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# *Book Reviews*

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*Republicanism, Communism, Islam: Cosmopolitan Origins of Revolution in Southeast Asia*. By John Sidel. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021. xiv+309 pp.

A book spends almost its entire existence on a shelf, next to other books. Sometimes it is obvious which book it should be placed beside. John Sidel's *Republicanism, Communism, Islam: Cosmopolitan Origins of Revolution in Southeast Asia* belongs next to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. It was written almost as much to be Anderson's worthy lasting bookshelf companion as to be read, in its own right, as a solitary work of scholarship.

And what a worthy lasting companion it is. Like Anderson, Sidel succeeds in making us rethink not just national revolutions but nationalism itself. His main point is that national revolutions involve so much more than nationalism and are driven by sources that go way beyond the national. In other words, national revolutions are not territorially constricted parochial upsurges against transnational empires; they are great epochal cosmopolitan conjunctures and every bit as transnational as the sprawling empires they overthrow.

In the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam, the revolutionary fuel came from three transnational ideologies—republicanism, communism and Islam—as reflected in Sidel's book title. These revolutions were neither products of locally delimited traditional attachments nor Pavlovian reactions to the colonial boundaries in which the leaders and followers of independence movements found themselves confined and defined. Sidel's goal is nothing less than "internationalizing the three great revolutions of Southeast Asian history" (p. 14).

In fact, Sidel achieves even more than what he explicitly attempts. His introductory theoretical chapter is a relatively thin trunk for holding the weighty branches of his ten empirical chapters: two on the Philippines; five on Indonesia; and three on Vietnam. By page 19, Sidel has already cut to the evidentiary chase. What the reader then gets to consume—feast upon, really—is a deeply historicist account of these three nationalist revolutions over much longer stretches of political, economic and social development than what other accounts of revolutions usually provide.

We witness Sidel's desire to furnish a "historicized" as much as a "denationalized, internationalized, and transnationalized account" of Southeast Asia's nationalist revolutions (pp. 24–25) through a quirk in his fluid, gripping and oft-alliterative prose. On at least thirty-three occasions, Sidel opens a paragraph with a sentence containing the phrase "against this backdrop". These three words pepper dozens of mid-paragraph transitions throughout the empirical chapters as well.

This reveals that, when Sidel narrates the drama of nationalist revolutions, most of what he wants to give us is the "lights and camera" that precede the revolutionary "action". Sidel's historicist commitments are most obvious in his analysis of Indonesia, where we are treated to three full chapters of "backdrop" before meeting Soekarno—the supposedly central actor in Indonesia's revolution.

The contents of this "backdrop" deliver this book's greatest delights. I cannot begin to do them justice here. Instead, I will simply whet readers' appetites by noting that the "tour" in Sidel's *tour de force* includes extended excursions through settings as far-flung as Bohemia, Baku, Guangzhou and Paris. Sidel respects no boundaries in tracing the "circuitries of cosmopolitan culture and commerce" (p. 209) that animated revolutionary mobilizations. His is emphatically a global history and, for certain long stretches, as much of a European history as a Southeast Asian one.

Where—if anywhere—does Sidel leave us wanting and with more work of our own to do? At least one area merits some critical or at least inquisitive engagement here: the thinness of the connective tissue—both theoretical and historical—with which Sidel links all

his "backdrop" to the revolutionary mobilizations that eventually transpired. Especially in Indonesia and Vietnam, interwar bouts of Islamic and communist mobilizations are portrayed as resilient roots for popular politics that sprouted anew when the Second World War's disruptions undermined colonial control. Yet, the Dutch and French colonial repressions of the 1920s and 1930s were massive. Oftentimes, these earlier mobilizations seem more like smothered seeds than resilient roots.

How essential were these prior histories of mobilization for the revolutions that followed, particularly when compared with the importance of the wartime disruptions that unleashed them? Here, Sidel's light theoretical touch raises questions. His implicit theory of revolutionary mobilization hinges heavily on Barrington Moore (1966), and his implicit theory of revolutionary openings owes an unspoken debt to Theda Skocpol (1979). But here lie underexamined theoretical paradoxes: the Philippines had the strongest *bourgeoisie* but the least successful revolution among the three nations; and revolutions in Indonesia and Vietnam were driven by intensifications, not just by disruptions, in state repressions.

Addressing such paradoxes and answering other questions that arise in Sidel's book must be a collective effort rather than an individual task. He has moved us a quantum leap forward in our understanding of the international drivers of Southeast Asia's nationalist revolutions. It is up to his most avid readers to keep populating the bookshelf he now rightfully shares with his late friend and great mentor, Benedict Anderson.

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*Political Violence in Southeast Asia since 1945: Case Studies from Six Countries*. Edited by Eve Monique Zucker and Ben Kiernan. London: Routledge, 2021. xix+308pp.

The editors, Eve Monique Zucker and Ben Kiernan, begin the introduction for this excellent collection with the United States' use of the atomic bomb to obliterate Hiroshima (p. 1). The brief history that follows, from the end of the Second World War through decolonization and spanning the Cold War in Southeast Asia, is a depressing recounting of incredibly brutal wars and episodes of horrendous political violence. And, as several of the essays in this collection attest, the end of the Cold War did not mean political peace. Rather, repression and violence have continued to be central to political contests across the region.

The collection focuses on political violence in Indonesia, Burma/Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam, covering topics like genocide, mass violence and the technologies of violence. The fear and injustice associated with political violence and the legal impunity of perpetrators are also traced through several of the chapters. This book is an antidote for what Australian political rock band Midnight Oil describes as "Short Memory" in their classic musical dissection of colonialism and war. No one should forget the destruction of Cambodia and the internal genocide that followed (chapters 4, 7, 10, 13, 14 and 17) or the atrocities against Vietnamese in Lon Nol's 1970s "religious war" (chapter 16). Likewise, memories of Indonesia's 1965–66 genocide (chapter 1), the West's war in Indochina and the terrible deaths, maiming and destruction this brought (chapters 6 and 9), and the recent ethnic violence in