within a Chinese cemetery. In the outer hall, Anderson’s former student Melani Budianta — representing the University of Indonesia, where Anderson had just given a seminar launching the Indonesian-language version of *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (Anderson 2015) — gave the last eulogy. This was followed by Father Alexius performing the last rites, before Wahyu led the procession that brought the coffin into the inner hall for cremation. Before cremation, everyone present had a chance to place flowers on the coffin, to bid farewell one more time.

One final symbolic act was the release of a dove, which represented the freedom of the deceased. However, the dove lingered in the



FIGURE 5 *Kendi* and watermelon smashed on the ground.
Photograph by Hui Yew-Foong, December 2015.



FIGURE 6 Father Alexis performing the last rites at the crematorium.
Photograph by Hui Yew-Foong, December 2015.

crematorium for a while, just as Anderson's words and acts continued to linger in the minds and hearts of those present. Finally, the coffin was conveyed into the cremation chamber, and Anderson's brother Perry pressed the button to start the cremation process.



FIGURE 7 Wahyu leading Anderson's coffin into the inner hall of the crematorium. Photograph by Hui Yew-Foong, December 2015.

20 December — Sea Burial

The *larung*, or immersion of the ashes into the sea, could, rather unexpectedly, be performed the next day. Usually the crematorium would advise that a number of days pass between the cremation and the *larung*, so that the ashes could dry completely. We convened at the office of the state-owned company, PT Pelindo Marine Service, at 7:00 a.m. and made our way to the ferry dock behind the office in Perak, in the northern part of Surabaya.⁷ Anderson's younger friends helped carry the urn that contained his ashes.

The windswept, beautiful seascape dotted with hovering cranks and ships lifted the mood on the ferry. During the journey, more convivial conversations, reminiscences and curious inquiries were shared among those who were somehow connected to Anderson but who had previously not known one another.

At around 10:00 a.m., at a considerable distance from the shore, the urn was put on a table in the middle of the ferry. Anderson's close associate and assistant in Surabaya Khanis Suvianita led the final farewell ritual by performing Catholic prayers, but at the same time encouraged those present to pray following their own beliefs. The urn, wrapped in a piece of white cloth and tied with black raffia, was held by members of Anderson's family and his close friends as it was lowered into the sea. Everyone, realizing the finality of the moment, scattered flowers into the water to accompany the urn as it slowly drifted and went under. Some minutes later, two butterflies — one yellow and the other white — emerged from the sea, feeding the imaginations of many of those present. Others also delighted in pointing out how Anderson, denied entry into Indonesia by the New Order regime, finally had his ashes ferried by a state-owned boat and deposited into the Java Sea, never to be removed from the land and waters (*tanah air*) of the Indonesia that he loved so much.



FIGURE 8 Anderson's sister, brother, and friends (Melanie Anderson, Perry Anderson, Khanis Suvianita and Sugito) preparing to lower the urn holding his ashes into the Java Sea. Photograph by Kathleen Azali, December 2015.

Final Yet Not Final

Is it possible to truly give someone up for dead? In the case of Anderson, this is difficult. The rituals performed constantly reminded us of both the finality and the non-finality of death. Anderson lingers on, through the memories and writings that he has left us.

One of these writings is *A Life Beyond Boundaries*, published posthumously (2016).⁸ The book speaks not only of the many places where Anderson lived and conducted research during his lifetime, but also of the linguistic and disciplinary boundaries that he transcended in his intellectual life. This teaches us that we should read Anderson as someone who has gained insights from those moments between languages and disciplines, rendering in fragments what he has glimpsed in comparative perspective, just as a translator renders partially the truth that language seeks to manifest (Benjamin 1968, p. 77).

This instalment of *SOJOURN* Symposium aptly features reviews of Anderson's memoir by contributors who have worked on the countries and in the disciplines in which Anderson was most adept.



FIGURE 9 The urn containing Anderson's ashes drifting into the sea. Photograph by Kathleen Azali, December 2015.

Their experiences with Anderson and his work show us the multiple contexts in which his insights and approach continue to be relevant. We suspect that many, like us, will continue to talk about Anderson and his work for a long while. One aspect of the funeral that impressed us was how, without prompting, many shared their encounters with Anderson. A course taken with him, a single meeting, the kindness that he showed through sharing his office, or respect for his writings and political activism — these were enough to draw people to attend his funeral, where they were together with many others that they had never met. Similarly, we believe that Anderson's writings will continue to prompt many to join in what Siegel (2015) calls “unimagined solidarity”, together with others unknown to themselves as “living members of an organization without a form”.

Ben Anderson Beyond Comparison: John Sidel

Ben Anderson gave so much of himself to his students and to Southeast Asian Studies, and there is so much to mourn with his passing and so much to be grateful for in his life. He remains very much alive through his writings and through the influence he had on his students, his colleagues and the many students and scholars around the world who read his work or otherwise learned from him. But, as a former student and someone who'd had intermittent contact with him over the past few decades, I'll always especially treasure the Ben Anderson I encountered in Ithaca when I first arrived at Cornell in 1988. This was Ben Anderson back in the days when *Imagined Communities* (1983a) was a cult classic rather than an international bestseller, when Ben worked on a typewriter in a smoky, shambolic office in the condemned building that housed the Southeast Asia Program at 102 West Avenue, and when his house in Freeville was equally shambolic and lacking in central heating. This was Ben Anderson before he became a celebrity for scholars outside Southeast Asian Studies, when his students could still think that they had somehow “discovered” him themselves.

Today, in an age of PowerPoint teaching and intensifying managerialism and “professionalism” in academic life, it’s the Ben Anderson of those years that I appreciate the most, perhaps especially in the context not only of the Cornell Southeast Asia Program but also in that of the Department of Government, where he — and students of his, like me — had to contend with the pressures and pretensions of “Political Science”. With his fly invariably down, some of his shirt buttons often coming undone and his gut poking out, Ben would sit in the back of a seminar room in the department, reading his mail, doing the *New York Times* crossword puzzle, picking his nose or falling asleep as visiting political scientists gave their lectures. Then, when it came time for questions, he would raise his hand and, as his students exchanged conspiratorial, expectant glances, he would invariably suggest, seemingly innocently and tentatively, some kind of “axial twist” along the lines he had so elegantly executed in his famous intervention in Thai studies in the mid to late 1970s (Anderson 1978). As the speaker tried to regain his or her composure and respond, it felt as if everyone in the room knew that Ben had somehow magically put his finger on something which no one else would have identified and suggested a much more interesting, compelling, analytically powerful way of understanding the problem at hand.

It wasn’t just that he was unparalleled in his erudition, his elegance of elocution and, let’s face it, his brilliance. It was also that he showed — and showed off — a way of being that was immensely attractive, at least to me: intellectual and cultural sophistication without ugly social-science jargon, authority combined with devil-may-care irreverence, a capacity to displace his own awkwardness on to others, political engagement and courage, and an ability to combine ironic detachment and critical caricature with deep immersion and empathy. He was, in both senses of the term, “beyond comparison”; he could provide comparative perspective and contextualization, but he always also abandoned the empty-box quality of Comparative Politics in favour of some kind of effort to explore the actual “content”, process, lived experience and consciousness that made

politics. He had a wonderfully wicked sense of humour (yellow toothy grin, big bellied laugh) as well as a gentle, generous way of showing sympathy and providing support and guidance (head tilted back, eyebrows up, voice soft and slow).

He made it seem — to me, at least — that one could craft a meaningful life as a scholar of Southeast Asia. A life that would be intellectually rich and exciting, politically engaged and progressive, and somehow still relatively unconstrained by institutions, conventions and pressures for conformity. And that in doing so, one could live in something approaching truth and freedom — and sometimes in interesting parts of Southeast Asia as well. In my eyes, Ben lived the dream.

Against this backdrop, Ben's memoir, *A Life Beyond Boundaries*, has been for me a great pleasure to read, not so much for any new information or insight about his life story, but more for the familiar voice from years gone by and, as the saying goes, from "beyond the grave". It is a voice that is strikingly soft and light and still filled with a sense of wonder and gratitude for the life that he led and the people that he encountered along the way. It is heart-warming to know that it was in this spirit and frame of mind that he spent the final years and months of his life, without bitterness, disappointment, disillusionment or remorse. In this sense, the book reassures those of us who knew and cared about him that he truly rests in peace.

In the Afterword to *A Life Beyond Boundaries*, however, Ben does allude to the dramatic shifts in academic life, and the disappearance of the kind of institutional context and intellectual climate in which he came of age as a scholar. Ben was not much of one for "whingers", as they say here in London, but there is a palpable wistfulness in his discussion of the prospects for Southeast Asian Studies in the early twenty-first century, especially in his nominal home discipline of so-called Political Science. It is perhaps not coincidental that he mentions student allusions to "statistical probability theory" and muses "in what sense can 'probability' be understood as a 'cause'" (Anderson 2016, p. 184)? Today, academic study of the contemporary politics of Southeast Asia is being rapidly colonized by students and

scholars whose interest in causality is narrowly confined to this kind of positivist — and highly economic — approach, without any awareness or curiosity as to the specific patterns of variation and change observable across the diverse and rapidly transforming local and national landscapes of the region. There is no more room for a Ben Anderson in the Political Science departments of North American universities, not even room for the kinds of doctoral students who worked under his supervision over the years in Cornell's Department of Government. With Ben's passing we seem to have reached the end of the road.

For someone like me, it is tempting to lament this state of affairs. The work of North America-based political scientists on Southeast Asia is no longer informed by the level of immersion, expertise, linguistic competence, understanding of historical and sociological context or, to be honest, interest bordering on obsessiveness that characterized earlier generations of specialists working on the politics of various countries in the region. Today's new generations of North American political scientists working on Southeast Asia typically have a working familiarity with one or two or three countries in the region based on short-term stints in national capitals, spent largely in air-conditioned environments with Internet access and English-language interlocutors. They would never think to bother with, say, meticulous record-keeping on Indonesian military promotions, translations of Javanese poems or Thai short stories or a re-reading of the nineteenth-century novels of José Rizal in the original Spanish, as Ben Anderson famously did. They are too busy with democratization/development industry consultancies, or with arrangements for interviews of important government officials, or with the challenges of "data collection" before they fly home.

But all is not lost. After all, so much of the quantitative data-driven work on Southeast Asian politics today has been enabled by what Ian Hacking calls the "avalanche of numbers" (1990, p. 45) that has fallen on the region for less than fully lamentable reasons: election results thanks to the entrenchment and expansion of formal democratic procedures and surveys and other new data generated by

globalization, marketization and industrialization, as well as shifts in the technologies and techniques of information-gathering and governance. We may cast aspersions on the accuracy or importance of the “metrics” without fully mourning the developments and trends which have generated so much “Big Data” across Southeast Asia. If Southeast Asia has become seemingly more easily intelligible and accessible in these and so many other ways, perhaps the losses of the old-fashioned “Orientalists” are really the gains of today’s “Orientals” themselves.

As for shifts in the production of knowledge about Southeast Asia, the trends are also decidedly mixed. On the one hand, it should be noted that today there is a thriving industry generating a steady stream of expert briefings, research papers and reports on political developments and trends in the region. The World Bank offices in capitals like Jakarta and Manila are major hubs of knowledge production about “conflict” and “governance” and “social capital” as well as economic data, and the local offices of various other overseas development agencies and foundations likewise sponsor diverse forms of empirical research and analysis across the region, as do institutions like the International Crisis Group, with its focus on Islamist terrorist groups and other security threats across the region. Meanwhile, there are hundreds and hundreds of analysts working for investment banks, political risk consultancies and polling outfits whose profit margins require constant tracking of developments and trends across Southeast Asia. In terms of accumulated in-depth empirical expertise and sustained production of knowledge and analysis of Southeast Asian politics, North American political scientists are today clearly outnumbered and outperformed by analysts working in non-academic institutions. This dramatic shift in the production of knowledge about Southeast Asia from the distant spires of the proverbial ivory tower to the shiny new offices of inherently less disinterested institutions surely comes at the expense of the independence, integrity and impartiality of the knowledge produced, drastically reducing the realm for critical and self-critical reflection and narrowing the focus of enquiry to essentially utilitarian lines.

On the other hand, there have been other developments and trends which suggest a rosier future for the kind of Southeast Asian Studies which Ben Anderson worked so hard to nurture over the years and writes so eloquently about in *A Life Beyond Boundaries*. Historians, anthropologists, ethnomusicologists and other scholars working on the region outside Political Science have continued to combine sustained interest and immersion in the diverse countries of the region with the demands of their disciplines, as seen in the rich body of scholarship now being produced at a wide range of universities across North America. Meanwhile, American hegemony in Southeast Asian Studies has markedly diminished, as seen in the efflorescence of scholarship on the region in Australia, and in various parts of Europe, in Japan and recently South Korea, and, most importantly of all, in Southeast Asia itself, with Singapore as an especially impressive hub of academic expertise and empirical research. Ben Anderson was always especially keen for Southeast Asian scholars to play more prominent roles in the production of knowledge both *on* Southeast Asia and *in* Southeast Asia, and there was dramatic change in this direction over the course of his lifetime, change which is certain to continue if not accelerate in the years ahead. Thus, even as we mourn the passing of Ben Anderson and the passing of the era in which he lived, we should also be grateful for the generous legacies of scholarship he bequeathed to us and take to heart the generosity of spirit with which he bade us farewell.

The Art of Noticing: Danilyn Rutherford

Among the links that circulated in the wake of Benedict Anderson's death in December 2015, one brings up a 1994 interview aired on Dutch television in which he explained, in sly equanimity, that nationalism is all about love. As Anderson spoke, the interviewer nodded, as if relieved. It's easy to boil *Imagined Communities* down to a simple message: nations are imagined as bands of brothers. It's also easy to read Anderson's masterpiece as suppressing differences

in tracing a history in which a cultural model born in South America gives shape to political struggles throughout the world. A bevy of critics have done just that. But in doing so, they have missed something critical in Anderson's scholarship that his remarkable memoir, *A Life Beyond Boundaries*, makes plain: his passion for the peculiar. For me, and perhaps for others who have learned from him in various ways, Benedict Anderson's most important legacy may have been his curiosity — his art of noticing connections that others might miss. Whereas analyses spark analyses, memoirs spark memories. In this essay, using Anderson's memoir as a starting point, I offer some reflections on how it felt to be trained in this art.

I must begin with a caveat. I was not quite Anderson's student. He was gone during my first two years of graduate school, and, when I asked him to be on my committee, he refused, although he read and commented on everything I sent him and was more than kind to me as I moved forward in my career. But I still had a sufficient share of the anxiety of influence to jump on the bandwagon, I'm sad to admit, when my colleagues at the University of Chicago, where I spent the first decade of my career, began engaging in the fashionable sport of Anderson-bashing back in the late 1990s and early 2000s. John Kelly, with his partner, Martha Kaplan, was completing *Represented Communities* (2001), which challenged Anderson's chronology and what they thought of as his romanticism. They argued that the nation was the product of the post-Second World War period of decolonization, the top-down creation of the United Nations, not the outcome of struggles from below. In the Chicago history department, Steven Pincus was gearing up to attack Anderson from the opposite end of the timeline. The first nation was not born in Latin America, Pincus declared, but in England, in the Glorious Revolution, a much underestimated episode in the history that gave rise to the West (Pincus 2011). Taking another tack, my colleagues Michael Silverstein (2000) and Susan Gal (2014) brought the arsenal of linguistic anthropology to bear on the problem. Not only were nations not what Anderson imagined; neither were languages, which didn't exist in a discrete, self-contained form until nineteenth-century

states worked to standardize what were in fact mixtures of tongues (see also Gal and Woolard 2014a and 2014b).

Then there were the feminists and the post-colonial theorists, who were also outraged by what they thought Anderson's paradigm lacked. I was impressionable. I was a turncoat. When I turned my dissertation "Raiding the Land of the Foreigners: Power, History, and Difference in Biak, Irian Jaya, Indonesia" (Rutherford 1997) into a book (Rutherford 2003), I gave it a new subtitle: *The Limits of the Nation on an Indonesian Frontier*. I saw my material as showing how the people of Biak — denizens of a distant and troubled corner of Indonesia — managed to participate in Indonesian institutions without adopting Indonesian points of view. I called their practices "anti-national" and explicitly discussed how my findings diverged from what *Imagined Communities* might lead us to expect.

Anderson read my book. And was nice enough to tell me how much he liked it. I was surprised, but then I felt stupid. Anderson was intellectually generous, but there were limits; none of my teachers suffered fools lightly. More to the point, there was a clear difference between the thinker whom critics thought they were attacking and the author of *Imagined Communities* and of Anderson's other groundbreaking works. Like so many others, I'd missed the mark.

In fact, Anderson's fingerprints were all over *Raiding the Land of the Foreigners* (Rutherford 2003). What I had taken from Anderson was less a model for understanding the nation than a disposition, a sense of how comparative insights can spring from conjunctions — the unlikely coincidence of small but suggestive occurrences. When the time had come to write my dissertation, I spent a year trying in vain to put pen to paper. This is the sentence I finally came up with: "In 1908, in a settlement on the eastern edge of the Netherlands Indies, the Johannes van Hasselt Society for Bible Study and Prayer lost a founding member when Petrus Kafiar's mother finally succeeded in her quest to bring him home" (Rutherford 2003, p. 31). Anderson's friend Jim Siegel was my dissertation chair. But I'm quite sure I was channelling Anderson. Almost everything I published in the

first years of my career began with episodes of this sort. I couldn't write against Anderson, no matter how hard I tried.

Anderson implicitly responded to his critics in the books that followed *Imagined Communities*, including *The Spectre of Comparisons* (1998) and *Under Three Flags* (2007). We get a sense of what was at stake in the chapter of his memoir devoted to what he calls "frameworks of comparison" and the question of what, in his various writings, justified the juxtaposition of particular "thises" with particular "thats". "Within the limits of plausible argument", he writes, "the most instructive comparisons (whether of difference or similarity) are those that surprise" (Anderson 2016, p. 130). I remember the light bulb that went on when I first read Anderson's 1983 essay, "Old State, New Society" (1983*b*).⁹ Indonesia's long-time authoritarian president, Soeharto, lived through the Japanese Occupation and Indonesian Revolution as a small-time colonial soldier and then policeman, Anderson tells us. Noticing this detail helps us understand how the New Order inherited the impulses and institutions of the old colonial state. This fact sparks flights of counterfactual imagination. "If the Japanese had not invaded", Anderson tells us,

Suharto would probably have ended his active days as a master-sergeant — officership in the KNIL [*Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger*, Royal Netherlands Indies Army] was essentially a white prerogative.... [H]ad the Dutch been in a position to resume control immediately, like the British in Malaya or the Americans in the Philippines, it is quite possible that Suharto would have joined a resuscitated KNIL or the colonial police. (Anderson 1983*b*, p. 487)

The spectre of the colonial in the post-colonial swims into view. Anderson's writing is so beautiful, and so precise; his rhetoric so playfully pointed, so carefully crafted to have an effect. But if his prose moves us, it is because he was ready to be moved: by chance, by history, by the sound of strange words.

A Life Beyond Boundaries has a great deal to tell us about this receptivity. It leaves open the question of how it might be taught. In the fall of 1991, like so many Southeast Asianists before me,

I enrolled in Anderson's signature course, "The Plural Society Revisited". I have enough evidence from this time to provide a picture of what it was like to be on the receiving end of Anderson's pedagogy. My archive consists of a syllabus, hand-written notes on the readings, and some things I jotted down in a hilltop classroom high above Cayuga's waters. Let the trip down memory lane begin.

The Plural Society Revisited, Revisited

It was two years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. George Bush, Sr. was in office. Vaclav Havel had been elected president of Czechoslovakia, and his book, *The Power of the Powerless* (1985), was being read widely. Slavoj Zizek had recently spoken at Cornell on what Donald Duck could teach us about Jacques Lacan. Towards the end of the semester, the Dili Massacre would bring attention in the United States to the plight of East Timor; Anderson would be instrumental in organizing speaking appearances by Amy Goodman and Alan Nairn, two young journalists who had survived and filmed the killings. Anderson had been banned from Indonesia for years, and yet he remained committed to various struggles, including in West Papua, where I had just gotten funding to work. I was back in Ithaca after spending a semester as a visiting student at New York University, where I had taken courses with Annette Weiner and Fred Myers ("The Ethnography of Oceania"), Bambi Schieffelin (a reading course on "language ideology") and Michael Taussig ("The Magic of the State"). My most recent Cornell course had been "Feminist Film Theory", taught at the Society for the Humanities in the fall of 1990 by Constance Penley, who had very short hair and wore a pantsuit apparently modelled on Mao's. I was thirty years old. Anderson, for his part, was fifty-five, almost exactly the age I am now.

To say I was green would be an understatement. I'd been admitted to Cornell on the basis of my ability to get very good grades in very irrelevant subjects: as an undergraduate, the closest I came to Southeast Asia was a course on "China from Earliest Times to 800 AD". When I applied, I'd recently returned from two years in Yogyakarta, where I'd read *The Religion of Java* (Geertz 1976)

cover to cover and acquired a healthy hatred of the New Order to go with my righteous disdain for any regime supported by the United States. At Cornell, I was a dutiful student, gamely trying out any concept that was thrown at me, and eventually developing a handful of fixed ideas that seemed to offer the key to the universe. (Jim Siegel had by that time, to quote the phrase Anderson used to describe his colleague's effect on students, "blown my fucking mind".) Anderson had been the first scholar of Indonesia I'd heard of before coming to Cornell. He was the reason I applied to Cornell. I hadn't actually read anything he had written. Anderson had been blacklisted by Soeharto, and that was all I needed to know. By the time "The Plural Society Revisited" was offered, I'd been waiting to take a class with Anderson for two years. The topic was right up my alley. Even though I was busy with my qualifying exams, I signed on.

Anderson used the Socratic method. I remember the room where we met — wider than it was long, furnished with student desks arranged in curved rows. I remember Anderson sitting in one of those desks facing us, to the right of the blackboard, smiling, Sphinx-like, watching us squirm. We were eager to please and not a little terrified. One of the readings on the syllabus was Ongkhokham's classic essay, "The Inscrutable and the Paranoid" (1978). This seemed apt. Anderson was inscrutable; we were paranoid. We hadn't yet arrived at the realization that our professors did not, in fact, spend all their waking hours reviewing our performance and shaking their heads over the stupid things we said.

Anderson may not have helped, I see now, looking back at the syllabus. He listed himself very formally as "Mr. Anderson" — despite the fact we all called him Ben — and ended the handout with a warning, underlined for emphasis.

It is very important that students NOT selfishly stash these readings¹⁰ away in their carrels or other caches. Any student shown to have done so will be asked to leave the seminar.

I'm spacy, and I no doubt worried that some inadvertent stashing might get me evicted. In the end, the terror was motivating. I got

pegged to give the first presentation, and I put so much thought into the task that the commentary I wrote became the basis of my second book.

The requirements were threefold: the aforementioned presentations, a final paper using vernacular sources and reflecting Furnivall's comparative perspective and interrogating his formulations, and a team project, which had small groups of us engaged in analysing historical changes in census categories in a particular Southeast Asian country. (My team got Malaysia — a lucky break, since we had Charles Hirschman's 1987 article to give us a head start.) Each class began with a student presentation, all of very high calibre for the reasons listed above. The rest of the class period consisted of Anderson directing our attention to the wealth of ways in which we had managed to miss the point. Anderson was not cruel. At the Halloween party Anderson threw for us, he took me aside to make sure he hadn't hurt the feelings of one of my classmates by dismissing her Foucauldian reading of Jean Taylor's *The Social World of Batavia* (1983). (He hadn't; in addition to being brilliant, she was [and is] made of stern stuff.)

At the time, I found the experience challenging. Looking back at my notes, I can trace a steady deterioration in the quality of my engagement with the materials. I was a dutiful student — the irritating teacher's pet sort, the kind who took notes by hand and then typed them up — but I had trouble keeping up with Anderson. During the first few weeks, I managed to write short synopses of what I thought had happened in class — in which I attempted to tie Anderson's comments back (naturally) to my fixed ideas, which at that point involved lots of tortured references to Lacan. These synopses all begin with some variant of "Ben said some interesting things...". Socratic method notwithstanding, there really wasn't much dialogue. When another classmate took issue with something Anderson said about the colonial police in Burma, I wrote an entire paragraph about the encounter. I'm not sure whether this struck me as bravery or foolhardiness; either way, I was deeply impressed.

Of course, it's not as if Anderson hid the point of the exercise from us. Here's how he put it in the syllabus.

John Furnivall was the first of a tiny group of scholars studying Southeast Asia to have proposed concepts which then entered the general language of the social sciences. But while Clifford Geertz's "agricultural involution" and Jim Scott's "moral economy of the peasant" and "everyday resistance" continue to be the source of fruitful research and controversy, Furnivall's "plural society" has, on the whole, fallen into disuse, especially in the field of Southeast Asian studies for which it was coined. The reasons for this neglect are not hard to identify. First, the master-text, Colonial Policy and Practice, appeared in 1948, just as the wave of decolonization in Southeast Asia was getting under way; so it was easy to regard the book's central concept as relevant only to a dying colonialism. Second, there began in the late 1950s an explosion of in-depth single-country studies based on research in the national vernaculars of the region; Furnivall's work, in its reliance on sources in the colonial languages (English, Dutch, and French above all), could be seen as methodologically obsolete and narrowly Eurocentric. Between 1960 and 1985, furthermore, the trajectories of the various Southeast Asian countries appeared so unmanageably heterogenous (as they passed under communist, socialist-military, capitalist military, populist, civilian-dictatorial, etc. regimes) that Furnivall's broadly comparative historical framework seemed impossible to sustain. Today, however, convergence seems much more marked a tendency than divergence, encouraging the possibility of a revived interest in the concerns of our "grandfather."

And here's an excerpt from my notes from 3 September.

Character of social research. Beginnings. British (Raffles, Crawford) plus Dutch.

Two conflicting principles at work.

1. Those who emphasize that history of societies in the region has a general unity — part of "human unity." Southeast Asian societies at bottom are cases that exemplify unifying principles. Principle under this is the idea of social evolution. All societies fit into a set of stages and levels of civilization. So you place societies on a ladder — trace their place in the movement from savagery to enlightenment.

"Postcolonial" modernization theory. Feudal to bourgeois. Any particular group of minor interest. Marxism, liberalism,

Christianity, Darwinism all share this. Everyone is the same. Look for variation. Assume languages are transparent. Nothing is problematic about writing about Southeast Asia in Dutch, Japanese, etc. Truth is there, language doesn't matter. Vernacular sources are absorbable into language of research. Indonesian into English. (Dictionaries.) Effect of those who viewed comparison as simple — is that the tools used involved a set of abstract formulations — “social structure,” “class struggle,” “development,” “bureaucracy,” did not exist in the vernaculars of these languages — or Europe — before the nineteenth century. Assumed to be fundamentally true — will always be social structure, political systems — you have it without knowing it. Ideas and concepts are not changed if not recognized in places where they take place.

2. Countertendency. Missionary scholarship. Christians — later Buddhist, Islam. Assumption not accepted. Islam is not a “belief system.” Rather, it is wrong. Block to approach 1.

Later on, people who lived for long period in the Orient got into the habit (Furnivall) of speaking other's language. Culturally absorbed. Not so sure that they understood — harder to make such pronouncements. People use vernacular resources for research. *Colonial Policy and Practice* has nothing in Burmese. “Civil.” Furnivall never faced up to this problem — what to do with indigenous language evidence. Decolonization led to this — collapse of European power — you couldn't be a white bureaucrat. So you study the language of people with power.

Anderson went on to describe how the Cold War affected these trends, and how in its aftermath it now seemed like a period of “calm comparativism” was likely to emerge, albeit in the form of an evolutionism based on the privileging of market economies. Then he explained Furnivall's concept of the “plural society”, made up of different groups, living separately, side by side, with a racial division of labour similar to caste, but without the religious sanction. Then he told us where to find his office. Just when one might expect an explanation of a third approach to comparison, synthesizing the first two, came the reference to Furnivall's biography and, more particularly, to the languages he spoke in everyday life. By this point, we had already heard about Furnivall's three careers: as a “colonial

whiz kid”, a book club founder and a post-colonial politician. We’d learned that Furnivall was fluent in Burmese and married to a Burmese woman. Anderson had told us to look at the index of *Colonial Policy and Practice* (Furnivall [1948] 1956) and pay attention to what was missing: Marx, revolution and sex. Anderson didn’t give us a recipe; instead he demonstrated a practice. Rather than laying out grounds for comparison, he instituted in us an ethic. The best bumper sticker I’ve seen in Santa Cruz reads: “Always remember: pillage first, then burn”. “The Plural Society Revisited” could be summed up in a similar bumper sticker: “Notice first, then compare”. If indeed it makes sense to separate the operations. “Be shocked by something that violates your expectations”, might be a better way to put it. “Then try to make what you can of your surprise”.

This accounts for the kind treatment Anderson reserved for Furnivall. Furnivall was wrong about the plural society to the degree he didn’t recognize that the ethnic groups that came together in the market were the creation of the colonial state, which was out to avoid the “common will” that could emerge with the appearance of an indigenous middle class. But he didn’t hold it against Furnivall — he’d been surprised, he’d noticed, then compared — and now it was our job to notice more. Much of what we noticed derived from Anderson’s favourite column in the colonial and post-colonial censuses we studied. He told us to look for the “others” and, if we could find them, the “other others”, as in a census from Malaysia which divided “other Europeans” into a set of nationalities, with a final catch-all for those who still didn’t fit. Those who still didn’t fit were legion in the readings Anderson assigned to us — from the progeny of barracks concubines to members of hill tribes to the “Chinese”, whose entries and exits Anderson traced. But Anderson noticed other things as well: inheritance patterns, styles of comportment, the way colonial crime statistics failed to list the ethnicity of victims, whose letters got read by whom. What Anderson gave us was less a comparative method than a comparative ethos: notice first, then compare. If some of the things he taught us to notice seemed to evade comparison, so much the better. A tale — perhaps apocryphal — was

doing the rounds when I was a student. Supposedly, Anderson asked someone during their qualifying exam what would have happened if a particular Javanese dance was performed in the nude. I have no idea where that question was heading. But one thing is for sure; it would have provided food for thought.

The Future of Noticing

At the time, I proved better at noticing than at comparing. Drawing on Dutch-language sources, I wrote my final paper on a debate in the Netherlands Indies People's Council on whether the government should support, or even sanction, agricultural settlements for mixed-race European colonists in Dutch New Guinea. My paper was filled with quirky details and arresting anomalies. It featured precious little comparison and little mention of Furnivall. Anderson was merciful and gave me an A-, knowing I was caught up in the honeymoon phase of my project; I'd just learned Dutch, and whatever I read in that language was by definition fascinating, whether or not it spoke to any conceivable point. I did a better job in my thesis, although I was — and remain — pretty bad at what my friend, John Sidel, gently told me was “middle level theory”; “Power, History, and Difference” pretty much covers everything, if the foreign and its presence in the local did not (Rutherford 1997). Still, I had the order right, and if I had different things to say about nationalism from what Anderson had proposed, it was because I'd looked in new places and through a somewhat different lens.

As for my field, anthropology, it definitely noticed Benedict Anderson's work, which spawned a cottage industry of ethnography within and beyond Southeast Asia. At this point, the imagined community is built into our analytic hardware. The force of Anderson's thought is still felt when anthropologists talk about publics, or affect, or belonging, or immigration, or the plight of refugees, even if they don't mention his name. We're hip to the tricks of imagined identities and the lives colonial categories have come to lead. But we're also alert to the possibility of living otherwise, as Elizabeth Povinelli (2011) might put it: we attempt to notice things that might escape

our notice if we began with comparisons that chopped the worlds we have encountered into easily digestible chunks.

But if the ethic is strong, the practice isn't always. It's hard to find anthropologists able to engage in the kinds of comparisons that came so easily to Anderson. I don't know anyone with anything like Anderson's breadth of knowledge, which means that the details we can bring into conjunction are far more paltry; we don't have the same capacity to be surprised. A couple of younger anthropologists I have worked with do have something of Anderson's penchant for the peculiar detail. Rihan Yeh (2012), for instance, has developed the notion of a "hearsay public" by way of a careful reading of how working-class Tijuans talk with one another; among other things, she's described the strange sense of temporality discernible in a city where an imagined community has emerged around a shared experience of sitting in traffic — yet another modern version of morning prayers. Going back further, one of my favourite lines in Suzanne Brenner's *The Domestication of Desire* (1998) comes when a Javanese woman is explaining why she's the one, rather than her husband, presiding over rituals for the wealth of her family. Her husband was "at the office", the informant tells the ethnographer. "I work at an office, too, but I took the day off", she adds as an afterthought, in a titbit that opens on to the divergent ideologies of gender Brenner's informants subscribed to at one and the same time (Brenner 1998, p. 176). Suzanne had Anderson on her committee, and it shows.

Benedict Anderson had a lot to teach us about the nation, anarchism and other phenomena that attracted his attention. But he had even more to teach us about what it means to be a scholar, as his memoir makes abundantly clear. At the end of that Dutch interview that was making the rounds, things got a bit weirder. "Have you ever wondered why soldiers never get medals for killing the enemy", Anderson asked the interviewer in so many words. "Even though that would seem to be the point of war?" The man stared at him, silent. Why hadn't he ever noticed that? If we are going to understand the strange, dark futures now approaching us, we are going to need to

start paying attention. We are going to need to learn to notice things on the edge of our awareness and draw connections that we can't yet see. We're lucky to have *A Life Beyond Boundaries* as our guide.

A Mistitled Memoir? Michael Montesano

Ben Anderson originally prepared what has become *A Life Beyond Boundaries* as a “simple kind of English-language text” (Anderson 2016, p. vii), destined for translation into Japanese and for publication in that language. The purpose was to expose “young Japanese students” (ibid.) to the interplay between the author’s experiences and his intellectual development and to “help [them] to think in terms of useful comparisons” (ibid., p. ix). This purpose helps account for the book’s two distinguishing characteristics. The first of these is, quite simply, its tone of deep and moving kindness, kindness that will recall for a great many readers their own conversations and encounters with the book’s author. The second is its programmatic nature.

The book’s programme is of four parts. First, and gently, it sets out Ben Anderson’s misgivings about a number of intellectual — and not so intellectual — fashions, particularly as embraced by younger scholars. Second, it promises to address “the importance of translations for individuals and societies” (ibid., p. x). Third, it takes as a central theme “the danger of arrogant provincialism, or of forgetting that serious nationalism is tied to internationalism” (ibid.). Fourth, every word of *A Life Beyond Boundaries* affirms the value of what is called “area studies”. I dedicate most of this review to considering the relationship between the third and fourth parts of this programme, between Ben Anderson’s study of nationalism and the Southeast Asian area studies project.¹¹

The importance of that relationship suggests that Verso Books could and perhaps even should have published *A Life Beyond Boundaries* under a somewhat different title. To be sure, good Marxists know their commodities, and ours is an age of self-conceived “global

citizens". Releasing a volume entitled *Pushing the Boundaries of Southeast Asian Area Studies* would thus certainly generate fewer sales for a print-capitalist enterprise than one bearing the title actually chosen, with its appeal to cosmopolitans ersatz and not so ersatz. But, while Ben Anderson may have defied boundaries, he also pushed them outward, extended them, broadened them. His concern with nationalism was closely related to that achievement. And doing justice to his memoir also requires attention to that achievement.

Ben Anderson's engagement with nationalism was firmly grounded in his vocation as a Southeast Asianist. As *A Life Beyond Boundaries* makes explicit, the origins of his conscious relationship to the nation and to nationalism lay in his earliest days as a graduate student in the Southeast Asia Program at Cornell in the late 1950s. "Probably inevitably, we were almost all drawn into a close attachment to the nationalism of the country we chose to study" (ibid., p. 54). This "emotional attachment to 'our countries'" (ibid.) grew directly out of the atmosphere that Lauriston Sharp, George Kahin¹² and John Echols had, along with others, fostered in Ithaca. It was an atmosphere in which "students felt like explorers investigating unknown societies and terrains" (ibid., p. 53), so undeveloped was the Southeast Asia field at the time.

Nor, after all, did attachments to Southeast Asian nationalisms among Ben Anderson and his peers emerge merely as a by-product of the camaraderie of studying languages and pioneering a new field. This was, after all, the era of the "new nations", the "building" of which was to make them reliable bulwarks against international Communism. Cheerleading for the nationalisms of the region thus stood close to the core of the early Southeast Asian area studies project, a project centred on winning legitimacy for scholarship on these countries in the American academy. In describing that project as he first encountered it, however, Ben Anderson delivers one of the gentle rebukes for which *A Life Beyond Boundaries* is a vehicle. He has no time for indolent characterizations of the Southeast Asian area studies project as a monolithic Cold War exercise in American imperialism. Early funding for the study of Southeast Asia, chiefly

at Yale and Cornell, came most importantly from private foundations like Ford and Rockefeller. The foundations' "senior leaders ...[were] often highly educated people who had grown up under the long reign of President Franklin Roosevelt, [and] were more liberal in their outlook than state functionaries" (ibid., p. 35). Substantial funding from the United States government for programmes in Southeast Asian area studies at Cornell would come only later, "[s]tarting around 1960" (ibid., p. 45).

The foundation officials exerted, above all via their support for language training and the development of library collections, a corrective influence on a field in which Cold War priorities favoured "the study of *contemporary* politics and economics" (ibid., p. 34; italics in the original). That influence notwithstanding, the emerging field nevertheless suffered, and in Ben Anderson's mind would for decades continue to suffer, from a "marked imbalance between the disciplines" (ibid., p. 50). From its early beachhead in political science and anthropology, Southeast Asian area studies long failed to break out into sociology, let alone into the humanities including "classical literatures, classical musics, and classical plastic arts" (ibid., p. 52). It should thus come as little surprise that the young Eton- and Cambridge-educated classicist felt impelled to extend the boundaries of his new field.

The grounding, above all linguistic, in Graeco-Roman antiquity that stood at the centre of educations like that which Ben Anderson had received before arriving at Cornell engendered an "awareness of Difference and Strangeness" (ibid., pp. 189–90). Tellingly, he compares the resultant curiosity of those so educated with the experience of fieldwork. For it was during Ben Anderson's first spell of fieldwork in Southeast Asia, undertaken in Indonesia between 1961 and 1964, that the relationship between Southeast Asian area studies and his understanding of nationalism first crystallized.

On the one hand, he makes clear his inclination, even so early on, to push the boundaries of Southeast Asia area studies outward. While researching the Japanese Occupation of the Netherlands East Indies, he took lessons in Javanese music. To learn to read Dutch,

and almost certainly also to reimmerge himself in a sort of learning to which his pre-American education had habituated him, he read Theodore Pigeaud's *Javaanse Volksvertoningen* (1938). This book revealed to Ben Anderson "the depth and complexity of traditional Javanese culture outside the royal courts" in their "local variations, peculiarities and specializations, district after district. Nothing I had learned at Cornell prepared me for this" (Anderson 2016, pp. 68–69). Ben Anderson also interviewed a member of the Politburo of the Indonesian Communist Party, as well as the same man's younger brother ... who served as the head of army intelligence. A pair of conversations with a former senior Japanese naval officer who had played midwife to the proclamation of Indonesian independence on 17 August 1945 thoroughly transformed Ben Anderson's agenda for dissertation research. These were just a few of his Different and sometimes "[S]trange experiences" during his first fieldwork on Java (*ibid.*, p. 75).

On the other hand, this period saw Ben Anderson "becoming a kind of Indonesian (or Indonesian-Javanese) nationalist" (*ibid.*, p. 114). It resulted in a dissertation and then a book celebrating the role of youth, or *pemuda*, in the Indonesian national revolution (Anderson 1967 and 1972*a*) — the book version drawing, as would *Imagined Communities*, on Victor Turner's "unsettling semi-psychological concept of the 'pilgrimage'" (Anderson 2016, p. 155).

Both the determination, rooted in curiosity about the Different and the Strange, to push the boundaries of the Southeast Asian area studies project outward and the commitment to the nation central to that project would come together most importantly in this early phase of Ben Anderson's career with the publication of "The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture" (1972*b*).¹³ It is impossible to read that work without seeing that it is nothing so much as an effort to explain or contextualize Sukarno, the hero and indeed the embodiment of Indonesia's national revolution. But it employed means that would have dumbfounded narrowly focused "state functionaries".

Along with the publication of that classic essay, the unbroken thread leading from Ben Anderson's exposure to vicarious Southeast

Asian nationalisms among Cornell graduate students and through the assimilation of Indonesian-Javanese popular nationalism during his dissertation fieldwork led to a pair of other developments in this same pre-*Imagined Communities* period. First, and only after that fieldwork and its effect in stirring feelings of nationalism in him, Ben Anderson moved actively to choose a formal nationality for himself. Not without having to make some effort to prove his right to it, he received his “first Irish passport” in 1967 (Anderson 2016, p. 6). Second, the aftermath of the events in Jakarta of 1 October 1965 not only gave Ben Anderson “the sense that the Indonesia I had known and loved was gone forever” (Anderson 1990, p. 6). But it also exposed him, cruelly, to nationalism in its intolerant, state-sponsored variant — nationalism “harnessed by repressive and conservative forces” and marked by “an unexamined, hypersensitive provinciality and narrow-mindedness” (Anderson 2016, p. 194). Thirteen years after the so-called *Gestapu* affair, Ben Anderson would revisit that variant of arrogant and provincial nationalism in another context with a path-breaking skewering of Thailand’s royal-nationalism (Anderson 1978).¹⁴

* * * *

My point will by now be obvious. *Imagined Communities* had a rather long pre-history, and that pre-history lay in Ben Anderson’s participation in the development of Southeast Asian area studies. To be sure, and as *A Life Beyond Boundaries* makes clear, he originally intended *Imagined Communities* as a bit of a scholarly detour. He had come to take great pleasure in his friendships with members of the *New Left Review* “circle” (Anderson 2016, p. 120) around his beloved, much admired younger brother Perry/Rory. Not least, these friendships had made him “more internationalist and no longer *just* an Indonesian nationalist” (*ibid.*, p. 121; italics added). And, under the influence of this circle, Ben Anderson set out to make a wide-ranging polemical intervention in a “very ‘British’” debate (*ibid.*, p. 124).

Of course, the book proved more than a detour. An early post–Cold War concern with “[d]angerous nationalism” (ibid., p. 150) and Ben Anderson’s canonization as “a ‘theorist’” (ibid., p. 151), at a time when “theory” was just beginning to corrode academic life, saw to that. A certain sort of reader will, therefore, respond positively to the teaser on the back cover of *A Life Beyond Boundaries*: “An intellectual memoir from Benedict Anderson — author of the acclaimed *Imagined Communities*”. But one has little hope that such readers will recognize that this line is above all shrewd marketing on the part of those who know the book business. Another, if rather smaller but perhaps more discriminating, market segment would respond far more positively to “An intellectual memoir by Benedict Anderson — Waterford-bred doyen of Indonesianists, pioneering demystifier of Thai royalism, brilliant re-interpreter of José Rizal”. For, notwithstanding the celebrity that *Imagined Communities* would bring and the consequent invitations to lecture to audiences whose members could not find Malang or Suphanburi or Calamba on a map, Ben Anderson stood by, and indeed continued to deepen, his commitment to Southeast Asia.

In pursuing this commitment, the stage of Ben Anderson’s career devoted above all to the study of the Philippines, from 1988 onwards, proved fruitful and personally rewarding. He began his Philippine fieldwork with a determination “to get into the minds and hearts of the great generation of Spanish-speaking intellectuals and activists who were behind Asia’s first militant nationalist movement” (ibid., p. 101). It was vintage Ben Anderson: humanistic, linguistically demanding, focused on nationalism and serious about Southeast Asia in its own right rather than as a proving ground for “theory”. It also extended the boundaries of the Southeast Asian area studies project. Ben Anderson’s work on the *ilustrados* achieved that latter end in a rather interesting way — by posing a direct challenge to critics of that project. In asserting a “global” dimension to the nationalism of the *ilustrados* in the age of anarchism, Ben Anderson sought deliberately to counter the Philippine academy’s dominant, “nativist”, “inward-looking historiography” (ibid., p. 166).¹⁵ That

historiography “largely excluded the rest of the world, except for colonial Spain and especially imperialist America, which were to be condemned” (ibid.). In exposing its hollowness, Ben Anderson reaffirmed his commitment to the endeavour that he had first joined on arriving in Central New York in 1958.

Ben Anderson’s work on the pioneering Filipino folklorist Isabelo de los Reyes (1864–1938) and his planned but apparently unfinished “literary-political biography” (ibid., p. 176) of the Sino-Indonesian journalist and “colonial cosmopolitan” Kwee Thiam Tjing (1900–74) are a long way from the Southeast Asian area studies project of the early Cold War. Yet, in their assimilation of and focus on these figures’ nationalism and in the matter-of-fact legitimacy that they accord the study of such Southeast Asian figures, the two undertakings embody an elaboration of that project. The lineage is unmistakable, even if the approach is unmistakably Andersonian.

* * * *

Considerations of space mean that this review of *A Life Beyond Boundaries* can offer little more than a listing of some of the concerns noted and admonitions offered, with gentleness and in a cautionary rather than overtly critical spirit, in the book. One admonition concerns the risk of scholars’ obsession with “identity” — a term “mainly connected with mathematics or the forensic identification of a corpse” when Ben Anderson was a boy (ibid., p. 5). The vogue for “positionality” and “self-reflexivity”, he believed, imperilled access to new perspectives and experiences. A similar concern relates to “theory”, to its inevitable obsolescence and, implicitly, to the risk that theory-headedness leads to a confusion of research subject and research tool. *A Life Beyond Boundaries* also expresses scepticism about “political economy” (ibid., p. 58) as an approach to the study of Southeast Asia and about “cultural studies” (ibid., p. 153) more generally, along with sadness over the increasing dependence of scholarship all over the world on “a degraded (American) form of English” (ibid., p. 198).

Concerned, perhaps, with the fetishization among his own students and others of his emphasis on comparison, Ben Anderson baldly notes, “It is important to recognize that comparison is not a method or even an academic technique; rather, it is a discursive strategy” (ibid., p. 130). This is the counsel of an intellectual, and not an “academic”. It comes from a man who, often in very good company, made Southeast Asian area studies a field within whose much expanded boundaries intellectualism had room to thrive. It is the counsel, too, of a scholar who saw in the contemporary “method-driven” study of politics something frankly anti-intellectual, a set of practices destined to constrict the field of Southeast Asian area studies that he had done so much to broaden. All the more important, then, that he also saw as “good omen” (ibid., p. 195) growing interest in the study of the region, with all the sense of Difference and Strangeness involved, among young students in Southeast Asia itself.

* * * *

Curiously, *A Life Beyond Boundaries* does not deliver on its opening promise to address the importance of translations. This is a shame, for reasons that I must, as this review nears its conclusion, break into the first person to explain. Like nearly all Cornell-trained Southeast Asianists, and quite clearly under the influence of Ben Anderson, I view language as standing at the centre of the enterprise. And, not really knowing what to do in the days and weeks following Ben Anderson’s death in East Java last December, but knowing that something was without fail to be done, I settled on returning before bed each night to *Under Three Flags* (2007). I did so not least with feelings of guilt at never having given my copy of that book the attention that it deserved. This time around, what struck me most were the mastery, grace and deftness that marked Ben Anderson’s translations from the Spanish of Rizal and his fellow *ilustrados*. They revealed to me, a fledging Hispanist in my youth, a measure of Ben Anderson’s talents that I had never before taken.

This revelation, in turn, brought the realization that Ben Anderson had devoted what was perhaps the greatest part of the effort that he

put into the study of Thailand between 1974 and 1986 neither to the classic “Studies of the Thai State” (1978), nor to the sociologically brilliant “Withdrawal Symptoms” (1977), nor even to the widely cited historical introduction to *In the Mirror* (Anderson and Ruchira 1985).¹⁶ Rather, that effort went above all into reading, selecting and translating the Thai short stories that appeared in *In the Mirror*. Those of us in the Thailand field, and perhaps others too, must pay more attention to those translations than we have done, instead of merely turning to *In the Mirror* for its provocative and valuable introduction. In those translations, I suspect, lies much that was essential to Ben Anderson’s understanding of Thailand, there for us to discover. What can we learn, for example, from the way in which he rendered in English the social and political realities that the stories conveyed? From his handling of the range of authorial voices in those stories? From his grasp of and insight into Thai language that is not quite today’s Thai? The choices that Ben Anderson made in the painstaking, careful process of translating the stories in *In the Mirror* doubtless add up to nothing less than a well-rounded, monograph-length interpretation of the decades in which those stories were written. We need to approach Ben Anderson’s translations of Thai, and other, literature anew.

To continue in a personal vein, I did not know Ben Anderson well. He was never formally my teacher. But he reacted with kindness and good humour when I once crashed the session devoted to Thailand in his course on “The Plural Society Revisited”. And I always had him in my thoughts when with the greatest relish I gave the lecture in which I introduced Singaporean — Southeast Asian, that is — undergraduates to John Furnivall’s ideas, and to his way with language, during my years teaching at the National University. There were also occasional conversations with Ben Anderson, about Irish parliamentary politics or American identity politics, during the large gatherings that materialized at his home in Freeville on nights when the weather was warm. On a wall in a corner of the main room of that same home hung, of course, a picture of the young Sukarno — that tragic, Southeast Asian, internationalist, polyglot icon of “the emancipatory possibilities of

both nationalism and internationalism” (Anderson 2016, p. 200).¹⁷ Commitments matter, more than celebrity.

Excerpt from Benedict Anderson’s
A Life Beyond Boundaries

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

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

The point is that we have not yet managed to eliminate chance and accident, let alone luck, in our everyday thinking. We do try to explain bad luck. For this reason or that, because of this person or that, I had this or that bad luck. Yet we cannot explain how good luck intervenes either in our scholarship or in our daily life. This is why, in the preceding account of my life as a scholar and intellectual, I have put such emphasis on my general run of good fortune: the time and place of my birth, my parents and ancestors, my language, my schooling, my move to the US and my experiences in Southeast Asia. It makes me feel like the grandpa who stayed to chat with the shopkeeper five minutes longer.

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

Scholars, especially younger ones, need to know as much as possible about their changing academic environment, which offers them great privileges but at the same time tends to confine them or leave them stranded. In the G8 countries most professors are very well paid, have plenty of free time and opportunities for travel, and

often have access to the general public through newspapers and television. What they usually lack is closeness to their countries' rulers. It is true that in the US there have been some high-profile political professors — such as Kissinger, Brzezinski, Summers and Rice — but the huge country has more than 1,400 universities, and the capital city has no first-class model. In poor or medium-rich countries, professors are often less well paid, but they enjoy superior social status and access to the media, and, especially if they work in capital-city universities, are able to develop close contacts with the circle of their rulers. In both environments, if for different reasons, they have a high degree of security with regard to their futures. Their high salaries and high security are justified on the grounds of defending 'academic freedom' and ensuring professionalism. The first claim is a good and classic justification, so long as the professors practise it themselves — which they do not always do. The second is more recent and more ambiguous, since it depends on qualifications set by senior professors, requires long periods of disciplinary apprenticeship, and is marked by a jargon which is increasingly hard for intelligent laymen to grasp. Furthermore, professions are notoriously self-protective, and this outlook can encourage conservatism, conformism and idleness.

Professionalism is also increasingly accompanied by changes in the philosophy and practice of higher education. Active state intervention is visibly increasing almost everywhere, as policy-makers attempt to square the intake, processing and production of students and professors with the 'manpower needs' of the 'labour market', and respond carefully to demographic trends. More and more states make efforts to tie research grants to the state's own policy agenda. (In the US today, for example, a huge amount of money is being poured into 'terrorist studies' and 'Islamic studies', much of which will be wasted on mediocre or mechanical work.) Corporate intervention, direct or indirect, benign or malign, has been on the rise for some time, even in the social sciences and humanities. Professionalization is also having its effect on undergraduate education, where the older idea that youngsters aged between eighteen and twenty-one should be gaining a broad and general intellectual culture is in decline, and

students are encouraged to think of their college years as mainly a preparation for their entry into the job market. It is highly likely that these processes will be difficult to reverse or even slow down, which makes it all the more important for universities and their inhabitants to be fully conscious of their situation and to take a critical stance towards it. I think I was very lucky to have grown up in an era when the old philosophy, in spite of its being conservative and relatively impractical, was still strong. *Imagined Communities* was rooted in that philosophy, but a book of its type is much less likely to emerge from contemporary universities.

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

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NOTES

1. When the first-person singular is used here, the narration takes the perspective of the first author. The two authors jointly documented the funeral, but only the second author was present at the sea burial.
2. A full *tahlilan* usually lasts two to three hours.
3. Anderson’s fascination with this aspect of Indonesia can be seen in the effort that he put into republishing Kwee Thiam Tjing’s *Indonesia dalem api dan bara* (Indonesia in Flames and Embers), which brought out this “cross-cultural and cross-language” Indonesia, as discussed in *A Life Beyond Boundaries* (pp. 171–77). In fact, one remaining project in which he was immensely interested was a “literary-political” biography of Kwee.
4. These were delivered by Anderson’s younger brother Perry Anderson and by his former students Kato Tsuyoshi, Thak Chaloehtiarana, Charnvit Kasetsiri, Daniel Dhakidae and Coeli Barry. Khanis Suvianita also recited a poem dedicated to him.

5. In Javanese death rituals, before the body is to be dispatched, a *kendi* filled with water is broken in the belief that it can refresh or cool the body of the dead.
6. In Chinese folk belief, the Tang Dynasty Emperor Lie Sie Bin (Li Shimín, 李世民; also known as Emperor Taizong), having returned to life after death, sent some watermelons, which have a cooling effect, to hell as presents to the King of Hell. On the other hand, among the Chinese of Bangka, the smashing of the watermelon signifies the end of life in this world as well (Theo and Lie 2014, p. 73). We are indebted to Myra Sidharta for sharing these bits of information with us.
7. Here, the first-person plural is used to narrate events from the perspective of the second author.
8. The Indonesian-language version of the book is forthcoming. Its publication by Marjin Kiri, the same independent publishing house that released the Indonesian-language version of *Under Three Flags* (Anderson 2015), is expected for July 2016.
9. It had this effect even though I didn't realize that the title was a pun on Clifford Geertz's *Old Societies and New States* (1963).
10. They were kept in a reading room in Cornell's Olin Library.
11. I thank Peter Zinoman for his generous and valuable comments on an earlier version of this review.
12. A scholar whom, the book seems to suggest, Ben Anderson's brother Perry/Rory had first brought to his attention (Anderson 2016, p. 24).
13. In his own posthumously published memoir, George Kahin acknowledged Ben Anderson's success in pushing the boundaries of Indonesian studies outward through his attention to "Javanese political culture" (2003, p. 147). Of course, Claire Holt, whom Kahin himself had brought to Cornell, played a crucial role in awakening Ben Anderson's interest in things Javanese. In addition to Kahin and John Echols, "two perfect American gentlemen", he counts Holt and Harry Benda, "my fellow Europeans", among "[t]he four teachers who influenced me most as a graduate student" (Anderson 2016, p. 43).
14. Later on, Ben Anderson would also directly address the "conflation of nation and state" (Anderson 1983*b*, p. 477), with specific reference to Soeharto's New Order dictatorship.
15. That is, the *Pantayong Pananaw* (Our Perspective) school associated above all with Zeus Salazar and his acolytes, whose work left Ben Anderson "feeling rather suffocated" (Anderson 2016, p. 166).
16. For a thoughtful full-dress assessment of Ben Anderson's work on Thailand from a student who worked intensively on the country under his supervision,

see Ockey (2015). With typical graciousness and consideration, Ben Anderson noted at the Southeast Asia Program faculty reception held to honour Ruchira Mendiones on her retirement from Cornell in the spring of 1989 that the value and extent of the assistance that she had given to him during the course of his work on *In the Mirror* had led him to designate her as his co-editor and co-translator at the time of the book's publication.

17. "Possibilities" is really the operative term here; for Ben Anderson's sober perspective on Sukarno's career as whole — and on the nationalism of his generation of "Indonesians" — see Anderson (2002). The opening passage of this article — originally published in Indonesian "in mini-pamphlet form, at the cheapest possible price, for sale in bus stations, street corners, local markets" (ibid., p. 1) — puts Sukarno's revolutionary nationalism in the context of that not only of Gandhi, Attaturk and Sun Yat-sen, but also of José Rizal. "Bung Karno revered all these leaders, learned from their struggles, and so came to feel that Indonesia's fight for independence had to be made part of the fight for emancipation throughout the colonial world. Here was sown the 'global' consciousness that later bloomed in the form of the Bandung Conference of Non-Aligned Nations in 1955 and his own concept of New Emerging Forces" (ibid., p. 2). I am thankful to Douglas Kammen for bringing this article to my attention. I should also perhaps note that it has been some years since I myself have lived in a home without a picture of Bung Karno hanging near its entrance; again, commitments.

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